

**DEWEYAN NATURALISM: A CRITIQUE OF EPISTEMIC  
REDUCTIONISM**

A Thesis

by

RICHARD THORP TUCKER III

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2011

Major Subject: Philosophy

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	William Alex McIntosh
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## ABSTRACT

Deweyan Naturalism: A Critique of Epistemic Reductionism. (May 2011)

Richard Thorp Tucker III, B.A., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Gregory Fernando Pappas

This thesis articulates a critique of scientific naturalism from the perspective of John Dewey. Scientific naturalism can be defined by two explicit, metaphysical commitments, one ontological and one epistemological. Implicit to these commitments is a further commitment concerning the nature of human experience. This understanding of human experience can be described as epistemic reductionism because it reduces the whole of experience and all empiricism to epistemology.

Scientific naturalism is the orthodox position for most contemporary, Anglo-American philosophy. Many philosophers within this tradition are dissatisfied with scientific naturalism and attempt to critique scientific naturalism from the perspective of “liberal” naturalism. One major objection from the liberal perspective concerns the ontology and placement of moral qualities: where are moral qualities to be placed in a scientifically naturalistic ontology? However, due to the fact that liberal naturalists share with scientific naturalists a commitment to an epistemically reductionistic understanding of the nature of human experience, liberal naturalism fails to adequately address the placement problem.

John Dewey's understanding of human experience rejects the ontological interpretation of the dualisms which are presupposed by both scientific and liberal naturalism, such as the subject/object dichotomy, the dualism between the self and the world, and between subjective and objective experience. Since Dewey rejects these dualisms, he also rejects language which would "place" moral qualities on either side of this ontological division.

In place of these ontological dualisms, Dewey asserts a functional distinction between primary and secondary experience in which the world is fundamentally experienced in its qualitative determinations and is only experienced reflectively (epistemically) when particular problematic situations arise and particular concrete inquiries are required. Concrete inquiries are initiated and regulated by *felt* qualities which represent disequilibrium between man and his enviroing conditions, and these qualities can be scientific, moral, aesthetic, political, or religious in nature. *Felt* qualities are found in experience, and as such, can be said to reveal genuine traits of nature. Through critiquing the epistemic reductionism common to both scientific and liberal naturalism, Dewey dissolves the metaphilosophical assumptions which give rise to the placement problem.

## **DEDICATION**

*To Shane*

*With whom I'm not finished working*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In my thesis I have attempted to define a particular philosophical position which has become dominant in Anglo-American philosophy, as well as critique that position from the Deweyan perspective. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur have termed this position scientific naturalism, and while I take their critique of scientific naturalism to be worthwhile and important, I think the focus of their critique is too narrow. De Caro and Macarthur have compiled two volumes dedicated to the critique of scientific naturalism from the perspective of liberal naturalism, a version of naturalism equally rooted in the analytic tradition. I believe that any critique of scientific naturalism from within the analytic tradition will not be strong enough, given that there are fundamental assumptions about human experience, the world, and philosophy which are common to the vast majority of philosophers within this tradition. In fact, scientific naturalism is the received view, or is mainstream orthodoxy for analytic philosophy today, and as such, any critique of scientific naturalism from within the analytic tradition may not be able to get at the source of the problem.

In order to attempt a broader critique than De Caro and Macarthur, I have adopted the term epistemic reductionism to describe these fundamental assumptions common to both scientific and liberal naturalists. While liberal naturalists seek to critique the core ontological and epistemological commitments of scientific naturalism,

they still share an understanding of human experience which makes their critique less profound than it needs to be.

John Dewey critiqued this analytic understanding of experience over a century ago. In his article “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism”, he critiqued an understanding of experience which viewed knowing as the sole and only genuine mode of experience. The idea that the world is only or is most fundamentally, experienced as *known*, is that which is common to both scientific and liberal naturalism. Though this idea is overwhelmingly pervasive, it is often implicit, and for this reason, I felt compelled to draw explicit attention to it in my thesis.

Epistemic reductionism, that is, the reduction of all experience and all empiricism to epistemology, is unwittingly accepted as fact by most of my fellow students. In both professional and casual conversation, it is apparent to me that this is the received view and that it is received dogmatically. The analytic attitude can be expressed thusly: “The notion that philosophy and philosophical analysis is properly concerned *with the world as it is known*, is surely something of which every freshman philosophy major is aware. To question this is not just to do philosophy differently; it is to cease doing philosophy. Perhaps it is literary criticism, psychology, sociology, or something “continental” in flavor which the questioner means to concern himself with, but it is not *really* philosophy in the robust, rigorous sense which we analytic philosophers take it to be.” It is this disposition which I mean to undermine by contrasting Dewey’s naturalism with the epistemically reductionistic forms of naturalism typical of analytic philosophy.

My main argument is that epistemic reductionism is not just a feature of scientific naturalism, but is a feature of the whole analytic tradition, whether understood scientifically or liberally. However, in order to condense this argument, I have isolated De Caro and Macarthur's definition of scientific naturalism, as I believe it cleanly and succinctly articulates the central features of this philosophical position. I believe these central features would be accepted by any self-proclaimed scientific naturalist, but I also believe that anyone accepting that label would implicitly (or perhaps explicitly) accept epistemic reductionism.

Dewey called epistemic reductionism by the name Intellectualism and, as I mentioned, authored a critique of it over a century ago. But his critique of Intellectualism has either been ignored or misunderstood by contemporary analytic philosophy. I don't believe this is because there is anything wrong with Dewey's critique, and as such, I have not sought to alter its content. What I have attempted to do is bring this critique into the contemporary debate about what kinds of things should be accepted by an empirically naturalistic account.

Scientific naturalism is a cluster of ontological, metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions which I have attempted to present in a linear fashion. In linear form, I understand scientific naturalism to be committed to an epistemological theme, that is, that scientific inquiry is our only source of genuine knowledge. As a direct result of this epistemological commitment, an ontological commitment arises, namely, that we should only accept those entities to which successful scientific explanations commit us. Implicit to both of these commitments is an understanding of

human experience which is best described as epistemically reductionistic. In fact, it is this understanding of human experience which is the most central assumption of scientific naturalism, even if it is only implicit. Therefore, scientific naturalism can be understood thusly: there is an implicit notion of human experience which yields an explicit notion of epistemology, which in turn yields a sparse ontology.

Alternatively, Dewey articulates an understanding of human experience which directly yields his ontology; there is no intermediate epistemological commitment. Dewey's understanding of experience, coupled with its resulting ontology, is called Immediate Empiricism, and it is the idea that things *are* what they are experienced to be. Essentially, however a thing presents itself in experience is the way it really is, and as such, it reveals genuine traits of nature. One should not attempt to transform the thing as experienced into something else due to *a priori* metaphysical or methodological commitments. *Treating things as known*, even when they are not *experienced as known*, is thoroughly unempirical, and this is the direct result of an *a priori* understanding of experience, and what Dewey calls the philosophical fallacy. If the success of scientific advancement has revealed anything, it is that the way forward must be thoroughly empirical; however, that is not to say that empiricism must be reduced to science or epistemology.

The reason for this is that science and epistemology are both reflective processes which arise out of our primary, qualitative experience of the world. One experiences the world in a fundamentally qualitative manner and it is only when one encounters specific problematic situations that the world is treated scientifically or epistemically. In other

words, these modes of experience (scientific or epistemic) are not one's primary modes of experiencing the world, much less one's only modes of experiencing the world.

However, it is clear to all that the precision and clarity which the epistemic treatment of things provides is exceedingly useful for resolving problematic situations. The usefulness of knowledge in an uncertain world makes knowledge exceedingly valuable. Philosophically, this superior value has often been equated with superior being, and thus, in the history of western philosophy, *known* objects have been accorded a superior ontological status. Today, in scientific naturalism, known objects are accorded an *exclusive* ontological status, as they are the only objects which are declared to be objectively *in the world*.

This exclusive pursuit of known objects is what Dewey calls the quest for certainty. While there is no sense in which Dewey rejects the attempt to understand the world *as known*, he emphatically denies that this is the only manner in which the world is experienced. The attempt to understand the world *as known* is a noble and necessary pursuit, as it is the best means one has to assess and manipulate environing conditions in order to ameliorate uncertainty and one's sense of peril. However, it is this uncertain standing in a precarious world which gives rise to the quest for certainty. One does not seek to express the world as certain because it is certain; one seeks to express the world as certain because it is precarious.

One central problem which results from the received view is called the placement problem. What is the ontological status of moral qualities and values according to scientific naturalism? Where can they be *placed* in the world as it is understood by

scientific naturalism? Scientific naturalism asserts that moral qualities and values are not objectively in nature because they are not known, or revealed, by scientific inquiry. As such they are subjective judgments which are projected onto the world by an antecedently independent subject.

This answer to the placement problem reveals another fundamental assumption of scientific naturalism, namely, the subject/object dichotomy, which is scientific naturalism's principle ontological presupposition. The content of this presupposition is that man and the world are ontologically distinct, that there is something peculiar about the mental activity of man which ontologically distinguishes him from his world, just as mental entities such as propositions and concepts are ontologically distinct from the empirical objects of scientific inquiry. Because scientific inquiry cannot investigate moral qualities and values, they must not reveal anything about the world, and must be placed on the subjective side of the subject/object dichotomy.

Dewey rejects this ontological dualism between subject and object, and therefore, cannot accept scientific naturalism's answer to the placement problem. In fact, because Dewey rejects this ontological dualism, he does not accept *any* subjective account, nor any *objective* account, for both are equally unempirical.

In order to determine the ontological status of moral qualities and values, one must return to Dewey's nondualistic immediate empiricism. Is the world experienced as moral? Do *morally* problematic situations arise? Are moral qualities pervasive to some inquiries? The answer to all these questions is "yes" and therefore, Dewey takes moral qualities and values to reveal genuine traits of nature. Just as epistemic and scientific

qualities are found in experience, so are moral qualities, and thus, they should be placed on equal ontological footing with these other qualities.

While Dewey's moral philosophy is richer and more complex than what I will present it to be, my presentation of it here is only meant to establish how Dewey would answer the placement problem, a problem which is ontological in nature. Because moral qualities and values present themselves in experience, they can be said to reveal genuine traits of nature. But this does not just speak to the placement problem of moral qualities and values. It also provides the philosophical method for treating all affective and emotive qualities which are experienced in an empirical manner, such as aesthetic, political, and religious qualities. This was, after all, one of Dewey's primary concerns: to articulate an empirical method of philosophy which would treat things *as they were experienced*, and not in a scientifically or epistemically reductionistic manner.

In the second section I present Dewey's critique of scientific naturalism. First, I use the work of Mario De Caro, David Macarthur, and Charles Guignon to help define what the core commitments of scientific naturalism are. Next, I define the placement problem, a problem which reflects the uncertain ontological status of normative values within the framework of scientific naturalism. I then comment on the place accorded to Dewey in De Caro and Macarthur's work by taking a critical look at the only contributor to their volumes who discusses Dewey. Peter Godfrey-Smith treats Dewey as though he were a liberal naturalist because he misunderstands the potency of Dewey's critique of epistemic reductionism. This shows that even though it is recognized by some that a new form of naturalism which is not as narrow and reductionistic as scientific naturalism

must be brought forth, no one in the analytic tradition has taken Dewey's version of naturalism seriously enough to consider it a viable alternative. Finally, I present three specific criticisms of scientific naturalism from a Deweyan perspective. These three criticisms concern (a) the environmental and moral nature of the motivations for accepting scientific naturalism, (b) the unempirical philosophical worldview which results from scientific naturalism, and (c) the fact that all empirical inquiry cannot be reduced to scientific inquiry.

In the third section I present the Deweyan alternative to scientific naturalism. Of principle importance is the different manner in which Dewey conceives of the nature and operations of experience. First, I outline the distinction between primary and secondary experience. Next, I place this distinction within its environing context, and discuss how the distinction between primary and secondary experience arises when man as organism moves throughout the world, attempting to establish harmonious relation with it. Then, I outline Dewey's general pattern of inquiry in order to provide an ideal formalization of the emergence of primary and secondary experience from its environing context. These central ideas of Dewey provide the background for a direct discussion of the nonsubjective nature of pervasive qualities. Finally, I present a brief outline of Dewey's notion of moral inquiry. This outline is offered in order to demonstrate how moral inquiry might proceed given that normative values are no longer considered subjective, but are taken to reveal genuine traits of nature<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 1*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 24.



## 2. EPISTEMIC REDUCTIONISM

### 2.1 Naturalism

Naturalism is a label with which most contemporary, Anglo-American philosophers are comfortable. Many think of themselves and their projects in naturalistic terms, and understand philosophy in a naturalistic fashion. But there is much disagreement about what naturalism is and what kinds of things should be included in a naturalistic account of the world. For, as many philosophers as self-identify as naturalists, there may be that many definitions of naturalism.

Negatively, a naturalistic theory of the world would reject an appeal to supernatural entities and events. God, spirits, demons, ghosts, souls, magic, and miracles are the types of things which are disallowed in any naturalistic account. And while at first glance, it may appear that naturalism simply rejects immaterial things or events, this is not the case. Minimally, numbers, propositions, and concepts are immaterial things which all naturalists acknowledge as critical to any account of the world. Even beyond these commonly accepted things though, there are other kinds of immaterial entities with which some naturalists are quite comfortable. Some naturalists suggest that minds, consciousness, and human agency may be immaterial, yet naturalistic things or events. And some naturalists attempt to account for moral values in naturalistic terms.

Clearly, then, a positive account of naturalism becomes more difficult to articulate. Where can the line be drawn, and on what grounds might a line be drawn

between those things which are included and those which are excluded from a naturalistic account?

## 2.2 Scientific Naturalism

Mario De Caro and David Macarthur have co edited two volumes in which these concerns are explicitly discussed. In both volumes, De Caro and Macarthur choose to differentiate between scientific naturalism and liberal naturalism. Both authors take scientific naturalism to be the “current orthodoxy” for contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. As such, their notion of scientific naturalism serves an important function in their discussion of naturalism as it represents the *status quo* within the naturalistic community to be critiqued. In *Naturalism in Question*, naturalistic accounts of mind, agency, aesthetics, and morality are articulated from what they have called the “liberal” perspective. In *Naturalism and Normativity*, more attention is devoted to normative values, but also to the relationship between philosophy and the natural sciences, philosophy and the human sciences, meta-ethics, epistemology, and human nature in general, again from the liberal perspective. For De Caro and Macarthur, “liberal” simply means a more inclusive sense of what constitutes a natural thing or naturalism.<sup>2</sup> In neither volume do they attempt a positive definition of liberal naturalism, instead using the term in the most general way possible, almost in a purely negative fashion; liberal

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<sup>2</sup> The authors make mention of several other labels for nonscientific naturalism, of which liberal is just one. “Apart from being united with scientific naturalists in this negative conception of naturalism, most of our authors hope for a new, more substantive, *nonscientific* naturalism distinct from the scientific (or, better, scientific) naturalism that is currently so influential. In this spirit, John Dupré, has endorsed ‘pluralistic naturalism,’ Jennifer Hornsby, ‘naïve naturalism,’ John McDowell, a ‘liberal naturalism,’ and Barry Stroud, a ‘more open minded or expansive naturalism.’”

naturalism could be read simply as “not scientific naturalism,” or “naturalism divorced from scientism.”

De Caro and Macarthur define scientific naturalism with reference to two themes, or doctrines, which are formed around some basic concepts to which any scientific naturalist might assent. They are the ontological and epistemological<sup>3</sup> themes of scientific naturalism. According to the ontological theme, “the world consists of nothing but the entities to which successful scientific explanations commit us.”<sup>4</sup> This theme explicitly addresses the question concerning what types of things can be included within a naturalistic account.

Schematically, the first theme is a commitment to a scientism that says not only that modern (or post-seventeenth-century) natural science provides *a* true picture of nature but, more contentiously, that it is the *only* true picture. Wilfred Sellars expresses its animating spirit in his remark that “science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not.”<sup>5</sup>

The epistemological theme of scientific naturalism states that “it is only by following the method of the natural sciences...that one arrives at genuine knowledge”<sup>6</sup>; or, put another way, “scientific inquiry is in principle, our only genuine source of

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<sup>3</sup> In their works, De Caro and Macarthur label these themes as the ontological and methodological themes. However, they define this theme in a variety of ways which, while not unrelated, are not always clear. In addition, they note that the methodological theme has a specifically epistemological component, and as such, I have used the label epistemological instead of methodological, while also selecting this specifically epistemological component of their definition. The other component, the one more properly called the methodological, relates explicitly to the relation between philosophy and science, as well as Quine’s rejection of First Philosophy. The methodological component of scientific naturalism will not be addressed in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, “Science, Naturalism, and the Problem of Normativity,” in *Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, “Introduction: The Nature of Naturalism.” in *Naturalism in Question*, ed. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

knowledge or understanding.”<sup>7</sup> De Caro and Macarthur think that these two themes could be pulled apart. Essentially, one could be an ontological scientific naturalist, i.e., someone who accepts the ontological theme, but does so for reasons other than those articulated in the epistemological theme. For example, one could be a scientific naturalist who holds to certain philosophical premises which establish “the presuppositions, extent, and limits of knowledge and epistemology,”<sup>8</sup> therefore leading one to have the ontology specified by the ontological theme.

However, it is unlikely that one could accept the epistemological theme without also accepting the ontological theme. “An [epistemological] scientific naturalist will presumably endorse the ontological theme on the ground that scientific inquiry has ontological presuppositions and implications.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the ontological theme is a direct implication of this view of scientific inquiry. More needs to be said about what constitutes the ontological presuppositions of scientific inquiry, but I agree that it is fair to say that any scientific naturalist who accepts the epistemological theme will also accept the ontological theme. I will identify the initial acceptance of the epistemological theme which leads to the acceptance of the ontological theme by the label epistemological scientific naturalism.

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<sup>7</sup> De Caro and Macarthur, “Science, Naturalism, and the Problem of Normativity”, 4.

<sup>8</sup> De Caro and Macarthur, “Introduction: The Nature of Naturalism”, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

### 2.3 Charles Guignon and Ontological Presuppositions

In a work entitled “The Ontological Presuppositions of the Determinist Free Will Debate” Charles Guignon criticizes a set of ontological presuppositions from a Heideggerian perspective. Guignon calls the set of ontological presuppositions which he criticizes the modern, scientific worldview, which is a way of viewing of the world that results from the historical development of scientific inquiry. Since the beginning of the development of the natural sciences in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the conclusions of scientific inquiry have changed the manner in which man understands his place in the world, as well as how he relates to and understands the world around him.

Guignon condenses the modern, scientific worldview into five basic assumptions.

The upshot of the rise of modern science has been a cluster of basic assumptions that color our understanding of ourselves and our world. We understand ourselves in terms of the subject/object dichotomy, according to which we are entities who are set over against, though interacting with, the surrounding material world. We assume that reality, at its most basic level, consists of material substances in causal interactions. We believe that even if all phenomena are not reducible to the physical level, the physical constrains what can count as an explanation in any area. We think that the kind of explanation found in classical physics is the paradigm for explanation in any area of inquiry. And, consequently, we assume that making things intelligible is a matter of showing how those things are caused to be, where the relevant causes are seen as law-governed efficient causes.<sup>10</sup>

I think that Guignon’s articulation of the basic assumptions of the modern, scientific worldview generalizes nicely, that it can be applied to De Caro and

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Guignon, “The Ontological Presuppositions of the Determinism-Free Will Debate.” in *Between Chance and Choice: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Determinism*, ed. Harald Atmanspacher and Robert Bishop (Charlottesville: Imprint Academic, 2002), 325.

Macarthur's work on scientific naturalism, and that it need not be focused on in terms of the free will debate or Heidegger.

I take the set of basic assumptions identified by Guignon to accurately state the ontological presuppositions which result from scientific inquiry, and I identify them with the ontological presuppositions which result directly from the acceptance of the epistemological theme. It is my contention, then, that a scientific naturalist who accepts the epistemological theme accepts (a) the ontological sparseness characteristic of the ontological theme, as well as b) the ontological presuppositions articulated by Charles Guignon.

I feel it is important to make a distinction between scientists and philosophers, and by extension, a distinction between scientific inquiry and scientific naturalism. The scientist is often not explicitly concerned with ontology. The scientist *as scientist* is concerned with experimental methodology, with specific procedures, with scientific theories, auxiliary hypotheses, and measurable data. In addition, the procedures of scientific inquiry require that selective emphasis be placed on the specific aspects of the world which are most relevant to the particular task at hand. As a result of this selective emphasis, the material irrelevant to the particular task at hand is set aside. It should be noted that, for the scientist, these set-aside elements are only excluded as functionally irrelevant.

However, once the philosopher observes this procedure of selective emphasis, he thinks of it in ontological terms, in a way that the scientist does not and would not. The philosopher reifies the objects of scientific inquiry, as well as the scientific procedure of

selective emphasis, drawing ontological conclusions from them. The different manner in which the philosopher treats the procedure of selective emphasis accounts for the difference between scientists and scientific naturalists, the latter of whom are philosophers.

At this point it may be helpful to summarize what has been presented. De Caro and Macarthur define scientific naturalism according to two core themes, one ontological and one epistemological. While these two themes can be separated, I will focus on a critique of epistemological scientific naturalism, which will simply be referred to as scientific naturalism as it will be the only version of scientific naturalism considered here. Scientific naturalism is a philosophy which declares that “the world consists of nothing but the entities to which successful scientific explanations commit us” because “scientific inquiry is, in principle, our only genuine source of knowledge or understanding.” The modern, scientific worldview, as articulated by Guignon, forms the basic set of assumptions which man has about the world and his relation to it as a result of the historical development of scientific inquiry. These basic assumptions constitute the ontological presuppositions of scientific naturalism.

According to the scientific naturalist, scientific inquiry has the final ontological word, and is the sole arbiter of what does and does not exist. Behind these explicit themes of scientific naturalism lies an implicit notion of experience, as well as an implicit notion of what counts as genuine empiricism. These explicit and implicit claims about ontology, empiricism, and experience will be criticized from a Deweyan perspective throughout the rest of this section.

## 2.4 Scientific Naturalism and Moral Values

The principal ontological presupposition of the modern, scientific worldview is the assumption of a fundamental, ontological dualism between the self and the world, or the subject/object dualism. In the modern era, the problem of knowledge arises as a direct result of this fundamental dualism: how can one gain reliable knowledge of an ontologically distinct world? Scientific inquiry is the answer provided by scientific naturalism. But scientific naturalism goes further still. Scientific naturalism also states that not only is scientific inquiry the only reliable source of knowledge, but also that “the world consists of nothing but the entities to which successful scientific explanations commit us,” namely, that things in the world can only be investigated scientifically.

The solution to the problem of knowledge offered by scientific naturalism raises profound questions for other areas of philosophy, perhaps most notably in moral theory. Where do moral qualities fit into this picture? Where can they be *placed* within this concept of the natural order? Due to the answer given to the problem of knowledge, that scientific inquiry provides the only means of attaining knowledge about the world, scientific naturalism cannot place these qualities in the world. Moral qualities are not investigated by scientific inquiry, and because of this, they are not considered to be objective in nature. Since the objects of scientific inquiry are the only objects which can be said to be objective in nature, and thus, objects in the real world, moral qualities are declared to be subjective in nature; they are not part of the objective world, but they and analysis of them belong to the inner, subjective world of the mind, and they are accorded inferior ontological status.



De Caro and Macarthur call the problem of how to fit moral qualities into a scientific conception of the world the *placement problem* and they attempt to address this problem in both of their volumes.

In contemporary philosophy these issues often find expression in terms of the problem of “placing” or “locating” normative phenomena in the scientific image of the world. According to the most common form of naturalism, the image of the world provided by the natural sciences is all the world there is. Since this image seems, *prima facie*, not to include normative phenomena, the following question arises: What “place” can we find for the normative in the natural world? The question becomes urgent if, as seems highly plausible, we suppose that central normative phenomena are not going to be explained away or eliminated.<sup>11</sup>

However, in both volumes De Caro and Macarthur select contributors only out of the analytic tradition<sup>12</sup> to critique scientific naturalism. While they acknowledge that continental thinkers struggle with the meaning of science no less than do analytic thinkers, they clearly prefer to settle the issue “in house,” and select their contributors from within the analytic tradition. While this allows for continuity of assumptions and arguments between the thinkers on both sides of the debate, I have long wondered whether this issue can be resolved within the analytic framework. To my mind, it is no wonder that moral qualities are not accorded the same degree of reality as scientific objects given the manner in which the placement problem is conceived and approached in the analytic tradition. I contend that the placement problem arises not just as a result of being scientifically reductionistic, but also from being epistemologically

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<sup>11</sup> De Caro and Macarthur, “Science, Naturalism, and the Problem of Normativity”, 2.

<sup>12</sup> De Caro and Macarthur explicitly link the fate of scientific naturalism with the fate of the entire analytic tradition. “We have restricted ourselves to authors broadly within the analytic tradition of philosophy. Partly this is a matter of sheer magnitude of undertaking to compare the attitudes of the analytic and continental traditions to the sciences; partly it is because we believe that the fate of analytic philosophy is more closely aligned with the fate of contemporary or scientific naturalism.” From De Caro and Macarthur, “Introduction: The Nature of Naturalism”, 1-2.

reductionistic. In other words, a central feature of analytic philosophy is that it reduces all empiricism, all experience, to epistemology, and this is the case for both scientific *and* liberal naturalism. Perhaps for a thorough critique of scientific naturalism to occur, one must go outside the analytic tradition. I don't pretend that this claim is absolute, nor that it is the only way to embark upon a critique, as De Caro and Macarthur's work clearly shows. However, I consider classical American pragmatism, specifically the work of John Dewey, to articulate a particularly thorough critique of scientific naturalism.

The pragmatic version of naturalism articulated by John Dewey addresses the placement problem of moral qualities by expounding different notions of experience and empiricism, notions which have very different ontological consequences. More specifically, instead of beginning with a notion of empiricism in which all experience is reduced to knowledge, Dewey articulates a notion of experience in which epistemology is not arbitrarily privileged, and therefore the objects of scientific inquiry have no ontological exclusivity. In Dewey's immediate empiricism, everything which occurs in experience is indicative of a transaction with nature, and consequently, reveals something of the nature of nature. This is as true for empirical moral inquiry as well as for scientific inquiry. Dewey's notion of experience yields a much broader empiricism, and thus, a much thicker ontology, one in which the placement problem is dissolved rather than resolved. In addition, since the pragmatic tradition is not fixated on knowing as the sole mode of experience, Dewey analyzes experience and empiricism in terms of primary experience, that is, in terms of the human condition and man's ability to deal

with problematic situations in their environing conditions, rather than in terms of “given” objects of reflection.

Scientific inquiry is particularly good at stating and solving the problems which are proper to its mode of investigation because of its rigorously empirical methodology. However, the fact that scientific inquiry cannot speak to moral problems does not mean that these problems do not exist in the world, nor does it mean that they cannot be solved empirically. Dewey’s inclusive notion of experience and empiricism makes possible a naturalistic theory of normative judgments. Far from making moral qualities mere subjective notions, Dewey expounds a general, empirical method of inquiry which encompasses both the scientific and moral modes of investigation, both of which reveal genuine traits of nature.

## **2.5 The Epistemological Theme and Epistemic Reductionism**

The epistemological theme states that scientific inquiry is the only genuine source of knowledge or understanding. More specifically this means that it is only by following the method of the natural sciences that one arrives at genuine knowledge. This amounts to an account of empiricism which equates scientific inquiry with knowing, and claims that knowing is the only genuine mode of experience. Dewey rejects the epistemological theme as an instance of intellectualism, or what I have called epistemic reductionism. Epistemic reductionism is the specific claim that “knowing is

the sole and only genuine mode of experiencing,”<sup>13</sup> and it is the explicit claim that all empiricism can be reduced to epistemology. It is my contention, which I will prove throughout the course of this paper that there are no empirical grounds for claiming that knowing is the only genuine mode of experiencing. There are many empirical modes of experiencing the world which are not properly called scientific. Things can be experienced morally, aesthetically, politically, religiously, etc., in addition to being experienced scientifically, and each of these modes of experiencing have their own unique empirical methods of inquiry.

From a Deweyan perspective, what the epistemological theme actually states is that scientific inquiry is the *best method* of acquiring a *specific kind* of knowledge or understanding. While things can be inquired into morally, aesthetically, or politically, it is scientific inquiry which yields the best sort of knowledge for mapping the physical, causal relations between objects in the world, as well as yielding the best tools, physical and mental, by which the physical world can be manipulated and controlled.<sup>14</sup>

The content of the epistemological theme restated from the Deweyan perspective faces three critiques. First, the claim that any particular mode of inquiry is better at achieving some particular end is a normative judgment, which would mean that value-free scientific inquiry is originated and regulated by a value judgment. Second, the epistemological theme results in a reductionistic worldview which is not sustainable empirically, but instead is justified by metaphysical assumptions. Third, while the

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<sup>13</sup> John Dewey, From “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” in *The Philosophy of John Dewey: Two Volumes in One*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 242.

<sup>14</sup> Dewey’s notion of scientific inquiry is much broader than this sentence would convey. However, discussion of the social sciences is beyond the scope of this endeavor.

scientific method of inquiry may be the best method possessed for manipulating and controlling the natural world when specific kinds of problems arise, there are many other kinds of problems that man experiences with and in the world which scientific inquiry is simply not designed to address.

## **2.6 Peter Godfrey-Smith and Dewey**

Before discussing these three critiques of epistemic reductionism, I would like to take a brief look at the only chapter in De Caro and Macarthur's volumes which address Dewey's work. In *Naturalism and Normativity*, many philosophers present their understanding of what liberal naturalism could look like. Peter Godfrey-Smith is the only contributor to the volume who addresses Dewey's work as it relates to the project of liberal naturalism; however, Godfrey-Smith's mention of Dewey is once-removed from any critique of scientific naturalism.

Godfrey-Smith's chapter entitled "Dewey, Continuity, and McDowell" highlights specific aspects of Dewey's thought which are used to critique the work of John McDowell, a philosopher who attempts to offer his own form of liberal naturalism. Godfrey-Smith describes McDowell's work in *Mind and World*, in which McDowell calls for a reconceptualization of what is considered natural. He claims there is a realm of "second nature" which cannot be described by the traditional terminology or methodology of naturalism, but which is nonetheless thoroughly naturalistic. Dewey's work is brought into the discussion only as a means of gaining a new perspective on McDowell's project. The details of how and for what reason's Godfrey-Smith brings

McDowell and Dewey into dialogue are not important here. What is revealing is that Dewey's work is not employed to levy a direct critique of scientific naturalism.

My principle assertion in this thesis is that Dewey has his own, robust critique of something very much like contemporary scientific naturalism, an assertion with which Godfrey-Smith appears to disagree. Godfrey-Smith does not use Dewey's work as a starting point for a critique of scientific naturalism in its own right, but instead uses Dewey's work as part of an "in house" discussion amongst liberal naturalists. I believe this presentation of Dewey fails to properly understand the value and uniqueness of Dewey's philosophy, and that Dewey should be brought into the contemporary debate over scientific naturalism in a direct way.

What I believe accounts for Godfrey-Smith's treatment of Dewey as a peripheral thinker is Godfrey-Smith's own analytic viewpoint. Due to this, Godfrey-Smith fails to emphasize a central component of Dewey's philosophy, namely, his critique of epistemic reductionism, that philosophical position which would claim that knowing is the only mode of experience. He makes mention of Dewey's critique of epistemic reductionism, and in fact, he devotes significant space to outlining this aspect of Dewey's thought. However, he does not at any point use it to critique scientific naturalism directly.

In speaking of the significance Dewey accords man's biological interaction with the world, Godfrey-Smith mentions "the link to biology is also used to support Dewey's insistence that our epistemic commerce with the world develops out of various kinds of nonepistemic commerce with it and remains embedded within this larger context of

interaction.”<sup>15</sup> And in another place, Godfrey-Smith makes reference to Dewey’s historical analysis of epistemic reductionism, in which Dewey discusses how epistemic reductionism is a result of the ancient Greek reaction to the changing nature of the empirical world.

For Dewey, however, it is in some ways an *inescapable* fact that knowledge, as discussed above, involves use of the stable to deal with the unstable. This fact makes its way into Greek thought in the form of a distinction in kinds of being. The unchanging is regarded as superior and more real.

As I understand the argument, Dewey describes two factors at work here. One is the treatment of knowledge in isolation from its context within our larger nonepistemic traffic with the world. That makes it possible to treat the epistemic roles of various things as reflecting their degree and kind of reality. The second is a forcing of the different epistemic roles of the changing and the stable into a framework that treats knowledge as matter of contemplation. Knowledge becomes contemplation of the unchanging, and the unchanging acquires a superior kind of reality.<sup>16</sup>

In order to conclude his summary of the relevant features of Dewey’s work to his critique of McDowell, Godfrey-Smith mentions the following with regard to Dewey’s analysis of the dualistic nature of modern philosophy:

Early in *Experience and Nature* Dewey notes that everyday experience is of objects in the world. It takes a definite mental operation to sever experience from nature and treat the mind as a self-contained domain. This is the conception of experience that troubles philosophy, of course, but Dewey does not merely see it as a misstep. The drawing of a line between mind and nature in the modern period reflects a new pattern in actual epistemic affairs. Thinking of the mind and the physical world as self-sufficient domains turned out to have enormous practical power. “To distinguish in reflection the physical and to hold it in temporary detachment is to be set upon the road that conducts to tools and technologies, to construction of mechanisms, to the arts that ensue in the

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Godfrey-Smith, “From *Dewey, Continuity, and McDowell*,” in *Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 307.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

wake of the sciences.” The problem of philosophy has arisen not by according the distinction between mind and world a special status but by allowing the distinction to “harden” in a particular way.<sup>17</sup>

These accounts of Dewey’s philosophy are accurate, and there is no sense in which Godfrey-Smith inaccurately reports the central details of Dewey’s project. What does appear to be the case is that Godfrey-Smith misunderstands the *point* of Dewey’s project. While it is true that Dewey did not explicitly author a critique of scientific naturalism as here presented, he did critique a notion of experience which would allow a philosophy such as scientific naturalism to be viable by supposed empirical standards. Given the tenor of Godfrey-Smith’s treatment of Dewey here, Godfrey-Smith appears to see Dewey as sort of “outdated” philosopher of science, someone whose ideas offer “valuable vantage points from which to view philosophical problems,” yet also someone he regards as representing an “unorthodox” form of naturalism.

Godfrey-Smith plainly states that “I do not endorse anything like the whole of this package”<sup>18</sup> in reference to what he takes to be “Dewey’s account of mind and knowledge, how traditional philosophical problems have arisen, and the proper philosophical framing of a naturalistic view.”<sup>19</sup> I think there are two reasons for this. First, there is my already-stated belief that Godfrey-Smith simply misses the point of Dewey’s project, namely, to critique a notion of experience which could have scientific naturalism as one of its potential consequences. Second, I believe that Godfrey-Smith is

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 311.



operating with the very notion of experience which Dewey critiqued and is therefore unwilling to allow the full force of Dewey's arguments to gain traction.

De Caro and Macarthur acknowledge that they selected contributors from the Anglo-American, analytic tradition for their volumes. As such, Godfrey-Smith would necessarily fit into this category and does philosophy from within this tradition. But the notion of experience which Dewey critiques *underlies* the very tradition of which Godfrey-Smith is a part. This raises a question I asked earlier: can a proper critique of scientific naturalism take place from within the analytic tradition? Or, alternatively, would certain ontological presuppositions made by analytic philosophers need to be abandoned in order to accurately critique scientific naturalism? One of these presuppositions would involve assumptions about the nature of experience.

While Godfrey-Smith is to be applauded for reaching outside his own tradition in order to gain "valuable vantage points from which to view philosophical problems," doing so might not be fruitful if one's own ontological presuppositions are not scrutinized in the process.

## **2.7 Immediate Empiricism and Epistemic Reductionism**

I return to the three critiques of epistemic reductionism by contrasting epistemic reductionism with Dewey's own notion of empiricism. Dewey gives his form of empiricism the name immediate empiricism. By this he means that things ['things' is the non-technical sense] are what they are experienced to be. Each encounter with a thing has its own quality, its own sense, which determines the manner in which that

thing is experienced. The total situation and circumstances within which engagement of a thing occurs determines the manner in which that thing is *had*, and the kind of quality which pervades the engagement determines the manner in which the thing is reflected upon, whether epistemically, morally, aesthetically, politically, socially, and so on. It is the *had*, immediate [i.e. non-mediated] sense of the thing, as opposed to the reflective sense, that Dewey means to approximate by the term immediate empiricism.

Often saying that “a thing is what it is experienced to be” is interpreted as “a thing is what it is *known* to be.” These phrases have extremely divergent meanings. The former takes things according to the mode in which they are encountered, as mentioned above, within a particular context, situation or problem, and accepts whatever traits, qualities or aspects which the thing might reveal as being genuine traits of nature; the latter attempts to transform what is experienced into a thing cognized, attempts to make it an object of and for knowledge, to interpret it in an exclusively epistemic manner.

It is evident that taking objects as they are *known* yields a specific degree of clarity and certainty. Historically, the pursuit of the epistemic characteristics of things has had specific, although diverse, criteria according to which it is judged. These criteria may mean that a *known* thing is clear and distinct; or is separated out from other things for analysis; or that it is abstracted out of its native and naïve context as a mental object; or perhaps that it is the only way in which the thing can be stated in a satisfactorily rational and linguistic fashion. It is these characteristics of things as *known* which philosophic and scientific inquiry have historically and perennially sought after.

However, when the epistemic approach is granted priority and privilege over other modes of experiencing, this privileging is too often translated as “knowing is the sole and only genuine mode of experiencing.” The conferral of exclusive ontological reality to things only *as they are known* is termed “intellectualism” by Dewey.

In the assertion (implied here) that the great vice of philosophy is an arbitrary “intellectualism,” there is no slight cast upon intelligence and reason. By “intellectualism” as an indictment is meant the theory that all experiencing is a mode of knowing, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such.<sup>20</sup>

In order to allow Dewey’s term “intellectualism” to relate more directly to the analysis of scientific naturalism, I have referred to the content of this notion with the term *epistemic reductionism*, explicitly defined as the reduction of all experience and empiricism to epistemology.

There are several questions one can ask concerning epistemic reductionism in order to better understand why Dewey rejects this philosophical approach. First, what circumstances motivate epistemic reductionism, or what accounts for this particular interpretation of experience? Second, what are the effects of such a view for experience and philosophy, or what kind of philosophical worldview might this view of experience yield?

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<sup>20</sup> John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 1*, 28.

## 2.8 The Moral Motivations of Epistemic Reductionism

Dewey locates the motivations of epistemic reductionism in the human condition. Human beings live in a world of stress, uncertainty, and peril. Humans are creatures subject to ever changing environing conditions with perpetually vacillating sets of circumstances which require direct, sharp adjustments and adaptations. The flow between those elements in life which are stable and those which are precarious is inescapable; no person is immune from the march of change which defines the crux of the human condition.

The insecurity of man's course in the world yields a quest for certainty and assurance; those things which can be held to, counted on, and which are stable and immutable, are immensely valuable, and in fact, are of superior value compared to those things which are shifting and uncertain. Certainty has been sought by a variety of methods, and a plethora of things have been declared to provide certainty. Each philosopher has his own favored object(s) of certainty. "The arbitrary character of the 'reality' that emerges is seen in the fact that very different objects are selected by different philosophers... That is, whatever strikes a philosopher from the angle of a particular problem that presses on him as being self-evident and hence completely assured, is selected by him to constitute reality."<sup>21</sup>

They may be mathematical entities, states of consciousness, or sense data. [...] Scholasticism considered that the True and the Good, along with Unity, were the marks of Being as such. [...] There is Spinoza with his assurance that a true idea carries truth intrinsic in its bosom; Locke with his "simple idea"; Hume with his "impression"; the English neo-realist

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 31-2.

with his ultimate atomic data; the American neo-realist with his ready-made essences.<sup>22</sup>

Each of these represents the attempt to identify that which is knowable and therefore certain.

The comfort provided by the certainty of the epistemic treatment of things is of unequalled value. “Certainty, assurance, is immensely valuable in a world full of uncertainty and peril as that in which we live. As a result whatever is capable of certainty is assumed to constitute ultimate Being, and everything else is said to be merely phenomenal, or in extreme cases, illusory.”<sup>23</sup>

The mental process by which the epistemic characteristics of objects are elevated to such lofty heights is a misapplication of selective emphasis, a principle which characterizes all thought. Thought and reflection analyzes, draws distinctions, abstracts, and separates. The act of identifying information which is pertinent and relevant to a specific matter at hand is the hallmark of all thinking. Typically, irrelevant and inconsequential information is cast aside. There is nothing inherently wrong with this procedure; however, when the functional distinctions which reflection draws are treated as ontological distinctions, and when the irrelevant is deemed the unreal, the “philosophical evil” of epistemic reductionism is apparent.

In ordinary matters and in scientific inquires, we always retain the sense that the materials chosen is selected for a purpose; there is no idea of denying what is left out, for what is omitted is merely that which is not relevant to the particular problem and purpose in hand. But in philosophies, this limiting condition is often wholly ignored. It is not noted and remembered that the favored subject-matter is chosen for a

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 31.

purpose and that what is left out is just as real and important in its own characteristic context. It tends to be assumed that because qualities that figure in poetical discourse and those that are central in friendship do not figure in scientific inquiry, they have no reality, at least not the kind of unquestionable reality attributed to the mathematical, mechanical or magneto-electric properties that constitute matter. It is natural to men to take that which is of chief value to them at the time as *the* real. Reality and superior value are equated.<sup>24</sup>

The quest for certainty by which stable objects are accorded superior value, then, is the result of a moral judgment, morality here construed in the widest sense possible. The choice or decision by which selective emphasis is placed on only the epistemic characteristics of an object is an act of normative valuation, one in which something perceived as ‘good’ is preferred to something ‘bad’. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with making a judgment of this sort, but unfortunately it is often unseen, ignored, or denied. In fact, it reveals an irony; epistemic reductionism, which would seek to grant reality only to objects which can be *known*, which leaves no room for objective moral assessment, is generated by a specific moral decision.

This bias toward treating objects selected because of their value in some special context as the “real,” in a superior and invidious sense, testifies to an empirical fact of importance. Philosophical simplifications are due to choice, and choice marks an interest *moral* in the broad sense of concern for what is good.<sup>25</sup>

The motivations, then, for affirming epistemic reductionism are environmental and moral. The conditions and circumstances in which the human creature finds himself, and the requirement to grow and adapt in the direction of survival, which entails a necessary “concern for what is good”, leads some to adhere exclusively to that which

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 33.

appears to provide the most certainty, namely, epistemic and scientific inquiry. But a second question suggests itself: what sort of philosophy does this view of experience yield?

## 2.9 The Philosophical Consequences of Epistemic Reductionism

Dewey claims that epistemic reductionism “accounts for the belief that nature is an indifferent, dead mechanism,” despite the fact that nature is not experienced as such. Once philosophy treats the world as though it can only, genuinely be *known* by scientific inquiry, this means the world is value-free because scientific inquiry is value-free.<sup>26</sup>

The isolation of traits characteristic of objects known, and then defined as the sole ultimate realities, accounts for the denial to nature of the characters which make things lovable and contemptible, beautiful and ugly, adorable and awful. It accounts for the belief that nature is an indifferent, dead mechanism; it explains why characteristics that are the valuable and valued traits of objects in actual experience are thought to create a fundamentally troublesome philosophical problem.<sup>27</sup>

As was previously stated, the acceptance of the epistemological theme leads directly to the ontological theme. In addition, acceptance of the epistemological theme yields other philosophical problems, such as the placement problem. Moral experiences are common to everyone, yet if philosophy privileges knowing as the primary or exclusive mode of experience, the nature of other forms of experience become problematic. There is much philosophical maneuvering which must take place in order

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that there is much talk in the philosophy of science about scientific “values”. However, these values are referred to specifically as cognitive or epistemic values. They are values which are concerned with what counts as knowledge or the best way provide scientific explanations.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 28.

to account for such experiences, but in the end, scientific naturalism will simply relegate them to the subjective realm, and regard them as less real.

Dewey's philosophy recognizes and celebrates scientific inquiry, but he rejects the notion that only scientific inquiry can reveal genuine traits of nature.

It is important for philosophic theory to be aware that the distinct and evident are prized and why they are. But it is equally important to note that the dark and twilight abound. For in any object of primary experience there are always potentialities which are not explicit; any object that is overt is charged with possible consequences that are hidden; the most overt act has factors which are not explicit. Strain thought as far as we may and not all consequences can be foreseen or made an express or known part of reflection and decision. In the face of such empirical facts, the assumption that nature in itself is all of the same kind, all distinct, explicit and evident, having no hidden possibilities, no novelties or obscurities, is possible only on the basis of a philosophy which at some point draws an arbitrary line between nature and experience.<sup>28</sup>

Dewey calls the philosophical move by which all other empirical modes of experiencing are rejected in favor of the epistemic reductionism a "trick of logic." Far from being anything which scientific inquiry demands of its results, it is the philosopher with specific metaphysical (i.e., *extraempirical*) commitments who demands such ontological reductionism. The scientist *as scientist* does not engage in such matters; they are outside of his discipline and field of expertise. The philosopher does not grant ontological priority to epistemic objects on any particular empirical or scientific grounds; he does so due to his own metaphysical and metaphilosophical preferences.

The same considerations apply to the other objection that was suggested: namely, that to view experience naturalistically is to reduce it to something materialistic, depriving it of all ideal significance. If experience actually presents aesthetic and moral traits, then these traits may also be supposed to reach down into nature, and to testify to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 27-8.



something that belongs to nature as truly as does the mechanical structure attributed to it in physical science. To rule out that possibility by some general reasoning is to forget that the very meaning and purport of empirical method is that things are to be studied on their own account, so as to find out what is revealed when they are experienced. The traits possessed by the subject-matters of experience are as genuine as the characteristics of sun and electron. They are *found*, experienced, and are not to be shoved out of being by some trick of logic. When found, their ideal qualities are as relevant to the philosophic theory of nature as are the traits found by physical inquiry.<sup>29</sup>

A philosophy committed to epistemic reductionism will necessarily have unempirical foundations. The immediate empiricism put forth by Dewey is an attempt to take seriously the notion of empiricism, by which “the very meaning and purport of empirical method is that things are to be studied on their own account, so as to find out what is revealed when they are experienced.” Things are to be treated as they are found in experience. Epistemic reductionism demands that things be conformed to the restrictions of scientific inquiry before they are experienced, and if they cannot be, then they are discarded as unscientific. This disdain with which unscientific pursuits are treated should be an indication that scientific naturalism is founded on normative principles.

This philosophical methodology has no empirical foundations, and is not affirmed for empirical reasons, but is due to unempirical, metaphysical commitments coupled with the normative principles which characterize the quest for certainty. It results in an ontological dualism between man and the world, a dualism which is a secondary object of reflection. If the foundational ontological presupposition of a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 13-4.

philosophy cannot be empirically verified, but can only be asserted metaphysically, how can this philosophy claim to be empirical in nature?

### **2.10 Scientific Inquiry and Epistemic Reductionism**

To close this section, a few words need to be said about the Deweyan view of the relation between knowledge and scientific inquiry. In the western tradition, knowledge has been defined as justified, true belief. There are philosophers in the analytic tradition who are still working under this epistemic paradigm, attempting to understand how man can achieve a true belief with the proper justification given that there is an ontological gap between man and the world.

The Deweyan conception of knowledge originates from man's interaction with his environing conditions and is defined empirically by what is found to take place when man is seeking and using knowledge.

It is easy to see what knowledge contributes—namely, the possibility of intelligent administration of the elements of doing and suffering. We are about something, and it is well to know what we are about, as the common phrase has it. To be intelligent in action and in suffering (enjoyment too) yields satisfaction even when conditions cannot be controlled. But when there is possibility of control, knowledge is the sole agency of its realization. Given this element of knowledge in primary experience, it is not difficult to understand how it may develop from a subdued and subsidiary factor into a dominant charter.<sup>30</sup>

The desire to control the problematic and uncertain situations man finds himself in accounts for the value which knowledge, and any pursuit which can reliably yield knowledge, possesses. This is particularly the case with scientific inquiry, as its great

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 29.

successes in controlling and manipulating the environment have proven to be unmatched in human history. Scientific inquiry is so successful at achieving its desired ends that it is no wonder that scientific naturalism claims that scientific inquiry provides the only empirical method capable of unlocking all the secrets which nature might be hiding.

But the successes of scientific inquiry are successes of a specific kind. Scientific inquiry was only developed to solve one particular kind of problem. Scientific inquiry investigates physical objects in the natural world and the relations between these objects. But in scientific investigation, these objects are abstracted out of their larger environing conditions.

The independence of scientific objects from limited and fairly direct reference to the environment as a factor in activities of use and enjoyment, is equivalent, as has already been intimated, to their *abstract* character. It is also equivalent to their *general* character in the sense in which the generalizations of science are different from the generalizations with which common sense is familiar. The generality of *all* scientific subject-matter as such means that it is freed from restriction to conditions which present themselves at particular times and places.<sup>31</sup>

When objects can be restricted and simplified in such a way that their relations to one another as quantitative, value-free, physical objects becomes apparent, then the control of those objects *as restricted and simplified* is possible. Of course, it is possible to treat objects in the world in this way for particular purposes, namely, the purposes of scientific inquiry. But it is another matter to declare that these objects only possess the characteristics that they do when they are treated in this restricted and simplified manner. There are no empirical grounds to make this claim.

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<sup>31</sup> John Dewey, From "The Pattern of Inquiry," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey: Two Volumes in One*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 237.

From the fact that scientific inquiry is the best method possessed for attaining an understanding of the relation between objects in their restricted, simplified, value-free sense, it cannot be concluded that scientific inquiry is the only method of empirical inquiry available or used. The claim that scientific inquiry is the only genuine mode of inquiry is the methodological parallel to the claim about experience which states that knowing is the only genuine mode of experiencing. These claims simply cannot be sustained on empirical grounds, and are the direct result of metaphysical and metaphilosophical, normative judgments.

In this section I have presented Dewey's critique of scientific naturalism in a way that analyzes its basic metaphysical and metaphilosophical claims about the nature of experience and empiricism. In section 3, I will present Dewey's notion of experience as a genuine, empirical alternative to epistemic reductionism. Dewey's immediate empiricism yields an ontology which is as thick as his notion of experience, and rejects the idea that the placement problem must be resolved in either objective or subjective terms.

### **3. DEWEYAN NATURALISM**

#### **3.1 Deweyan Naturalism**

Before discussing how it is that Dewey understands moral qualities to reveal genuine traits of nature, I must first highlight several central components of Dewey's philosophy. Dewey makes an important, functional distinction between primary and secondary experience. This distinction divides experience in a way which accounts for the occurrence of both epistemic experience of the world, and nonreflective, qualitative experience of the world. This distinction is functional in nature, and does not impose an unnecessary ontological dualism upon experience, as scientific naturalism does. Dewey gives several examples of the way the distinction between primary and secondary experience can be thought of which will not result in a metaphysical rift between epistemic and nonreflective, qualitative experience.

Next, it is important to understand the particular manner in which primary and secondary experience relate to one another, namely, that secondary experience arises as a result of problems which occur in primary experience. When man is considered as an organism in perpetual transaction with ever-changing environing conditions, the term primary experience can be understood to encompass the normal, everyday transactions of man within said environing conditions. As long as the organism can persist comfortably, it can be said that equilibrium has been achieved. Any loss of this equilibrium is immediately felt by the organism. What was previously a determinate situation has become indeterminate, in that the elements and relations between man and

the environing conditions no longer hang together in a sure, comfortable manner. The organism cannot simply return to the previous state of equilibrium; man cannot move backwards in time. In order to restore the equilibrium, man must be able to identify what about the environing conditions is the cause of the indeterminacy. In other words, he must identify and articulate the problem. Then, he must come to know what organization of future environing conditions could be obtained in order to restore the equilibrium. He must possess the knowledge and ability to bring these future environing conditions into being. This general structure of problem-solving is called the pattern of inquiry.

The nature of indeterminate situations will vary, which means the nature of problems encountered will vary. What determines the nature of the problem is the pervasive quality which runs throughout the process of inquiry. The moral problem will have a much different feel to it than will the scientific problem. If the problem is epistemic and a moral solution is given, it will be dissatisfying and equilibrium is not restored. Pervasive qualities are acutely felt when the wrong sort of solution is offered to the problem. In this way, qualitative considerations regulate all thinking, all inquiry.

These felt qualities are not to be identified with subjective feelings. Felt qualities are experienced components of environing conditions and only active change of conditions in the environment can bring resolution of the problem, and thus abate the force of the experienced quality.

Valuation, then, the process of preferring one organization of environing conditions to another as a means of ameliorating a specific problem, is subject to

empirical investigation. The means used to bring about the resolution can be tested and observed; the ends achieved are also consequences in the world which can be observed. The analysis of moral actions in terms of their functional fitness to bring the desired resolution is an empirical matter, which can be assessed objectively and through observation. Moral qualities are found in experience and are therefore considered to have the same ontological status as any other things found in experience.

### **3.2 Primary and Secondary Experience**

In his philosophy Dewey makes an important, functional distinction between primary and secondary modes of experience. This distinction is a way of dividing man's experience of the world in such a way that both reflective and nonreflective experience can be account for on equal ontological grounds. As was seen in the second section, scientific naturalism has a notion of experience which is ontologically dualistic, in which knowing is taken to be the only genuine mode of experience and all other modes of experience are considered subjective, and therefore are accorded an inferior ontological status.

Dewey's notion of experience brings richness to the analysis of experience, enlarging and deepening experience rather than restricting and simplifying it as is done in scientific naturalism. Also, this notion of experience takes experience as it actual occurs, and does not make any *a priori* assumptions about the nature of experience. "Suppose however that we start with no presuppositions save that what is experienced,

since it is a manifestation of nature, may, and indeed, must be used as testimony of the characteristics of natural events.”<sup>32</sup>

This distinction between primary and secondary experience is tied directly to Dewey’s notion of immediate empiricism, and is best understood in terms of it. Recall that immediate empiricism states that things are what they are found to be. When a thing is engaged or experienced, it shows itself to have certain traits within a particular context.

Hence, if one wishes to describe anything truly, his task is to tell what it is experienced as being. If it is a horse that is to be described, or the *equus* that is to be defined, then must the horse-trader, or the jockey, or the timid family man who wants a “safe driver,” or the zoologist or the paleontologist tell us what the horse is which is experienced. If these accounts turn out to differ in some respects, as well as congruous in others, this is no reason for assuming the content of one to be exclusively “real,” and that the others to be “phenomenal”; for each account of what is experienced will manifest that it is the account *of* the horse-dealer, or *of* the zoologist, and hence will give the conditions requisite for understanding the differences as well as the agreements of the various accounts. And the principle varies not a whit if we bring in the psychologist’s horse, the logician’s horse, or the metaphysician’s horse.<sup>33</sup>

Here Dewey not only states that things should be treated as they are found, but that there are no firm grounds for claiming that one experience of a horse is more ‘real’ than any other experience of the horse.

Primary experience is precisely that mode of experience in which things are treated as they are found, and in which “things are to be studied on their own account, so as to find out what is revealed when they are experienced.”<sup>34</sup> Secondary experience is

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<sup>32</sup> John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 1*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 27.

<sup>33</sup> John Dewey, “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism”, 241.

<sup>34</sup> John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 1*, 14.



the reflective, mental process performed upon elements found in and furnished by primary experience in order to gain a clearer understanding about the relations between them.

The facts are familiar enough. They are cited [here] in order to invite attention to the relationship between objects of primary and of secondary or reflective experience. That the subject-matter of primary experience sets the problems and furnishes the first data of the reflection which constructs the secondary objects is evident; it is obvious that test and verification of the latter is secured only by return to things of crude or macroscopic experience—the sun, the earth, plants and animals of common, every-day life.<sup>35</sup>

The relation between primary and secondary experience is central to understanding Dewey's notion of experience. The next example demonstrates that primary experience, the mode of experience in which things are non-reflectively *had* and *felt*, provides the material which becomes the subject-matter of secondary, reflective experience.

In the following passage, Dewey understands the hearing of a loud, fearsome noise and the cognitive identification of the source of the noise as two, distinct, temporally separate experiences; however, both are equally real and both are genuinely empirical because each is actually experienced.

I start and am flustered by a noise heard. Empirically, that noise *is* fearsome; it *really* is, not merely phenomenally or subjectively so. That *is what* it is experienced as being. But, when I experience the noise as a *known* thing, I find it to be innocent of harm. It is the tapping of a shade against the window, owing to movements of the wind. The experience has changed; that is, the thing experienced has changed—not that an unreality has given place to a reality...not that truth has changed, but just and only the concrete reality experienced has changed. I now feel ashamed of my fright; and the noise as fearsome is changed to noise as a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 15-6.

wind-curtain fact, and hence practically indifferent to my welfare. This is a change of experienced existence effected through the medium of cognition. The content of the latter experience cognitively regarded is doubtless *truer* than the content of the earlier; but it is in no sense more real.<sup>36</sup>

These two examples demonstrate the manner in which Dewey means for his distinction to be understood. The passage about various experienced accounts of the horse portrays an instance in which a thing can be described from various perspectives, none of which can be said to be more real than any other. The passage concerning a fearsome noise which comes to be known as nonthreatening demonstrates that experiences can be transformed by the process of reflective inquiry, but that the *known* products of reflective inquiry cannot be said to be more real than are the initial, *felt* experiences from which they originate. In fact, in the latter example, it becomes clear that secondary experience relies upon primary experience for its subject-matter; or, stated different, reflective experience can only occur upon elements furnished by nonreflective experience.

In order to further understand the relationship between primary and secondary experience, both modes of experience need to be understood within the existential, environing context from which they arise.

### **3.3 Organism, Environment, and Equilibrium**

To use one of Dewey's favorite explanatory tools, man can be understood as an organism within an environment. Not only did he feel that this expression captured the

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<sup>36</sup> John Dewey, "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism", 243.

importance of biology for the recovery of an empirical method in philosophy, but that the language also emphasizes the organic nature of the intimate transactions which occur between man and the world.

Dewey takes man's experience to be comprised of transactions with his environment. The intercourse which occurs between man and the world, the coming and going, living and dying, thriving and struggling, constitutes man's experience. As such, those things which man experiences are taken to be manifestations of the natural world, manifestations which reveal generic traits of nature to man, all of which are considered equally real.

Man is subject to the same biological and physiological demands and drives as every natural organism.

The nature of experience is determined by the essential conditions of life. While man is other than bird and beast, he shares basic vital functions with them and has to make the same basal adjustments if he is to continue the process of living. Having the same vital needs, man derives the means by which he breathes, moves, looks and listens, the very brain with which he coordinates his senses and his movements, from his animal forbears. The organs with which he maintains himself in being are not of himself alone, but by the grace of struggles and achievements of a long line of animal ancestry.<sup>37</sup>

Man may be different from other organisms also found within this biological matrix in profound ways, but biology is never left behind and serves as the vehicle through which all man's desires, demands, and dreams are fulfilled. There is no aspect of man's existence which escapes this fundamental and foundational part of his nature.

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<sup>37</sup> John Dewey, From "The Live Creature," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey: Two Volumes in One*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 535.

This vital, biological interaction which man has with the world through his environment is characterized by struggle. The environment in which man is housed does not exist for his sake. It does not exist to serve him. It must be tamed, adapted to, changed, and engaged in such a way as to establish a harmony between organism and environment. It is this sort of biological intercourse with the world which typifies man's life and experience, and which can never be escaped or neglected without man's essential vitality being threatened.

All the conditions and elements of man's experience are determined principally by this interaction with the environment; everything he does and everything done to him occurs within this environing context.

Every need, say hunger for fresh air or food, is a lack that denotes at least a temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings. But it is also a demand, a reaching out into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium. Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it—either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.<sup>38</sup>

The needs of the organism initiate a large set of actions undertaken by the organism. When man has harmony with his environment and there are no needs which require immediate action or fulfillment, man's situation can be described as determinate, or in terms of equilibrium. As soon as needs make demands of man, his situation

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 535.

becomes indeterminate in that a future set of enviroing conditions which will reinstate that lost equilibrium has not yet become apparent. It is the case that many needs can be satisfied with little or no effort. If the need can be readily fulfilled by objects directly available in the environment, no true problem develops. If the need cannot be so directly and immediately fulfilled, then the situation is indeterminate, and will remain so until a resolution is found. An indeterminate situation which requires further investigation in order to be resolved necessitates the institution of an inquiry, which is an intentional process of reflectively engaging the relevant elements in the environment to bring about resolution.

The rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union not only persists in man but becomes conscious with him; its conditions are material out of which he forms purposes. Emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The discord is the occasion that induces reflection. Desire for restoration of the union converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization for harmony.<sup>39</sup>

Reflection, then, is the result of a particular disruption in, or loss of equilibrium with, the environment. Man's goal is to restore the previous, happy circumstances in which the distress and angst of the indeterminate situation were not present. But man cannot go backwards to some antecedent time. He must proceed forward into the future, and must look to establish equilibrium there. As such, he must seek to change the current indeterminate enviroing conditions which constitute the indeterminate situation into those which will once again be pleasant. This can only be achieved through reflection, that is, by assessing the cause of the current disruption and identifying the means of action which would bring about its resolution. Only through reflection can

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 536.

man imagine and hypothesize future enviroing conditions which would restore the lost equilibrium.

### 3.4 The Pattern of Inquiry

Here I want provide a more general account of how reflection arises out of primary experience. Dewey called this process the pattern of inquiry. This pattern should be understood as a formalization of what takes place in all concrete, empirical inquiries.

Before an inquiry can be instituted, there are several antecedent conditions which obtain in order to constitute a genuinely indeterminate situation. The first of these conditions is that there must be something about the particular situation which is puzzling or questionable. "The peculiar quality of what pervades the given materials, constituting them a situation, is not just uncertainty at large; it is a unique doubtfulness which makes that situation to be just and only the situation it is." The second condition is that the situation itself which must be inherently doubtful.

It is the *situation* that has these traits. *We* are doubtful because the situation is inherently doubtful. Personal states of doubt that are not evoked by and are not relative to some existential situation are pathological; when they are extreme they constitute the mania of doubting. Consequently, situations that are disturbed and troubled, confused or obscure, cannot be straightened out, cleared up and put in order, by manipulation of our personal states of mind. The attempt to settle them by such manipulations involves that psychiatrists call "withdrawal from reality." Such an attempt is pathological as far as it goes, and when it goes far it is the source of some form of actual insanity. The habit of disposing of the doubtful as if it belonged only to *us* rather than to the existential situation in which we are caught and implicated is an inheritance from subjectivistic psychology. The biological antecedent conditions of an unsettled situation are involved in that state of imbalance

in organic-environmental interactions which has already been described. Restoration of integration can be effected, in one case as in the other, only by operations which actually modify existing conditions, not merely “mental” processes.<sup>40</sup>

And finally, the third condition is that the situation must be able to be acted upon, to be influenced in one direction or another. The course of events which might transpire in the environment must be alterable as to their future consequences. A situation in which no action can be taken to bring about different future consequences is already a determinate situation, in one sense at least.

An indeterminate situation can be called a problematic situation once it is recognized and articulated as such, and this process is called the institution of a problem. Previously, the indeterminate situation is merely precognitive; it exists in the environment, but may not yet have been recognized as posing a threat, or be understood as something which requires rigorous investigation. At this point it has been felt, but all its implications have not yet been reflectively assessed. Once an indeterminate situation is recognized as a problem, it becomes a problematic situation.

A problem represents the partial transformation by inquiry of a[n] [indeterminate] situation into a determinate situation. It is a familiar and significant saying that a problem well put is half-solved. To find out *what* the problem and problems are which a problematic situation presents to be inquired into, is to be well along in inquiry. [...] Without a problem, there is blind groping in the dark.<sup>41</sup>

The next stage in the pattern of inquiry is called the determination of a problem-solution. First, observations must be made of those elements of the situation which are

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 227-8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 229.

settled or determined in existence. An indeterminate situation is never wholly and completely indeterminate. There are also elements of the situation which are familiar and stable due to previous inquiry and experience. Second, a possible solution in the form of an idea may present itself. As a possible solution, this idea will suggest that the materials of the given situation be transformed into a new arrangement which will yield particular, desired consequences in the future, which are as yet unrealized. And third, the idea is examined for its functional-fitness, which means its ability to offer a genuine solution to the problem.

A few more words need to be said about this last component in which an idea is examined for its functional-fitness. The process by which an idea is evaluated as to its relevancy as a possible solution to the established problematic situation is called reasoning. In reasoning, the idea (possible solution) is weighed in light of all the observed facts known about the circumstances in order to determine its functional-fitness for bringing resolution to the problem. If the idea does not consider all the facts which come to light, it may not be thorough or complete enough to accurately map the future conditions which need to obtain to bring about resolution of the problem. Or, if the idea considers the wrong kinds of fact about the situation, the idea may bring resolution to a particular problem, just not pressing problem of the current indeterminate situation.

The phrase of the pattern of inquiry called the determination of a problem-solution can be summarized by saying that a concrete, empirical inquiry must obtain a relevant and appropriate solution to a specific problematic situation; observation of settled traits in existence must occur so that firm grounds upon which an inquiry might



be built can be established; a possible solution (or idea) must arise from reflection on those settled traits and be weighed against other possible solutions (other ideas) which might also be a functional fit for the problem; the idea must be put in action in order to resolve the problematic situation in such a way that the solution brings resolution to the original need from which the problematic situation arose.

### 3.5 Pervasive Qualities and Subjective Feelings

But how are problematic situations and the pattern of inquiry experienced? Dewey has already spoken of “emotion [as] the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending.” The language of emotion begins to suggest what Dewey means by *had* and *felt* experience. But Dewey also speaks in terms of pervasive qualities. “The peculiar quality of what pervades the given materials, constituting them a situation” is one mention of qualities in conjunction with the pattern of inquiry. Dewey discusses qualities more extensively in other places.

When it is said that I have a feeling, or impression, or “hunch,” that things are thus and so, what is actually designated is primarily the presence of a dominating quality in a situation as a whole, not just the existence of a feeling as a psychical or psychological fact. To say I have a feeling or impression that so and so is the case is to note that the quality in question is not yet resolved into determinate terms and relations...But something presents itself as problematic before there is recognition of *what* the problem is. The problem is had or experienced before it can be stated or set forth; but it is had as an immediate quality of the whole situation. The sense of something problematic, of something perplexing and to be resolved, marks the presence of something pervading all elements and considerations.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John Dewey, From “Qualitative Thought,” in *The Essential Dewey: Volume 1*, ed. Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 198.

Reflection is the process by which a problematic situation is identified and stated. Prior to this act of reflection, however, there is the *felt* disturbance of things as indeterminate. Recall that an indeterminacy or problem in the environment is identified by emotion, which is the conscious sign of a break with the environment. This break is not thought, but it is *felt*. It is the felt, emotional acknowledgement of a break *of a certain kind* with the environment. The nature, or force, of the kind of break which is encountered is the quality *possessed by* the break. It is this qualitative break which determines what set of appropriate responses and active engagement the world requires of man in order for him to restore equilibrium with his environment, and which will characterize all man's efforts to bring the problem to resolution. In fact, the resolution of the problem will result in the abating of the quality's influence. Whether this is called emotional, affective, inchoate, or qualitative, it is clear that Dewey thinks of primary experience as embodying this kind of nonreflective, nonepistemic core.

However, these qualities are not subjective. In order to speak of qualities as subjective, one must first affirm the dualism of subject and object as it is articulated by scientific naturalism. Scientific naturalism assumes a fundamental dualism between man and the world, subject and object, and then addresses the placement problem, that is, where qualities and values are to be located. Since they are not investigated or revealed by scientific inquiry, they cannot be said to inhabit the world; they are not intrinsic qualities of things. Therefore, scientific naturalism locates moral qualities on the subject-side of the dualism, accords them inferior ontological status, identifying them with subjective, mental states or personal feelings.

Dewey rejects this dualism, and consequently, he rejects that moral qualities must be located either in an antecedently independent world or in a subject's mind. This dichotomy is a false dichotomy which forces artificial ontological categories onto philosophy, and thus onto moral theory.

These qualities are not subjective; they are characteristic of a set of environing conditions; they are something which is experienced, but they are not subjective mental states.

It is an old saying that the gods were born of fear. The saying is only too likely to strengthen a misconception bred by confirmed subjective habits. We first endow man in isolation with an instinct of fear and then we imagine him irrationally ejecting that fear into the environment, scattering broadcast as it were, the fruits of his own purely personal limitations, and thereby creating superstition. But fear, whether an instinct or an acquisition, is a function of the environment. Man fears because he exists in a fearful, an awful world. The *world* is precarious and perilous...It was not fear of gods that created the gods.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear that the procedure by which qualities are relegated to the subjective begins with taking man in isolation from his environing conditions, as though he had antecedent independent reality apart from the world. Empirically (scientifically) this is not the case. The fact that man can be reflectively and functionally distinguished from the rest of nature does not mean that he is *in fact* independent of it. The act of rendering this functional distinction as ontological and then proceeding to address the placement problem, coupled with the commitment to epistemic reductionism, naturally leads to treating qualities as subjective.

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<sup>43</sup> John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 1*, 43-4.

It is no wonder that moral experience is considered a subjective matter when most of the entities with which morality is purported to involve (i.e., mental states, beliefs, dispositions, and attitudes) are unempirical in nature. Dewey's functional distinction between primary and secondary experience clearly identifies these entities as resultants from the process of reflection, yet they are treated as 'given,' or as the fundamental data of moral experience by scientific naturalism. When the given entities of moral experience are unempirical in nature, all moral philosophy will also be considered unempirical in nature.

One might think that perhaps Dewey identifies the enviroing conditions which give rise to subjective mental states as the fundamental data of moral experience, but this is not the case. First, Dewey is not concerned with subjective mental states as though they were the fundamental data of moral experience. Any treatment of mental states must by necessity be unempirical because these states are not subject to empirical investigation. What is subject to empirical investigation in moral experience are moral problems, moral actions, and moral valuations. It is actions and the ends produced by them within the context of a moral inquiry which are judged to be morally good or otherwise. An empirical investigation of moral subject-matter must take place in terms of the active means and ends-in-view. The mental states, beliefs, dispositions, and attitudes of mentalistic and subjectivistic morality can only be empirical when they become actions in the world; until that point, they are something like transcendental entities, and are merely the necessary conditions of moral action, a view I assume no scientific naturalist would explicitly endorse, yet does so implicitly at every stage.

What has just been said demands a more thorough analysis in terms of moral inquiry, an analysis which will occur shortly. Here I am concerned with making clear that Dewey does not think moral quality and moral traits are subjective in nature.

The world in which we immediately live, that in which we strive, succeed, and are defeated is preeminently a qualitative world. What we act for, suffer, and enjoy are things in their qualitative determinations. This world forms the field of characteristic modes of thinking, characteristic in that thought is definitely regulated by qualitative considerations.<sup>44</sup>

The qualitative nature of man's experience with the world is primary, is most fundamental. When things are experienced, acted upon, suffered and enjoyed, it is in this qualitative manner. All thought and reflection are instigated by processes and relations within this qualitative world and return to it in order to act upon the qualitative determinations of things.

To say that action, suffering, and enjoyment are of things in their qualitative determinations is to say that things are genuinely experienced as primary, as *felt*, or *had*. Scientific naturalism will refer to these felt qualities as feelings, and will once again speak of them subjectively. This viewpoint, again, treats the subject as though it has an antecedent and independent reality apart from and prior to his environing conditions. This presentation of qualities *as feelings* can only occur in a philosophy which assumes (a) a fundamental dualism between man and the world and (b) assumes that engagement with the world begins *within* man and then extends *outward* into the world, again, as though man and the world were ontologically separated *a priori*, which accounts for the notion that qualities are projected onto the world.

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<sup>44</sup> John Dewey, "Qualitative Thought", 195.

If we designate this permeating qualitative unity [of experience] in psychological language, we say it is felt rather than thought. Then, if we hypostatize it, we call it *a* feeling. But to term it a feeling is to reverse the actual state of affairs. The existence of unifying qualitiveness in the subject-matter defines the meaning of “feeling.” The notion that “a feeling” designates a ready-made independent psychical entity is a product of a reflection which presupposes the direct presence of quality as such.<sup>45</sup>

Qualities, then, are best spoken of as *felt*, not as feelings.

Dewey rejects the dualism between subject and object, and he rejects the artificial ontological categories forced on moral philosophy; therefore, he necessarily rejects qualities as strictly subjective or objective in nature. A subjective understanding of qualities treats qualities as mentalistic projections onto an antecedently independent world; a strictly objective understanding of qualities would treat them as innate or intrinsic to things in the world, as though God created these objects to possess these or those specific qualities. In moral discourse, the objective understanding of qualities would identify objects or actions as intrinsically good or evil. Dewey rejects both the subjective and objective characterization of qualities as unempirical.

Dewey’s notion of qualities locates them in experience, not in the subject as mental entities or in the world as intrinsic parts of objects. Experience is the conscious awareness of transactions between man and the world. Experiential transactions are transactions in and with nature, and the traits revealed by these transactions, whether qualitative or reflective, are manifestations of nature. I acknowledge that there is not much by way of argument. Simply saying that qualities are found in experience, therefore they are real, might not be enough to convince a person who already holds to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 198.

scientific naturalism. But isn't this the nature of all empirical claims, particularly the claims of scientific inquiry?

Empiricism is the claim that things are experienced. The achievements of scientific inquiry been accomplished because centuries ago, people begin to look directly at what they were experiencing, casting off millennia of traditional theory and mythologizing.

Experience, if scientific inquiry is justified, is no infinitesimally thin layer or foreground of nature, but that it penetrates into it, reaching down into its depths, and in such a way that its grasp is capable of expansion; it tunnels in all directions and in so doing brings to the surface things at first hidden—as miners pile high on the surface of the earth treasures brought from below. Unless we are prepared to deny all validity to scientific inquiry, these facts have a value that cannot be ignored for the general theory of the relation of nature and experience.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, it is no small claim to say that something is real simply because it is had in experience. That is the essence of all empiricisms. The difference between scientific naturalism and the empirical naturalism articulated by Dewey is that empirical naturalism makes no arbitrary, ontological distinctions within experience due to *a priori* metaphysical commitments; empirical naturalism claims to be thoroughly empirical, and radically so.

In the natural sciences there is a union of experience and nature which is not greeted as a monstrosity; on the contrary, the inquirer must use empirical method if his findings are to be treated as genuinely scientific. The investigator assumes as a matter of course that experience, controlled in specifiable ways, is the avenue that leads to the facts and laws of nature.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 1*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

That there is continuity between what is found in experience and what is found in nature is the most foundational assumption of scientific inquiry. Scientifically, what is found in experience is the result of transaction between man and the world. There are no empirical grounds, only metaphysical ones, for the additional claim that scientific inquiry is the only genuine mode of experiencing the world.

But candid regard for scientific inquiry also compels the recognition that when experience does occur...it enters into possession of some portion of nature.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.6 Moral Inquiry and the Placement Problem**

It is now appropriate to turn to Dewey's empirical notion of moral inquiry in order to provide, by way of example, an indication of what form an empirical inquiry, which is not considered scientific, would have. Empirical moral inquiry as conceived by Dewey provides the clearest example of a genuine mode of investigation and a genuine mode of inquiry which is empirical, but which is not scientific. Granted, it is not my task to give a complete account of Dewey's moral philosophy, as such is beyond the scope of this project. Here I only intend to present an upshot of Deweyan moral inquiry in order to motivate the claim that scientific inquiry is not the only genuine mode of empirical investigation available.

A morally indeterminate situation arises as the result of a consciously felt, emotional realization that a proper future course of action is not immediately apparent because particular moral obligations are in irreconcilable conflict. This conflict is not

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 12.



the conflict between good and bad, right and wrong, beneficial or damaging; it is the conflict between diverse obligations, some of which are understood in terms of duty, others in terms of virtue, or the good. The conflict arises because each of these ideals is morally valued, yet their demands initially appear to call for different, irreconcilable courses of action. Moral valuation is the reflective process of adjudicating between these irreconcilable, morally valued courses of action, each of which is nothing less than a future set of enviroing conditions which bring resolution to the initial morally problematic situation. In addition, moral valuation is the process of assessment of these various, potential ends-in-view for their practical, functional fitness to solve the initial moral problem in light of these diverse, yet relevant moral obligations. This entire process by which a moral problem is brought to resolution by implementing the morally preferred ends-in-view through morally approved means (a course of actions) is what is meant by the term moral inquiry.

Moral inquiry, as here described, is a thoroughly empirical process. It is assessment and manipulation of enviroing conditions in light of moral obligations, just as scientific inquiry is assessment and manipulation of enviroing conditions in light of epistemic concerns.

Indeterminate situations arise as a result of a felt break in equilibrium with the environment. It should be noticed that this entails that indeterminate situations are specific, individual occurrences. In a moral context, this means that morally indeterminate situations, and the subsequent morally problematic situation which results from it, are specific and isolated, not general. "A radical empiricist approach to the

nature of moral problems seeks a...description of what moral problems are experienced *as* rather than an essence or a definition of moral problems. We do not, after all, experience moral problems in general.”<sup>49</sup>

The consciously emotional break with the environment is the awareness of an irreconcilable conflict which brings active progress to a halt. The next step in a process is not apparent, whether that process is a particular undertaking or life in general. Or, there is hesitation to complete the next stage or phrase of the project because it has become clear that there are different demands to which one is accountable, demands which seem to be incompatible in that they would each require a different course of action to be fulfilled.

The conflict which exists is between various ideals which are valued morally. It is not a conflict between good and bad, or right and wrong. The conflict exists because the various relations one has with objects and persons in the world create various obligations, or manners in which an individual is responsible to or for others. These obligations can be characterized differently, as instances of required duty, or the obligation to be virtuous, or obligation to what is good, however this may be understood. Each of these responsibilities may demand a particular course of action if one is to fulfill the responsibility, but they may also prohibit other courses of actions and if these prohibited courses of actions are demanded by other moral responsibilities or obligations, the conflict is apparent. Which set of obligations, responsibilities, and

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<sup>49</sup> Gregory F. Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 89.

actions ought one pursue given that different sets of obligations, responsibilities and actions may be irreconcilable?

Moral valuation is the reflective process by which one attempts to decide which of these morally valued courses of action are to be undertaken in light of conflicting moral obligations. Central to moral valuation is the idea that these courses of action are not yet been undertaken, that they are future courses of action. A 'course of action' is a series of actions which will bring about a future set of environing conditions. Notice that the essence of the morally problematic situation is a halt in action. No action is resumed until a particular course of action is judged morally appropriate. As such, the action to be performed has not yet been realized and lies in the future. The action, or course of action, is an end-in-view, and it is various ends-in-view which are in conflict, for different ends-in-view may be demanded by different moral obligations. Moral valuation, then, is the assessment of various ends-in-view according to their implications for various moral obligations.

This whole process from the recognition of the morally indeterminate situation, the identifications of the moral problem as the specific conflict between various obligations, and the reflective procedure of weighing the various obligations and their implications for future action in moral valuation is moral inquiry. How this moral pattern of inquiry resolves particular moral problems is beyond the scope of this particular thesis. What is central here is that this entire process of moral inquiry is experienced and is empirical.

The goal or purpose of empirical moral inquiry cannot be to understand the moral structure of the universe, nor can it be to help a moral agent realize that suffering is merely an illusion. Empirical moral inquiry is about improving the circumstances of the agent and others by effecting change in the world by solving morally problematic situations. This instrumentalist understanding of morality may dissatisfy some, but no more than the instrumental understanding of scientific inquiry will dissatisfy the person who has embarked on the quest for certainty. Empirically, however, these instrumental conceptions of both scientific and moral inquiry are all that can be claimed. Certainly one can entertain realist interpretations of both scientific and moral inquiry, but one does so because he finds this *metaphysical* viewpoint satisfying in some way.

Empirical verification of the products of moral valuation occurs in the same manner that empirical verification of the prediction of future events occurs. If someone says they can predict the future, one assesses a particular prediction and then waits for the predicted set of enviroing conditions to either obtain or not.<sup>50</sup> The point is that what needs to be verified can be experienced, and is thus subject to empirical verification. The same can be said for moral valuation of ends-in-view. When these ends were brought about, did they bring resolution to the situation? There is nothing about the pattern of moral inquiry which guarantees that an individual will be a competent moral agent, but his solutions can be observed and assessed as to their ability to bring about resolution. Thus, this process is thoroughly empirical.

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<sup>50</sup> Presumably, this procedure of verification would be repeated several times in order to prove the actual validity of the prediction, not just the chance correlation of prediction with future events.

The manner in which the process of moral inquiry is empirical is the same manner in which scientific inquiry is judged to be empirical, though the subject-matters of each inquiry are vastly different. A scientifically indeterminate situation is one in which a physical linkage of causes and effect in the world is not fully understood. What causes one thing to be or occur as opposed to another is not apparent. The precise source of the indeterminacy is articulated as a problem. Various scientific procedures for further assessment and manipulation of the physical elements of the problem are suggested, considered, and selected. This process is usually repeated and proceeds over a lengthy period of time until either a particular cause-effect relationship can be given or until it is realized that larger scientific assumptions about the physical world may need to be revised given the initial physical problem. If the initial problematic situation is resolved by the scientific explanation suggested, then the scientific inquiry has been successful.

In the same way that scientific inquiry lays bare and reveals the physical relations of nature, moral inquiry reveals the moral relations of nature, where moral relations are understood in terms of naturalistic obligations and responsibilities for action. There is nothing supernatural about these obligations and responsibilities, nor is there anything transcendental. These obligations and responsibilities to act in specific ways are not mental entities, but they describe the social and communal relations between natural organisms, namely, human beings. As human beings relate to one another within the context of friendship, familial bonds, as colleagues, or members of particular organizations, or members of society, various responsibilities arise and proper moral

action demands that these responsibilities and obligations be assessed and balanced when they come in conflict. These moral relations are as much a part of human experience as are physical realities, each of which requires their own characteristic modes of reflection when problems arise. These modes of reflection constitute different forms of inquiry for resolving problematic situations, inquiries which Dewey believes can be thoroughly empirical in each case.

## 4. CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with the intent of criticizing the ontological sparseness of scientific naturalism from a Deweyan perspective. As I conceived it, this entailed not only offering a good critique of scientific naturalism, but also offering a plausible, alternative ontology to that offered by scientific naturalism. A complete account of Dewey's ontology and philosophy could not be given here; however, it was my intention to reinterpret the placement problem in light of Deweyan naturalism, a philosophical tradition which has as much respect for empiricism and science as scientific naturalism. In fact, it should be clear that the metaphilosophical presuppositions of Dewey's naturalism are nothing less than a commitment to be thoroughly empirical in all things, something which cannot be said of scientific naturalism.

It has been my intention to examine the metaphysical assumptions of scientific naturalism in order to induce a more critical attitude toward this philosophical tradition, and in order to curb the philosophical dogmatism which is creeping into mainstream Anglo-American philosophy. By way of a conclusion, I would like to summarize the Deweyan critique of scientific naturalism, paying particular attention to the relationship between the various key elements of the critique: ontology, inquiry, and experience.

Ontological sparseness is the core metaphysical commitment of scientific naturalism. Ontological sparseness was defined by the ontological theme of De Caro and Macarthur: that one should be ontologically committed only to those objects which successful scientific explanations commit one. The natural sciences are the disciplines

by which elements of the natural world are treated in terms of their physical and causal relations to one another, though doing science requires more than just physical objects. Quantifications, measurement, explanations, predictions, and the like are the mental tools of the scientist, which means that the entities required to perform these operations must be accounted for as well, namely, propositions, numbers, and conception, along with the rules of inference and applicable logical systems. However, scientific naturalism would be cautious about attributing ontological reality to any other entities without much investigation.

This metaphysical commitment to ontological sparseness is justified by appealing to the epistemological theme of scientific naturalism, or the notion that it is only by following the methods of the natural sciences that one arrives at genuine knowledge. Knowledge is here taken to mean the ability to determine what is in the world and how those things in the world relate to one another. This means that the scientific understanding of the world is the only correct understanding of the world, and while the world is amenable to many other interpretations or ways of being understood and experienced, all other interpretations of the world are subjective, not objective, in nature.

Implicit to the epistemological theme is commitment to a specific view of human experience. According to scientific naturalism throughout the long, historical development of scientific inquiry, other competing interpretations of human experience of the world have been rejected. The modern, scientific worldview has replaced all other interpretations of how the world could be, or could be experienced. Since it is the case that scientific inquiry is the only genuine mode of determining what there is in the



world, it is not a far reach to assume that knowing is the only genuine mode of experience. This is precisely what Dewey calls Intellectualism, the reduction of all experience to epistemology.

For my purposes, scientific naturalism is understood as a contemporary occurrence of Intellectualism. There are no empirical grounds for making the claim that knowing is the only genuine mode of experience. As has been seen, the world is not primarily experienced as known; the world is not given as *known*. It is primarily experienced as *had* or *felt*. *Knowing*, or seeking knowledge, is but one mode of experience which arises out of this felt, had, qualitative experience. The exclusive privileging of knowledge is not the result of empirical investigation of the content and structure of experience. The exclusive privileging of knowledge is the result of the quest for certainty, the seeking after the stable elements of a precarious world which his ever changing.

Through the Deweyan critique the quest for certainty is recognized as a pursuit of those elements of the environment which allow for a happy harmony amidst the peril. But Dewey also makes it clear that man experiences the world in modes as other than as *known*, and that he seeks to establish and maintain harmony with the world through a variety of means, of which knowing is only one. Thus, Dewey articulates a notion of human experience which includes all the modes in which the world is actually experienced. This notion of human experience is called immediate empiricism.

The rejection of Intellectualism is the rejection of the notion of human experience in which knowing is the only genuine mode of experience. Since knowing is

not the only genuine mode of experience, scientific inquiry can no longer be considered to be the determinant of what there is in the world (nature). According to Dewey's immediate empiricism, things are what they are experienced to be. This means that those things which are found in experience reveal genuine traits of nature, and if moral qualities and values are experienced, then nature genuinely has moral traits. As different traits of nature are identified, appropriate modes of inquiry for each subject-matter will be developed. The form, practice, and history of scientific inquiry are untouched, even if Dewey's pattern of inquiry has certain instrumentalist overtones. This, though, is a topic for another day. What remains to be done is to develop empirical modes of inquiry which will treat moral, aesthetic, or political experience as revealing genuine traits of nature, rather than being merely subjective pursuits.

The reasons for rejecting ontological sparseness become clear. Scientific inquiry is not longer the standard by which ontology is determined. There are more things found in experience than are dreamt of in scientific naturalism. Dewey's commitment is to immediate empiricism, and as such, something being found in experience is good grounds for asserting its existence and including it in an ontological account of the world.

This critique addresses the placement problem in two ways. First, it removes the ontological dualism upon which the problem was built. With the disappearance of the ontological distinction between subject and object, the original concern which motivated the placement problem has also disappeared. Second, according to the new pragmatist ontology, things are as they are experienced to be. If the world is experienced as moral,

then moral qualities and moral values must be included in any naturalistic account of the world. As such, Dewey not only offers an empirical account of inquiry into moral experience, but he also provides a naturalistic foundation for moral qualities and values.

I take Dewey's critique of scientific naturalism to be a robust critique of the entire analytic tradition, liberal naturalism included, in as much as I identify the analytic tradition with epistemic reductionism. While the versions of liberal naturalism which appear in De Caro and Macarthur's volumes are attempting to articulate a version of naturalism which is not scientifically reductionistic, they are still being epistemically reductionistic. Like the scientific naturalism they attempt to critique, these versions of liberal naturalism still reduce all experience to epistemology, as though knowing was the sole and only genuine mode of experience.

Clearly, Dewey is not a liberal naturalist, and cannot be properly understood in this context. If liberal naturalism truly wishes to address the root causes of the placement problem, as well as suggest a stronger solution, then it should take Dewey's critique of epistemic reductionism on its own terms.

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## VITA

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