

JOHN DEWEY AND PRAGMATIC ECONOMICS

By

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To Danny, who always believed, even when I did not

and

To my mother, my father, Katie, and Andy,

who have made this and so much more possible

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CHAPTER I

JOHN DEWEY AND ECONOMICS

Thus there is here supplied, I think, a first-rate test of the value of any philosophy which is offered us: Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in “reality” even the significance they had previously seemed to have?

It is the fact, I repeat, that so many philosophies terminate in conclusions that make it necessary to disparage and condemn primary experience, leading those who hold them to measure the sublimity of their “realities” as philosophically defined by remoteness from the concerns of daily life, which leads cultivated common sense to look askance at philosophy.¹

Economists are only one class of “scientific” inquirers into human subjects who cannot professionally admit the part played by need, purpose and an unceasing valuing (as distinct from evaluating judgments) in the generation and management of human affairs.

But whatever reasons scientific economists may use to justify excluding from their professional concern the human consequences of economic enterprise, philosophy cannot agree that economics is a domain having its own independent subject-matter and career without denying its claim to be comprehensive in scope. Philosophy which does not take into account the economic enterprise and its human consequences is an escapist intellectual gymnastic.²

John Dewey and the Place of Economics in his Philosophy and his Life

In 1879, at his undergraduate commencement ceremony at the University of Vermont, the nineteen-year-old John Dewey delivered an address entitled “The Limits of Political Economy.” Just three years before his death (on June 1, 1952), Dewey

¹ LW1, 18.

² LW1, 359.

forwarded a new introduction for a reissue of *Experience and Nature* to his close friend and editor Joseph Ratner. The introduction was never finished, though it was more than one hundred pages long at the time of Dewey's death. This stands in sharp contrast to the seven-page preface that accompanied the republication of the 1925 edition (in 1929). One of the reasons for this extensive introduction was surely Dewey's desire to defend one of his most important works. Another reason was that he had included an entire subsection in this introduction that criticized the work of "scientific economists."³ I believe it is fair to say that, in the seventy three years between his college graduation and his death, Dewey never stopped thinking about economics.

Dewey was close to his older brother, Davis Rich Dewey, and Davis was an economist and historian of great influence. A professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Davis edited the *American Economic Review* from 1911 until 1940.⁴ Throughout his own work, John Dewey made reference to some of the greatest economic thinkers in history, and he was clearly familiar with the subtleties of their work. In a letter in 1886 to his wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, John Dewey wrote "that he was 'reading up on machinery & wages...It has opened up a new field to me—I almost wish sometimes I were in pol[itical] ec[onomy]; it is so thoroughly human.'"⁵ In the same year, Dewey spoke before the Political Science Association, and the title of his talk was "The Rise of Great Industries." A review described Dewey's lecture as "'a masterly study of the economic, industrial, social, and moral effects...of the great corporate undertakings of modern times.'"⁶ Shortly after earning his doctorate at Columbia in

³ LW1, 357.

⁴ Martin, 172.

⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁶ Ibid., 109.

1913, Dewey's son, Frederick Archibald Dewey, taught economics at Bryn Mawr.⁷

Dewey was deeply interested in economics himself, and he was surrounded by professional economists in his own family.

Though Dewey, of course, chose a profession in philosophy, he considered a career in economics, and it would be a surprise to find that he had not thought himself accomplished in the study of economics. After reviewing the more than three hundred references Dewey made to economic concerns and study throughout the *Collected Works*, I am convinced that there is much to be learned about Dewey's pragmatism through a careful study of its relationship to economics. The relationship is a complex one and it is not always consistent, but it is nonetheless very interesting. Though the connection between Dewey's version of pragmatism and psychology, sociology, and other social sciences has been given much scholarly attention, relatively little has been written about Dewey and economics.⁸ This strikes me as odd, especially given the fact that his work is replete with references to economic issues and the fact that he was himself very much interested in economics. More importantly, Dewey was explicit in his belief that philosophy **had** to concern itself with economics: "Philosophy which does not take into account the economic enterprise and its human consequences is an escapist intellectual gymnastic."⁹ Thus, without some attention to Dewey's "pragmatic economics," I believe Dewey scholarship is incomplete.

⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁸ One significant exception to this statement has been very recent. In June 2003, the *Journal of Economic Methodology* dedicated an issue to "John Dewey and Economic Theory." See Khalil, Mousavi and Garrison, Stickers, Shook (2003), Klamer, Stuhr, White, and Ryan. See also Brodsky, Parker, and Min. There are several other examples, though none longer than article (or contribution) length.

⁹ LW1, 359.

Thesis

In this dissertation, I argue that many of the mistakes Dewey identified throughout the history of philosophy had been replicated or had parallels in economic thinking. This can be established by considering the criticisms that Dewey makes of traditional philosophic thinking and comparing these to work in the academic discipline of economics. To some extent, I have done this in what follows. But I have also attempted to undertake what I would consider to be a more Deweyan project: I have tried to identify the ways in which Dewey's pragmatism and his use of the experimental method might have affected practical economic systems and institutions and how this, in turn, has the power to affect the lives of those who must live within them.

Though Dewey was not always explicit in distinguishing the academic study of economics from more simple matters of commerce and material well being as they affect the "common man" (though, of course, this is a part of the academic study of economics), it is clear that he had more interest in one than the other. It was not uncommon for Dewey to respond to the work of professional economists, but he was far more interested, for instance, in considering the ways in which capitalism had shaped the modern man's life than he was in debates about marginal analysis. In this dissertation, the distinction between these two things will generally be referred to as a distinction between "economics" (the academic study of economics) and "economic life" (non-academic discussions of things like wages, well-being, trade, etc.). The two are, of course, related, but when Dewey spoke of one, he did not always mean to include the other.

The distinction is an important one for my thesis: I will argue that Dewey dedicated himself to criticisms of economic life as that existed for most people during his

lifetime. This is particularly true during the 1920s and 30s, and it is more generally true for his later work than his early and middle work. On the other hand, I believe that Dewey, though critical of mistakes that economists had made in their own methodology, was an enthusiastic supporter of the social sciences in general and economics in particular. This is not surprising, since, although he was critical of the mistakes philosophers had long made, he was, nonetheless, an enthusiastic supporter of the role of philosophy in improving the lives of individuals.

Apart from his own words to his wife (which demonstrate at least a passing interest in having become a political economist), he devoted much of his life to studying economics and the work of economists. In the same way that Dewey would never have abandoned the practice of philosophy, I believe he would never have called for the abandonment of economics as an academic discipline. Instead, as he did with philosophers, Dewey would have encouraged economists to turn to the experimental method and the “laboratory habit of mind” in their studies. Economics, no less than philosophy, was in desperate need of reconstruction during Dewey’s lifetime (and, like philosophy, perhaps still needs such a reconstruction today).

This brings me to the second major claim of my dissertation: I will argue that these appeals to the experimental method and the “laboratory habit of mind” are, at once, the most important **and** the most underdeveloped parts of Dewey’s pragmatism. Dewey’s specific claims that the experimental method can be employed to resolve many of the problems that have plagued philosophers for thousands of years is an original and provocative one. Though there are other pragmatists who make similar claims, I believe none were as thoroughgoing as Dewey in their attempts to “naturalize” the laboratory

habit of mind in philosophy and “ordinary experience.” Dewey believed that the methods and successes of the natural and physical sciences could be translated into the social sciences and the humanities, and this makes him someone well worth studying.

Accordingly, however, as this belief stood at the center of his philosophical thinking, it made him terribly vulnerable: without some sort of verification that the experimental method could indeed be used as he thought it could be, Dewey’s calls for reconstruction in philosophy should rightly go unheeded.

Though I am intrigued and excited by Dewey’s convictions about the power of the experimental method in traditionally non-empirical disciplines, I will argue that he largely fails to provide specific examples of how this method will be put into practice in the manner he suggests. What would it mean to apply the experimental method to philosophy? What would it mean to employ the “laboratory habit of mind” in economics? Recent work in economics has certainly begun to answer the second question, but it is highly doubtful that Dewey’s work was influential to this development. Moreover, it seems unlikely that his work has been successful in effecting any similar change in the methodology of philosophers. This dissertation claims that, without specific examples of how this method might work in practice, the reconstruction Dewey envisioned was bound to fail or—worse yet—was never likely to be attempted.

Finally, despite my criticisms of Dewey’s project, I continue to believe that Dewey was truly a philosophical pioneer in his attempts to draw philosophy closer to the demands and difficulties of “everyday experience,”¹⁰ and the fact that he gave **any** attention whatsoever to economic concerns, theories, and issues makes him someone well

¹⁰ Dewey uses this phrase and “ordinary experience” repeatedly, and the instances are too many to cite here. For one example, see LW4, 156.

worth studying. In some respects, as the next chapter will demonstrate, Dewey's interest in the nature of economic science and its methodology predates economists' own attempts to reflect about the nature of their discipline. Thus, there is no question in my mind that Dewey deserves praise for his willingness to engage subjects that philosophy had traditionally left to others. Dewey's interest in economics led him to believe that there was an important relationship between philosophy and economics, and this project also represents an attempt to determine what that relationship might be.

I will argue that Dewey believed the proper relationship between philosophy and economics was a complementary one. On the one hand, economics can provide important insights into "economic life," and the models and theorems of economists will also help supply information that will enable us to make the goods we desire and seek more secure. Philosophy, on the other hand, can serve to provide critiques of economics, economic life, and the methodology of economists. For instance, as I have noted in the next chapter, economists have long debated whether economics is a positive or normative practice. Dewey's pragmatism attempts to provide a resolution to this debate. Though the work of the natural and physical sciences might inform Dewey's philosophy (and, in turn, economics), philosophers have an even stronger connection to economics than they do to these other sciences. Dewey demands of philosophers that they be engaged in the world of "ordinary experience," and few matters are more significant and influential in the world of "ordinary experience" than those of economics and economic life. Economists and philosophers are engaged in similar work, and another important reason to consider Dewey's writings on economics is to demonstrate this very fact.

Economics and the Methods of Science

The title of Dewey's college commencement address ("The Limits of Political Economy") suggests a skepticism about the goals of political economy, and the addition he intended to make more than seventy years later to *Experience and Nature* supports this conclusion. In this "Unfinished Introduction,"¹¹ Dewey harshly criticizes the work of economists who seem to separate the study of economics from human activity and practice. There is little to be surprised about in this criticism since it is the same one that Dewey leveled at philosophers from Plato forward. What is surprising, however, is the fact that Dewey repeatedly refers to these economists (in a manner that I am unable to find replicated anywhere else in his work) as "scientific economists."

In these pages, Dewey berates "scientific economists" for their commitment to methods of inquiry that enable them to dissociate the "economic" from the "moral and political." I think Dewey's criticism is apt and, as I shall venture to demonstrate in this thesis, it points to further criticisms of the scientific method that Dewey himself did not take up. Though Dewey praised the "scientific method" in his work, I believe that, very late in his life, he may have come to recognize that the problems he identified in traditional philosophic methodology were not confined to philosophy. In his account of the "scientific method," he spoke of the importance of "abstraction" and "isolation." The same "abstraction" or "isolation" which was one of the characteristic defects of "non-empirical" philosophy was, oddly, one of the first steps in the experimental method as Dewey described it.

As is clear from his criticisms of "scientific economists," he was not convinced that all science ends with the return to experience which made the experimental method

¹¹ Ibid., 329-364.

praiseworthy for him. This claim can conveniently be supported by the success of an exciting new field in economics, experimental economics. I will argue that **this** is the sort of economics of which Dewey would have approved, but that economics, like other sciences (physical and natural, as well as social), has instead long been dominated by a tendency similar to that which began thousands of years ago in philosophy: a tendency to shy away from “ordinary experience.”

Dewey was absolutely right to call philosophers to task for their misdirected “quest for certainty,” but he should have expanded his criticisms beyond philosophy. Much of what Dewey criticized in philosophy had been repeated or mirrored in the study of economics. I believe that Dewey was close to making this more explicit in his work near the end of his life as the “Unfinished Introduction” shows, and I think he would have come to argue that economists had unwittingly adopted the mistakes of philosophers in their own methodology. There is every reason to believe that he would have found the same mistakes in other disciplines as well. This is not a deficiency which is unique to economists, and Dewey should have recognized the dangers that were inherent in the “scientific method” as well as in the “philosophic method.”

One of the reasons I think this point is so critical to Dewey scholarship is that it bears directly on his appeals to the scientific method. I will argue that, despite its central place in his philosophy, Dewey’s account of the scientific or experimental method may well be one of the most underdeveloped themes in his pragmatism. Dewey repeatedly praises the advances of the natural and physical sciences, and he calls again and again for their application in other disciplines. He wistfully imagines a time when the “laboratory habit of mind” will become naturalized into human inquiry and intelligent action. But, as

is clear from these very late criticisms of “economic scientists,” Dewey was not unconditionally enamored of science, and it is significant, I think, to try and determine exactly what sort of experimentalism Dewey favored and which of the dangerous tendencies of scientific methodology he failed, at least in his early and middle work, to acknowledge. I think a study of his “economics” can bring about that understanding.

Dewey’s “Economics”

Unquestionably, there is some difficulty in speaking of “economics.” Do we mean by this term the academic discipline or do we mean household management? Are we referring to the fiscal health of a nation? Or do we simply mean to speak of matters associated with money and finance? In some contexts, we may use the term “economics” to refer to more than one of these things. Thus, the first order of business must be to define what we mean when we speak of “economics” in **this** context.

The meaning of the term will here be dependent on its use in John Dewey’s work. I will not argue that Dewey was an economist, nor will it be necessary to demonstrate that he had a specialized knowledge of the term “economics” in any of its many technical usages. For the purpose of this thesis, I first wish to define what I think **Dewey** meant when he spoke of “economics.” In the *Middle* and *Later Works* alone, there are more than three hundred separate references to “economics.” By contrast, the phrase “experimental method” appears just forty-nine times in the same texts. Is there any consistency in the way Dewey uses “economics” or are these references divided among many different usages of the term?

Many of Dewey's references to "economics" are explicitly about a subject matter that has a history and that is studied by academics. Often, "economics" is mentioned in conjunction with politics, history, sociology, and law. In the passages in which "economics" appears alongside other academic subjects it is reasonable to assume that Dewey means the disciplined study of economics. In some cases, Dewey also intends to include the study of the history of economic thinking in this discipline.

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, for example, there are more than thirty references to "economics." In this book, Dewey attempted to demonstrate the value and necessity of considering human nature from a perspective informed by "scientific knowledge."¹² In particular, he hoped to encourage a study of morals from this perspective:

A morals based on study of human nature instead of upon disregard for it would find the facts of man continuous with those of the rest of nature and would thereby ally ethics with physics and biology. It would find the nature and activities of one person coterminous with those of other human beings, and therefore link ethics with the study of history, sociology, law and economics.¹³

Thus, this human-nature-based-morality enables ethical studies to be related to **other** studies that view the "nature and activities of one person coterminous with those of other human beings." From this claim, I believe we are to understand that these other studies—history, sociology, law and economics—already consider human nature from a perspective informed by physics and biology. The historian and the economist may still fall short of Dewey's ideal standard; that is, the average historian or economist may not fully understand the significance of the physical and biological underpinnings of human nature with regard to his or her discipline. Yet Dewey seems to suggest here that

¹² MW14, 5.

¹³ Ibid., 11.

researchers in these fields have done a far better job of understanding this connection than have ethicists.

Further evidence of his approbation for this approach exists in Dewey's later works. In a brief article entitled "What is Social Study?" published in *Progressive Education* in 1938, Dewey considers the "social" aspect of "social studies", a discipline receiving new emphasis in education at the time. Here, Dewey explicitly links the study of economics to the natural sciences:

The industrial and commercial change which has taken place in the world in the last century, in the past forty years, is the product of the great change which has taken place in physical, chemical, and more recently biological science. The prime factor in the economic and political history of this period is what is known as the industrial revolution. The story of that revolution is the story of new technologies in the production and distribution of goods, which are themselves the result of a scientific revolution. Any vital comprehension of existing economic and political issues demands insight into processes and operations that can be grasped only through understanding of fundamental physical and chemical operations and laws.¹⁴

If "economics" is a discipline that aims at "vital comprehension" of "existing economic" issues, it must first gain insight into the natural sciences. Presumably, Dewey believes that the discipline at its best will explore "economic issues" through a solid grounding in and attention to the natural sciences. Of course, the value of the natural sciences lies in their reliance on experience as "the avenue that leads to the facts and laws of nature."¹⁵ One would expect, therefore, that a "science" of economics would also show deference to experience as a means of understanding the world. What that entails, then, for economics, is that economics approaches its subject matter in such a way that it will return the products of any intellectual reflection to "ordinary" experience. The only

¹⁴ LW13, 339.

¹⁵ LW1, 11.

method which will achieve this is experimentalism, and, therefore, the only “economics” which can qualify as “pragmatic” for Dewey is one which utilizes the experimental method.

It is also worth noting that, in the above citation, Dewey relates “industrial and commercial change” (as factors of economic life) to the natural and physical sciences. The “production and distribution of goods,” important aspects of the economic lives of individuals, are “the result of a scientific revolution.” We can understand the conditions of economic life better if we first understand the underlying empirical science upon which these conditions are established. Thus, this citation demonstrates another important way that Dewey uses the term “economics.”

Dewey does appear to make distinctions (though not always explicitly) between the study of economics as an academic discipline and economics as a part of the normal business of everyday life. “Economic” issues for Dewey are those which occupy debates between professional economists, but they are also issues which the average person faces on a daily basis: how will I pay for my next meal? How will I be able to afford to retire when I am older? What sort of life can I live in a capitalistic society? Can I say that I have meaningful freedom if I cannot afford to pay my bills? “Economic history,” for Dewey, is more than just the study of David Ricardo, Adam Smith, John Maynard Keynes, Joseph Schumpeter, and Milton Friedman. Economic history must also include an account of the way the “common man” makes his living from day to day.

I believe references such as those cited above demonstrate that, in at least some contexts, Dewey appeals to “economics” as a discipline, and, perhaps, even as a science. As a discipline, “economics” is on a par with sociology, history, law, politics, and

religion, and Dewey demonstrates familiarity with this discipline throughout his work. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, he notes that the modern industrial structure has resulted in something that would be unexpected from the point of view of traditional economics (as a discipline).¹⁶ In the *Ethics*, Dewey cites Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics*,¹⁷ and a description of the "economic theory" of Adam Smith constitutes several paragraphs of Dewey's entry on "Altruism and Egoism" in the *Cyclopedia of Education*.

Much discussion of his understanding of economic theory appears in *Freedom and Culture*. Here, he claims that "economic explanation" and theory from the eighteenth century forward have differed from such reasoning in previous history. Dewey argues that the role of economic theory in culture has become much bigger than it once was, so much so that many mistake it for the single defining characteristic of culture.¹⁸ His understanding, in this text, of the "classic school of economic theory" is clearly dependent on the work of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, not just *The Wealth of Nations*.¹⁹ He also demonstrates more than passing familiarity with Karl Marx's economic ideas in the same book in a chapter entitled "Totalitarian Economics and Democracy," and he compares the "mistakes" of "laissez-faire individualism" with problems of generalization in Marxism. Dewey's knowledge of Marxist economics can also be discerned in "Anti-Naturalism in Extremis," an article published in the *Partisan Review* in 1943.²⁰

¹⁶ MW14, 100: "From the standpoint of orthodox economic theory, the most surprising thing about modern industry...."

¹⁷ MW5, 401.

¹⁸ LW13, 72-73, 137-139.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁰ L15, 46-62.

There are other references to “economics” that suggest Dewey also used the term interchangeably to mean that which is “material” (as well as a “scientific discipline”). In *Human Nature and Conduct*, he wonders “why process is so definitely subservient to product in so much of modern industry” and concludes that the answer is, at least in part, because “An increasingly large portion of economic work is done with machines.” Here, “economic” seems to mean “material,” and, again, this use of the term demonstrates that Dewey believes economic considerations also belong to the world of those who are not professional economists.

We need not rely on inference, however. In Dewey’s criticisms of Marxism in *Freedom and Culture*, he explicitly acknowledges that “economic” and “material” are terms used interchangeably by Marx, and he seems to concur with Lionel Robbins’ later criticism of that terminology as overly restrictive.²¹ In response to the “accusation” that “the essence of Marxism, at least as a practical doctrine, is appeal to the motive of self-interest,” Dewey replies:

But actually it comes close to reversing actual Marxist doctrine—the doctrine that the state of the forces of production is the sole causal force. For according to this view, all the factors of human nature are shaped from without by “materialistic,” that is economic, forces. . . . A much juster criticism would be that Marxism systematically neglects everything on the side of human nature with respect to its being a factor having efficacy, save as it is previously determined by the state of the forces of production. In claiming to replace “Utopian” socialisms, Marxism throws out psychological as well as moral considerations. Whether the theory is in fact able to live up to this claim—without which its “materialism” is meaningless—is another matter.²²

As we shall later see, Marxism, not unlike “laissez-faire individualism” and other economic theories, makes a mistake with respect to human nature, its richness, and its

²¹ Robbins (1946), 17.

²² LW13, 133.

adaptability.²³ The present point, however, is simply to show that Dewey sometimes uses “economic” synonymously with “material” and he recognizes that tendency in others as well.

Again, many of Dewey’s references may be intended to incorporate more than one meaning of the word “economics.” Further, the various meanings are not unrelated: though the economist Lionel Robbins argued that “economics” is not simply a study of the causes of material well being, material well being is indeed *one* of the important concerns of the discipline of economics and it is one that is of tremendous importance to Dewey’s philosophy. Dewey may be aware of the subtle distinctions made within the professional field of economics, but he is also aware that the “common man” cannot be bothered with such distinctions. Material well being is one of the most immediate concerns of human beings, and it is therefore of immediate concern to Dewey. Though he was well prepared to engage in theoretical debates with professional economists, Dewey was far more interested, in his philosophy, to examine how economic systems and institutions affected the material well being of individuals. In short, while Dewey undoubtedly understood and was intrigued by comparisons between Smith and Marx’s work, he was ultimately most concerned with how their work had shaped the lives and well being of individuals in the twentieth century.

I certainly will not argue that, to have something meaningful to say about the relationship of pragmatism to economics, Dewey must use the term “economics” consistently or in the same context throughout the thirty-seven volumes of his collected

²³ Chapter V below.

works. As I will note in the next chapter, if Robbins is to be believed, this is a standard that economists themselves have historically found too difficult to satisfy.²⁴

Project History and Explanation

I began this project after having been exposed to some of Dewey's most important later works: *Experience and Nature*, *Human Nature and Conduct*, *Art as Experience*, the 1932 *Ethics*, and his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. My study of these books led me to believe that Dewey's work was largely repetitive; that is, he had several significant and original themes to contribute to philosophical thinking, and he applied them to various topics, but the results were often strikingly similar to those in a previous book. The preparation of this dissertation has demonstrated to me that this claim is both true and false. On the one hand, there is little doubt that themes such as the scientific method, experimentalism, reconstruction, empiricism, and naturalism are present in Dewey's work as early as 1902 and reappear in each subsequent work until his death. But my early belief was false in the sense that I gave Dewey little credit for any development in these themes, and a careful reading of the early middle works²⁵ showed me immediately that these were ideas he re-worked throughout his life. Though his most mature works like *Experience and Nature*, *Art as Experience*, and the *Logic* demonstrate that his thought on these subjects had begun to crystallize, the fact that he expected to add more than one hundred pages of introduction to *Experience and Nature* at the age of ninety tells me that he had not yet said all he wanted to say.

²⁴ See II.A., note 1 below.

²⁵ MW1 – 4 especially.

I am sorry to say, however, that another hypothesis I had at the outset of this project was, in fact, confirmed. Dewey's relationship with economics, albeit complex and interesting, is, I believe, ultimately a flawed one and one that, for all his study of sophisticated economic literature, was sadly unsophisticated. This should hardly be damning criticism of a philosopher: after all, Dewey *was* a philosopher and never pretended or claimed to be something else. But I will argue that his unique brand of philosophy (as well as his writing on public policy and politics) obligated him to be more sophisticated in his economic thinking and, perhaps more importantly, more explicit and concrete. We cannot, for instance, fault Descartes for failing to take up an analysis of diminishing marginal returns. We most certainly can, however, fault someone who repeatedly makes claims about the modern and increasing "subordination of the political to the economic"²⁶ without giving more detail about what that means and how it might be different than previous political and economic relationships. We can, in fact, fault someone who speaks again and again about the reform of "economic structure" and "institutions" without first giving more than a caricatured account of the same.

To be clear, this thesis is not an entirely negative account of Dewey's work as it relates to economics. As noted above, I believe that Dewey was truly a philosophical pioneer and there is much about his pragmatism—and its relationship to economics in particular—that demands further study. But Dewey was also a philosopher who happily accepted the mantle of "pioneer," and his criticisms of "classic" philosophy could be systematic, unforgiving, and severe. I do not condemn Dewey for this: it is one of the traits of his work that makes the other thousands of pages of dense, often overly complex prose tolerable. Yet I also take Dewey at his word, and I believe we should employ the

²⁶ LW13, 130.

guidelines he himself set. He spoke of “a first-rate test of the value of any philosophy which is offered us”:

Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in “reality” even the significance they had previously seemed to have?²⁷

Did Dewey’s philosophy, particularly with respect to his economic thinking, meet this test? Will the application of the methods and successes of the physical and natural sciences help economists as well as philosophers to “criticize” and “re-create” “the casual goods of nature into intentional and conclusive goods of art”?²⁸ If so, how is that end to be effected? In order for Dewey’s philosophy to pass his own test, it must be specific enough to give us direction toward achieving this goal especially since, as he himself argues, **his** philosophy departs from the methods of traditional philosophy.

My worry, in short, is that Dewey cannot meet the criticism raised by Richard Rorty in his article “Dewey’s Metaphysics.”²⁹ There, Rorty argues that “the talk of ‘observation and experiment’ is as irrelevant to the accomplishment” of Dewey’s work in *Experience and Nature* “as it was to the great predecessor of all such works of philosophy-as-criticism-of-culture, Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.”³⁰ The accuracy of Rorty’s criticisms hinge, I believe, on examining Dewey’s own examples of the application of the “experimental method” to various problems in philosophy, economics, education, and religion. What will it mean to apply the experimental method to problems that are outside the realm of the physical and natural sciences? If his pragmatism is to “render

²⁷ LW1, 18.

²⁸ Ibid., 326.

²⁹ Rorty, 72-89.

³⁰ Ibid., 74.

ordinary life experiences” “more fruitful,” Dewey must explain this and, as an experimentalist, he must provide the details and outcomes of his experiments in order to support his explanation and to allow others to verify his work.

I will argue that Dewey’s interest in economics provided an exceptional opportunity for him to demonstrate the value and the operation of the experimental method as it might be applied in a non-traditional setting. Instead, at the end of his life, Dewey came to criticize economists for the increasingly “scientific” character of their work. In October of 2002, however, four months and fifty years after Dewey’s death, the Bank of Sweden announced that Professor Vernon Smith had been awarded the Nobel Prize in economics for the use of the experimental method in economics. Dewey anticipated and advocated this very application, yet he played no part whatsoever in its development.

Plan of Chapters and Methodology

Despite his own hopes, there are certainly places in Dewey’s work where he professes to be somewhat pessimistic about the likelihood that philosophy will become better integrated with other disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. This pessimism was justified, and the unfortunate fact is that, while philosophical thinking has made an impact in many fields outside of itself, economics has been one area that has resisted the intrusion of philosophy. This is especially ironic since early political economists would have been far more likely to describe themselves as “philosophers” than “economists.” Adam Smith, after all, was first famous for his work in moral philosophy, not economics.

In any event, the distance between philosophy and economics that persists requires that this thesis begin with a brief discussion of the history of economics as a discipline and the sorts of concerns that have persistently engaged the attention of economists. Little will be said about Dewey here as the purpose of this chapter is to provide a point of comparison between Dewey's philosophical concerns and the way economists have historically treated the same subjects. Subsequent chapters take up those concerns one by one, beginning, in Chapter III, with behavior. This chapter focuses almost exclusively on Dewey's account of behavior, though it does connect his account to the study of behavior in economics.

Chapter IV takes up the issue of rationality, and, as means and ends are integral to Dewey's understanding of rationality, they are discussed here as well. The difference between traditional economic thinking and Dewey's philosophy is perhaps most marked in this chapter. Dewey describes means and ends as part of a continuum, while economists have historically taken them to be distinct. Again, this chapter attends primarily to Dewey's work and only incidentally deals with the specifics of economic thinking on rationality. This account of rationality leads naturally in Chapter V to Dewey's conception of human nature and habit. Since rationality has, for Dewey, everything to do with practice and action, it is important to understand how Dewey conceives of action and its relation to instinct and habit. This, in turn, leads to Dewey's account of intelligence as a sequence including ordinary or primary experience, reflection or secondary experience, and a return to primary experience which incorporates the products of reflection.

The model for this sequence is the experimental method, and Chapter VI turns to that method and the role of models in science. Again, though the bulk of this chapter deals with Dewey's work on the experimental method and models, connections are drawn between that work and economic thinking on the same. In particular, this chapter introduces the work of Vernon Smith and experimental economists. A detailed account of that work, however, is postponed until Chapter VII. There, I have attempted to find, in Dewey's collected work, specific instances of examples of the application of the experimental method. This proved even harder to do than I had expected, and I fear that the results are not particularly helpful. The chapter ends with an emphasis on experimental economics, and I believe that the specific illustrations I have been able to provide from that field will demonstrate both that Dewey's own account of the potential of the experimental method was prescient and that his work would have benefited from concrete suggestions as to how the method might be applied in other fields, particularly economics.

Finally, the last substantive chapter on Dewey's work highlights the importance of certainty, uncertainty, and risk in his philosophy. In contrast to the subject of means and ends, questions of certainty and uncertainty show how similar Dewey's "metaphysics" was to economists' own assessments of the nature of existence. Economists, like Dewey, are willing to embrace the "contingency" that characterizes human experience, and it is somewhat surprising that Dewey never capitalized on this parallel in his own work. This chapter is followed by a concluding discussion of my thesis and some final thoughts on the prospects for "pragmatic" economics.

One of the most challenging things about studying John Dewey is, of course, the sheer quantity of work that he produced during the course of his impressively long life. I believe that, even in professional philosophy, most attention is given to his so-called “middle” (1899-1924) and “later” (1925-1953) works. I confess that I did not deviate from this tendency, and the reader will note that most of the citations drawn from Dewey’s work fall into one of these two periods. Throughout, I have relied on the Southern Illinois University Press’ thirty-seven volume *Collected Works*, and each citation of Dewey refers to a volume number in that collection. References from *The Early Works* are referred to in the notes as EW followed by a number (which indicates the volume from which the citation was drawn). Similarly, citations from *The Middle Works* and *The Later Works* are referred to as MW and LW, respectively. I have attempted, in each case, to name the original work from which the citation is drawn. Though there is an equally daunting body of critical work in secondary sources on Dewey’s philosophy, I have used these sources only sparingly, preferring instead to compare Dewey’s work with sources drawn from the history of economics and economic theory.

Finally, the appendix is a catalogue of Dewey’s references to “economy” or “economics.” Though the thesis does not rely on this catalogue for argumentative support, I found this to be a handy reference as I worked. I did not attempt to deal with each citation in the body of the thesis (this would likely have been impossible in less than a thousand pages), but I thought it an interesting document nonetheless. I should acknowledge that this catalogue was done “manually” and drawn primarily from references listed in the index to the *Collected Works*, though, unfortunately, as my work

progressed, I found this index to be incomplete. Thus, I do not claim that this catalogue is exhaustive. The *Collected Works* are, of course, now available on compact disc and fully searchable by means of computer, and a more accurate catalogue could be derived thereby. I did not, however, have access to the digitized version and relied entirely on good old-fashioned books, and any oversights or omissions are, accordingly, solely my responsibility.

CHAPTER II

THE ECONOMIST'S "ECONOMICS"

Economics and Dewey's Philosophy

The famous economic theorist and historian, Lionel Robbins, believed that understanding the history of economic thought was a prerequisite for being able to speak intelligently about contemporary economic issues. At the same time, however, he recognized the difficulty of defining the discipline of economics:

The efforts of economists during the last hundred and fifty years have resulted in the establishment of a body of generalizations whose substantial accuracy and importance are open to question only by the ignorant or the perverse. But they have achieved no unanimity concerning the ultimate nature of the common subject-matter of these generalizations. The central chapters of the standard works on Economics retail, with only minor variations, the main principles of the science. But the chapters in which the object of the work is explained still present wide divergences. We all talk about the same things, but we have not yet agreed what it is we are talking about.¹

Interestingly, this description might have suited Dewey just fine. That is, he would have had less interest in whether economists could speak intelligibly about the "ultimate nature" of what they do as long as their "generalizations" were accurate and played some role in making "ordinary experience" more meaningful. According to Robbins' description of it, economics might well have passed the test that Dewey set for philosophy: relevance and clarity in prediction and management of day-to-day affairs. Nonetheless, economists continue to struggle to define the "ultimate nature" of what they do.

¹ Robbins (1946), 1.

In an inaugural lecture at Cambridge in 1885, Alfred Marshall, the renowned Victorian economist, recounted significant moments in the history of economics and described the discipline's future prospects.² Many accept this lecture and Marshall's work as the point at which economics broke away from philosophy and became a "specialized discipline in its own right...[one whose] concerns...are of a more concrete and practical kind than those of philosophy."³ The "chief task of economic science," according to Marshall, is the "measurement of motives."⁴

This account of economics is an important one, not simply because of its author's prominence. It may be argued that a number of disciplines exist which either consider the **nature** of motives or examine the **causes** of motives. Economics does neither, and Marshall's description reflects this by its emphasis on measurement. The "economic organon" concerns itself "with those motives to which a money price can be directly or indirectly assigned." Marshall is careful to note that money has no special meaning beyond the fact that it serves as the most efficient means to measure motive in "the world in which we live."⁵ Thus, according to Marshall, economists do not need to concern themselves with the "ultimate nature" of their discipline. Rather, economics is a discipline which is concerned with a certain type of measurement, and, more specifically, measurement of one particular kind of thing: motives.

Elsewhere, Marshall defines economics as a discipline whose subject matter is "the world in which we live" (as opposed to any ideal theoretical construct or utopia):

Political Economy or Economics is a study of mankind in the ordinary business of life; it examines that part of individual and social action which

² Marshall (1956), 152-174.

³ Roy, 49. There are many other examples to support this claim.

⁴ Marshall (1956), 159.

⁵ Ibid., 158, 161.

is most closely connected with the attainment and with the use of the material requisites of wellbeing. Thus it is on the one side a study of wealth; and on the other, and more important side, a part of the study of man. For man's character has been moulded by his every-day work, and the material resources which he thereby procures, more than any other influence unless it be that of his religious ideals; and the two great forming agencies of the world's history have been the religious and the economic.⁶

If we accept Marshall's definition, then the implications for philosophy and pragmatism in particular are clear. Dewey's own "test" for philosophy demanded that philosophers deal with and improve "the world in which we live." Economics, like philosophy, studies that world and the people who live in it. In particular, economists are concerned with those material aspects of "the world in which we live" and how individuals satisfy their material needs and desires.

In an article published in the *Journal of Philosophy* in 1923, Daniel Sommer Robinson critically named John Dewey as an advocate of the "sociological" motivation in philosophy. Dewey responded by accepting the label, and he proceeded to describe its strengths. He quoted favorably (in response to Robinson's citation of the same) Josiah Royce's *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* to characterize his assumption about the task of philosophy. It was an assumption that he shared with Royce:

It is the assumption that Philosophy, in the proper sense of the term, is not a presumptuous effort to explain the mysteries of the world by means of any superhuman insight or extraordinary cunning, but has its origin and value in an attempt to give a reasonable account of our own personal attitude towards the more serious business of life. **You philosophize when you reflect critically upon what you are actually doing in your world. What you are doing is of course, in the first place, living.** The critical inquiry into what all these things mean and imply is philosophy.⁷

⁶ Marshall (1947), 1.

⁷ Royce, 1. Quoted in part by Dewey in "Tradition, Metaphysics, and Morals" in MW15, 19. The emphasis is mine.

The “ordinary business of life,” as Marshall puts it, and those parts of it “most closely connected with the attainment and with the use of the material requisites of wellbeing,” “every-day work, and the material resources which [man] thereby procures”: for the pragmatist, these **are** the materials of philosophy and the subject matter of critical reflection. Thus, Dewey’s philosophy and economics (as described by Marshall and Robbins, at least) share the same objectives, though they may employ different methodology.

Dewey accepted Royce’s definition of philosophy as the practice of critical reflection upon “living.” Marshall claims that the subject matter of economics is man’s “every-day work, and the material resources which he thereby procures.” Though Marshall’s definition is a bit more specialized than Royce’s in the sense that it focuses on the economic aspects of life, we can easily see why Dewey believed that a philosophy which did not concern itself with economics (as the study of “every-day work” and the “material resources” earned through this work) was an “escapist intellectual gymnastic.” Marshall claims that the economic is largely responsible for the shaping of a man’s character. Dewey’s philosophy, because it is the sort that addresses itself to the concerns of daily life, must be one which is also preoccupied with the things that influence character. Both Marshall’s “economics” and Dewey’s pragmatism are a “part of the study of man.”

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, John Dewey regularly appealed to “economics” and the “economy” in his written work, and his frequent references and personal letters demonstrate that the topics were often on his mind. Dewey even cites

Marshall's *Principles of Economics* in the *Ethics* of 1908.⁸ In the thousands of pages of Dewey's writing, however, there is no single essay or book dedicated to "economics" or the "economy" alone.⁹ Dewey published on many different topics in many different forums, and yet, on the subject of economics (with the exception of these frequent, brief references) he is strangely reserved.

It is surprising that, in these references, Dewey does not elaborate or provide much detailed analysis of his thinking on economics because he repeatedly connected economics with matters of material wealth, and he criticized ancient and medieval philosophy for denigrating the "material" in favor of the "spiritual." In fact, in an address given at Cooper Union on December 7, 1941, Dewey asserted that the rise of Nazism and totalitarian regimes was bound up with "The heritage from philosophies which thought to advance the cause of the ideal and spiritual by cutting it off from the material..."¹⁰ Human flourishing first requires, apart from any concern for sophisticated philosophical ideals, attention to the material, and economics is the social science that occupies itself with important information about the material aspects of "ordinary life." Thus, we might expect Dewey to have had much more to say in detail on the subject, and it seems odd that he would not have addressed the subject of economics in monograph form as he did, for instance, aesthetics, ethics, or individualism. In the absence of Dewey's own detailed treatment of the subject, it is important to have some brief background on economists' accounts of the issues which mattered to Dewey. The remainder of this dissertation attempts to connect these issues to Dewey's work.

⁸ MW5, 401.

⁹ There are, however, essays regarding economic crises and the importance of educators learning about economic conditions.

¹⁰ LW14, 320 ("Lessons from the War – in Philosophy")

Behavior and Rationality

Lionel Robbins defines economics as “the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses.” This definition, he notes, is not classificatory. That is, it does not “attempt to pick out certain *kinds* of behaviour, but focuses attention on a particular *aspect* of behaviour, the form imposed by the influence of scarcity.” Thus, for the economist, **any** sort of behavior may serve as the subject matter of economics as long as it “involves the relinquishment of other desired alternatives.”¹¹

Other economists have also relied on behavior to describe their field. As recently as 1996, David Friedman defined economics as “that way of understanding behavior that starts from the assumption that individuals have objectives and tend to choose the correct way to achieve them.”¹² More than fifty years prior to this, Frank Knight presented a paper at the American Philosophical Association on “Social Science.” His description was very similar to Friedman’s: “Economic behavior implies or is, in the degree in which it is economic, the use of means in such a way as to realize the maximum quantity of some general end or objective, embodied in specific wants and conditioned by the limited means available to an individual subject.”¹³

Economists, then, see economics as the study of behavior. In particular, their interest lies in human behavior that involves means and ends. They assume that human beings behave “rationally”; that is, that human beings, faced with the desire to achieve certain ends, will employ the limited means they possess in such a way as to maximize the possibility that they will achieve their ends. Economic “rationality,” therefore, can be

¹¹ Robbins (1946), 16-17. The emphasis is Robbins’.

¹² Friedman, 3.

¹³ Knight (1956), 127.

demonstrated by this assumption. The economist identifies the rational being as one who makes choices between limited means in order to successfully achieve certain ends. This “rationality” is not, however, a normative standard. Economists do not argue that human beings should work to **become** rational in this sense. The economist assumes that people **are** rational in this sense and then uses this assumption to better understand behavior and, often, to make predictions about behavior. Economic rationality is, for the economist, an assumption about human nature.

Human Nature and “Economic Man”

What does it really mean, however, to say that “economic rationality” is, for the economist, an assumption about human nature? First, it is a characteristic that all human beings possess, and it is evidenced in their behavior when faced with limited means and unlimited desires. Does this mean that the economist believes that behaving in an economically rational fashion is **the** defining characteristic of human nature? In other words, is the concept of economic rationality exhaustive when we seek to understand human nature?

These questions probably first arose from John Stuart Mill’s essay “On the Definition of Political Economy” and his conception of the “economic man” (often referred to as *Homo economicus*). The essay was published in 1844, but written in 1829 or 1830. In the essay, Mill defined “political economy” as a science concerned with man

solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging of the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end....[Political Economy] makes entire abstraction of every other human passion or motive; except those which may be regarded as perpetually principles to the desire of wealth, namely, aversion to labour, and desire of the present enjoyment of costly indulgences....Political Economy

considers mankind as occupied solely in acquiring and consuming wealth; and aims at showing what is the course of action into which mankind, living in a state of society, would be impelled, if that motive, except in the degree in which it is checked by the two perpetual counter-motives above adverted to, were absolute ruler of all their actions.¹⁴

Given this description of the activity of political economy, it is rather ironic that, in Dewey's letter to his wife (cited above) in 1886, he would say, "I almost wish sometimes I were in pol[itical] ec[onomy]; it is so thoroughly human." Mill's description of the economic man is of a person who seems thoroughly **inhuman** and an individual who has been reduced to little more than a few base desires.

In fact, Mill's description of the "economic man" spurred debate among later economists as to the significance of this "man" in economic theory. Many claimed that Mill's description of "economic man" was intended to describe man as he always is **in fact**, a being solely concerned with the possession of wealth. On this interpretation, Mill's description of "economic man" would be exhaustive of human nature. Economists would impute to human beings a natural and complete preoccupation with "acquiring and consuming wealth." Mill's own words do not support this interpretation, however. In the essay, Mill follows the passage cited above with the qualification, "Not that any political economist was ever so absurd as to suppose that mankind are really thus constituted, but because this is the mode in which science must necessarily operate."¹⁵ As I will note later, Dewey agrees with this assessment of the "mode in which science" necessarily operates. One of the first characteristics Dewey identifies within the "experimental method" is abstraction and isolation. Mill continues:

With respect to those parts of human conduct of which wealth is not even the principal object, to these Political Economy does not pretend that its

¹⁴ Mill, 137-138.

¹⁵ Ibid., 139

conclusions are applicable. But there are also certain departments of human affairs, in which the acquisition of wealth is the main and acknowledged end. It is only of these that Political Economy takes notice.¹⁶

Dewey is clear that philosophy cannot similarly narrow its vision; that is, philosophers cannot say that there is only one aspect of human behavior or character which is of interest to them. His condemnation of “scientific economists” in the “Unfinished Introduction” to *Experience and Nature* suggests that he is unwilling to grant Mill’s point. If “science” means ignoring the “part played by need, purpose and an unceasing valuing....in the generation and management of human affairs,” Dewey wants no part of it.

Alfred Marshall later agreed that Mill’s “economic man” was indeed a scientific construct. In his *Principles of Economics*, however, he claimed that economists study man “as he is,” as “a man of flesh and blood.” They do **not** deal with “an abstract or ‘economic’ man.” Thus, for Marshall, the “economic man” Mill describes could not represent man “as he is.” Yet Marshall continues, describing the “one side of man’s life” that interests economists as “those aspects of life in which the action of motive is so regular that it can be predicted, and the estimate of the motor-forces can be verified by results”.¹⁷

This implies that between Mill and Marshall there exists a difference of terminology, but not of concept. Mill’s “economic man” provides a useful analytic tool that abstracts one particular aspect of human nature at the exclusion of all others. Economists, according to Marshall, focus on the “man of flesh and blood.” Their focus is, however, on “one side of man’s life” and that side simply happens to be the same

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Marshall (1947), 26-27.

aspect that Mill's "economic man" illustrates. Again, this isolation or abstraction of a particular aspect of behavior is, as we shall later see, one of the defining characteristics of the "scientific method," as Dewey understands it. In order to better understand a phenomenon (in this case, economic behavior), one must first isolate that phenomenon and remove it from an uncontrolled context. In essence, this is what both Mill and Marshall have described in the accounts they provide of economics (or political economy).

It would seem, therefore, that neither Mill nor Marshall conceive of "human nature" as wholly constituted by "economic rationality." Both do, however, understand untutored human nature to include behavior that attempts to employ limited means to achieve particular ends in the most efficient manner. Philip Wicksteed in his important work *The Common Sense of Political Economy* emphasized this aspect of human nature and, at the same time, discouraged the reliance on Mill's term:

We shall therefore have to consider what constitutes an economic relation rather than what constitutes an economic motive. And this does away at a stroke with the hypothetically simplified psychology of the Economic Man which figured so largely in the older books of Political Economy, and which recent writers take so much trouble to evade or qualify. We are not to begin by imagining man to be actuated by only a few simple motives, but we are to take him as we find him, and are to examine the nature of those relations into which he enters, under the stress of all his complicated impulses and desires—whether selfish or unselfish, material or spiritual,—in order to accomplish indirectly through the action of others what he cannot accomplish directly through his own.¹⁸

Mark Blaug has argued that "all modern economists" have adopted Wicksteed's view of the "theory of 'real man'" and that they "take the whole man as he is, staking [their] claim on correctly predicting how he will actually behave in economic affairs."¹⁹ Mill's

¹⁸ Wicksteed, 4.

¹⁹ Blaug (1980), 61-62.

“economic man” was decidedly **not** “the whole man”, but Mill believed the concept nonetheless supplied the subject matter of economics. His concern for the “economic man’s” behavior was a scientific one. As Kenneth Shepsle and Mark Bonchek put it, the question economists attempt to answer is “Can we explain variations and regularities in economic performance, outcomes, and behavior with a simple set of assumptions?”²⁰

Despite economists’ disagreements about the significance of the concept of “economic man” and how it might operate in economic analysis, it seems clear that they agree that at least some part of human nature involves economic rationality.²¹ This should not be taken to mean that economic rationality is a fixed characteristic, however. Economic rationality may well be an aspect of human nature, but economists also believe that it is influenced by education. If economic rationality entails using available means to achieve desired ends, it follows that beliefs about the effectiveness of alternative means will be repeatedly revised in the face of new information. In this sense, economists’ understanding of human nature is not dissimilar to Dewey’s. Though Dewey argued that many economic accounts of human nature were mistaken and reductive (in precisely the way that Wicksteed describes them), he would have applauded those economic thinkers who believed that “human nature” was “adaptable.”

The presence of uncertainty in the world requires rational actors to continually reconsider the instruments and behaviors they employ to achieve their objectives,²² and education often provides both the impetus and the means for this reconsideration.

Economists also acknowledge the influence of other factors such as environment and

²⁰ Shepsle and Boncheck, 21.

²¹ In the last fifty years there has been extensive work by economists on the limits of this rationality. See particularly the work of Herbert Simon, Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, and Ariel Rubinstein

²² Shepsle and Boncheck, 18.

culture on rationality and beliefs about the effectiveness of alternative means of obtaining ends. Again, Dewey's pragmatism is suffused with attention to environmental factors, and his account of human nature includes habituation as well as instinct.

Means, Ends and Efficiency

Though economists rarely speak in terms of “means” and “ends,” traditional economic theory assumes that concern regarding means and ends shapes individual behavior. As Robbins' definition of economics above demonstrates, economists study the choices individuals make between limited alternatives (means) in order to maximize the ends they seek. Kenneth Arrow uses slightly different terminology, but the effect is the same: “the basic question of the individual is a choice of actions.”²³ In the same way that economists do not focus on particular **kinds** of behavior, neither do they speak of particular ends as “economic.” Again, according to Robbins' definition, the economist's interest in any “end” is confined to its role as the product of scarce means:

The economist is not concerned with ends as such. He is concerned with the way in which the attainment of ends is limited. The ends may be noble or they may be base. They may be “material” or “immaterial”—if ends can be so described. But if the attainment of one set of ends involves the sacrifice of others, then it has an economic aspect.²⁴

Traditionally, then, economists have prided themselves on their neutrality between possible ends. This is one of the aspects of economics that Dewey would come to criticize late in his life. Again, in the “Unfinished Introduction” to *Experience and Nature*, he condemned economists who failed to interest themselves in the consequences of seeking particular ends. Part of Dewey's pragmatic project entailed efforts to draw

²³ Arrow, 3.

²⁴ Robbins (1946), 25.

moral theory and economic concerns closer together, and economists' neutrality between different ends represents the antithesis of this project. It would be unfair, however, to say that economists are neutral between alternative *means* since they believe that the most useful assumptions about behavior are those that illustrate efficiency. In an economic sense, "efficiency" and "inefficiency" describe the relationship between ends and means. The relationship is "efficient" if the means employed to achieve the end were not wasted. Very simply, means have been wasted if more utility could have been achieved using the same means.

Means and ends also figure in economic subject matter through issues of preference and ordering. Economists assume that an individual's preferences are comparable and can be ordered. That is, given a set of ends or objectives, an individual can compare these ends to one another and thereby order them. This may take the form of preferring one end to another or it may involve an individual expressing indifference between two (or more) ends.²⁵ This is clearly related to means in the sense that a rational individual's beliefs about how likely alternative actions are to achieve a particular end will affect his or her choice of action. This also suggests that an individual will likely be able to order his or her preferences regarding particular actions. These preferences will be based on the strength of the individual's belief that a particular action will more directly result in the desired effect (end).

²⁵ Ordering also entails an assumption about transitivity. See Arrow (1967), 5; Shepsle and Bonchek, 26.

Certainty, Uncertainty and Risk

For the economist, beliefs are “probability statements”²⁶ about the likelihood of a particular action to result in the desired effect. If the probability that the action will lead directly to the desired end is high, the individual is acting under conditions of “certainty” or “risklessness.” Alternatively, if the probability that the action will lead to the desired end is low, the individual acts under conditions of “risk.” Finally, if the individual is unable to determine the probability between the action and the desired end, the individual is operating under conditions of “uncertainty.”²⁷ Though models of perfect competition have classically tended to assume “practical omniscience on the part of every member of the competitive system,”²⁸ economists have increasingly acknowledged that this is an assumption which requires further investigation and study.

Recent Nobel Prize winners in economics have been cited for their willingness to challenge traditional assumptions about behavior. In 2002, Daniel Kahneman was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics for “having integrated insights from psychological research into economic science, especially concerning human judgment and decision-making under uncertainty.”²⁹ Concerns about the presence of uncertainty and risk in economics are not entirely new, however. They were at the heart of Frank H. Knight’s important book *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit*, originally published in 1921, thirteen years before Kahneman was even born. Knight, in this work, explicitly links the study of risk and uncertainty in economics with epistemology and philosophy:

It is a world of change in which we live, and a world of uncertainty. We live only by knowing *something* about the future; while the problems of

²⁶ Shepsle and Bonchek, 32.

²⁷ Knight (1948), 19-20.

²⁸ Ibid., 197

²⁹ Bank of Sweden.

life, or of conduct at least, arise from the fact that we know so little. This is as true of business as of other spheres of activity. The essence of the situation is action according to *opinion*, of greater or less foundation and value, neither entire ignorance nor complete and perfect information, but partial knowledge. If we are to understand the workings of the economic system we must examine the meaning and significance of uncertainty; and to this end some inquiry into the nature and function of knowledge itself is necessary.³⁰

This description of the “world of change in which we live” is very similar to the description Dewey gives in his work and particularly in *Experience and Nature*. Knight subsequently traces these concerns to the mid-eighteenth century and the infancy of political economy through the work of Adam Smith.

Risk and uncertainty also play important roles in economics through price theory. Prices reflect the anticipated and real costs of risk and uncertainty. That cost may be the owner or producer’s insurance against risk, and the cost of this insurance will be communicated through price. Alternatively, consumers must consider risk and uncertainty in their own calculations regarding price. In *The Common Sense of Political Economy*, Philip Wicksteed demonstrates just such a calculation:

Indeed, whether I buy fewer potatoes at this stall in order that I may in five minutes’ time buy more plums at that; or whether I spend less in the market to-day altogether that I may spend more on my holiday six months hence; or whether I spend less in the whole year to make provision for the education of my children if they live to want it, or for my old age if I ever reach it, I am always estimating future wants of more or less remoteness and uncertainty (for I shall not use even the potatoes for some hours, and events may happen that will prevent my using them at all), and am always balancing them against each other and asking at what price I care to renounce relatively certain satisfactions in order to provide for relatively uncertain ones; and I am always making smaller or larger provision for some contingency according to whether the terms are harder or easier.³¹

³⁰ Knight (1948), 199. The emphasis is Knight’s.

³¹ Wicksteed, 113.

Consumers, as well as producers, will figure the cost of an uncertain or risky future when they determine value. In the same way, Dewey believes philosophers, like “ordinary” people, must acknowledge and respect the presence of uncertainty and risk in their environment. The main challenge of a pragmatic philosophy, according to Dewey, is to reverse the tendency of traditional philosophy to deny the presence of uncertainty in the world. Beyond that, the philosopher must strive to help produce meaning and stability (where possible) in this “contingent” world.

Economic Models and Theories

Attention to certainty, risk, and uncertainty seem to incorporate the practical, day-to-day concerns of men and women into the science of economics, but the models used by economists are often criticized for failing to do precisely this. Though he intends to clarify the methodology of economics, David Friedman thereby provides an example of the sort of reasoning that often frustrates non-economists: “Economics is based on the assumptions that people have reasonably simple objectives and choose the correct means to achieve them. Both assumptions are false—but useful.”³² If the assumptions made by economists are acknowledged by **economists** to be false, how can they possibly be of any use? If an economic model requires significant abstraction from complicated circumstances, how can the model be said to provide any valuable information about the “real world”?

Although other disciplines use models, economists tend to be the object of more criticism than other scientists who use models—physicists and chemists, for example. In part, this may be a result of the fact that many people have an intuitive understanding

³² Friedman, 4.

both of the subject matter of economics and its significance in their day-to-day lives, while the same might not be said of physics and chemistry. Many of us can look at the simplest graphs that demonstrate the existence of an equilibrium price between a supplier's production curve and a consumer's demand curve, and we can argue that the neatness and clarity of the graph do not seem to represent our own experiences with supply and demand and, further, that some of the information on such graphs seems counterintuitive. On the other hand, a graph representing elastic scattering crosssections for hydrogen-antihydrogen atoms might be the sort of thing we have no intuition about whatsoever, and we likely do not know enough about the behavior of antihydrogen atoms to have any opinion about whether that graph seems "too neat" or not.

Frank Knight suggests another explanation for the fact that economists' models have become the targets of intense criticism. In a manner similar to that of theoretical physicists, Knight argues, economists have "developed a historic body of theoretical economics which deals with 'tendencies', i.e., with what 'would' happen under simplified conditions never realized, but always more or less closely approached in practice."³³ The success enjoyed by those who use models in theoretical physics has not been shared by economics, however, and Knight believes this can be accounted for "largely because" economics "has failed to make its nature and limitations explicit and clear." He continues:

It studies what would happen under "perfect competition," noting betimes respects in which competition is not perfect; but much remains to be done to establish a systematic and coherent view of what is necessary to perfect competition, just how far and in what ways its conditions deviate from those of real life and what "corrections" have accordingly to be made in applying its conclusions to actual situations.³⁴

³³ Knight (1948), 5.

³⁴ Ibid.

Thus, for Knight, models may be the targets of criticism, but not simply by virtue of their being accessible. The concerns voiced in these criticisms are less about the use or nature of models than about the use and nature of economic science. Knight believes that economics must do a better job of stating its own principles, as it is the “vague and unsettled state of ideas on this subject” which leads to disagreements about and criticisms of the use of models in economics.³⁵ In short, Knight believes that economists must do a better job of applying themselves to the problems of “ordinary experience.” Dewey would agree, and he certainly **did** criticize economists for their tendency to stray from such problems.

All models and theories involve abstraction at some level, however, and the methods of the economist are no different. Dewey identifies “abstraction” as one of the first steps of the experimental method. First, though, we must consider what it means to speak of an economic “model.” The word “model” itself can be used synonymously with many others,³⁶ but it is the economist’s use of the word that interests us here. Have economists, though they disagree on so many issues fundamental to the discipline, agreed about their use of the word “model”? Surprisingly little has been written on this topic explicitly, though economists tend to use the word “model” easily, as if some agreement has been reached. Perhaps several attempts at definition will suffice to demonstrate that any such agreement may be premature.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Fritz Machlup provided a rather lengthy list of such synonyms: “concept, mental construct, conceptual scheme, schema, ideal type, abstraction, idealization, useful fiction, fictitious construction, schematic representation, analogy, hypostatization of analogies, postulate, assumption, system of fundamental assumptions, axiomatic system, hypothesis, theory, law, system of related variables, system of equations, and probably other things.” Machlup, 175.

Joseph Schumpeter, in his landmark book *History of Economic Analysis*, confidently asserts, “The total or ‘system’ of our concepts and of the relations that we establish between them is what we call a theory or a model.”³⁷ In his book *Methodology of Economics and Other Social Sciences*, Fritz Machlup disagrees with this definition, noting that economists have a “need for a word connoting more than a construct and less than a complete theory; ‘model’ can do this very well.”³⁸ Donald McClosky writes

It is pretty clear that an economist, like a poet, uses metaphors. They are called “models.” The market for apartments in New York, says the economist, is “just like” a curve on a blackboard. No one has so far seen a literal demand curve floating in the sky above Manhattan. It’s a metaphor.³⁹

Between Machlup and McClosky, however, there is some measure of agreement. Both believe that an economic “model” falls short of “theory.” Machlup argues that a theory entails a model “plus a specification of the empirical observations to which it applies.”⁴⁰ McClosky’s terminology differs, but the meaning behind the terms echoes Machlup’s. McClosky claims that, while economic “models” (as well as those in other sciences) can be viewed as metaphors, “theories” similarly should be seen as stories which employ metaphors, thereby broadening our understanding of the world.

But consider the most elementary account of economic models, the sort that appears in an introductory level college textbook. Comparisons between economics and other sciences often first appear in such books when the issue of models is discussed. Here, we see explanations such as, “Like these other sciences, economics uses models, or theories. Economic models and theories are simplified representations of the real world

³⁷ Schumpeter (1954), 562.

³⁸ Machlup, 176.

³⁹ McCloskey, 1.

⁴⁰ Machlup, 178.

that we use to help us understand, explain, and predict economic phenomena in the real world.”⁴¹ This, then, seems to return us to Schumpeter’s conviction that “models” and “theories” are words that can be used interchangeably.

One suspects that this debate is not unique to economics, and the same questions regarding the relationship of “models” to “theories” might well be raised in chemistry, physics, and biology. The exact nature of this relationship falls within the purview of philosophy of science, and, therefore, somewhat outside the subject matter of this thesis. Before proceeding, however, it will be important to establish some common understanding about the nature of economic models.

Economic models do, as the textbook definition above notes, serve to help economists understand, explain, and make predictions about the world. In the process of trying to understand, explain, and make predictions, the economist will be forced to abstract. This abstraction involves more than just describing “classes or types of things.” Indeed, “for purposes of analysis we must often go much further and abstract from still more of the familiar features of the thing or event or whatever it is we are thinking about.”⁴² Quickly, these abstractions may reach a level which seems absurd: the “models of the firm, the industry, and the whole system that are used in price theory are... ‘shockingly’ unrealistic,”⁴³ for example.

Again, though reflections about the nature of abstraction are better suited to the philosophy of science or social science, a few words about the relationship between models and “realism” are nonetheless appropriate. In economics, as in other sciences, models are **not** meant to represent the “real world” accurately to the smallest detail.

⁴¹ Miller, 12.

⁴² Machlup, 75.

⁴³ Ibid., 78.

Instead, models are expected to “capture only the *essential* relationships that are sufficient to analyze the particular problem or answer the particular question with which we are concerned.”⁴⁴ Economic models, then, will not be judged by virtue of their accuracy in re-presenting the world as it is. Rather, “good” models abstract from the world as it is and make numerous assumptions that may not apply in individual circumstances, but they do so in such a way as to demonstrate accuracy in prediction, understanding, and explanation of real world phenomena.⁴⁵ Dewey’s account of the experimental method provides support for the economist’s use of models, but one of the aims of this dissertation will be to show that Dewey did not unconditionally support the use of models in science. Models, for Dewey, are only valuable insofar as they contribute to the furthered understanding of “ordinary” experience, and, thus, models must be used in conjunction with some sort of full experimentation (as Dewey describes that process).

Economics as Positive or Normative

Shortly after the 1977 annual assembly of the American Economic Association, an editorial about the meeting was published in *Business Week*. The editorial bore the title “The Furniture Movers” and likened economists to “moving men” because they do no more than “collect money and hours” for “pushing the furniture around.” In the economists’ case, “furniture” amounted to ideas and theories that have already been shown to be ineffective, and are, therefore, akin to inanimate objects. *Business Week*

⁴⁴ Miller, 12. The emphasis is Miller’s.

⁴⁵ See note 20 above. Shepsle and Bonchek also make this point in *Analyzing Politics*.

criticized the attendees for their lack of humility and competence.⁴⁶ In addition, the editorial also criticized economists more generally for their inability to agree with one another. The editorial prompted several members of the Association to undertake a more careful study of these criticisms.

The study surveyed a random sample of 600 U.S. based economists: some were full professors in leading graduate economics programs, others were economists with academic appointments, and the remainder were economists who were employed by the government or the private sector. The authors of the study hypothesized that agreement is far more widespread among economists than has been widely reputed, but they did qualify this. They expected, in part, to see “greater consensus about questions of what *can* be done than about those concerned with what *ought* to be done.”⁴⁷ This hypothesis represented, for the authors, their belief that economists have significant disagreement about the status of the discipline: is it positive or normative?

The results of the survey bore out the authors’ hypothesis. There was little or no consensus for statements like “Antitrust laws *should* be used vigorously to reduce monopoly power from its current level” and “The economic power of labor unions *should* be significantly curtailed.” The respondents split almost evenly between strong agreement, agreement with provisions, and general disagreement with these propositions. However, for propositions such as “Tariffs and import quotas reduce general economic welfare” and “A ceiling on rents reduces the quantity and quality of housing available,” all but two or three of the respondents agreed.⁴⁸ The authors concluded that, though there is generally more agreement among economists than is often reported to the public, “The

⁴⁶ Kearn, Pope, Whiting, and Wimmer, 28.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 30, 33. Emphasis added.

normative nature of many issues also allows ideological considerations to become important.”⁴⁹

Evidence of disagreement between economists as to the question of economics as a positive or normative discipline existed well before 1977, however. Lionel Robbins discussed the issue at length in the 1946 edition of *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science*. In answer to those who asserted that economics and ethics cannot be “dissociated,” Robbins replied that any association between the two would be “mere juxtaposition.”⁵⁰ Economics and ethics deal with very different types of subject matter, according to Robbins, and there can be no connection between them. Economics operates in the realm of “is” and ethics in the world of “ought.” For Robbins, this represents a difference in “kind:” “The two fields of enquiry are not on the same plane of discourse.”⁵¹ As an example of the distinction between these two sorts of discourse, Robbins suggests the difference between the **price** of pork and the way in which pork is **valued**:

The proposition that the price of pork fluctuates with variations in supply and demand follows from a conception of the relation of pork to human impulses which, in the last resort, is verifiable by introspection and observation. We can ask people whether they are prepared to buy pork and how much they are prepared to buy at different prices. Or we can watch how they behave when equipped with currency and exposed to the stimuli of the pig-meat markets. But the proposition that it is *wrong* that pork should be valued, although it is a proposition which has greatly influenced the conduct of different races, is a proposition which we cannot conceive being verified at all in this manner.⁵²

The task of ethics and philosophy, according to Robbins, is to examine the proposition that “it is *wrong* that pork should be valued.” Economics, on the other hand, should

⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁰ Robbins (1946), 148.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. The emphasis is Robbins’.

concern itself with the proposition that “the price of pork fluctuates with variations in supply and demand.” Though Robbins acknowledges that the “methodological axioms” of economists “involve no prohibition of outside interests,” he also notes that economists’ talents are better suited to economic (i.e. non-ethical) concerns.

The only agreement that appears to exist within economics on the question of the nature of the discipline is that there is no agreement. Many economists have, historically, agreed with Robbins’ position; i.e. that ethical issues are merely “outside interests” for the economist. Still others have been vehement in their belief that there is no such thing as (ethically) value free economics. Gunnar Myrdal, who shared the 1974 Nobel Prize in economics with Friedrich Hayek, called the belief in “neutral” economics “naïve empiricism.”⁵³ Even those who seem to be entirely confident in their views on the subject seem to have difficulty expressing their opinions with clarity. In a book entitled *Essays in Positive Economics*, another Nobel Prize winner, Milton Friedman, claimed:

that “economics can be, and in part is, a positive science” and that “positive economics is in principle independent of any ethical position or normative judgments” and “is, or can be, an ‘objective’ science in precisely the same sense as any of the physical sciences.”⁵⁴

Many, many examples can be cited of the difference of opinion among economists on the question of economics as positive or normative science,⁵⁵ but the brief summary of these examples is simply that there is little agreement among economists on the issue.

It should also be noted that there are intermediary positions as well as those mentioned above. Many economists do not believe that economics is **either** positive or normative, but that it includes elements of both. Joseph Schumpeter provides one such

⁵³ Quoted in Hutchison, 45.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 14ff.

example. He argued that while economics should largely be concerned with that which had typically been the subject of positive science (“objective” facts), it would be ridiculous to suggest that the subject matter of economics (the behavior and choices of men and women) was unaffected by “value judgments.”⁵⁶ In effect, “value judgments” and normative claims become observable “positive” facts in the economist’s study: a person’s “motivation may, and as a rule does, imply also propositions about causes and effects, some or all of which may come within the province of the economic analyst.”⁵⁷ A person may hold the belief that one “ought” always to respect binding agreements, and, while an economist may withhold judgment about what people “ought” to do, she will certainly find valuable the information that an individual actor holds such beliefs since they will likely affect the person’s behavior.

There is more significance in the lack of consensus among economists than simply the failure to resolve philosophical questions about the nature of the discipline. Discussions intended to determine whether economics is positive or normative (or both) often occur because of economists’ desire to influence public policy. Schumpeter, though his position was moderate on the positive vs. normative issue, criticized attempts by economists to engage in policy-making: “the progress of economics—including progress in its practical usefulness—has been and is being severely impeded by economists’ quasi-political activities.”⁵⁸ Thus, regardless of the nature of economics, Schumpeter believed economists had no business meddling in political matters.

Others are less sanguine about the resolution of this issue. To many, the potential of economics rests on its definition as a positive or normative endeavor, and the

⁵⁶ Schumpeter (1954), 805-807.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 807.

economist's contribution to political issues and debates constitutes the most important part of his or her profession. T.W. Hutchison worried that, if some consensus on the question of positive vs. normative was not reached by economists, "the applications to public policy of economic theorizing [would] consist to a large extent of arraying rival political points of view in impressively persuasive pseudo-technical jargon" and "the discussion of policies by economists [would] amount to [nothing more] than a clash of rival brands of political propaganda dressed up in esoteric patter."⁵⁹ It is hard to imagine that Schumpeter would be unfazed by this worry: why would someone invest nearly 1200 pages (as Schumpeter does in his *History of Economic Analysis*) in a subject that has little more to offer us than "a clash of rival brands of political propaganda dressed up in esoteric patter"? Hutchison argues convincingly that the "practical applications" of economics depend upon some sort of consensus about the positive or normative nature of economic science, and one suspects that Schumpeter, insofar as he is concerned with the practical application of the science, would agree that this is an issue with which economic theorists must contend.

We will see shortly that Dewey agreed with those economists who believed economics had to concern itself both with political issues and moral issues. Many of the references Dewey makes to economics occur within his work on moral theory. In particular, his *Ethics* focuses throughout on the history of moral conduct and this conduct is often strongly influenced by economic conditions. In fact, when Dewey re-wrote the *Ethics*, much of the additional material included in the revision was further detailed information about the economic conditions which have led to particular moral developments. Throughout his life, Dewey worried about the impact of economic

⁵⁹ Hutchison, 15.

activity on the quality of human life, and he was especially interested in the way economic activity had shaped moral conduct. In the same way that he would deem a philosophy that ignored economics an “escapist intellectual gymnastic,” one suspects that Dewey would have argued that an economics which ignored moral issues would also be of little use to “ordinary experience.”

Human Development and Fulfillment

Some of the disagreements described above clearly have a source other than differences in belief about the nature of economic science. Despite protestations that economists have little or no concern with ethical value, one must wonder whether their own views of what constitutes the “good life” for humans play a role in their work. John Neville Keynes, author of *The Scope and Method of Political Economy* and father of John Maynard Keynes, recognized this problem and likened it to a similar problem in philosophy: “Even if philosophers are agreed as to facts, they may still arrive at contrary solutions...because they differ as to the true ideal of human society.”⁶⁰ Do economists have a conception of the “good life” or of ideal human development and fulfillment, and, if so, how does that affect the work they do?

Many economists will argue that, while they may have a conception of the “good” for humans or the “good life,” this conception is irrelevant to their work. In the same way that the physicist’s conception of the ideal human life would be unimportant in his study of quantum mechanics (or so the argument goes), so the economist’s view of “the best life” for humankind would be immaterial to her study of the leading indicators of inflation. On this understanding of the economist’s work, the only “good” that would

⁶⁰ Keynes, quoted in Hutchison, 16.

matter would be the “good” of utility maximization. It is no coincidence, however, that economics employs the term “goods.” As Marshall notes in his *Principles of Economics*, “In the absence of any short term in common use to represent all desirable things, or things that satisfy human wants, we may use the term *Goods* for that purpose.”⁶¹ Questions about why it is that an individual or institution derives utility from a particular good, on the other hand, would be left to the philosopher, and such questions would interest the economist only insofar as they enable her to measure aspects of the individual or institution’s economic behavior.

Consider the words the winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize in economics, James Buchanan, uses to open his book *The Limits of Liberty*:

Those who seek specific descriptions of the “good society” will not find them here. A listing of my own private preferences would be both unproductive and uninteresting. I claim no rights to impose these preferences on others, even within the limits of persuasion.... Consistency demands that we list our private preferences as being neither more nor less significant than those held by others.... A situation is judged “good” to the extent that it allows individuals to get what they want to get, whatsoever this might be, limited only by the principle of mutual agreement.⁶²

Buchanan seems to suggest that his own interests are only incidental to the work, and that, as an economist, he is required to disclose any possible conflicts of interest at the outset of the book. He could not be more explicit that, if an ideal political life exists for human beings, it matters little to his own work: “We live together because social organization provides the efficient means of achieving our individual objectives and not because society offers us a means of arriving at some transcendental bliss.”⁶³ But most philosophers (Dewey not least among them) would argue that using “good” to describe

⁶¹ Marshall (1947), 54.

⁶² Buchanan, 1-2.

⁶³ Ibid., 1.

“individuals getting what they want” suggests certain moral (and perhaps metaphysical) commitments on Buchanan’s part (whether Buchanan acknowledges these commitments or not).

Other economists will find this reading of their profession lacking, and they will argue that economics, while a science, is a science of a different sort than physics. While one might be able to ignore considerations of “the good” for human beings in examining time asymmetries in quantum cosmology (and even this might be more than they are willing to grant), similar disregard cannot be abided in questions of employment protection in labor economics. Many would contest the claim that a physicist’s understanding of human development and fulfillment is irrelevant to his work on any topic. On this argument, the physicist’s work, no less than the economist’s, is always affected in some manner by his beliefs about the “best life” for human beings.

In fact, George Frankfurter and Elton McGoun make precisely this argument in their 1999 article “Ideology and the Theory of Financial Economics.” They do not dispute that economists, particularly neoclassical economists, attempt to use methodology similar to that of physicists and those engaged in the natural sciences. However, work done by natural scientists, like that of economists, is also “imbued with certain beliefs”⁶⁴ and, according to Frankfurter and McGoun, neoclassicists “have been using their ideological cravats...as scientific belts to hold up their theoretical trousers.”⁶⁵

Schumpeter seems to agree, arguing that both the social structure in which an economist (or physicist) lives and the one that she favors will affect the way she works. At a very

⁶⁴ Frankfurter and McGoun, 161.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 174. It should be noted, however, that this reference is to the capital asset pricing model (CAPM) and the efficient market hypothesis (EMH). Though Frankfurter and McGoun only claim this to be so with regard to CAPM and EMH, they suggest it is true of all neoclassical economic methodology.

fundamental level, “the scientific worker’s choice of problems and of approaches to them, hence the pattern of an epoch’s scientific thought, becomes socially conditioned—which is precisely what we mean when speaking of scientific ideology rather than of the ever more perfect perception of objective scientific truths.”⁶⁶ The very problems that an economist chooses to focus on are determined, at least in part, by the societal conditions in which she works, according to Schumpeter. The neoclassicist who lives in a free-market economy, then, will make decisions about what to study based on a neoclassical, free-market framework.

But the influence of this “ideology” is more pervasive than selective emphasis.

Douglass C. North, winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in economics, argues that these ideologies will affect the sorts of theories that economists will design:

By ideology I mean the subjective perceptions (models, theories) all people possess to explain the world around them. Whether at the microlevel of individual relationships or at the macrolevel of organized ideologies providing integrated explanations of the past and present, such as communism or religions, the *theories* individuals construct are *colored* by normative views of how the world should be organized.⁶⁷

If North is right, both the way economists think about the world and the theories they produce to describe or understand or to make predictions about the world will be “colored” by their understanding of “the best life” or the “good.” North stands in clear opposition to those who believe that economics can be “value free” and this demonstrates one more difficulty of the positive-normative problem in economics.

Though economists like North and Schumpeter may be willing to acknowledge the influence of their views about human fulfillment on their work in their discipline, many of their colleagues are unwilling to admit such views play any role in professional

⁶⁶ Schumpeter (1949), 348.

⁶⁷ North, 23. The emphasis is North’s.

economics. While it might be useful, in an attempt at a brief history of economics, to consider economists' views about the best life for human beings and their understanding of the good, this is, unfortunately, impossible. By and large, economists have been reluctant to make claims about ideals of human development or to even admit that such ideals might play a significant (or even insignificant) part in their theorizing. Thus, the default position has simply been that human development and fulfillment, for the economist, are realized through utility maximization. If "utility maximization" seems an indistinct concept, the economist will likely direct those with further inquiries to one of her counterparts in the humanities.

Dewey, of course, believed that there could be no separation between an economist's environment, his habits, instincts, beliefs, and theorizing. He never condemned theorists for their use of theory, but he did criticize them sharply for failing to "intellectually disrobe" and "examine" their prejudices and influences. He would not have faulted these "neoclassicists" for having prejudices, but he would have faulted them for failing to acknowledge them or for failing to attempt to identify them. A pragmatic economist, like a pragmatic philosopher, will endeavor to remember at all times that he or she has a biological foundation (which entails certain needs and behavior), a history (which entails certain education and prejudices), and an obligation to incorporate the results of all intellectual study into "ordinary experience."

CHAPTER III

BEHAVIOR

Economics, Pragmatism, and Behavior

If, as Lionel Robbins claims, the study of behavior provides the key to an understanding of economics, Dewey would surely have applauded this assessment and remarked on its similarity to philosophy. Dewey began his graduate work in philosophy by immersing himself in the study of psychology. At Johns Hopkins, he did “laboratory work” of “observation and experiment” with G. Stanley Hall,³¹ the first American to receive a doctorate in psychology. Not surprisingly, then, Dewey’s pragmatism rests on a foundation of behavioral observation, and his work in logic relies on “knowing” as a form of behavior. For Dewey, behavior and rationality are importantly linked, and, although his work abounds with attention to both, the most concentrated discussions appear in *Human Nature and Conduct*, *Experience and Nature* and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.

As Dewey’s late criticism of “scientific economists”³² demonstrates, the subject matter of philosophy, as well as economics, has to be the “ordinary experience” of human beings. This experience includes their behavior, and it must include the “part played by need, purpose and an unceasing valuing”³³ in constituting behavior. If economics is the study of a particular type of human behavior, then economics must certainly be an important aspect of Dewey’s pragmatism. If, as Marshall and Mill both claimed,

³¹ Martin, 65. Hahn, ix.

³² LW1, 357.

³³ Ibid, 359.

economics is the study of human behavior particularly as it relates to the material well being of individuals, Dewey's pragmatism is undoubtedly economic, too. The philosopher, according to Dewey, cannot afford to ignore the economic circumstances of the individuals he hopes to understand. Philosophy can be valuable to us insofar as it helps us derive more meaning from our "ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments," and matters of material well being and economic considerations are a significant part of our "ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments."

The economist and the pragmatic philosopher are engaged in a similar endeavor: they attempt to use the "data" of human behavior to make predictions and draw conclusions that will improve "ordinary experience." Dewey cites the influence of that which is "economic" on the moral behavior of individuals: "It ["the economic"] has worked out certain important moral necessities of its own. Honesty, the keeping of contracts, the steadiness and continuity of character fostered by economic relations are important contributions."³⁴ Human behavior, economics, and Dewey's pragmatism are all connected by virtue of the data that this behavior provides in order for the shared goals of economics and Dewey's pragmatism to be furthered.

Finally, if further evidence is necessary to support the thesis that Dewey's pragmatism is closely related to economics, recent work in economic methodology provides this. In particular, a recent symposium about behavioral economics and decision theory used Dewey's work to explain "empirical anomalies" cited by behavioral economists.³⁵ Behavioral economists have long focused on incentives and context as the determining factors in individual choices about action. Recently, however, behavioral

³⁴ MW5, 79.

³⁵ Khalil, 107.

economics has demonstrated that many long-held assumptions about human behavior as a response to incentives and environment do not hold up to empirical observation. Several of the authors at this symposium boldly claimed that Dewey's work provides answers to questions which economists have been struggling with for years. Since Dewey called for the application of the experimental method in disciplines other than the natural and physical sciences and since he advocated an "empirical" philosophy, it is especially interesting that these authors believe Dewey's work will be most helpful in explaining "empirical anomalies."

Dewey on Behavior

Although Dewey does not always speak specifically about "behavior," he consistently focuses on the matter of "conduct." In particular, he believes that attempts by philosophers to distinguish between human behavior as the result of **either** biological predispositions or environment are misguided. Throughout his work, Dewey argues against this dichotomy and claims instead that all human "conduct is *interaction* between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social."³⁶ This environment may more simply be referred to as "culture":

The state of culture is a state of interaction of many factors, the chief of which are law and politics, industry and commerce, science and technology, the arts of expression and communication, and of morals, or the values men prize and the ways in which they evaluate them; and finally, though indirectly, the system of general ideas used by men to justify and to criticize the fundamental conditions under which they live, their social philosophy.³⁷

³⁶ MW14, 9. The emphasis is Dewey's.

³⁷ LW13, 79.

Thus, human behavior cannot be understood in isolation from the environment in which it occurs. At the very least, it is not solely determined by biology but significantly influenced by the society in which it occurs. It is worth noting, too, that “industry and commerce” are integral parts of the interaction which comprises culture. Understanding human behavior requires, in part, an understanding of the nature and details of industry and commerce. If the role of philosophy is to be, as Dewey describes it in *Experience and Nature*, a criticism of culture, it must also be a criticism (and study) of industry and commerce, among other things. Again, the details of economic life are an important concern of the pragmatic philosopher.

As Kenneth Stickers describes it, Dewey (unlike contemporary rational choice theorists in economics) believed that preferences were not “given” by nature but instead reflect the influence of the organism’s environment:

[Preferences] are defined as the organism gropes its way through and transacts with its environment, thus undergoing development and growth. So the preferences of the organism are always somewhat vague, provisional, and in the process of becoming increasingly concrete, in light of particular encounters with the environment.³⁸

If economists consider the preferences of individuals as “given” and unworthy of further investigation, Dewey would argue that economics is not, in fact, a study of behavior.

True observation of behavior will demonstrate that preferences, like so many other aspects of human life, change as individuals develop and as they interact with culture.

Dewey avoided the sort of “chicken or egg” problem of determining which (biology or culture) is of primary importance by arguing that it would be impossible to discover the answer. By the time we have observed human behavior or conduct, it has already long been embedded in a culture, and there is little hope (or point) in trying to

³⁸ Stickers, 158.

peel away the layers of culture to discover some pure human nature. Further, men and women do not live in pre-cultural worlds and Dewey's pragmatism demands that we, as philosophers, do not concern ourselves with such worlds. Perhaps if we lived alone and our habits were formed in a vacuum, the question of pure or untutored human nature would be important. We do not live alone, however, and, according to Dewey, "since habits involve the support of environing conditions, a society or some specific group of fellow-men, is always accessory before and after the fact."³⁹

Human behavior, then, is a function of the "interplay" of several things: environment or culture, instinct, habits, and education. Though preferences may help us predict human behavior and, accordingly, create hypotheses about economic behavior and action, preferences are themselves affected by these various influences. Economists might observe human behavior and draw conclusions about economic activity based on these observations, but, in order to be "pragmatic," economists would then have to test these conclusions in "ordinary experience." Neither economics nor philosophy can satisfy itself with theorizing, according to Dewey. Instead, the "test" of economics and philosophy must be their ability to employ this theorizing in order to draw meaning from and give meaning to "ordinary experience." Economists' view of human behavior (as the product of certain "given" attributes) cannot pass Dewey's "test" for philosophy without being aided by "experimentation." The simplified or reductive view of human behavior as the product of a "fixed and final" character is far too similar to "non-empirical" philosophy to be endorsed by Dewey.

As Dewey describes philosophy, "Its ultimate value for life-experience is that it continuously provides instruments for the criticism of those values—whether of beliefs,

³⁹ MW14, 16.

institutions, actions or products—that are found in all aspects of experience.”⁴⁰

According to Dewey, then, philosophy takes human beings as they are, engaged in a culture but partially determined by their biological foundations, and it enables them to act intelligently through criticism of that culture. There is thus an important continuity between the individual and the environment.

Habit

Fundamental to understanding human behavior from Dewey’s perspective is the notion of habit.⁴¹ In “higher organisms” such as human beings, behavior or “what is done” is largely the result of habit.⁴² Human beings generally act according to the ways they have acted in the past. Habits thereby demonstrate the continuity of the past and the present, according to Dewey. The way we behave now is “conditioned by consequences of prior activities”⁴³ and thus connected to the past. In fact, apart from communication with others, Dewey claims that “behavior is confined to channels established by prior behavior. In so far the tendency is toward monotonous regularity.”⁴⁴ Left alone, our behavior tends to be repetitive and lacks anything novel - it “wears grooves.”⁴⁵ Until our habits face challenges or obstacles, they will continue in the same manner that they have in the past.

Yet habits continually face challenges and obstacles in the form of a human being’s surrounding environment. Habits “manifest themselves” by virtue of the “social

⁴⁰ LW1, 9.

⁴¹ See below, Chapter V, for further development of the concept of “habit.”

⁴² LW1, 213.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 214.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

environment,⁴⁶ and they change according to that environment. Though Dewey notes the “tendency...toward monotonous regularity” in habits, he quickly follows this with an explanation for the corresponding lack of such monotony in the average human being’s life:

Each habit demands appropriate conditions for its exercise and when habits are numerous and complex, as with the human organism; the organism is compelled to make variations, and exposed to error and disappointment. By a seeming paradox, increased power of forming habits means increased susceptibility, sensitiveness, responsiveness. Thus even if we think of habits as so many grooves, the power to acquire many and varied grooves denotes high sensitivity, explosiveness. Thereby an old habit, a fixed groove if one wishes to exaggerate, gets in the way of the process of forming a new habit while the tendency to form a new one cuts across some old habit. Hence the instability, novelty, emergence of unexpected and unpredictable combinations.⁴⁷

Habits can only be said to be fixed when they exist in isolation from the surrounding environment. Dewey describes the human condition as one of equilibrium which is constantly being disturbed by the surrounding environment: “living may be regarded as a continual rhythm of disequilibrations and recoveries of equilibrium.”⁴⁸ Habits are the hallmark of this equilibrium, but a fixed set of habits will prove insufficient in the face of the novelty and variation that are characteristics of human life. Thus, an economist might assume that human beings have a fixed set of habits or a fixed sort of behavior (i.e., faced with x, the individual will do y), but, unless the individual lives in an unchanging environment, this assumption will prove inadequate for making predictions about actual human behavior. A pragmatic economics would acknowledge the fact that human behavior varies as the environment varies, and a pragmatic economics would also have to acknowledge that predictions about human behavior will have to adapt as that behavior

⁴⁶ MW14, 15.

⁴⁷ LW1, 214.

⁴⁸ LW12, 34.

adapts. The usefulness of predictions about behavior, then, may be somewhat limited if they are presented as “truths about human nature” or predictions that will hold true in all cases.

Human beings live in a world that is complicated and therefore requires the development of a myriad of habits. The paradox Dewey describes takes the form of responsiveness: though our biological tendencies incline us to try to restore equilibrium through fixed habits (the “worn grooves”) and to find the means to eradicate novelty in our lives, this very action also makes us much more responsive to changes in our environment and we subsequently develop a sensitivity to opportunities to develop new and better-adapted habits. In short, by virtue of our attempts to stifle change in our lives, we unwittingly become adept at adapting and we begin to seek occasions upon which to exercise these new “habits.”

For Dewey, the word “habit,” like many of the words he uses in his work, does not have a conventional meaning. In Dewey’s philosophy, “habit” does not simply mean something done repetitively. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey denotes “habit” as

that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity.⁴⁹

Although this may not be what we typically think of when we refer to “habits,” Dewey believed that his meaning was better summarized by this word than words like “attitude” and “disposition.” These terms did not reflect the “operativeness” and “actuality” of the idea he intended.⁵⁰ Even though our habits may not be readily apparent to those around

⁴⁹ MW14, 31.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

us, they are all always operating and working together. This continuous operation of habits or, as Dewey calls it, “the interpenetration of habits,”⁵¹ is what forms our character. This interpenetration is described by Dewey as an “interplay” of sorts: “each habit operates all the time of waking life; though like a member of a crew taking his turn at the wheel, its operation becomes the dominantly characteristic trait of an act only occasionally or rarely.”⁵² Any account of behavior that is pragmatic on Dewey’s terms will pay careful attention to the role of habits as constitutive of human character.

Environment

Human behavior, like that of all life forms, entails interaction between the human being and the surrounding environment. In fact, according to Dewey, an “environment” is defined as the means a being employs **in order** to live: “The processes of living are enacted by the environment as truly as by the organism; for they *are* an integration.”⁵³ This environment expands through the organism’s activities. As human beings deal with the disequilibrations that occur in their lives, they also increase the extent of their environment by utilizing new means to resolve these disturbances. These “new means” provide “a new way of interacting,”⁵⁴ and thereby expand the organism’s environment. Again, therefore, if an economist treats an individual’s environment as “fixed” in order to draw conclusions about his or her behavior, the conclusions are doomed to fail when tested against “ordinary experience” or the facts of every-day existence.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ LW12, 32. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

As our environment expands, so too do the opportunities for disturbances to occur, and this is particularly true for higher organisms as their abilities to adapt exceed those of lower organisms. The higher the organism, the more likely that attempts to restore equilibrium will result in improved meaning or stability of goods. Accordingly:

The “higher” the organism, the more serious become the disturbances and the more energetic (and often more prolonged) are the efforts necessary for its reestablishment. The state of disturbed equilibration constitutes *need*. The movement towards its restoration is search and exploration. The recovery is fulfillment or satisfaction.⁵⁵

Human behavior can only be understood, according to Dewey, if we trace it to its roots in biological need. First, human beings, like other organisms, must fulfill certain basic needs in order to survive. As these needs are fulfilled, other needs arise and the organism must find means to fulfill these as well. Human beings constitute “higher” order organisms and their needs are consequently many and varied. Fortunately, human beings tend to be endowed with the creativity necessary to develop new means of meeting these needs.

Finding food for basic survival is an interaction between a human being and its environment. In the same way, attempts to resolve the mind-body problem are also interactions between human beings and their environment. Both involve initial disturbances to the human being’s equilibrium and are followed by efforts to resolve these disturbances. Undoubtedly, when viewed from the perspective of simple survival, the need created by hunger will be judged more urgent than the need created by problems of metaphysics, but both demonstrate the pattern Dewey describes. The continuity between acts of simple survival and philosophical thinking is central to Dewey’s pragmatism. This continuity demonstrates the connection between nature and reason,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 34. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

and this connection provides the basis for Dewey's *Experience and Nature*. Human behavior must always be understood, for Dewey, as the product of interplay between nature and culture (though, of course, our knowledge of "nature" is mediated by culture).

In addition to the fact that sophisticated behavior (reasoning, critical analysis) seems to be continuous with less sophisticated behavior (breathing, eating), behavior between individuals also appears to be connected. Human conduct, Dewey claims, is always social:

Some activity proceeds from a man; then it sets up reactions in the surroundings. Others approve, disapprove, protest, encourage, share and resist. Even letting a man alone is a definite response. Envy, admiration and imitation are complicities. Conduct is always shared; this is the difference between it and a physiological process.⁵⁶

If human behavior is to be understood as the interaction between an individual and the surrounding environment, we must remember that that surrounding environment includes other individuals. Thus, in addition to being characterized by habit, behavior, on Dewey's account, always involves a social context.

Tastes and desires also influence behavior, but, as noted above, Dewey does not believe that these are inborn and unalterable. As with other elements of human behavior, these are the largely the product of "objective conditions."⁵⁷ Although Dewey does not rule out the influence of "personal exhortation, advice and instruction," he does claim that they are "feeble" when compared to "that which steadily proceeds from the impersonal forces and depersonalized habitudes of the environment...."⁵⁸ Individuals may be born with tendencies toward certain preferences, but attempting to determine what these preferences are would require the absence of the "habitudes of the

⁵⁶ MW14, 16.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 20.

environment” that Dewey mentions. We never live in such a world, however, and it is therefore futile to try to discern “inborn” preferences.

Dewey does not mean to suggest that these “objective conditions” produce taste and desire in a way that is wholly deterministic. The surrounding environment which influences taste and desire is full of uncertainty and precariousness: “Man finds himself living in an aleatory world; his existence involves, to put it baldly, a gamble. The world is a scene of risk; it is uncertain, unstable, uncannily unstable.”⁵⁹ Accordingly, preferences are subject to instability and chance, and even individuals that live together in similar circumstances will have some unique preferences. The fact that “objective conditions” lead to the development of tastes and desires, however, makes attention to the surrounding environment essential to any scheme intended to alter behavior. It also suggests that, without changes in objective conditions, tastes and desires would be likely to remain fixed. A pragmatic economics, then, would have to interest itself in individual behavior, social behavior, and, finally, the context and culture in which these occur.

Again, the role of habits in behavior must be noted. Dewey claims that habits are constantly under revision, and the presence of uncertainty in “objective conditions” explains this fact. We will never be done with the work of “revising and readjusting habits, even the best of good habits” since “Consequences reveal unexpected potentialities in our habits whenever these habits are exercised in a different environment from that in which they were formed.”⁶⁰ Behavior and character, since they are the product of our habits, will be influenced by changes in the surrounding environment and the “precariousness” of existence. Some of the revisions we must make to habits will

⁵⁹ LW1, 43.

⁶⁰ MW14, 38.

entail adapting current habits, but because of the “unexpected potentialities” revealed by changing circumstances, we will also develop new habits that might not otherwise have seemed related to the immediate change in our environment.

If it can be said that, as individuals, we have tendencies, it is only in the sense that both the accumulation and constant revision of habits suggest that we will **tend** to behave in a certain manner. These tendencies, however, cannot be said to be fixed, either by nature or by repetition. As noted above, if natural tendencies are those which are inborn and exist apart from environment, we will never be able to identify them because we are never entirely apart from the influence of our surroundings. In fact, far from habits reinventing the world, Dewey believes that the influence of the world plays an important part in the reinvention of our habits and our selves. Customs, according to Dewey, are not the collective product of individual habits. Instead, “individuals form their personal habits under conditions set by prior customs.”⁶¹ The habits individuals form come to them in the same way that speech does:

Each person is born an infant, and every infant is subject from the first breath he draws and the first cry he utters to the attentions and demands of others. These others are not just persons in general with minds in general. They are beings with habits, and beings who upon the whole esteem the habits they have, if for no other reason than that, having them, their imagination is thereby limited. The nature of habit is to be assertive, insistent, self-perpetuating.⁶²

Behavior is a response or explication of the stimuli caused by habits, and habits both result from and perpetuate customs. The surrounding environment includes physical elements, but it also includes social elements, like customs.

⁶¹ Ibid., 43.

⁶² Ibid.

As Dewey uses it, the term “tendency” is meant to highlight the contingent connection between intentions and consequences. The connection between “disposition” and “deed” or intention and consequence is, for Dewey, generally a direct one. He is critical of attempts to separate intentions and consequences in moral theory, and he argues for a continuum between motives and consequences. He does, however, acknowledge the role that accident and contingency play in the world (indeed, this is one of the most significant characteristics of human existence, according to Dewey). However, he still claims that, “other things being equal, the right disposition will produce the right deed.”⁶³

Uncertainty, Moral Theory, and Behavior

According to Dewey, one of the most significant mistakes made in the history of philosophy (and moral theory in particular) has been reliance on theories which see reality as fixed and final. Human behavior is conditioned as a response to the nature of existence. The habits and conduct of human beings tacitly recognize the facts of a precarious existence even though philosophers and moralists have largely failed to do so for thousands of years. While philosophers have attempted to “deny...to the universe the character of contingency which it possesses so integrally”⁶⁴ through metaphysical doctrines of stability and fixedness, non-philosophers have had to go about the business of obtaining stable goods and ideals through effort, risk-taking, and various attempts “to safeguard the excellent objects and to deflect and reduce the obnoxious ones.”⁶⁵ Those engaged in scientific inquiry tend to be most successful in their attempts to “control”

⁶³ MW14, 34. See also 37.

⁶⁴ LW1, 46.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 56.

objects and thereby add “greater control to life itself,”⁶⁶ but Dewey’s pragmatism demonstrated his conviction that these successes could be replicated in fields outside of the natural sciences. Economic activity was one such area, and Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy held the hope that individuals’ material well being would be improved by the “intelligent action” he described.

Using a method similar to that of metaphysicians, moralists have often posited a “transcendental” or an ideal morality which lacks any hint of the hazard and instability inherent in day-to-day life. Moral theorists have established rules that are “foreign to human nature,” and Dewey describes conventional morality as “drab” and “colorless conformity.”⁶⁷ Morals should be the product of human nature (such as it is), according to Dewey, and this “colorless” conventional morality does not reflect the nature of existence, human or otherwise. Dewey argues that morality, like philosophy itself, requires reconstruction, and “drab” conventional morality should be replaced with a morality that respects the facts of the human condition and a morality that understands that the physical sciences are an important tool in understanding moral theory. The precariousness of existence would not be eliminated by this theory nor would moral problems disappear, but there would be other advantages to the moral theory Dewey advocates:

It would destroy fixed distinction between the human and the physical, as well as that between the moral and the industrial and political. A morals based on study of human nature instead of upon disregard for it would find the facts of man continuous with those of the rest of nature and would thereby ally ethics with physics and biology. It would find the nature and activities of one person coterminous with those of other human beings,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁷ MW14, 4, 6, and 7.

and therefore link ethics with the study of history, sociology, law and economics.⁶⁸

By virtue of their shared biological foundations, the behavior of individual human beings, though varied in some respects, is generally “coterminous with those of other human beings.” Moreover, any observation or study of human behavior by philosophers must be approached in the same way a biologist approaches her subject matter: that is, the successes and the methods of the natural sciences must be brought to bear on both metaphysics and moral theory.

I noted above (in Chapter II) that one of the debates that has long occupied economists has been the question of whether economics is a positive or normative endeavor. Some of the greatest economic theorists in history have disagreed on this subject, but Dewey’s pragmatism suggests a solution. If we approach moral theory in a manner similar to the manner in which we approach the natural and physical sciences, we will see that the moral and the “industrial” are not distinct. That is, both the daily economic activity of individuals and the theories of economists can be demonstrated to be continuous with ethical activity and theory. The economic life of individuals is laden with moral concerns and considerations. Since the “activities of one person [are] coterminous with those of other human beings,” and since the economic life of individuals is a part of ordinary experience and requires the activity of individuals, it is clear that activity which is a part of the “economic life” of human beings is thereby activity that affects other individuals. Thus, it is moral in its content.

Any economist who suggests that his or her work is “neutral” or “value free” has simply failed to observe human behavior as it is. A reconstructed economics, like a

⁶⁸ Ibid., 11.

reconstructed moral theory, will acknowledge the shared nature of human conduct. In short, this means that, as far as possible, the empirical method must be employed in questions of ethics and economics, as well as history, sociology, and law.

The Experimental Method, Economics, and Human Behavior

Any study of behavior, whether by economists or philosophers, must indeed (as Marshall put it) “take man as he is.” For Dewey, that means that we must attend to the complex organism that is “man”: he is, first, a biological being with certain needs and desires, but he is also a being that is born into a “culture” and thereafter influenced by that culture. His means of living in his environment involve adapting to his surroundings and using his surroundings in order to draw meaning from them. His means of living in his environment require him to restore “equilibrium” when the uncertain conditions of existence surprise him. His preferences are in almost constant flux and always in the process of development and adaptation. No single theory can, in short, reduce the behavior of human beings to a few “fixed” principles and still accurately portray the conditions of ordinary human existence. Does this mean that the study of economics (or philosophy, for that matter) is doomed if it is, in fact, a study of human behavior and human behavior cannot be (or cannot accurately be) generalized? What can be gained by observations which are incapable of leading to useful generalizations about the nature of human behavior?

The fact that a generalization will not hold true forever, for Dewey, does not mean that it is useless. In fact, generalizations, like theories, are meant to be tested and only have relevance to “ordinary experience” so long as they are testable. Thus, pragmatic

philosophy must take the facts of “man as he is” and “ordinary experience” and subject them to intellectual reflection or “secondary experience.” Once this has been done, the products of that reflection can be re-instituted in “ordinary experience” and tested to see if they work. “Work,” in this context, means that they will make our “ordinary experience” more meaningful and help us to procure more stable goods. There is thus a “real world” test for the value of pragmatic philosophy. A “pragmatic economics” must do the same. Though it might step away, momentarily, from the demands and disturbances of the “uncertain” world in order to reflect and engage in “secondary experience,” it must ultimately return to the uncertain “real world” in order to determine whether its predictions, assumptions, and conclusions can improve the meaning of ordinary experience.

If Dewey is right to claim that this “empirical” philosophy is superior to the “non-empirical” philosophy that has traditionally been practiced, he can only be proven so by concrete examples which demonstrate the advantages of this experimental method. Similarly, if an empirical economics is superior to a “non-empirical” economics, this can only be demonstrated by concrete examples which show that “experimental” economics can produce improved meaning and stability for the “ordinary” man. What sort of philosophy and what sort of economics can pass the “test” that Dewey has set? What sort of study of behavior will “render” the ordinary experiences of life “more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful?”⁶⁹

I believe that the success of Dewey’s philosophy ultimately depends on his being able to demonstrate that it can pass this “test.” There are, I believe, examples in contemporary economic theory that will show that some studies in economics will pass

⁶⁹ LW1, 18.

this test. Whether or not the same can be said for Dewey's version of pragmatism is dependent on an examination of his use of the "experimental method." But an important part of behavior and human action in both economics and philosophy is the issue of rationality, and it is to this issue that I now turn.

CHAPTER IV

RATIONALITY, AND MEANS AND ENDS

John Dewey constantly used common words in uncommon contexts. He often took terms that had been used in a relatively consistent manner by philosophers for thousands of years, and he re-defined them to fit his own projects. Sometimes this method was not successful, as Dewey himself recognized when he regretted his use of the term “experience” in the title of *Experience and Nature*.⁷⁰ In other cases, Dewey did not even attempt such a revision: he understood that the term had been associated with a particular meaning or meanings for so long that it would be useless to try to employ it in a different context than that which was customary. “Rationality” was just such a term, and Dewey jettisoned it in favor of “social intelligence” or “intelligence.”⁷¹ In the same way that Dewey’s account of “intelligence” differed markedly from that of other philosophers, it also bore no resemblance to economists’ views of rationality. At the heart of this contrast is Dewey’s understanding of means and ends.

Ken Stickers highlights this difference in his article “Transaction, Development, and Capacity: Commentary on ‘Toward a Transactional Theory of Decision Making.’”

While “rationality” has been generally conceived, at least since the modern period during which classical and neoclassical economics emerged, as the possession and instrument of a presumably already individualized agent, with a set of given desires and preferences, “social intelligence” helps to describe the constitution of individual agents, and transformation of their preferences through their social transactions, and how such socially constituted individuals appropriate social notions of “rationality” and “logic” to experimentally satisfy those preferences. In

⁷⁰ Rorty, 72.

⁷¹ Stickers, 158.

short, we are not “by nature” *homo economicus*, although we might be socially constituted as such, through the habituation of prevailing values and norms of rationality. Rather, we can reflect critically upon and transform our habits into more satisfying ones.⁷²

Thus, “rationality” (as Dewey understands it) is not a fixed capacity. It is not “the possession and instrument of a presumably already individualized agent” and he does not believe that the individual has “a set of given desires and preferences.”

This chapter attempts to demonstrate the distinction between Dewey’s understanding of “rationality” (intelligence) and the account historically provided by economists. Human nature and “homo economicus” will be taken up in the next chapter, but the current discussion will lay the foundation for this by exploring Dewey’s use of “means” and “ends” and his contention that they are inseparable and continuous. The significance of “habits” will also be addressed in this chapter, and questions of the role of empiricism in philosophy will be raised (though these questions will be treated more fully in subsequent chapters).

Dewey’s “Rationality” in Contrast to More Traditional Philosophical Accounts

“Rationality” is a term that is used by philosophers and economists alike, yet there is a world of difference in the way each field treats the concept. Economists have only recently begun to challenge traditional assumptions about rationality; for many years, they have simply defined “rational” in terms of “utility maximization.” Thus, “rationality” is indeed a characteristic of human beings, but whether it is **the** distinctive characteristic or just one among many is of little interest to the economist. Rationality is one more assumption that is made in order to facilitate the use of economic models, and,

⁷² Ibid., 159.

while economists acknowledge that these assumptions do not always hold true in the “real world,” they maintain that they are nonetheless useful in predicting and theorizing.

This assumption and the use made of it in constructing models will be discussed further in Chapter VI, but it is important to note that economists’ understanding of “rationality” also demonstrates the tendency of theorists (like non-empirical philosophers) to reduce human behavior and nature to a set of simple assumptions. Dewey argues that this tendency is not, in itself, dangerous, but, depending on the use to which it is put, it may have disastrous consequences politically, economically, and philosophically. The only way to avoid these sorts of consequences is to employ empiricism, though it remains to be seen whether economists or pragmatists have been successful in accomplishing this.

To return to “rationality,” however, it is a concept that, for Dewey, vividly demonstrates the difference between pragmatic epistemology and metaphysics and more traditional theories. Historically, philosophers have used the term “rationality” to describe the process by which an individual comes to her beliefs. To be considered “rational,” the individual’s beliefs or commitments must be the product of one or more reasons. Ideally, of course, these reasons would have appropriate connections to the beliefs they produce. Further, a “rational” individual is thought to be one who follows a “rational” set of rules. These rules were derived from some transcendent truths, the sorts of truths that “non-empirical” philosophers have struggled to find for thousands of years. These are, coincidentally, the “fixed and final” and “certain” truths that have fueled philosophers’ denigration of “ordinary experience,” according to Dewey.

Traditionally, “rationality” has been based on an ontology that Dewey believes has been shown to be outdated by advances in the natural and physical sciences. Though it would be misleading to suggest that there has been widespread agreement about the nature of rationality among philosophers, it does seem fair to claim that Dewey’s understanding of “rationality” departs from the tradition that preceded him. Dewey’s account of “rationality” relies, in turn, on his account of means and ends. For Dewey, unlike for economists, means and ends are part of a continuum and cannot be disconnected from one another. An important aspect of Dewey’s overall project is his desire to remove (from the language of philosophy) distinctions that he considers to be meaningless. Among those distinctions or “divisions” are the separations between “nature *and* experience...practice *and* theory, art *and* science...art [which is] useful *and* fine, menial *and* free.”⁷³

In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey devotes a chapter to “Experience, Nature and Art.” In this chapter, he contrasts the “modern” view of art to that of the Greeks, and he employs this contrast to support his claim that “intelligence” or “rationality” for the post-Darwinian philosopher cannot mean the same thing that it did to the ancient philosopher. Here, Dewey explains that distinctions of the sort made by ancient thinkers—i.e., distinctions between knowledge and art—betrayed a social bias that was carried over into later philosophy. Despite the fact that the modern social context is in no way similar to the social landscape of the Greeks, the denigration of “need, labor, and matter” persist in modern philosophy. The success of the physical and natural sciences, however, demonstrates that the same antipathy does not currently exist against “scientists.” Further, modern man has inverted the Greek view of art: “creation” is thought to be

⁷³ LW1, 269.

superior to enjoyment or contemplation. In short, while modern men and women revere the “need, labor, and matter” employed by scientists and artists in the production of “knowledge,” modern philosophy maintains the ancient Greek biases against these very things. We live, therefore, with a philosophy that does not match the **way** we live.

In order to determine the distinction between Dewey’s conception of “rationality” and that of other philosophers, we must look briefly at the tradition. Rationality, for the philosopher, has often been divided into “theoretical rationality” and “practical rationality.” Theoretical rationality, according to this distinction, provides reasons to believe one proposition over another, while practical rationality offers reasons to take one action instead of another.⁷⁴

In his book, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the cause of modern disagreement about the nature of justice can be traced to underlying discrepancies about the nature of rationality.⁷⁵ There is plenty of evidence in the history of philosophy to support MacIntyre’s claim, yet a quick survey of some of the examples he cites from the history of philosophy will suffice to demonstrate that Dewey’s understanding of rationality departs still further from these earlier, competing conceptions.

MacIntyre considers Plato and Aristotle, among others, and their views of rationality. For Plato, an individual can be said to behave rationally when he gives “rational allegiance to that statement or set of statements, that *logos*, about a given subject matter which has best withstood refutation so far.”⁷⁶ This, according to MacIntyre, is the lesson of the *Gorgias*, and the continuation of this lesson appears in

⁷⁴ Audi, 4.

⁷⁵ MacIntyre, 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 75; see also 73.

Plato's *Republic* where Plato sets dialectic as "the science of the intelligible" and, thereby, "a new resource of rationality."⁷⁷ For Plato, the test of rationality ultimately turns on a proposition's irrefutability. Dialectic enables those engaged in it to move "toward a kind of *logos* which will disclose how things are, not relative to some point of view, but as such."⁷⁸ Thus, Plato's account of rationality entails that propositions and theses are subjected to dialectic in the hopes of gaining knowledge of the forms or, as MacIntyre puts it, "how things are." For Plato, theoretical and practical rationality are not separable, however. Having knowledge of the good entails that one could not behave in a manner inconsistent with the good.

Aristotle's account of rationality builds on Plato's, and, while Aristotle recognizes a distinction between practical and theoretical rationality, he (unlike Hume after him) does not believe that this distinction entails a **separation** between practical and theoretical rationality. Aristotle's understanding of rationality, like Plato's, is in large part dependent on his teleology, and a rational individual will be one who undertakes the sorts of activities necessary to reach the highest end which can be achieved by human beings. Aristotle gives plenty of attention to the nature and operation of practical rationality, including the conditions necessary to be able to act rationally (maturity, "good habits," etc.). Practical reasoning, however, relies on a theoretical foundation which enables the rational man to give assent to only those "rational principles" which deserve his assent.⁷⁹ Without some theoretical rationality which identifies the good for human beings, the practical rationality which determines which acts will achieve that good is impossible.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Aristotle (1941), 943 (1098a5-10).

In *Theory of Valuation*, which appeared in Otto Neurath's *Foundations of the Unity of Science* in 1939, Dewey described his criteria for assessing rationality. In prose that, even for Dewey, seems awkward, he writes:

One would suppose it to be peculiarly true of the ideal of rationality that it is to be judged as to its reasonableness (versus its arbitrariness) on the ground of its function, of what it does, not on the ground of its origin. If rationality as an ideal or generalized end-in-view serves to direct conduct so that things experienced in consequence of conduct so directed are more reasonable in the concrete, nothing more can be asked of it.⁸⁰

I take this to mean that Dewey understands “rationality” to be something which can be assessed only by virtue of its consequences, and that which is “rational” is synonymous with that which achieves certain desired results. Although this last may not be explicit in *Theory of Valuation*, consider the way Dewey describes “reasonableness” in *Human Nature and Conduct*: “The genuine heart of reasonableness (and of goodness in conduct) lies in effective mastery of the conditions which *now* enter into action.”⁸¹

Described in this manner, “rationality” also appears to be synonymous with Dewey’s use of the term “intelligence.” If rationality, for Dewey, is the ability to adapt means to ends, this sounds very much like the “intelligent method” he describes throughout his work. The closing words of *Experience and Nature* constitute one of the most profound and clear statements Dewey makes with respect to “intelligence.” There, he describes “intelligence” as “critical method applied to goods of belief, appreciation and conduct so as to construct freer and more secure goods, turning assent and assertion into free communication of shareable meanings, turning feeling into ordered and liberal sense, turning reaction into response....”⁸² If rationality and intelligence are synonymous

⁸⁰ LW13, 226.

⁸¹ MW14, 48. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

⁸² LW1, 325.

on Dewey's terms, it seems fair to say that Dewey's understanding of rationality differs significantly from "rationality" as it has generally been used by philosophers.

Philosophers have long focused on the justification of individual beliefs as constitutive of rationality and have thus placed questions of rationality squarely in epistemology and metaphysics. Dewey, like Aristotle in part, locates rationality in the realm of moral theory, and, as the citation from *Experience and Nature* demonstrates, intelligence has less to do with discovering the justifications of belief than it does with criticizing beliefs with the intent to "secure goods" and turn "feeling into ordered and liberal sense." Intelligence and rationality are, for Dewey, transformative. Undoubtedly, Aristotle understands reason to be a part of activity, but the proper activity of man is to abide by rational principles. For Dewey, intelligence operates as the result of activity which is prompted by habit. The function of rationality is to enable human beings to mitigate⁸³ the precarious and unstable nature of existence and to "secure goods," and the "intelligent method" employed in response to a "breakdown" in habit will, in turn, provide updates and additions to habits in advance of future activity. Though Dewey and economists may approach rationality differently, it seems that they end at the same spot: "rationality" is, at least in part, a means to "securing goods." Whether those goods are material or intangible, both the traditional economic understanding of "rationality" and Dewey's measure its success by its consequences.

Aristotle believes that rationality is peculiar to man.⁸⁴ Compare this to Dewey's words at the beginning of *Experience and Nature*: "Ability to respond to meanings and to employ them, instead of reacting merely to physical contacts, makes the difference

⁸³ The choice of the word "mitigate" is significant. Dewey believes precariousness and instability are characteristics of existence that can not be eradicated, only mitigated.

⁸⁴ Aristotle (1962), 16.

between man and other animals....”⁸⁵ Aristotle would identify the rational man as one who gives his assent to beliefs for appropriate reasons. Dewey describes the rational man as one who considers his beliefs, his “appreciation,” and his “conduct” and subsequently subjects them all to criticism. The purpose of this criticism is to determine value, and this criticism, “the intelligent method,” is therefore a moral method:

...every intelligent appreciation is also criticism, judgment, of the things having immediate value. Any *theory* of values is perforce entrance into the field of criticism. Value as such, even things having value, cannot in their immediate existence be reflected upon; they either are or are not; are or are not enjoyed.⁸⁶

In Dewey’s pragmatism, rationality is not something which can be judged by introspection or by inquiries into human nature. Rationality cannot be understood, for Dewey, without reference to means and ends.

Means and Ends

On Dewey’s terms, the rational man is one who adapts means to the ends he has in view. There is nothing more to rationality and intelligence than this: the ability to employ means in such a way as to achieve the consequences one desires. This process is not, however, as simple as it may sound from the preceding description. To truly understand the process as Dewey describes it requires an understanding of the sort of processes human beings engage in when they undertake the “method of intelligence.” Second, we must also understand what Dewey means when he speaks of “means” and “ends.” We will see that his use of these terms differs fundamentally from the way economists have used them, and, as is true of many of the elements of his pragmatism,

⁸⁵ LW1, 7.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 298.

his account of “means” and “ends” differs from that of other philosophers. Moreover, it is imperative to understand that Dewey’s account of “means” and “ends” is one which does not distinguish the two as separate: means and ends belong to a continuum.

Experience

Few concepts in Dewey’s work can be said to be as significant to an understanding of the whole as that of experience. The role of experience in human life is, of course, the focus of *Experience and Nature*, but all of Dewey’s work assumes a distinct conception of the term “experience.” Dewey claims that experience can be considered as being of two (integrated) types: primary and secondary, or crude and reflective. Primary or crude experience constitutes the majority of our experience. Dewey describes the subject matter of primary experience as “gross” and “macroscopic,” and the products of this experience are characterized as “the result of a minimum of incidental reflection....”⁸⁷

Primary experience is that which we experience in the course of our day-to-day lives. Our habits are largely responsible for the actions we take and the choices we make, and the experiences we have in the course of this activity are those which Dewey calls “crude.” These experiences center on our contact with things “in their immediacy” and it is the “ineffability” of things “in their immediacy” which has led philosophers either to ignore or denigrate them.⁸⁸ Yet Dewey argues that the ineffability of the immediate should not be used as evidence that the materials of crude experience are obstacles to knowledge. Knowledge simply has “no concern with” “things in their immediacy,” but

⁸⁷ LW1, 15.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 74.

primary experience still “grasps things.” Dewey criticizes those “modern thinkers” that would have us believe that “knowledge is the only mode of experience that grasps things.”⁸⁹ In fact, without “immediate qualities,” “thought would have nothing beyond itself to chew upon or dig into.”⁹⁰

In fact, Dewey believes that the function of intelligence or rationality is to transform the “objects of experience” as we encounter them in nature into something which is “immediately possessed.” In this sense, intelligence, particularly as it operates in the realm of the natural and physical sciences, resembles the creative work of the artist. Artists create “meanings capable of immediately enjoyed possession,” and the scientist, an artist of a particular sort, “conducts natural events to this happy issue.”⁹¹ Intelligence performs the function of uniting “the precarious, novel, irregular with the settled, assured and uniform...”⁹² There is thus a continuity between the crude objects we encounter in nature and the sophisticated products of science and art. Intelligence is the tool that highlights that continuity.

When our habits break down, though we must still act, we are often led to secondary experience. Dewey describes the subject matter of secondary experience as “refined” and the product of this experience as “what is experienced in consequence of continued and regulated reflective experience.”⁹³ The products of secondary or reflective experience “*explain* the primary objects, they enable us to grasp them with *understanding*, instead of just having sense-contact with them.”⁹⁴ On Dewey’s terms,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 74-75.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁹¹ Ibid., 269.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 16. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

therefore, a “rational” individual is not one who behaves according to a set of rules derived from a transcendent truth, nor is a “rational” individual one who conscientiously links his or her beliefs to a particular action. For Dewey, an individual would not become “more rational” by attempting to revise his or her beliefs in such a way as to connect them to a set of reasons. This is simply not the way human beings behave in fact, according to Dewey, and “rationality” (as it has traditionally been understood by philosophers) can thereby have little meaning for us.

Dewey believed that the value of the empirical method as it is employed in science has to do with the integration of primary and secondary experience. Although “objects of both science and philosophy obviously belong chiefly to the secondary and refined system,” the natural sciences begin with “material” drawn from primary experience.⁹⁵ Scientists use this material as the basis for reflection and secondary experience, but they return to primary experience to test the products of their reflection: they use “hypotheses as directive ideas for making new observations and experiments among the things of raw experience....”⁹⁶ Philosophy, to its discredit, has increasingly failed to return the products of reflection to primary experience, though I will later question whether science is not also subject to this same criticism in a way that Dewey failed to acknowledge. But for now, when Dewey calls for empiricism in philosophy, he hopes to encourage philosophers to adopt the methods of the natural sciences: their conclusions must be employed in raw experience and tested.

The intelligent method involves recognizing the connection between primary experience and secondary experience. Secondary experience, for Dewey, is valuable

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

insofar as it has the potential to enhance the quality of primary experience. Dewey describes the “method of intelligence” as “the use of science in criticizing and re-creating casual goods of nature into intentional and conclusive goods of art, the union of knowledge and values in production.”⁹⁷ This description alludes to the connection and continuity that exist between means and ends. The rational man is one who, armed with the products of reflection (which have in turn been constructed from the material of primary experience), goes about adapting means to ends. He employs reflections on crude experience in an attempt to enlarge “use and enjoyment of ordinary things.”⁹⁸

Means

Dewey’s understanding of the word “means,” like so many other words he employs in his writing, may not bear much resemblance to the way the word has been used throughout the history of philosophy. In his introduction to the *Collected Works* volume of the 1908 edition of Dewey and Tufts’ *Ethics*, Charles L. Stevenson⁹⁹ makes this very point. When Dewey tackled the subject of “means and ends,” he did so largely in response to what he took to be his earlier counterparts’ mistaken account of the terms. As noted below, “ends” for Dewey are never “fixed and final,” yet they have generally been understood this way in the history of philosophy. The “end” has been understood as **the** good (which is good in and of itself), and “means” have taken a subservient position in relation to ends. To put it crudely, the only interest “means” have for philosophers has been how well they effect **the** end which has been previously posited as the highest good.

One might view means, then, in the following way:

⁹⁷ Ibid., 326.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁹ Stevenson, xvi.

1. There is an end or “fixed and final” highest good. Let us call it E.
2. There are many “means” to achieve E: M₁, M₂, M₃, M₄, etc.
3. M₁, M₂, M₃, M₄ are interchangeable. That is, each is insignificant in its own right (not intrinsically valuable) and can only be judged to be “good or right”¹⁰⁰ insofar as it will produce E. M₁ could not be said to be “more good” or “more right” than M₂, for instance, unless it is more likely to produce E.

In short, the only value that any particular mean or means can have is in its ability or likelihood to contribute to producing **the** end or the sort of end which is “fixed and final.” Dewey objected to this characterization of “means” which he believed had been shared by philosophers from Plato’s time forward. He objected to the notion that means were separable from ends at all. Instead, Dewey believed that nature and empirical observation belied the claim that means might be interchangeable or valuable only instrumentally. This is, in fact, rather ironic since Dewey’s detractors often criticize him for being overly instrumental,¹⁰¹ yet Dewey made the same charge against the history of philosophy with respect to means.

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey describes habits as “active means,”¹⁰² and he rejects the notion that ideals or ends can be envisioned as distinct from means. Habits, as means, color every thing that we do, and that includes the ends or ideals at which we aim. Thus, among the mistakes which previous philosophers have made with respect to means and ends is the assertion that there can be a separate or distinct end which is intrinsically valuable and which determines the “rightness” or “wrongness” of a particular mean or habit. Dewey objected to the above characterization, saying, “Ideas, thoughts of ends, are not spontaneously generated. There is no immaculate conception of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Bourne, 205ff.

¹⁰² MW14, 22

meanings or purposes. Reason pure of all influence from prior habit is a fiction.”¹⁰³ To suggest, somehow, that the ends of human activity are first set or conceived of and **then** means are adapted to them is, for Dewey, a perversion of the facts of observed human behavior. And this perversion is one that economists, no less than philosophers, are guilty of perpetuating. As Stickers details above, “rationality,” for economists, has meant agents who possess a “set of given desires and preferences.”¹⁰⁴ There is, upon empirical examination of human behavior, nothing “set” about desires and preferences.

In Dewey’s account of human behavior, a person would first have to **know** what the good is in order to attempt to achieve it. That is to say, a person would first have had to experience the desired end before he could order his actions in such a way that the end could be achieved. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey illustrates this seemingly paradoxical claim with the example of a man who has bad posture.¹⁰⁵ In this case, “the assumption is that if a man is told to stand up straight, all that is further needed is the wish and effort on his part, and the deed is done.”¹⁰⁶ In terms of traditional accounts of means and ends in the history of philosophy, this is tantamount to saying that, if a person recognizes and envisions a certain end (good posture), all she must do in order to achieve that end is have the proper disposition (wish) towards achieving it and she must henceforward make “an effort” to achieve it.

But Dewey believed that neither the disposition nor the effort could possibly matter or even exist without first having had some experience of the end. The man with bad posture, for example, cannot achieve good posture unless he has first had some

¹⁰³ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁴ See note 2 above.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., see 23 ff.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 23.

experience of it. He cannot be a man with good posture simply by wishing he had it and putting forth effort to achieve it. Belief to the contrary, according to Dewey, “leaves out the importance of intelligently controlled habit.”¹⁰⁷ In order to actually achieve good posture, “objective conditions” must be changed.¹⁰⁸ One cannot simply rely on the “ordering of his mind” or the wish or will to gain good posture:

A man who does not stand properly forms a habit of standing improperly, a positive, forceful habit. The common implication that his mistake is merely negative, that he is simply failing to do the right thing, and that the failure can be made good by an order of will is absurd. One might as well suppose that the man who is a slave of whiskey-drinking is merely one who fails to drink water. Conditions have been formed for producing a bad result, and the bad result will occur as long as those conditions exist. They can be no more dismissed by a direct effort of will than the conditions which create drought can be dispelled by whistling for wind. It is as reasonable to expect a fire to go out when it is ordered to stop burning as to suppose that a man can stand straight in consequence of a direct action of thought and desire.¹⁰⁹

A man who has bad posture will continue to have bad posture until the objective conditions around him have changed. He might meet another man who has good posture or he might be told by someone else what good posture is and that he should aim to achieve it, but he cannot obtain good posture without first somehow experiencing good posture: “Only when a man can already perform an act of standing straight does he know what it is like to have a right posture and only then can he summon the idea required for proper execution.”¹¹⁰ In order to say that a man has the means to achieve good posture, we must first understand the habits he possesses, and we must first recognize that these habits are “things which independently accomplish definite results.”¹¹¹ Means are,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 25.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 22.

therefore, a **part** of the end, and the end cannot exist without the means necessary for achieving it.

Dewey further objects to the notion that our will or our wishes are somehow independent of habits. This suggestion, like so many of those common to the history of philosophy, misunderstands the nature of human behavior and activity. We would like to think that we should not become something we do not will, i.e. a drug-addict or an alcoholic. To think that “will” is sufficient to prevent such a thing, however, is to believe that will is something that is unrelated to habits and can be imposed upon an individual’s habits from without. This is to underestimate the power and effect of habit, and Dewey claims that the self is not, in fact, constituted by will or by the ends one believes one’s self to have. Rather, the self is constituted by habits, which are our “demands for certain kinds of activity....”¹¹²

Good posture is one with the habits that produce good posture. There is no separation between the two and, in fact, they are part of a continuum. Thus, to return to the history of philosophy and the more traditional accounts of means and ends, Dewey revises these accounts such that means are one with ends. Means cannot be separated from ends, and means and ends exist on the same continuum. Dewey describes that continuity in *Human Nature and Conduct*:

Means are means; they are intermediates, middle terms. To grasp this fact is to have done with the ordinary dualism of means and ends. The “end” is merely a series of acts viewed at a remote stage; and a mean is merely the series viewed at an earlier one. The distinction of means and end arises in surveying the *course* of a proposed *line* of action, a connected series in time. The “end” is the last act thought of; the means are the acts to be performed prior to it in time.¹¹³

¹¹² Ibid., 21.

¹¹³ Ibid., 27.

Means and ends, then, can only be viewed as separate retrospectively, not during the course of action itself. We do not, as individuals, set for ourselves ends which have not previously been experienced in some manner or another or which are not suggested or determined by objective conditions around us, and we cannot simply wish or will ourselves to examine which actions would most likely result in the accomplishment of those ends. Rather, we behave according to our habits, most of which have been determined by surrounding conditions and our dependence from birth on others, and, when those habits break down or come up against resistance, they will slowly be altered. The products of reflection can inform this process, but they certainly do not direct it. Thus, ends do not direct our employment of means, and they are susceptible to criticism (as a part of the “intelligent method”). This distinguishes Dewey from economists who have traditionally believed that ends, as the preferences or desires of individuals, are not subject to evaluation: they simply **are** what they are. If, as Dewey asserts, means and ends are not separable, neither are ends exempt from criticism as economists have taken them to be.

Ends

When Dewey speaks of “ends,” he clearly intends to distinguish them from the “ends” of ancient and modern philosophy. Though some might accuse Dewey of redefining the term “ends” for his own purposes, his account of the history of “ends” in philosophy suggests that it was the Greeks who redefined the meaning of “ends,” thereby perpetrating one of the “Great Bads of philosophy.”¹¹⁴ The Greeks (and later the rationalists) converted the idea of “ends” as naturally occurring into a metaphysics of

¹¹⁴ LW1, 88.

fixedness which holds in highest esteem the products of contemplation. The products of contemplation are subsequently defined in contrast to nature: that is, philosophers would have us believe that primary or crude experience is actually an obstacle to our understanding the world and achieving the most morally praiseworthy “ends.”

In order to understand the nature of “ends,” Dewey believes it is first important to recognize the significance of man’s preoccupation with “direct enjoyment.” Philosophers have long ignored the preoccupation humans have with “immediate enjoyment,” and, as the example of utilitarianism demonstrates, when they have paid attention to it, they have “given a curiously sober, drab, account of the working of pleasure and the search for happiness.”¹¹⁵ In contrast, Dewey claims that “The history of man shows...that man takes his enjoyment neat, and at as short range as possible.”¹¹⁶

“Direct” or “immediate” enjoyment and philosophers’ treatment of it has much to do with the matter of “ends,” on Dewey’s understanding of that term. It is only when men experience “direct satisfaction” that they recognize the desirability of repeating such experiences. The word “ends” derives its meaning from the fact that an individual must first “spontaneously and accidentally” “hit upon” these “consummations”¹¹⁷ and only later reflect upon and plan the means to repeat this experience. In this sense, an “end” is quite literally that which finally eradicates the desire to perpetuate the immediate enjoyment already experienced.

In the above example of the man with bad posture, “ends” become the intermediate steps necessary to improve posture. Certainly, the desired result of all the intermediate steps is good posture, but, as Dewey notes, “To *reach* an end we must take

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 71.

our mind off from it and attend to the act which is next to be performed.”¹¹⁸ Far from letting the end direct our habits or means, we must let each individual step become an end-in-itself. Habits, as opposed to a will imposed from the “mind” onto the “body,” “form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities.”¹¹⁹

In the absence of reflection and planning (or the leisure to reflect and plan), “ends” constitute those things that provide a finality:

A passion of anger, a dream, relaxation of the limbs after effort, swapping of jokes, horse-play, beating of drums, blowing of tin whistles, explosion of firecrackers and walking on stilts, have the same quality of immediate and absorbing finality that is possessed by things and acts dignified by the title esthetic.¹²⁰

Historically, philosophers have argued that these sorts of “ends” are inferior to those provided by “fancy or reflective inquiry.”¹²¹ In fact, Dewey argues that philosophers’ hostility to such “ends” ultimately resulted in an entire metaphysics based on the belief that the fixed “ends” derived from “contemplative appreciation”¹²² have moral superiority. This metaphysics in turn led to the discrediting of primary experience, and, for the Greeks, this took the form of denigrating artisans in favor of philosophers.

Philosophers, however, did not accomplish this conversion alone. Dewey attributes to humankind a desire to escape the contingency and instability of existence. Thus, there is a “joy in what is finished, when it is found amid a world of unrest, struggle, and uncertainty”¹²³ and men and women are inclined to accede to the belief that the fixed and final is superior to that which is incomplete and fleeting. Even if there is no explicit

¹¹⁸ MW14, 27. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹²⁰ LW1, 77.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 80.

¹²³ Ibid., 78-79.

acknowledgement by most people that the fixed and final is “superior,” it is, from the point of view of those living amidst the precariousness and perils of the everyday world, certainly preferable. That which is fixed and final suggests that the contingency of existence might be subject to control. In the seventeenth century, the Greek mistake was perpetuated by those who took the advances of science to be indicative of a design in nature. Dewey argues repeatedly that this delusion has led to a great many mistakes in philosophy, but he is clearly aware that, delusion or not, these notions provide the basis for many of the decisions and actions human beings undertake.

“Fixed and final” are not essential parts of Dewey’s conception of “ends,” however. An empirical account of ends will, in fact, support the claim “that nature is characterized by ends,” but it will not do so by asserting that the only legitimate end is the “life of the mind.”¹²⁴ Instead, Dewey’s understanding of the term “ends” borrows much from the colloquial usage of the term, and attributions about the significance of ends in any manner other than, literally, as endings, will be made only upon reflection:

We constantly talk about things coming or drawing to a close; getting ended, finished, done with, over with. It is a commonplace that no *thing* lasts forever. We may be glad or we may be sorry but that is wholly a matter of the kind of history which is being ended. We may conceive the end, the close, as due to fulfillment, perfect attainment, to satiety, or to exhaustion, to dissolution, to something having run down or given out. Being an end may be indifferently an ecstatic culmination, a matter-of-fact consummation, or a deplorable tragedy. Which of these things a closing or terminal object is, has nothing to do with the property of being an end.¹²⁵

Ends, for Dewey, are precisely this: “getting ended, finished, done with, over with.” To speak of an “end” does not entail that one necessarily speak about a *telos*. An “end” may

¹²⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 83. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

become an “end-in-view” in the sense that, having experienced a true closing or finishing of one experience, a person may wish to repeat the experience.

“Ends-in-view” are “projections of possible consequences,”¹²⁶ and, in that sense, similar to ends conceived as goals. But Dewey is quick to note that even these “ends-in-view” are “conditioned by antecedent natural conditions” and that they are “intellectual regulative means,” **not** “objects of contemplative possession.”¹²⁷ When speaking of ends as “ends-in-view,” we mean “objects once having occurred as endings, but which are not now in existence and which are not likely to come into existence save by an action which modifies surrounding.”¹²⁸ Ends-in-view help us to achieve those “endings” or “closings” which are inherent to the nature of existence and are experienced accidentally but can later become the object of our efforts and planning. Whether we speak of “ends” or “ends-in-view” specifically, however, we are always speaking about something that is based in nature and remains continuous with nature. Ends-in-view may require reflection and planning, but they are not disconnected from nature, and Dewey’s conception and discussion of ends is meant to highlight this fact.

In a very important sense, then, Dewey has turned the history of philosophy (as he understands it) on its head. Instead of positing that men can achieve a good or an end by first understanding it and then adapting the way they live to this end, and, instead of arguing that secondary experience or reflection is the most virtuous or laudable aspect of human life, Dewey claims that men can **only** understand goods or ends in their relation to means or habits. Secondly, Dewey believes that secondary experience or reflection can only be meaningful insofar as it improves primary (or, as philosophers prior to Dewey

¹²⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 88.

might have described it, non-intellectual or crude) experience. Ends, for Dewey, cannot be separated from means because means are a **part** of ends, and ends can, therefore, only be evaluated in light of their ultimate effect on means.

Means and Ends in Economics

If habits are the means used to achieve ends, and if ends are understood as ideas that give an image of the possible consequences of our action, as Dewey understands human behavior, it is impossible that the two should be separate. To speak of means and ends as distinct is merely a convenience we may use in the course of reflection, but no such distinction actually exists. Means and ends, according to Dewey, are continuous with one another, and both have their origin in habits, which in turn have their origin in the organism's surrounding environment.

Social scientists have long described human behavior as if means and ends were separate, and moral philosophers have used this distinction to support prescriptive claims about the most virtuous way for human beings to live. In order to live a moral life, according to these arguments, one must first fix on the appropriate end. Once this is done, philosophers would have us believe that the hardest part has been accomplished. All that is left is to align our day-to-day behavior with that end, and, since this requires nothing more than that the mind discipline the body, there is little left with which philosophers need bother.

Since the body and the details of primary experience are subordinate to the mind and the products of reflection, the most difficult part of living the best life is to train the mind or focus it on the proper ends. Once there is, as marketing professionals might say,

“buy-in” on the part of the will or mind, the rest is quite straightforward since the body can hardly resist the mind once it has fixed on a target. Of course, this will only be true if the mind and body have been properly understood and balanced in relation to one another, but the solution to this problem (according to such philosophers) is further reflection and analysis, **not** attention to the facts of primary experience.

John Dewey disagreed with this characterization of means and ends, and he had little use for the supporting account of mind and body and their relative significance. Like so much of the history of philosophy, this characterization ignores the facts of observable behavior and, once again, demonstrates the need for empiricism in philosophy. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey’s target is “conventional morality” which sets itself in opposition to human nature. This morality asks us to ignore our “natural traits” and to do the things that will make us more like “everyone else.” Though there are some who will understand this and will either use others’ docile acceptance of this morality to their advantage or will distinguish themselves by their willingness to flout conventional morality, by and large this philosophy will require that most people attempt “to live in two worlds, one the actual, the other the ideal.”¹²⁹

But such a life is, ultimately, impossible, and, perhaps worst of all, it relegates moral concerns to “a private, immaterial realm,”¹³⁰ since none of the facts of primary experience can support a moral philosophy that is, in almost every respect, in complete opposition to these facts. Hence, no one can be surprised when accounts of means and ends also correspond to this morality. “Fixed and final” ends or ideals belong to this private, immaterial realm, and they are set up as the things on which we should focus our

¹²⁹ MW14, 8.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 25.

efforts, while means are the stuff of ordinary, primary experience and warrant far less interest or examination. This kind of moral philosophy has taught us that, despite our natural inclination to oppose them, we must concern ourselves with ends that seem somehow disconnected from what we know to be true of our day-to-day lives.

Dewey rebels against this account, and he reminds us of the important role of habit in our behavior:

But in fact, formation of ideas as well as their execution depends upon habit. *If* we could form a correct idea without a correct habit, then possibly we could carry it out irrespective of habit. But a wish gets definite form only in connection with an idea, and an idea gets shape and consistency only when it has a habit back of it.... The act must come before the thought, and a habit before an ability to evoke the thought at will.¹³¹

Both moral philosophy **and** “ordinary psychology” reverse “the actual state of affairs,” according to Dewey.¹³² They focus on desired ends and results at the cost of attention to the things which make them possible: habits. They ignore the power of habits and the difficulty of changing habits, and, in so doing, misunderstand one of the most basic facts of human existence. Will is no match for the power of habit, and the philosopher and the social scientist’s emphasis on will at the expense of habit demonstrates that they have forgotten one of the fundamental aspects of human beings: “Man must act; and he must act well or ill, rightly or wrongly.”¹³³ The necessity of action in the contingent and precarious world of human beings will always trump the relative decadence of reflection and analysis, though Dewey certainly believes that the intelligent method will combine aspects of both.

¹³¹ Ibid., 25. For the content of the ellipsis, see note 37 above. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ LW7, 15.

Attention to economic concerns will, according to Dewey, help us identify the practical consequences of conventional moral philosophy. What the facts of everyday existence and modern economic life will show us is that the Greeks' "belief in fixed values" has perpetuated itself for thousands of years, and it has resulted in a "division of ends into intrinsic and instrumental..."¹³⁴ Thus, we understand that there are some goods which are "*merely* instrumental" and others which are "really worth while in themselves."¹³⁵ Conventionally, according to Dewey, that distinction has been demonstrated in the classification of material goods as the first sort and "ideal goods" or "religious or esthetic" goods as the latter.¹³⁶ This would be troublesome enough because such a distinction cannot be made if one accepts Dewey's assertions that the instrumental and the "final" are of one kind. But the mistake does not end there: instead, this hierarchy where material goods are "*merely*" instrumental and only "intrinsic" goods are ultimately desirable has resulted in "the obnoxious materialism and brutality of our economic life..."¹³⁷

The word "merely," in Dewey's depiction, is meant to capture the lack of respect that philosophers (and others) have shown for the things which "form the preoccupation of the great mass."¹³⁸ Dewey claims that philosophers and others who have perpetuated this distinction describe material goods and the activities which produce and secure them as "drudgery" and as things that "cannot command either intellectual, artistic or moral attention and respect."¹³⁹ The "great mass" of people, then, will lead lives which are

¹³⁴ MW12, 177.

¹³⁵ Ibid., first at 178 (the emphasis is Dewey's), second at 177.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 177.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 178.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 177.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

insignificant or characterized by “drudgery” since most people do not have the luxury to distance themselves from the activities which produce and secure material goods. In his introduction to *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Ralph Ross notes that Dewey is sharper in his attacks on other philosophies in this work than in many others. He describes Dewey’s approach here as “pugnacious,” “vituperative,” and angry.¹⁴⁰ That is nowhere more apparent than in Dewey’s account of those who hold themselves above the “merely” instrumental activities:

The vanity and irresponsibility of values that are merely final and not also in turn means to the enrichment of other occupations of life ought to be obvious. But now the doctrine of “higher” ends gives aid, comfort and support to every socially isolated and socially irresponsible scholar, specialist, esthete and religionist. It protects the vanity and irresponsibility of his calling from observation by others and by himself. The moral deficiency of the calling is transformed into a cause of admiration and gratulation.¹⁴¹

This sort of life cannot be a morally worthy life, according to Dewey. It is a rejection of the things that make one human and the things that demonstrate the continuity between human experience and nature.

Despite Dewey’s scathing assessment of this “higher life” and those who pursue it, there is no question that he believes traditional philosophy matters. At the very least, it matters because it has been responsible for a dangerous conversion of values. Instead of aligning moral theory with the facts of human existence, philosophy has set itself in opposition to human nature. In doing so, it has convinced those who undertook its study that they had the right and, perhaps, the obligation to “escape” from and “neglect” those who could not take up this study.¹⁴² Efforts to obtain material security were seen as mean

¹⁴⁰ Ross, ix.

¹⁴¹ MW12, 178.

¹⁴² Ibid., 177.

and low and, at the extreme, slavishness. This, in turn, helped to justify the alienation of those preoccupied with “*merely*” instrumental goods from political life.

To some extent, though interesting, this may move us away from the matter at hand. The point which is germane to our current study is that Dewey believed that the role of means and ends in human activity had been perverted by philosophy and continued to suffer the same fate in the social sciences. This perversion would only be resolved by an understanding that the “instrumental” is itself ideal and intrinsically valuable and, moreover, that it is not separated from “ends.” Philosophers, social scientists, and the “great mass” must all see that there is continuity between these “higher” ends and those ends which contribute to the material security of individuals. Not only might the study of economics be an important part of this resolution, but such a restoration of the connection between natural human behavior and the interests of daily life might also help to alleviate what Dewey calls the “brutality of our economic life.”¹⁴³ As far as philosophy is concerned, however, Dewey believes that the “reconstruction” for which he calls will help correct this understanding of means and ends: “Making a living economically speaking, will be at one with making a life that is worth living.”¹⁴⁴

In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey uses art to further detail the problems of separating means and ends. If the traditional philosophical understanding of rationality has entailed that means and ends are viewed as separate entities, the same can be said of the modern understanding of art. Art has often been divided into the “useful” and the “fine.” But experience, no less than art, belies this separation. It is a perversion of philosophical thinking to promote the “idea that work, productive activity, signifies

¹⁴³ See note 68 above.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 201

action carried on for merely extraneous ends....”¹⁴⁵ While it may be the case that much of productive activity is understood by those who undertake it and those who observe it as “action carried on for merely extraneous ends,” this should not be taken as a description of one of the necessities of human life. In fact, Dewey claims that “Our classificatory use of the conception of some arts as merely instrumental so as to dispose of a large part of human activity is no solving definition; it rather conveys an immense and urgent problem.”¹⁴⁶

There **are** indeed activities “that have no immediate enjoyed intrinsic meaning,” and, unfortunately, these activities “include much of our labors in home, factory, laboratory and study.”¹⁴⁷ Yet the fact that such activities exist in this form does not mean that the labors of home, factory, laboratory and study **must** always be meaningless. It is not a necessary characteristic of the “labors in home, factory, laboratory and study” that they be meaningless. Their meaninglessness (which Dewey does not deny as a characteristic of modern life) is the result of the way such activities have been treated, both by philosophers and social scientists (and certainly, therefore, by those who are required to undertake these activities on a daily basis). If we are convinced that the highest ends are those achieved by intellectual pursuit and contemplation, it is not surprising that we denigrate any activities which fail to obviously support these ends.

In what sense, then, are the “labors in home, factory, laboratory and study” actually “useful”? Such activities may be “useful to make shoes, houses, motor cars, money, and other things which *may* then be put to use;”¹⁴⁸ but they have other

¹⁴⁵ LW1, 271.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 272.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 271.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 272.

consequences which we tend to ignore. Chief among those consequences is the effect such activity (understood as meaningless) will have on our lives: they will make a “narrowed, embittered, and crippled life, [a] congested, hurried, confused and extravagant life....”¹⁴⁹ This notion of “useful,” according to Dewey, “ignores the only thing that is essential to the idea of utility, inherent place and bearing in experience.”¹⁵⁰ Unless the labors of the home, factory, laboratory and study provide meaning to experience, they are not, in fact, useful. They may produce commodities as described above, but this cannot, on Dewey’s terms, be said to be “utility.”

As noted above in the second chapter of this thesis, economists have traditionally prided themselves on their neutrality between ends. They tend to assume that individuals’ ends are given and that little effort should be expended in criticizing or analyzing them. In this sense, economics would at least seem open to Dewey’s broad account of various types of ends and their relative value. On the other hand, economists certainly do distinguish between means and ends and seem to share the attitude of traditional moral philosophers that means are interchangeable and of little (if any) interest intrinsically. An economist’s interest between M_1 and M_2 is not whether the former is more virtuous, more “right,” or tends to make experience more meaningful than the latter. Instead, the economist wishes to know which of the two means is more likely to achieve the desired end and what the opportunity costs are of employing M_1 instead of M_2 . While economists would not, like conventional moral philosophers, argue that ends are fixed, final, or morally more significant than means, they certainly do consider means to be “*merely*” instrumental. They will show more interest in means than the philosophers that

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Dewey criticizes, but this is primarily because they wish to determine which means are most efficient. They do not consider means (or ends, for that matter) as intrinsically valuable. Recall Lionel Robbins' words: "The economist is not concerned with ends as such. He is concerned with the way in which the attainment of ends is limited."¹⁵¹ Thus, economists are, like Dewey, immune to the fixation on ends, their nature, and their origins in the "higher" functions of human beings which has plagued the history of philosophy. Unlike Dewey, however, economists have little interest in the criticism or evaluation of ends, and this will, once again, lead us to question whether economists (and perhaps all social scientists) are not subject to the same mistakes as "non-empirical" philosophers.

Economists, apart from the separation they make between means and ends, also fail, largely, to see that ends, like means, are instrumental. Like a "genuinely esthetic object," the labors of the home, factory, laboratory, and study should not lead to that which is "exclusively consummatory." The ends of these labors should be "causally productive as well." For, as Dewey notes, "A consummatory object that is not also instrumental turns in time to the dust and ashes of boredom."¹⁵² A pragmatic reconstruction of economics would require that economists understand 1) that ends and means are not, in fact, separable and 2) that ends are not simply given to the individual or solely the function of natural disposition. Ends are modifiable, they are not metaphysically or ethically superior to means, and they are, themselves, instrumental.

Thus, for Dewey, the economist's notion of rationality (no less than the philosopher's) requires a significant overhaul. Dewey jettisons the term "rationality"

¹⁵¹ Robbins (1946), 25.

¹⁵² LW1, 274.

altogether in favor of “intelligence” or “social intelligence,” but, at the very least, the pragmatic economist would have to redefine “rationality” in order to include this revised notion of the relationship of means and ends. If “rationality” is a tool, it is not, as it has been traditionally understood in economics, “the possession and instrument of a presumably already individualized agent, with a set of given desires and preferences.”¹⁵³ Instead, economics (like philosophy) must recognize that “human nature” is such that preferences (or ends) are constantly subject to adaptation and revision. In fact, human nature itself is adaptable, according to Dewey. If that is so, it suggests that the foundation upon which economists base their assumptions (and thereby construct predictions) is open to further question. Not only must the pragmatic economist revise her conception of rationality, but she must also look carefully at her own understanding of human nature and ensure that it truly represents “man as he is.” If Dewey is to be believed, this is a test that philosophers have been failing for more than a thousand years.

¹⁵³ See note 2 above.

CHAPTER V

HUMAN NATURE AND “ECONOMIC MAN”

John Dewey was critical of the way philosophers, as well as economists and other social scientists, had reduced “human nature” to a simple set of assumptions or principles. Further, he worried about the way in which the idea of “human nature” as “fixed” or “unchangeable” had been used in public policy discussions in order to reject important economic reforms. In the same way that the philosophical distinction between “practice” and “theory” and “instrumentalism” and “higher ends” had produced social and economic consequences, this view of human nature as “fixed” had social and economic ramifications as well. At every turn, Dewey shows himself to be a pragmatist by his attention to the “consequences” and the results of “reflection” upon “ordinary experience.”

But it is this same attention to social and economic consequences that reminds us of the obligation Dewey has set for himself: the test of philosophy is whether it can “render” the “things of ordinary experience” “more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful.”¹⁵⁴ Dewey’s interest in the social and economic consequences of philosophical theorizing is laudable, but for it to also be “pragmatic,” it must allow us to “make our dealings” with the social and economic aspects of “ordinary” experience more fruitful. Will references to economic consequences alone do that, or is it also necessary for Dewey to provide concrete examples and explanations of how this might be achieved? As an “experimentalist,”

¹⁵⁴ LW1, 18.

what obligations does Dewey have in order to succeed in making ordinary experience more meaningful with respect to economic life?

This chapter looks specifically at Dewey's criticisms of traditional accounts of human nature, and it also details some of his specific references to the relationship between philosophical accounts of human nature and economic activity. The following chapter begins to formulate an answer to the question raised above regarding the need for Dewey to be more systematic in his explanation of how experimentalism will improve our economic activity, and thereby, our ordinary experience.

The Paradox of "Human Nature"

Like so much of Dewey's work, his writing on human nature was complicated by his uncommon use of common terms. As late as 1938, Dewey acknowledged that discussion of "human nature" was made more difficult by the fact that, when people speak of it, they "are talking about different things."¹⁵⁵ In his essay "Does Human Nature Change?" he identified (though he may not have **distinguished**) two conceptions associated with the term. Dewey seems to associate the common usage of "human nature" with "innate needs."¹⁵⁶ In fact, after giving a list of such needs, he remarks that "there are some tendencies so integral a part of human nature that the latter would not be human nature if they changed."¹⁵⁷ Thus, one would think that, if human nature is a function of innate needs or inborn tendencies, it is stable or unchanging. Yet at the very outset of the essay, Dewey answers the question posed in his title—"Does Human Nature Change?"—in what would appear to be the opposite tone: "...so far as the question is a

¹⁵⁵ LW13, 286.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 287.

practical one instead of an academic one, I think the proper answer is that human nature *does* change.”¹⁵⁸

How can these two seemingly different answers be reconciled? The task is not a simple one: one would think that, logically, either human nature does change or it does not. Dewey, however, seems to use “human nature” to refer to inborn tendencies in some places in his writing and, in others, he appears to include both inborn tendencies **and** the products of custom and tradition in his definition of “human nature.” Part of the difficulty of trying to understand Dewey’s account of “human nature” lies in attempting to distinguish the two instances and in determining whether such a distinction is important. While Dewey may have thought such distinctions pedantic or too academic, we may subsequently determine that his own account can only be made consistent when we understand the relationship between the two things: inborn tendencies and custom or tradition.

Clarifying Dewey’s own conception of “human nature” remains, however, an important task for this thesis. As noted above in Chapter II, “human nature” has relevance to economic theories and economists’ assumptions about behavior. More important than this, though, is the fact that some of Dewey’s most detailed discussions about the business and activity of economics and economists appear in his writing on human nature. For Dewey, human nature and moral philosophy were intimately connected, and proposals for the reform of political and economic institutions had, historically, been rejected based on the mistaken claims of “moralists” that human nature was fixed and not subject to modification. The rejected proposals were seen as failing to recognize the fixedness of human nature, and, therefore, doomed to failure because they

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 286. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

expected too much adaptation on the part of the individuals affected by the policies.

Dewey explicitly rejected this claim and the conservatism which it engendered.

Though *Human Nature and Conduct* may be Dewey's most well-known work on the subject of human nature, his 1932 essay "Human Nature"¹⁵⁹ from the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* provides a very useful survey of various conceptions of human nature throughout the history of philosophical thought. Given the location of the essay's publication, it is not surprising that the essay itself has implications for the current thesis. In the first words of the entry, Dewey connects human nature to the study of economics and other social sciences:

Are contemporary political and economic institutions necessary products of human nature? Or, more generally, does the very constitution of human nature show that certain social arrangements are likely to be successful while others are doomed to failure? Is war, for example, inevitable because of facts of human nature? Is self-interest so ingrained in human nature that the attempt to base industry on anything except a competitive struggle for private gain is sure to fail?¹⁶⁰

These may be questions that are not usually raised in discussions among philosophers about human nature, but they are important to Dewey's account of it.

First, Dewey outlines four different accounts of what "human nature" might mean:

1. "an alleged original and native constitution; that which is instinctive instead of acquired"
2. "alleged psychological powers or faculties"
3. human nature as a "blank slate" or "empty and formless and...therefore capable of being molded by external influence"¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ LW6, 29-39.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 29.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 30.

4. as something which can only be known “through its great institutional products—language, religion, law and the state, the arts.”¹⁶²

In this last case, “human nature” is a sort of potential and can only be fully understood in its exercise. Although these conceptions of “human nature” may have very different implications, Dewey believes that most conceptions of human nature have historically had one thing in common; that is, conceptions of human nature have often been nothing more than rationalizations of existing social and economic institutions.¹⁶³

In a later article entitled “Contrary to Human Nature,”¹⁶⁴ Dewey’s charge is made quite explicitly:

Opponents of projects for bringing about social change have a number of defense devices they resort to almost automatically. One of the commonest, and laziest, of these devices is the assertion that the proposal goes contrary to human nature. More sweepingly still, it is often said that human nature is so unalterable by its very constitution that the proposal is bound to fail and therefore shouldn’t even be tried.¹⁶⁵

Dewey continues, arguing that there is “danger” in attempting to oppose such practical projects as “political and economic change” on the basis of a “purely abstract idea.”¹⁶⁶ I take this to mean that, as it is used in such cases, Dewey felt that “human nature” was just such an abstract idea.

In “Human Nature,” Dewey calls for “experimental observation”¹⁶⁷ by social scientists in order to advance debates about human nature. In words that echo his earlier work, *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey claims that arguments which support the notion of a fixed human nature have historically been perpetuated by those who have an

¹⁶² Ibid., 31.

¹⁶³ LW14, 260; LW6, 37.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 258. The article was originally published in *Frontiers of Democracy* (15 May 1940).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ LW6, 38.

interest in keeping existing social and economic institutions unchanged. But he appeals to “anthropology and history” for evidence that human nature can be modified by virtue of these same institutions.

Dewey clearly rejects the first account of human nature detailed in the *Encyclopaedia* (“an alleged original and native constitution; that which is instinctive instead of acquired”) if it is meant to be exhaustive. He argues that, if there is “native constitution,” we should be hard-pressed to discover it. One of the most consistent themes that occurs throughout Dewey’s work is the conviction that an organism’s surrounding environment shapes the organism from birth. In “Human Nature,” he goes even further, noting that looking at a “snapshot of man” at birth would ignore “past history in the uterus” as well as “future history when the supposedly fixed and ready made structures will change as they interact with the surroundings.”¹⁶⁸ If there is an original human nature we shall never know of it, and, for Dewey, this is sufficient cause to consider other conceptions of human nature. However, given Dewey’s own words in the later piece, I take it that he acknowledges the existence of certain “native elements” yet he is unwilling to grant that these are wholly constitutive of human nature. Instead, he claims that these “native elements” will later be complemented by the products of custom, tradition, and habit.

The second account of human nature, that “psychological powers or faculties” constitute human nature, seems to be equally unappealing to Dewey. These “powers” exist prior to the influence of the physical and social environment which surround the individual. While such powers may, in fact, exist in the individual initially, the attempt

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 31.

to distinguish between “human nature and other nature”¹⁶⁹ forms a dualism that Dewey rejects. The discovery of these powers would fall prey to the same objection made against the “original and native constitution” conception above; that is, if such powers exist, they would be almost impossible to isolate because, from the first instant of life, an organism is subject to the influence of its environment in ways that might not be immediately obvious. Moreover, this account specifically relies on a distinction between human nature and all other nature, and Dewey repeatedly characterizes his own “reconstruction” of philosophy, aesthetics, ethics, and logic as a movement which aims to restore the continuity between nature and human experience.

The “empty slate” view of human nature represents the extreme opposite of the “fixed human nature” account. If human nature is “in itself empty and formless,” outside influences and external forces will be wholly responsible for the development of the human being. On this account, there is nothing which can be said to be native to the human being and everything about a human being, good or evil, will have to be attributed to the institutions and influences in the individual’s surrounding environment. Though he does not do so explicitly in “Human Nature,” one suspects that Dewey must believe this account is also subject to some of the same criticisms as the first two. If untutored human nature is a blank slate, we should never know it because there would never be any time during the life of the organism when this claim could be verified by observation. Further, as noted above, he explicitly appeals to the existence of some “native elements” and “instincts.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷⁰ See *Human Nature and Conduct* (MW14) and “Does Human Nature Change?” (LW13) especially.

As he so often does in regard to other philosophical issues, Dewey eschews extreme accounts in favor of the more moderate explanation. In so doing, he seeks to bring the methods and successes of the natural and physical sciences to bear on the study of human nature. He argues that human nature **can** be modified and that it is largely the work of institutions to effect this change, but he also acknowledges that there will likely be a limit to the extent of such change. Philosophers, however, should not be the ones to posit these limits. Instead, these limits will “have to be arrived at by experimental observation.”¹⁷¹ This imperative hints at more than Dewey’s respect for the experimental method of the physical and natural sciences and his conception of human nature; it also gives us significant insight into Dewey’s understanding of the limits of speculative philosophy and his conclusions regarding the appropriate application of the same in questions of practical import.

Human Nature and Empiricism

Dewey warns us that it “is always dangerous from an intellectual point of view to try to oppose practical movement with an argument drawn from a purely abstract idea.”¹⁷² A generous reading of this manner of “proceeding” is that it inadvertently draws attention away from “the proposal in question.” Determinations about whether or not to proceed with a particular proposal require “critical examination” of the details of the proposal.¹⁷³ But a less generous account of using “abstract ideas” in order to oppose “practical movements” would be that “this device is only an expression of a strong

¹⁷¹ LW6, 38.

¹⁷² Ibid., 258.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

prejudice clothed in the garb of an idea in order to appear respectable.”¹⁷⁴ This is a serious charge indeed: Dewey here means to suggest that philosophers have employed “abstract” concepts like “human nature” to further their own prejudices and to squelch proposals for political and economic change which they oppose. The philosopher’s use of the concept of human nature for these purposes may or may not be intentional, but it is most often unacknowledged.

Dewey’s account of philosophy demands that such prejudices, “clothed in the garb of an idea,” must be subjected to an “intellectual disrobing.”¹⁷⁵ In *Experience and Nature*, he describes his notion of an “empirical philosophy,” and such a philosophy is certainly **not** the sort of activity that would allow one to use the guise of “ideas” in order to subvert political or economic causes:

An empirical philosophy is in any case a kind of intellectual disrobing. We cannot permanently divest ourselves of the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our own time and place. But intelligent furthering of culture demands that we take some of them off, that we inspect them critically to see what they are made of and what wearing them does to us. We cannot achieve recovery of primitive naïveté. But there is attainable a cultivated naïveté of eye, ear and thought, one that can be acquired only through the discipline of severe thought.¹⁷⁶

Though these words appear at the outset of *Experience and Nature* in a chapter called “Experience and Philosophic Method,” there can be no doubt that Dewey has their meaning in mind when he speaks, fifteen years later, about appeals to the fixedness of human nature as a means of stifling political and economic change. Philosophers must subject themselves to the same sort of discipline that scientists do.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ LW1, 40.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Again, it is worth noting the gravity of this claim. Although philosophers have long believed themselves to be in search of truth and objectivity (or “pure” reason), Dewey argues that this is (as traditionally envisioned by philosophers) a search which is doomed to failure. Moreover, he does not claim that he is the first philosopher to have understood this, but he does suggest that philosophers have hidden behind abstract notions like “human nature” and, by doing so, have often furthered their personal interests through social and political policy recommendations. He does not condemn philosophers for **having** biases; rather, he condemns them for failing to recognize, acknowledge, or consider these biases.

I doubt seriously that Dewey means to suggest that, like experimental scientists, philosophers should record the details of the environmental conditions under which they engage in philosophizing (e.g., the temperature of the room, the minutiae regarding the sort of ink one uses in writing, or the specifications of the paper on which one composes). I do think, however, that Dewey believed there were analogous considerations that philosophers had to address. How might their political views influence the ways in which they view human nature? Are the facts of a philosopher’s economic situation relevant to his or her understanding of human nature? Why does the philosopher choose to focus on one subject instead of another?

Dewey reminds us that “No scientific report would get a hearing if it did not describe the apparatus by means of which experiments were carried on and the results obtained....”¹⁷⁷ He appears to be suggesting that the same should hold true for “philosophic” reports; that is, no “philosophic report” should be given a hearing if the author is not willing to divulge the means by which the conclusions were derived. This is

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 39.

not, he maintains, because scientists “worship” their own methods. Instead, the description of “the apparatus by means of which experiments were carried on” will provide other scientists the opportunity to confirm the results of these experiments. In the same way, philosophers should be willing to examine and report on their own means so that other philosophers can confirm their conclusions. According to Dewey, the neglect of this sort of “intellectual disrobing” throws the theories and conclusions of philosophers into doubt because they are little more than assertions made by thinkers who are unaware of their own prejudices. There is no way for others to replicate these theories and conclusions **except** by accepting the same prejudices.

In fact, if forced to choose just one idea that has been subject to mistreatment at the hands of philosophers and their prejudices, Dewey might well have chosen the concept of human nature. *Human Nature and Conduct* was published just three years prior to the publication of *Experience and Nature*, and its influence is seen throughout the later book as well as the remainder of Dewey’s work. Dewey’s concern with human nature seems to begin to develop fully in the latter part of the middle works and to continue consistently throughout many of the later works, regardless of their topic.

But it is *Human Nature and Conduct* that most forcefully and explicitly addresses the question of human nature and its shabby handling by philosophers in general and moral philosophers in particular. The very first words of the book constitute a rallying call against those who have misunderstood human nature for so long:

“Give a dog a bad name and hang him.” Human nature has been the dog of professional moralists, and consequences accord with the proverb. Man’s nature has been regarded with suspicion, with fear, with sour looks, sometimes with enthusiasm for its possibilities but only when these were placed in contrast with its actualities. It has appeared to be so evilly disposed that the business of morality was to prune and curb it; it would be

thought better of if it could be replaced by something else. It has been supposed that morality would be quite superfluous were it not for the inherent weakness, bordering on depravity, of human nature.¹⁷⁸

Though Dewey certainly believed that this view of human nature was wrong (if not downright laughable), his objection to it had less to do with the content than the means by which it had been constructed. This view of human nature had no basis in fact, and Dewey's hope, in *Human Nature and Conduct*, was to correct this. That correction was to be aided and accomplished by the resources of "scientific knowledge" and Dewey aimed to contribute to the "science of human nature."¹⁷⁹

The science of human nature has to begin with an observation of the facts of human existence and behavior. As noted above in Chapters III and IV above, the role of habit is significant in Dewey's account of human existence and behavior. Human nature cannot be understood apart from the habits which account for the bulk of human behavior. Between the four different conceptions of human nature Dewey sets out in his entry to the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, there is little agreement as to the "fixity" of human nature. The first three accounts, however, do seem to agree that human nature can be known by that which is (or is not) initially present in the individual. These accounts differ as to whether that native condition can be changed, but it is not unfair to say that there have been many who have argued that, while addition may be possible, little or nothing can be changed about these native faculties or predispositions. These are the arguments which most concern Dewey as he feels that they have had the greatest negative impact on moral philosophy and therefore require the greatest correction.

¹⁷⁸ MW14, 4.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

That which might be called “human nature” in the first three accounts above is, for Dewey, synonymous with “natural instincts.” He does not deny that human beings are born with “natural instincts” or tendencies. As noted above, however, it would be difficult if not impossible to isolate these instincts because they have been powerfully affected by the organism’s environment, even, perhaps, before birth. If human nature is taken to be the “inborn” qualities, faculties, tendencies, and “powers” an individual possesses, for Dewey there is no question about whether human nature is fixed or not. He writes that “instincts are most readily modifiable through use, most subject to educative direction.”¹⁸⁰ To believe otherwise is to accept an “outgrown” psychology and a “popular zoology of the bird, bee, and beaver, which was largely framed to the greater glory of God.”¹⁸¹ Like so many other antiquities of philosophy and psychology, this is one that Dewey believes science has authoritatively dispelled.

Only the fourth account of human nature from the *Encyclopaedia* article comes close to capturing the sense of human nature as Dewey conceives of it:

Human nature cannot be properly conceived or defined in terms of the constitution of individuals either native or acquired. Human nature can be known only through its great institutional products—language, religion, law and the state, the arts. As displayed in individuals it is merely potential; it develops into reality under the influence of cultural institutions, which form the content of objective mind and will.¹⁸²

The difficult question is not whether natural instincts can be modified or altered. Clearly, such instincts are subject to the influence of educational and social institutions. For Dewey, human nature is not a matter of native instinct but, instead, is the result of the influence such institutions exert over individuals and their native instincts. The key

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² See note 4 above.

question about human nature is whether, as the product of these institutions, it is thereafter subject to modification, and this is a question which needs to be understood in greater detail before it can be answered, according to Dewey.

Aristotle, Capitalism, and “Economic” Man

There have been plenty of responses in the history of philosophy to the question Dewey poses to social scientists in his *Encyclopaedia* article: “Are contemporary political and economic institutions necessary products of human nature?”¹⁸³ Unfortunately, those responses have too often confused instinct with necessity, and the result is that existing political and economic institutions are justified by appeals to arguments about the fixedness of human nature. Dewey uses numerous examples of this confusion throughout his work, but he cites two repeatedly and they are not unrelated: Aristotle’s references to “natural slavery,” and the “capitalistic system” or modern commercial life.

Aristotle’s account of “natural slavery” was, according to Dewey, “a systematically thought out interpretation of human nature.”¹⁸⁴ This discussion appears in the *Encyclopaedia* entry. In the same way that later moral theory squared itself against “human nature” (understood as natural instincts) by trying to subdue passions and urge compliance, Dewey argues that Aristotle and others perpetuated this interpretation in order to avoid “social and moral chaos.”¹⁸⁵ Dewey did not confine his criticism of Aristotle to academic journals or texts, however.

¹⁸³ See note 2 above.

¹⁸⁴ LW6, 33.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

In an article published in *Rotarian* in 1938, Dewey refers once again to this account: “Aristotle spoke for an entire social order as well as for himself when he said that slavery existed by nature.”¹⁸⁶ In another article “Mediocrity and Individuality” published in the *New Republic* sixteen years earlier, Dewey asked his audience to recall that “Aristotle rationalized slavery by showing how natural it was for those superior by nature to constitute the ends for others who were only tools....”¹⁸⁷

In that same year, *Human Nature and Conduct* was published, and Dewey re-raised Aristotle’s interpretation as evidence of the dangerous consequences associated with justifying political and economic institutions by reference to “natural instincts.” There, he notes that, “To Aristotle slavery was rooted in aboriginal human nature. Native distinctions of quality exist such that some persons are by nature gifted with power to plan, command and supervise, and others possess merely capacity to obey and execute.”¹⁸⁸ Though Dewey goes on in a number of these references to acknowledge the later improvements in societal attitudes towards class (which occurred as early as the Stoic school),¹⁸⁹ his citations of Aristotle are often associated with their relevance to contemporary economic life as Dewey perceived it.

First, Dewey believed that the economic institutions of his own time still accepted Aristotle’s account of natural slavery, albeit only implicitly. He worried about the millions of people who were forced to earn their living through menial, repetitive, and mindless labor. Though these people might enjoy greater political liberty than the slaves in ancient Greece, Dewey worried that they did not enjoy greater economic freedom and

¹⁸⁶ LW13, 287.

¹⁸⁷ MW13, 288.

¹⁸⁸ MW14, 78.

¹⁸⁹ LW6, 33.

that, without it, improved political freedoms meant little. Secondly, Dewey fought against the notion that natural instincts (which produced wants and needs) were any justification for a capitalistic economy which, as he saw it, was characterized primarily by selfishness.

In order to rationalize “the new industry and commerce” of the nineteenth century, Dewey believed that economists had exaggerated the importance of natural instincts. In his concern about this exaggeration, Dewey alludes to the version of the “economic man” mentioned above in Chapter II: the human being who is characterized by having a “natural and complete preoccupation with ‘acquiring and consuming wealth’.”¹⁹⁰

The economists who set out to give intellectual expression to the rising industrialism started from the affective side of human nature in accordance with prevailing English doctrine. They developed, however, a much more systematic theory than had ever been developed of the nature and operation of wants, out of which came a new conception of natural law. Economic activity, on this view, is basic; from it are derived the natural, in the sense of non-artificial, laws of human conduct. Society is the product of the efforts of human beings to satisfy their wants, since division of labor, exchange and permanent property are involved in this satisfaction. Government and political action exist in a secondary way in order to give security to the free play of economic forces.¹⁹¹

In the 1908 *Ethics*, Dewey cites Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy* in reference to private property, so it seems reasonable to assume that he was familiar with that work. The above excerpt from “Human Nature” does not explicitly identify Mill, but it is likely that Mill was one of the “economists” Dewey has in mind. There is, however, no question that Dewey was quite familiar with the corpus of Mill’s work.¹⁹² He began his

¹⁹⁰ See page 12 above.

¹⁹¹ LW6, 36.

¹⁹² Dewey lectured on Mill at the University of Michigan (Ryan, 77) and references him throughout the early, middle, and later works.

teaching career at the University of Michigan lecturing on Mill, and, at the age of eighty, he published *Freedom and Culture*. In that work, he uses Mill as the “classic expression of the point of view which would explain social phenomena by means of psychological phenomena,”¹⁹³ and, for Dewey, that translated into an accounting of extant social conditions by virtue of an appeal to native instincts.

Recall, from “On the Definition of Political Economy,” Mill’s own words: the science of political economy is one which sees man “solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging of the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end....”¹⁹⁴ This description is consistent with Dewey’s account from “Human Nature” above: “Economic activity, on this view, is basic....Society is the product of the efforts of human beings to satisfy their wants....” Dewey does not deny that economic activity has its basis in human instinct. He agrees with the description of “economic man” thus far, but he does deny that this completes the story of human nature.

As noted, in the *Rotarian* article mentioned above (“Does Human Nature Change?”) Dewey identified different meanings of the term “human nature.” If, by “human nature,” one means “the innate needs of men,” Dewey claims that there has been no convincing evidence to suggest that these have changed over time or that they will change in the future.¹⁹⁵ What does Dewey mean when he speaks of these “innate needs of men”? He gives a rather detailed list:

By “needs” I mean the inherent demands that men make because of their constitution. Needs for food and drink and for moving about, for example, are so much a part of our being that we cannot imagine any condition under which they would cease to be. There are other things not so directly physical that seem to me equally engrained in human nature. I would

¹⁹³ LW13, 138.

¹⁹⁴ See page 11 above, and note 4 in Chapter II.

¹⁹⁵ LW13, 286.

mention as examples the need for some kind of companionship; the need for exhibiting energy, for bringing one's powers to bear upon surrounding conditions; the need for both cooperation with and emulation of one's fellows for mutual aid and combat alike; the need for some sort of aesthetic expression and satisfaction; the need to lead and to follow; etc.¹⁹⁶

Thus, there are wants and needs that human beings possess which are both natural and immutable. In that sense, Dewey can agree with the description of an "economic man" who has, instinctively, certain wants and needs and desires to satisfy the same.

What Dewey cannot agree to, however, is the claim that these inborn tendencies will dictate a particular sort of political or economic order. The fact that human beings in general may instinctively share "acquisitive or competitive impulses"¹⁹⁷ does not imply that a particular economic system is therefore necessary. Dewey argues that, "Like Greek slavery or feudal serfdom, war and the existing economic regime are social patterns woven out of the stuff of instinctive activities."¹⁹⁸ Though these instinctive activities play a role in the development of political and economic structures, they do not play the **only** role in this development. The space between natural instinct and existing political and economic institutions—the actual weaving, as it were—is filled with the influence of custom. Custom, according to Dewey, "furnishes the machinery and the designs."¹⁹⁹

While the native "needs" of human beings may not change, the way these needs are evidenced certainly can change. Dewey locates another mistake of philosophy in its assessment of these "manifestations." Philosophers have likened the "manifestations" of these needs to the needs themselves: "We suppose that the manifestations we have got

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ MW14, 79.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 78.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

used to be as natural and as unalterable as are the needs from which they spring.”²⁰⁰

Dewey is rather measured in his description of this mistake, however, and he seems to suggest that it is not an unreasonable one. While it may be very obvious with respect to things such as food that the expression of our needs can be altered, it was not always quite so obvious that institutions such as slavery could be altered.

The ways in which human beings fulfill their need for food seems constantly to be subject to alteration, and there are numerous examples to support this (Dewey cites attitudes toward cannibalism²⁰¹ as one such example). The ways in which we fulfill our need “for bringing one’s powers to bear upon surrounding conditions” might seem less open to alteration, however. Aristotle, for example, “would have regarded efforts to abolish slavery from society as an idle and utopian effort to change human nature where it was unchangeable.”²⁰² Dewey at once argues that the “manifestations” of need fulfillment which constitute tradition and custom are alterable, but the inertia against any alteration is formidable and not to be underestimated. He admits that he would be far more sympathetic to those who oppose reform if they were to base their opposition on the fixedness of habit and custom instead of “human nature” and that there is some wisdom in such opposition.²⁰³

Dewey warns that revolutionaries (as well as reformers) will be unpleasantly surprised if they operate under the assumption that radical and wholesale reform happens quickly. Even if political and economic structures are dismantled in one stroke, the habits, which have grown up in conjunction with them, are not so easily razed:

²⁰⁰ LW13, 287.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ LW13, 287-288.

Any one with knowledge of the stability and force of habit will hesitate to propose or prophesy rapid and sweeping social changes. A social revolution may effect abrupt and deep alterations in external customs, in legal and political institutions. But the habits that are behind these institutions and that have, willy-nilly, been shaped by objective conditions, the habits of thought and feeling, are not so easily modified.... The force of lag in human life is enormous.²⁰⁴

The reformer must recognize this: reasonable reform will require a great deal of time and the acknowledgement of a dogged opposition that will exist in the form of individual and customary habits.

Ultimately, however, it is true that “affairs of tradition, custom, and institutional organizations” are “factors [which] belong among the changeable manifestations of human nature, not among the unchangeable elements.”²⁰⁵ Thus, “manifestations” or “expressions” of human nature **are** alterable, while the native “elements” are not. The “economic man” may, by native instinct, have a desire to accumulate wealth or possessions, but Dewey would reject any economic theory which, on this basis, asserted that a particular institutional arrangement was necessary or that it represented the only possible expression of that desire.

Human Nature and Economic Theory

Dewey’s account of human nature, as the interplay between native instincts and the customs and institutions which shape them, presents an important challenge to economic theory. First, if the economist’s account of human nature is one of the first three Dewey describes in his *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* entry, we would presume that he, on that basis, would reject any theory based on such assumptions. This

²⁰⁴ MW14, 77.

²⁰⁵ LW13, 289.

does not seem an unreasonable presumption: Dewey was comfortable rejecting the accounts his predecessors in philosophy had offered for thousands of years, so it is unlikely that he would have felt much reluctance to follow the same path with economics. But we must establish this without conjecture, and to do so we must return to the idea of the “economic man.”

In *Freedom and Culture*,²⁰⁶ Dewey turns specifically to questions of social and economic institutions and how they may or may not relate to human nature. He criticizes the theories which “have been marked by serious attempts to make some one constituent of human nature *the* source of motivation of action; or at least to reduce all conduct to the action of a small number of alleged native ‘forces.’”²⁰⁷ As noted in Chapter II above, Mill explicitly rejected the notion that “economic man” was meant to be an exhaustive description of human nature, but, as was also noted earlier, there have been many in the history of economics who have taken his description to be exhaustive. Dewey would have leveled the same criticisms at such theorists that he did at moral philosophers: if economists believe that human activity and existing political and economic institutions can be explained wholly by reference to a defining native instinct, they are grossly mistaken. He cites the “comparatively recent example” of “the adoption by the classic school of economic theory of self-interest as the main motivating force of human behavior....”²⁰⁸

He takes Marx to have been a proponent of the third account of human nature described in his *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*; that is, human nature as a blank slate which is wholly developed by the influence of culture and tradition external to it. In

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 64-188.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 74. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

the same way that the “classic school of economic theory” has an overly simplistic view of human nature, Marx also engaged in a sort of “systematic neglect” of the many aspects of human nature.²⁰⁹ Marxism, according to Dewey, takes the view that “all the factors of human nature are shaped from without by ‘materialistic,’ that is economic, forces.”²¹⁰ Marxism and classic economic theory, however, are two very different animals, and for Dewey to make a similar charge against each (that they oversimplify human nature) causes one to wonder whether Dewey might not also have had general criticisms of the methodology of economic theory itself.

And, in fact, Dewey confirms this in *Human Nature and Conduct*. In a chapter entitled “Changing Human Nature,” Dewey analyzes the significance of “incentives” in economic theory. He worries that economists understand “incentives” to be the only means of moving human beings to action. Worse yet, these same economists understand that the only incentives that will effect action are those that promise personal gain (and, as noted above in the description of “behavioral economics,” this is, in fact, true of the assumptions of behavioral economists²¹¹). This, of course, would imply that, without some self-interested motivation or incentive, a human being would remain “inert” or “absolutely passive,” and this simply does not make sense in Dewey’s biologically based philosophy. Whether incentives for action exist or not, human beings will act: “In truth, man acts anyway, he can’t help acting.”²¹²

In an attempt to explain the “economic psychology” behind this account of incentives, Dewey acknowledges a problem that exists with all sciences, and it is a

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 133.

²¹⁰ Ibid..

²¹¹ Khalil, 109.

²¹² MW14, 84.

concern that implies a call for increased attention to empiricism in the social sciences generally, but in economics particularly:

How then does it come about that current economic psychology has so tremendously oversimplified the situation? Why does it recognize but one type of motive, that which concerns personal gain? Of course part of the answer is to be found in the natural tendency in all sciences toward a substitution of artificial conceptual simplifications for the tangles of concrete empirical facts.²¹³

Does the science of economics pay sufficient attention to empirical facts? Is economics a discipline which has benefited from the application of the experimental method? Dewey is highly critical of philosophy and philosophers for ignoring the successes and the methods of the natural sciences. Was he any less critical of the study of economics and, if so, was his confidence in the science of economics well-placed?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to look more carefully at Dewey's praise of the experimental method and empiricism as it did operate in the sciences and as it might operate in philosophy after appropriate reconstruction. In particular, we must look at this in conjunction with the use of models and theory in the study of economics. I believe that Dewey's effort to introduce the use of the experimental method in philosophy (as well as in the social sciences) was both Dewey's most original contribution to pragmatism (and the history of philosophy) **and** one of the aspects of his philosophy that remained, despite more than seventy years and thousands of pages of writing, the most underdeveloped.

²¹³ MW14, 86.

CHAPTER VI

THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD AND MODELS

If the experimental method is one of the defining characteristics of Dewey's pragmatism and if, as I have suggested, it is also one of the most underdeveloped themes in his philosophy, the potential success of Dewey's work is thrown into question. I believe that Dewey saw the experimental method as a key to the type philosophy which would "render" the things of "ordinary experience" more "fruitful" and "luminous." Without the methodology of experimentalism, philosophy has not traditionally felt obligated to concern itself with the details of ordinary experience. Thus, the experimental method, as Dewey conceives of it, must carry the burden of the reconstruction of philosophy which he envisions.

Though I think it is fair to say that neither philosophers nor economists have been particularly anxious to adopt the "laboratory habit of mind" that Dewey described, this chapter is nonetheless an important part of my thesis. First, it will provide an account of Dewey's experimental method as I understand it. Second, it will act as background for the next chapter which attempts to demonstrate how the experimental method might actually be applied in philosophy and economics. Dewey was right to place the experimental method at the center of his philosophy, but I believe he failed to detail the way that even scientists (as well as social scientists and philosophers), would be reluctant to re-enter the world of "ordinary experience" once they had engaged in reflection and "secondary experience." I think experimentalism is the key to that "return from

reflection,” and I think that Dewey might have done a better job of convincing others of this had he used concrete examples from “ordinary experience.” The 1908 *Ethics* might well be one such example, and Dewey’s own explanation of that text in his understanding of the scientific method is considered briefly.

The “Laboratory Habit of Mind”

Pragmatism, for Dewey, was characterized by a number of things, but none was more important than the influence of experimental science and the use of the experimental method. Throughout his work, Dewey referred to the need for empiricism, observation, and experimentalism in philosophy. *Experience and Nature* may provide the clearest statement of Dewey’s philosophy and the role experimentalism should play in that philosophy. But there are also significant discussions in the early middle works about the importance that an understanding of the methods and the successes of the natural and physical sciences will have for philosophers.

In 1908, Dewey published a review entitled “What Does Pragmatism Mean by Practical?” in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*. The article was largely an analysis of William James’ *Pragmatism*, a series of lectures that had been published the previous year. Dewey describes pragmatism as a “method,” and he focuses especially on those parts of the method that seem to resemble the natural and physical sciences. He cites C.S. Peirce and says, “Pragmatism as attitude represents what Mr. Peirce has happily termed the ‘laboratory habit of mind’ extended into every area where inquiry may fruitfully be carried on.”²¹⁴ Elsewhere, he wonders, “Who can foresee what will happen when the experimental outlook has once become thoroughly acclimatized in

²¹⁴ MW4, 100.

a common culture?”²¹⁵ Thus, Dewey believed that Peirce, James’ and his own understanding of pragmatism, whatever their differences, shared a reliance on the “scientific” or “experimental” method. The pragmatic philosopher will be one who takes the same attitude and approaches that the scientist in the laboratory does. “Conceptions” and “theories” should not be taken as fact simply because the philosopher has provided an argument to support them. Rather, the pragmatic philosopher, with the “laboratory habit of mind,” will treat these conceptions and theories as “working hypotheses, as directors for certain experiments and experimental observations.”²¹⁶

Here, as elsewhere, Dewey wonders at the possibility of “sincerely and unreservedly” “carrying the method” of the laboratory to philosophy. His prose hints that he may consider this unlikely to happen soon in philosophy or elsewhere. In *Democracy and Education*, he is explicit on this point:

It will doubtless take a long time to secure the perception that [the experimental method] holds equally as to the forming and testing of ideas in social and moral matters. Men still want the crutch of dogma, of beliefs fixed by authority, to relieve them of the trouble of thinking and the responsibility of directing their activity by thought. They tend to confine their own thinking to a consideration of which one among the rival systems of dogma they will accept.²¹⁷

Dewey has shown that most people are at once both reluctant to engage in experimentalism and also inclined to seek the comfort of the “crutch of dogma, of beliefs fixed by authority.” He does suggest, in these earlier papers, that there are fields which might be more likely than his own to take the notion seriously and would see dramatic progress if they did: “Leaving philosophy out of account, what a change would be wrought in the historical and social sciences—in the conceptions of politics and law and

²¹⁵ LW10, 342.

²¹⁶ MW4, 100.

²¹⁷ MW9, 348-349.

political economy!”²¹⁸ It as if he has anticipated an objection from those who would say that the methods of the laboratory sciences have no place in philosophy, and he is willing, at least for the sake of argument, to concede this point, but he cannot help but appeal to their value for the social sciences.

If this interpretation of Dewey’s words is accurate, it also shows Dewey to be prescient. Certainly, political science and political economy (or economics) adopted some of these methods within Dewey’s lifetime. The “mathematization” of economics and the use of modeling in political science had already begun by 1908, and such tools would only become more vital to these disciplines as the twentieth century progressed. Perhaps one might object that there has been little success in the field of philosophy, but it is also worth mentioning that the “experimental method” (as Dewey characterizes it) has not been readily adopted in either political science or economics despite the increased empirical work done by scholars in these fields. What is surprising here, though, is the fact that Dewey did not follow this line of thinking more systematically in his own work. He clearly understood the value of the experimental method to philosophy, political science, and economics, yet he did not provide much direction as to how that method might actually be applied in practice. He did not provide examples that demonstrated how economists, let alone philosophers, might bring the “laboratory habit of mind” to their own work.

Dewey was prescient, however, in his understanding of the progress that might follow from the application of the experimental method in fields beyond the natural and physical sciences. In 2002, one of the two Nobel Prize winners in economics, Vernon Smith, was cited for his research and his use of laboratory experiments in the study of

²¹⁸ MW4, 100.

economics. Smith's laboratory work has shown that "the incentives to which people respond are sometimes not those one would expect on the canons of economic/game theory."²¹⁹ This work has provided empirical evidence to dispute the claims of traditional economic principles, and, among other things, it has been used to improve the regulation of electricity, evaluate policy proposals, and compare institutions.²²⁰ It is fair to say, then, that there has been professional recognition of the field of "experimental economics." But despite the fact that "experimental economics" has existed for more than forty years, there are still many economists who are skeptical both of its methods and its products, and there are some who are also skeptical as to whether the field deserves to be called a part of economics at all. In fact, it is precisely the things Dewey praises about experimentation that cause many economists to question the legitimacy of experimental economics: "the method of treating conceptions, theories, etc., as working hypotheses, as directors for certain experiments and experimental observations."²²¹ Indeed, these are the methods and tools that make a physicist or a chemist legitimate in the eyes of his profession. But it is the very willingness to bring "subjects" to a "laboratory" and conduct "experiments" regarding their preferences in controlled situations that has caused the work of experimental economists to be questioned by their peers in the profession.

What does Dewey have in mind when he speaks of the "experimental method"? How, exactly, does Dewey believe that the experimental method might operate in philosophy and the social sciences? What sorts of things will be derived from this method that would not otherwise have been produced through more conventional

²¹⁹ Smith (2003), 1.

²²⁰ Smith (1994), 115.

²²¹ MW4, 100.

philosophical analysis? These are all questions that must be addressed in order to draw any further conclusions about the relationship of Dewey's philosophy and the field of economic science.

The History of Dewey's "Experimental Method"

We can begin to understand Dewey's account of the "experimental method" by tracing its appearance throughout his written work. In 1902, Dewey was nearing the end of his tenure as the head of the philosophy department at the University of Chicago. Though he could not have known with certainty that he would be leaving for Columbia in two years, he was increasingly disappointed with his treatment at the hands of Chicago's president, William Rainey Harper. By 1902, Dewey had made a name for himself among philosophers. His work at Michigan had enabled him to gain the position at Chicago, and his reputation grew while he was in Chicago.²²² Despite this impressive reputation in the young field of professional philosophy and Dewey's record of publication, his written work was just beginning to focus on the "experimental method" and its importance for thinkers outside the physical and natural sciences. This method would, of course, later hold a central place in Dewey's mature philosophy.

In 1902, Dewey published a series of papers in *Philosophical Review* entitled "The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality."²²³ These papers demonstrate, in its infancy, Dewey's appeal to the "experimental method" and the "scientific method." Several years later, Dewey published an article entitled "Logical Conditions of a

²²² Martin (2002), 138 and previous.

²²³ MW2, 2-38.

Scientific Treatment of Morality.”²²⁴ Both pieces illustrate that Dewey, despite later calls for the wholesale reconstruction of philosophy, first developed the idea of applying the experimental method to philosophy in the areas of logic and moral theory. In addition, Dewey is explicit in the later piece that, though he thinks moral theory will benefit from the influence of science and the “laboratory habit of mind,” he understands the analogy between science and moral theory to be one of process, not product.

Experimentalism in Moral Theory

Both the notion that moral theory develops, at least in part, historically from social customs and conventions **and** the idea that an understanding of contemporary morality requires attention to the past are ideas which are obviously quite well-developed by the 1908 *Ethics*. Ostensibly, this is Dewey’s subject matter in the 1902 papers and the 1903 article, but there is much to be learned about Dewey’s regard for the experimental method in these papers as well. In both pieces, he describes the “transition from an ordinary to a scientific attitude of mind” and notes that this transition “coincides with ceasing to take certain things for granted and assuming a critical or inquiring and testing attitude.”²²⁵ In moral theory, Dewey argues, the “scientific attitude of mind” is characterized by a study of history.

Dewey’s attempt to introduce “the laboratory habit of mind” in the 1902 papers entails the “evolutionary method.” As he understands it, the “evolutionary method” as applied to morality is a method that requires attention to the origins of moral theory. He anticipates, throughout these papers, one major objection to this method: that there is no

²²⁴ MW3, 3-39.

²²⁵ Ibid., 3.

place in moral theory for “genetic” accounts of morality. He acknowledges that there are many who believe morality is a matter of “a spiritual nature,”²²⁶ and historical accounts or descriptions of morality do not belong in moral theory generally. These historical accounts may be interesting as “data,” but they certainly will not shed any light on the nature of morality itself. Morality is something that does not change and is therefore no more or no less understandable because of attention to historical matters, or so the argument goes. Dewey appears to have been prepared to argue against those who would claim that philosophy had no business considering history. In fact, Dewey himself used the “evolutionary method” in philosophy in his series of lectures published as *Reconstruction in Philosophy*.²²⁷ When speaking of the “classic type” of philosophy which had divorced itself from the “world of everyday experience,” Dewey said, “It seems to me that this genetic method of approach is a more effective way of undermining this type of philosophic theorizing than any attempt at logical refutation could be.”²²⁸ In attempting to “undermine” the philosophy he is criticizing, Dewey refuses to employ the accepted methods of that very philosophy and instead uses the “empirical method” he is defending.

Another objection, alluded to above, is the worry that, by introducing experimentalism or the “scientific method” into philosophy, one would aim to produce results similar to experimentalism in the natural and physical sciences. In the 1903 article, Dewey anticipates this objection as well, and he acknowledges that some might take him to be seeking a “reduction” in “matters of conduct to [the] similarly physical or

²²⁶ MW2, 2.

²²⁷ MW12, 77-201.

²²⁸ Ibid., 93.

even quasi-mathematical form”²²⁹ akin to those found in the conclusions of biological or chemical experiments. Instead, Dewey reassures his audience that he “disclaims any effort to reduce the statement of matters of conduct to forms comparable with those of physical science.”²³⁰

From the distance of more than one hundred years, Dewey’s concerns may seem foreign us. Many (if not most) philosophers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are willing to entertain the possibility that historical context might have relevance for moral theory. This is not, of course, to say that most philosophers have accepted morality as relative to culture or circumstances, but it does seem fair to say that most would admit the possibility that something might be learned about morality from an examination of historical accounts of the same. If anything, professional philosophy has been over-eager to embrace other fields and disciplines like history in the latter part of the twentieth century,²³¹ and the products of these engagements seem to fill the pages of philosophy journals. The later development of analytic philosophy also seems to contrast strangely with Dewey’s worry that his audience would interpret his efforts as attempts to “reduce matters of conduct” to “quasi-mathematical form.” Dewey might have eschewed such efforts, but there were many professional philosophers who succeeded him that did not.

To judge by Dewey’s papers, however, we can assume that his peers in 1902 and 1903 had raised these objections in conversation as well as print. Despite the subject matter evinced by his title, Dewey did not simply argue in favor of the “evolutionary method” in questions of morality. He apparently felt it was first necessary to undertake a

²²⁹ MW3, 4.

²³⁰ Ibid., 5.

²³¹ Kuklick, 267-269.

lengthy digression into the nature of scientific methodology and the significance of experimentalism within science. The digression, it seems, would support his overall project of using historical circumstances to better understand moral development and theory. Interestingly, these papers seem to be more than what they were intended to be: that is, they provide for us an insight into the difficulties Dewey faced in the early part of the twentieth century as he sought to marry the exciting progress of the natural and physical sciences to the conservative (and, Dewey might say, reactionary) methods of philosophical investigation.

The “Experimental Method” Explained

In the digression mentioned above, Dewey argues that, without an understanding of the “nature of the experimental method in science,” one might never be convinced that there is a place for the “evolutionary method” in the study of morality. Since the “experimental method” is, as he conceives of it, also a “genetic” or “evolutionary” method, its explanatory powers should be clear.²³² He provides a first step toward understanding his conception of the experimental method:

The essence of the experimental method I take to be control of the analysis or interpretation of any phenomenon by bringing to light the exact conditions, and the only conditions, which are involved in its coming into being.²³³

This brief description provides a quick look into the seed containing some of the themes and terms which would later germinate and figure prominently in Dewey’s mature philosophy.

²³² MW2, 4.

²³³ Ibid., 4.

Control

The experimental method enables the scientist to wrest control of a phenomenon from its natural occurrence and to direct the manner in which further analysis and interpretation takes place. Later, in *Experience and Nature*, Dewey described the same process, and he claimed that the very control of experience is what defines the scientist's activity: "The [scientific] 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."²³⁴ The experimenter or scientist will begin his or her work by attempting to control the environment in which the experiment occurs. In particular, this control will allow the "experimenter" to determine the genesis of the phenomenon. Are there parallels for philosophy? That is, does it follow that the advantages of the experimental method will translate into examinations of morality? Dewey believes that, if progress is to be made in moral philosophy, philosophers must acknowledge such parallels and seek out the same advantages through different methodology than has conventionally been employed.

He is well aware of the inertia he faces, and he realizes that much of this is territorial. These 1902 and 1903 writings provide ample evidence that he knows many will reject, out of hand, the introduction of the "scientific method" in any philosophical endeavor. This objection will be difficult to meet, too, because of its nature: there is little behind it save the simple assertion that moral theory and experimental science differ not just in method but also in kind. Dewey put the objection succinctly: "ethical judgment is ethical just because it is not scientific; because it deals with norms, values, ideals, not with given facts; with what *ought* to be, estimated through pure spiritual

²³⁴ LW1, 11.

aspiration, not with what *is*, decided after investigation.”²³⁵ Recall that, as noted in the second chapter of this thesis, economists have struggled with the same tension in their own field. Some economists (most notably, Lionel Robbins) have rejected the suggestion that economics can deal with **both** the positive and the normative.

Dewey acknowledges that there may be differences between moral theory and chemistry or physics, but he maintains that there remains an “identity of logical procedure in the two cases.”²³⁶ The experimental method “is concerned with the manner or process by which anything comes into experienced existence.”²³⁷ As an experimentalist repeats his experiments, he begins to understand how a particular phenomenon comes to be, and he is able to replicate the necessary conditions in the laboratory. In order to understand the phenomenon, Dewey argues that the scientist cannot take the “direct approach” of simple observation. We might experience the same phenomenon a thousand times, but these experiences would not necessarily give us any insight into the origins or causes of the phenomenon. The experimental method seeks understanding, at least in part, by efforts to determine origins and causes of phenomenon: “It takes an unanalyzed total fact which in its totality must simply be accepted at its face value, and shows the exact and exclusive conditions of its origin.”²³⁸

Similarly, Dewey wanted to demonstrate that our understanding of morality could only be improved by gaining insight into its origins and causes. We might observe “moral” conduct for years and years, but if we do not attempt to isolate the conduct (or phenomenon) and study its genesis, we will have to seek other means of understanding it.

²³⁵ MW3, 6. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

²³⁶ Ibid., 5.

²³⁷ MW2, 5.

²³⁸ Ibid., 19.

I can see a man tell another the truth hundreds of times, but if I do nothing more than observe this act in the course of daily life, I may never have any insight into its origin and I certainly will be unable to replicate its advantages in my own life in any **meaningful** way. Instead, I may only be able to parrot this behavior.

Experimentalism accomplishes more than simply the ability to mimic a phenomenon, and, indeed, a pragmatic moral philosophy should be able to do more as well. The experimentalist, in addition to understanding how a particular phenomenon is generated, works toward and eventually hopes to achieve “intellectual and practical control.”²³⁹ The physical and natural sciences, as Dewey understands them, do not seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Knowledge is not desirable because it is “the highest good” for man, nor is it desirable because it fulfills a distinctively human need. Knowledge may be and do both, but, as far as Dewey is concerned, these are coincident to the desire for knowledge. Instead, in philosophy as in science, knowledge is desirable in order to generate the “intellectual and practical control” mentioned above. The experimenter seeks “controlled interpretation”²⁴⁰ of a phenomenon, and, as Dewey would argue in print for the next fifty years, philosophy will only have relevance so long as it provides the same sort of “controlled interpretation” of the uncertainty and instability of primary experience (insofar as that is possible) as that accomplished by the physical and natural sciences. This, of course, obligates Dewey to the same standard: his own philosophical method must lead to improved control and stability in the goods of “ordinary experience.”

²³⁹ Ibid., 5.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

In short, the experimental method **redefines** what we mean by “knowledge” in philosophy: “we have no right to call anything knowledge except where our activity has actually produced certain physical changes in things....”²⁴¹ In this sense, the experimental method will often produce more than just a “controlled interpretation” of the phenomenon in question. Experimentation may actually produce control of the phenomenon itself, and, failing that, it may well produce control of the origins or consequences of the phenomenon. Dewey has here provided a physical test for knowledge: we can say that we know something if we can observe “physical changes in things” that result from our own examination.

Isolation and Abstraction

Another value of the experimental method in philosophical endeavors (such as moral theory) is the same as in the physical and natural sciences: isolation. That is, instead of considering an idea or theory (or, in the case of these other sciences, a “phenomenon”) as it occurs in day-to-day experience, entangled with other ideas and theories (phenomena), the “laboratory habit of mind” enables us to consider that idea (phenomenon) by itself and to focus our efforts on it alone. Experimentation provides “the artificial isolation of a physical fact from its usual context.”²⁴² Many years after these initial writings on the “experimental method,” Dewey would (in *The Quest for Certainty*) return to this characteristic of scientific inquiry and remind his readers that “abstraction” was part and parcel of that inquiry: “Abstraction is simply an instance of the economy and efficiency involved in all intelligent practice:—Deal first with matters

²⁴¹ MW9, 348.

²⁴² MW2, 9.

that can be effectively handled, and then use the results to go on to copy with more complex affairs.”²⁴³ Dewey’s account of the value of abstraction or isolation is, ironically, the reverse of what his pragmatism demands overall.

In *Experience and Nature*, one of his more mature works, he would remind us that turning away from our crude or primary experience of a subject in order to focus our analytical efforts on the subject in isolation always presents a danger. The danger (and, according to Dewey, it is one that philosophy has succumbed to for thousands of years) is that we will fail to turn back from this artificial isolation and restore the subject and the products of our reflection to our primary experience.²⁴⁴ In short, we may become enamored with the act of reflection and fail to remember why we first engaged in the act (i.e., to solve a problem or to improve our primary experiences in the future).

Of course, the act of reflection in the physical and natural sciences is, from beginning to end, predicated on the desire to understand more about the details of what Dewey calls “primary” experience. The scientist might “detach” “the operations of the lungs” from “air” for the purpose of study, but the scientist also recognizes that “breathing is in fact a function that includes both air and the operations of the lungs.”²⁴⁵ There is no danger that the scientist will forget this vital connection or that a disconnection can be effected in practice, even though he may make a theoretical detachment in order to better understand the phenomenon of breathing. Philosophy, on the other hand, often seems to turn to reflection as an escape from such experience. But experimentation demands that we return to the phenomenon that prompted our analyses. The experiment is undertaken because of an effort to secure “controlled interpretation”

²⁴³ LW4, 173.

²⁴⁴ LW1, 16-17, 26.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

and it can only be concluded when that has been achieved with respect to the phenomenon in question. In the physical and natural sciences, as Dewey explains in “Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality,” the experimenter need not fear the danger Dewey had described in *Experience and Nature*, of philosophy as “escapist intellectual gymnastic”:

The boast and pride of modern science is its distinctly empirical and experimental character. The term “empirical” refers to origin and development of scientific statements out of concrete experiences; the term “experimental” refers to the testing and checking of the so-called laws and universals by reference to their application in further concrete experience. If this notion of science be correct, it shows, without further argument, that generic propositions occupy a purely intermediate position. They are neither initial nor final. They are the bridges by which we pass over from one particular experience to another; they are individual experiences put into such shape as to be available in regulating other experiences.²⁴⁶

Unlike the philosopher, the experimentalist has an obligation to restore the products of her reflection to primary experience, and her peers also expect her to provide an account of her experiment so that they can attempt to replicate her findings and reflections. No such obligation exists among philosophers, and Dewey believes this is to the detriment of the field.

“Bridges” and “Recombination”

Dewey’s pragmatism does not disdain reflection or the “isolation” of subject matter from everyday experience. But it does object to the claim that such reflection and isolation should predominate philosophical thinking and that this activity should come at the expense of primary experience or “experience” as it is conventionally understood. Dewey vehemently criticized those forms of philosophy that both warned of trusting the

²⁴⁶ MW3, 9.

experience of our senses and argued that our day-to-day experience actually stands in the way of our knowing anything about “reality.” Though philosophers might never actually work in laboratories, Dewey believed that they would gain invaluable lessons from studying the methodology of the natural and physical sciences and engaging in experimentation wherever possible. In the description of “modern science” above, we see what Dewey hopes for in a “science” of morals: the possibility of “generic propositions” that provide “bridges by which we pass over from one particular experience to another” and the “recombination” of individual experiences “into such shape as to be available in regulating other experiences.” When Dewey speaks of the “identity of logical procedure” between science and the study of morals, this is what he means.

Thus, in his papers on the “Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality,” Dewey demonstrates that history provides for the moral theorist what experimentation does for the physicist:

We cannot apply artificial isolation and artificial recombination to those facts with which ethical science is concerned. We cannot take a present case of parental care, or of a child’s untruthfulness, and cut it into sections, or tear it into physical pieces, or subject it to chemical analysis. Only through history, through a consideration of how it came to be what it is, can we unravel it and trace the interweaving of its constituent parts. History offers to us the only available substitute for the isolation and for the cumulative recombination of experiment. The early periods present us in their relative crudeness and simplicity with a substitute for the artificial operation of an experiment: following the phenomenon into the more complicated and refined form which it assumes later, is a substitute for the synthesis of the experiment.²⁴⁷

There are several important points within this excerpt. First, this account of how history might stand in for experiment in moral theory is one of the few explicit, concrete examples Dewey provides for how philosophers might actually engage in

²⁴⁷ MW2, 9.

“experimentation.” Second, it is clear from these words that Dewey does not, at least with respect to moral philosophy, expect philosophers to literally “experiment.” As it is described here, the use of history in moral theory will serve the purpose that “cutting into sections” or “tearing into physical pieces” or “chemical analysis” would in the physical and natural sciences.

Employing history in moral theory will, however, provide the sort of isolation and “recombination” that these more scientific modes of experimentation would in other fields. We can gain knowledge about morality through an examination of its history, and we can understand how some of the things we see in the modern world have antecedents in the ancient and medieval world. We should endeavor to remember that “knowledge” for Dewey does not mean that we have some insight into Being or Existence. Rather, to have knowledge of morality from a pragmatic standpoint is to have an understanding of how the products of our reflection on moral theory will enable us to produce a “controlled interpretation” of our primary experience.

Moreover, Dewey argues that there is not nearly as much difference between the aims of the scientist and the moral theorist as some would have us believe. Their goals are similar, as both hope to settle questions of validity. He describes moral philosophers as being “primarily concerned with problems of validity” in the sense of “superior objective value,” and, while scientists do not concern themselves with “ultimate validity,”²⁴⁸ they do share an important desire. The moral theorist hopes to be able to settle questions of competing moral claims, and there is nothing so practical as that. In a similar fashion, the “fundamental and interesting problem” faced by the scientist “is that of ways of passing upon questions of specific validity; ways of determining the

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

respective values of this or that particular judgment.”²⁴⁹ In fact, apart from historical consideration, Dewey wonders how differences between competing moral claims or judgments can be settled. Different moral systems or principles cannot be evaluated as to their relative strength unless some criterion is employed. For Dewey, the criterion must be whether or not the principle affords the control and improved meaning that he has described throughout his work. The “scientific method” is not only useful to moral theory, but, according to Dewey, no progress has or can be made in moral theory without the means to assess validity. The “historical” or “evolutionary” method can provide that means.

Continuity

All of the advantages of the experimental method heretofore described, however, are inferior to that which Dewey calls the “supreme value of the genetic statement arrived at by experimental science.”²⁵⁰ The “supreme value” to be had from experimentalism is that it “reveals to us a process which is operating continuously.”²⁵¹ Identifying such a process is a key step in achieving the “intellectual and practical control of great bodies of fact”²⁵² which is, of course, the aim of philosophy as well as science, according to Dewey. When we have identified and understood this process, “we can analyze, we can understand, the phenomena... whenever and however they present themselves.”²⁵³ Once the experimenter has isolated and analyzed a phenomenon, she will find that, whenever the phenomenon is encountered in the future, she will be at a great advantage:

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 8.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

But when the secondary objects, the refined objects, are employed as a method or road for coming at them [the immediate qualities of experienced things] these qualities cease to be isolated details; they get the meaning contained in a whole system of related objects; they are rendered continuous with the rest of nature and take on the import of the things they are now seen to be continuous with.²⁵⁴

Instead of having to wonder anew at the phenomenon, the experimenter can use what she has learned from previous experimentation to make decisions based on her understanding of the phenomenon. In short, experimentation allows the experimenter to “update” her understanding of the circumstances and phenomena which she encounters in primary experiences. The successful conclusion of her experiment will be the ability to restore the isolated and “artificial” products of her experiment to the “continuous processes” which actually occur in her everyday experience.

In the same manner, the pragmatic moral philosopher will use what he has learned about moral theory and development from history. He will have understood morality as a part of a continuous process, the “moralizing process,”²⁵⁵ and he will be able to “analyze” and “understand” that process as it occurs in his day-to-day experience. One of Dewey’s most frequent criticisms about philosophers’ understanding of human behavior was that they repeatedly misunderstood the office of deliberation. Instead of deliberating in advance of action, human beings act according to habit and custom. Even in the face of resistance, habit and custom will impel an individual to act. Though the individual, if he behaves intelligently, will reflect on his responses to unexpected circumstances, he will not do so at every new experience. Rather, he will “update” his habits, though slowly, by employing the products of his reflection in his action, and he will rely on those habits until they too require modification.

²⁵⁴ LW1, 16.

²⁵⁵ MW2, 15.

The use of the evolutionary method in morality will also serve to reinforce what we have said about human nature above. “Experimentation” in morality will demonstrate that human nature is neither wholly a matter of native instinct nor wholly a matter of habituation or imperatives opposed to those instincts. This, too, is analogous to the use of experiment in the natural and physical sciences: “Just as experiment transforms a brute physical fact into a relatively luminous series of changes, so evolutionary method applied to a moral fact does not leave us either with a mere animal instinct on one side, or with the spiritual categorical imperative on the other.”²⁵⁶ The use of experiment in the sciences will allow us to look behind the “brute physical fact” of a phenomenon, and it will help us to see it as one part of a more complicated set of processes, including antecedent causes and subsequent consequences.

The use of experiment in science helps us make those phenomena which surprise or intrigue us into a part of the integrated whole of our experience. In the same way, the use of the “historical method” in moral theory will allow us to look behind the “brute physical fact” of moral conduct, and it will enable us to see what part that conduct plays in who we are. The “historical method” helps us to understand morality as a part of a more complicated process, and it demonstrates that we are not simply the victims of our native instincts nor are we determined entirely by the forces which surround us. Our nature is more complicated, and the use of “experimentation” in moral theory will help us to appreciate this. It will provide the “bridges” from “one particular experience to another.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁵⁷ MW3, 9.

A Concrete Example of the Experimental Method Applied to Morality

In “The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality,” Dewey makes a case for the use of the “evolutionary method” in the study of moral theory. By 1908 and the publication of the *Ethics*, he has moved from the justification of the project to the project itself. Consider his words in the preface to that book: “To follow the moral life through typical epochs of its development enables students to realize what is involved in their own habitual standpoints; it also presents a concrete body of subject-matter which serves as material of analysis and discussion.”²⁵⁸ The “experiment” of approaching moral philosophy by means of the history of moral development will enable the “experimenter” (or, in this case, the philosopher) to place his own habits and behavior in the “continuous process” of morality. The “experiment” begins in primary experience with the study of history, it continues with the “artificial isolation” of various “epochs,” and it ends with a return to primary experience such that the student has an improved understanding of his own habits. If the analogy to science holds, the use of the “experimental” method in moral theory will help us gain a “more thorough adequate experience”²⁵⁹ of the subject under investigation.

Unlike the earlier papers cited above, the *Ethics* was intended for classroom use. Dewey and Tufts wrote (and later re-wrote) it with the intention of using it for teaching, and the book was, in fact, “widely used as a classroom text.”²⁶⁰ Thus, we would expect that the text was written in order to facilitate discussion and instruction. We should not necessarily expect to see any explicit appeal for the application of the “scientific method” to moral philosophy, yet Dewey and Tufts’ preface is filled with such appeals:

²⁵⁸ MW5, 3.

²⁵⁹ MW2, 16.

²⁶⁰ Stevenson (1978), ix.

Theories are treated not as incompatible rival systems which must be accepted or rejected *en bloc*, but as more or less adequate methods of surveying the problems of conduct. This mode of approach facilitates the scientific estimation and determination of the part played by various factors in the complexity of moral life. The student is put in a position to judge the problems of conduct for himself. This emancipation and enlightenment of individual judgment is the chief aim of the theoretical portion [of the text].²⁶¹

We need look no further for concrete examples of Dewey's "experimental method" in practice. The "theoretical portion" of the *Ethics* is designed to provide students with "ways of passing judgment upon questions of specific validity; ways of determining the respective values of this or that particular judgment."²⁶² The text compels the student to "experiment" in the sense that it isolates the problem of moral conduct and allows for careful reflection. Once that reflection has been completed, the student will return to primary experience and will use the products of that reflection as a "bridge" between one experience and another. The student will be capable of providing a "controlled interpretation" of his or her primary experience.

In this preface, Dewey speaks of the "hope for a larger application of the scientific method to the problems of human welfare and progress,"²⁶³ and it seems reasonable to assume that the text is meant as a step toward realizing that hope. From this text, the student will learn to see his or her own habits as part of a continuous process, and such practicality, according to Dewey, defines education as well as science. The "science" of morals will only be "vital" so long as the student can engage "the questions which are occupying the minds of his contemporaries."²⁶⁴ And it will satisfy one of the criteria that Dewey sets out for science: it will provide "intellectual tools for

²⁶¹ MW5, 4. The emphasis is Dewey's.

²⁶² MW2, 21.

²⁶³ MW5, 5.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

the express purpose of facilitating our individual experiences....”²⁶⁵ As a “science,” moral theory demands of its students that it be used to solve problems or shed light on those things which resist the habits and customs of individuals. Perhaps more importantly, students will begin to understand moral theory as a “vital” **practice**, not merely as a subject for study.

But the references to ethics as a science are not confined to the preface to the text. On the first page of the introduction to both the 1908 and 1932 version of the *Ethics*, Dewey defines the field under consideration: “ethics is the science that deals with conduct, in so far as this is considered as right or wrong, good or bad.”²⁶⁶ Though the 1932 version of the text, according to Dewey and Tufts, might rightly have been called a “new book” and “two-thirds” of the edition was new, the introduction to the later version is almost identical to the first. The specifics of Dewey and Tufts’ approach to the science of morals might have changed in the space of the intervening twenty four years, but their justification and their understanding of the “science of morals” had not.

According to Dewey’s understanding of the “scientific method” and his remarks at the beginning of both editions of the *Ethics*, he claims to have undertaken an application of that method in moral theory. Apart from the claim, however, how does the text specifically employ the “experimental method” as Dewey understands it? First, it may be worth a brief summary of the elements of the experimental method already identified:

1. The experimental method will help us to understand a phenomenon “by bringing to light the exact conditions, and the only conditions, which are

²⁶⁵ MW3, 10.

²⁶⁶ MW5, 7; LW7, 9.

involved in its coming into being.”²⁶⁷

2. The experimental method provides the opportunity for others to repeat the experiment and confirm (or reject) the results.
3. The experimental method affords us the opportunity to isolate and control the phenomenon we are studying or to provide a “controlled interpretation” of the phenomenon.
4. The experimental method provides a “bridge” between universal statements and particular experiences and it obligates us to return the products of our reflection to primary experience. It thereby improves this experience.
5. The experimental method demonstrates that particulars are part of a longer, continuous process and have antecedents as well as consequences.

Though there is some overlap between these elements, this accounts for the advantages and characteristics of the experimental method as Dewey describes it in the 1902 and 1903 papers.

Recall that, in those same papers, Dewey refers to the “evolutionary” or “historical” method in morality as analogous to the scientific or experimental method in the natural and physical sciences. In the 1908 *Ethics*, the first third of the text is devoted to a historical survey of moral conduct from “Early Group Life” to “The Modern Period.”²⁶⁸ Through the historical account of moral conduct from primitive people forward, Dewey wanted to demonstrate the continuity of various aspects of moral conduct. With respect to “group life,” for instance, he noted that “It is beyond question that the ancestors of modern civilized races lived under the general type of group life which will be outlined, and that these types or their survivals are found among the great mass of peoples to-day.”²⁶⁹ In a chapter on “The Rationalizing and Socializing Agencies

²⁶⁷ See note 20 above.

²⁶⁸ MW5, Chapters 2 and 8 of Book I.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

in Early Society,” Dewey and Tufts describe three levels of conduct and trace their development from “savage life” to “present morality.”²⁷⁰

Thus, the plan of the *Ethics* and Dewey’s account of that plan appear to fulfill his own criteria for the “experimental method.” The historical approach of the book attempts to provide (1) the conditions under which moral conduct has come into being. As a textbook, it (2) affords the opportunity for others to repeat the “experiment” and confirm or reject the results. The textbook (3) isolates, chapter by chapter, various aspects of moral conduct, and Dewey’s preface and introduction encourage students to use the text to begin to develop their understanding of moral theory “with... simpler material” than that of complex, present moral life.²⁷¹ The discovery of “ethical principles” as a result of the use of the textbook should, according to Dewey, “give some guidance for the unsolved problems of life which continually present themselves for decision.”²⁷² The text thereby (4) provides a bridge between the products of reflection drawn from the study of ethics and the decisions a student must make on a daily basis. In giving “guidance” for solving problems, it improves primary experience. Finally, the history which demonstrates the conditions under which moral conduct has come into being also (5) provides insight into the continuous nature of moral conduct, from the “savage life” (antecedents) to the decisions (consequents) we will be forced to make as a result of our new, primary experiences.

Models

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 42.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 9.

²⁷² Ibid., 10.

There can be no question that Dewey wanted to bring the methods and the successes of the natural and physical sciences to philosophy through the use of the “experimental” or “scientific” method. As noted above, of course, the application of this method had more to do with a certain “logic” shared by experimentalism and philosophical inquiry than it did with hopes of achieving “quasi-mathematical” formulas in moral theory or reducing moral conduct to physical forms. An important part of the scientific method, however, is the use of models, and this is particularly true for the study of economics and other social sciences. Does Dewey’s account of the scientific method make use of anything similar?

As noted above in Chapter II, economists hardly agree about the definition of the word “model,” though there seems to be some consistency between the things to which the term is applied. The description offered above is worth repeating here: “good” models abstract from the world as it is and make numerous assumptions that may not apply in individual circumstances, but they do so in such a way as to demonstrate accuracy in prediction, understanding, and explanation of real world phenomena.²⁷³ According to this understanding of “model,” in the “scientific method,” the experiment may itself be said to serve as a model. Experiments isolate and abstract phenomena from the “world as it is” and they are used in order to generate information about universal or general conditions (i.e., assumptions that may not apply in individual circumstances), and, if done well, experiments should “demonstrate accuracy in prediction, understanding and explanation of real world phenomena.” Or, to put it in Dewey’s own terms, experimentalism in science and philosophy ought to provide us with improved experiences or, at the very least, the tools necessary to improve experience.

²⁷³ See “Economics, Models, and Theories,” Chapter II above.

Near the end of the previous chapter, Dewey's words on the "natural tendency in all sciences" were cited: that tendency is one "toward a substitution of artificial conceptual simplifications for the tangles of concrete empirical facts."²⁷⁴ Again, this description sounds quite like the characteristics that have already been identified in experimentalism: "artificial conceptual simplifications" are preferred over the "tangles of concrete empirical facts." As described above in the current chapter, this preference is one of the strengths of the experimental method. But the criticism leveled at economists for their use of models ought to apply to Dewey's "experimental method" as well. If the experiment (or model) begins by abstracting from "the world as it is" or from "concrete empirical facts" in order to simplify **and** if it is acknowledged that the method will make assumptions that may not apply in individual circumstances and may only hold true at a more general level, how can it be the case that the experiment (or model) will "demonstrate accuracy in prediction, understanding and explanation of real world phenomena"?

²⁷⁴ MW14, 86.

CHAPTER VII

THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD APPLIED

My claim that the experimental method is one of the most underdeveloped themes in Dewey's work is largely based on the paucity of examples provided by Dewey of the application of this method in any field other than the natural and physical sciences. I do not dispute that Dewey provides evidence of the work of experimentalism in these sciences, but I have claimed that there are few examples of this method applied to philosophy or any other traditionally non-empirical field. Though the example of Dewey's *Ethics* discussed near the end of Chapter VI above serves as an important counter to that claim, Dewey's subsequent works should have provided further examples.

After attempting to identify several possible examples of the experimental method as it might be applied in philosophy and other instances where such examples should occur but do not, I have included a brief account of current work in experimental economics. This work bears an uncanny resemblance to Dewey's account of the experimental method, and I will argue that this is the sort of thing that would qualify as a "pragmatic economics." Dewey himself might easily have anticipated the growth of this field, as the self-descriptions of experimental economists will show by their striking similarity to Dewey's own words. Yet Dewey seemed, for whatever reason, to shy away from specific, concrete examples of the experimental method in practice. That is a tendency that is troubling for an author who argues that, for a philosophy to be worthwhile, it must pass the test of "ordinary experience" and practice.

From Abstraction to “Ordinary Experience”

The question, in short, that needs to be addressed by Dewey (as well as economists) is how to bridge the gap between the abstraction necessary for experimentalism (and modeling) and the facts of “concrete” or “real world” experience. If experiments or models are to have any hope of improving human experience (by accuracy in predicting, understanding and explaining phenomena), there must be some connection between them. And it is hardly unfair to raise these sorts of questions with respect to Dewey’s account of the “experimental method.” He himself sets the standard in *Experience and Nature* when he criticizes his philosophical predecessors and their unwillingness to employ empirical methodology in their study:

But the problems to which non-empirical method gives rise in philosophy are blocks to inquiry, blind alleys; they are puzzles rather than problems, solved only by calling the original material of primary experience, “phenomenal,” mere appearance, mere impressions, or by some other disparaging name.¶ Thus there is here supplied, I think, a first-rate test of the value of any philosophy which is offered to us: Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful?...Or does it become a mystery that these ordinary things should be what they are; and are philosophic concepts left to dwell in separation in some technical realm of their own?²⁷⁵

From as early as 1902 until the end of his life more than fifty years later, Dewey continued to argue that the use of the experimental method and empiricism in philosophy would cure the ills of non-empirical philosophy. But what evidence does he provide in support of this argument?

This is not an insignificant question. If Dewey cannot support his claim, that philosophy as it has been previously practiced is inferior to that which he champions, we

²⁷⁵ LW1, 17-18.

have good cause for concern. If the experimental, scientific, or empirical method is at the heart of Dewey's philosophy, yet he cannot demonstrate that this method avoids "rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before,"²⁷⁶ his philosophy will be subject to the same criticisms he makes of his predecessors. How, precisely, will the experimental method (or the use of models) make "the things of ordinary experience" less "opaque than they were before" if this method turns away from "ordinary experience" in order to understand it? Further, exactly how are the products of this reflection or experimentation later employed in ordinary experience? In what sense is it the case that empiricism in philosophy demands a return to ordinary experience? Why is the empiricist any more likely than the non-empiricist to "refer back to ordinary life-experiences" when it is acknowledged that one of the significant aspects of experimentation is an "isolation" from such experience?

It would seem that, for a pragmatist, the obvious answer to these questions would lie in the use of concrete examples similar to Dewey's account of the use of the "historical" or "evolutionary" method in morality. If the test of a philosophy is whether it "renders" our "ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments... more luminous to us" and whether it "makes our dealings" with these experiences "more fruitful," what could better recommend Dewey's empirical philosophy than a demonstration that it passes this test? In order to show that his philosophy passes such a test, would it not seem reasonable that Dewey should have provided numerous examples of how empiricism improves "ordinary" experience? The best test of an experiment or model would be an example from "ordinary" experience that shows the experiment/model's "accuracy in prediction, understanding and explanation of real world phenomena." Sandra Rosenthal

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 18.

makes this point in her article, “John Dewey: Scientific Methodology and Lived Immediacy:”

As Dewey stresses, ‘The trouble then, with the conclusions of philosophy is not in the least that they are results of reflection and theorizing,’ and Dewey in developing a ‘philosophy framed upon the pattern of experimental inquiry,’ must himself go beyond description. In turn, the test of the adequacy of any philosophic theorizing must be found in its continual verification in lived experience.²⁷⁷

Yet examples of this verification are rare in the thirty-seven volumes of Dewey’s collected works. The following is a sampling of such examples as well as reflections on places where these examples do **not** appear (though one might expect them to). It should be noted that this is not intended to be an exhaustive listing of examples from Dewey’s work of the application of the experimental method.

*Liberalism and Social Action*²⁷⁸

Liberalism and Social Action was a series of lectures that Dewey published in 1935. In a chapter entitled “Renascent Liberalism,” Dewey spoke of the disparity between politics and the physical and natural sciences. As he had previously done with respect to moral theory, Dewey argued that progress in politics has been dwarfed by progress in the sciences. One imagines that Dewey believed every person in his audience easily grasped the evidence for this argument. In 1935, Dewey thought it quite evident that the “contrast between the state of intelligence in politics and in the physical control of nature”²⁷⁹ demonstrated that the field of politics had fallen far behind the physical sciences. This certainly matches his earlier accounts of success; that is, success was to be

²⁷⁷ Rosenthal (1992), 154.

²⁷⁸ LW11, 1-65.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 52.

measured by a practice or discipline's ability to exercise control (or a "controlled interpretation") over the phenomena which it studied. If one were asked to judge the political stability of most of the world in 1935 in contrast to the extent to which science had successfully solved problems that had plagued men for thousands of years, it is hard to imagine that any reasonable person would have had more confidence in the potential of politics to improve his life than he would have in science.

Not surprisingly, Dewey goes on to argue that the study and practice of politics would be greatly aided by appeals to the "experimental method" and treating "social problems" in terms of "means and consequences."²⁸⁰ In other instances from Dewey's work, that alone would have had to have served as sufficient proof of his argument in favor of the "experimental method," or this might simply have been complemented by some of the characteristics of the method as listed above. In this instance, however, he discusses experimentalism and its application specifically. After acknowledging problems of "class conflict," Dewey identifies the problem to be solved: "precisely *how* conflicting claims are to be settled in the interest of the widest possible contribution to the interest of all—or at least of the great majority."²⁸¹ According to Dewey's argument, democracy itself is the means of applying the scientific method to this problem.

Democracy can solve the problem of conflicting claims among citizens by virtue of its ability to draw out these claims into an open forum for discussion. Democracy seems, on this account, to serve as a laboratory for testing these conflicting claims against one another with a wide audience. In the same way that the scientist takes note of the conditions and details of his experiment in order that others might confirm or reject it by

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 56. The emphasis is Dewey's.

repeating his experiment, the “method of democracy... is to bring these conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised, where they can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests than are represented by either of them separately.”²⁸²

Dewey is unusually specific in the examples he provides:

There is, for example, a clash of interests between munition manufacturers and most of the rest of the population. The more the respective claims of the two are publicly and scientifically weighed, the more likely it is that the public interest will be disclosed and made effective. There is an undoubted objective clash of interests between finance-capitalism that controls the means of production and whose profit is served by maintaining relative scarcity, and idle workers and hungry consumers. But what generates violent strife is failure to bring the conflict into the light of intelligence where the conflicting interests can be adjudicated in behalf of the interest of the great majority.... The “experimentalist” is one who would see to it that the method depended upon by all in some degree in every democratic community be followed through to completion.²⁸³

There is much to be learned about Dewey’s philosophy from these examples. First, the nature of the conflict in both cases is that a small group (munition manufacturers or finance-capitalists who control production and receive profit) has interests which are opposed to the interests (safety or financial stability) of a large group (the public or “idle workers and hungry consumers”). In a democracy, such conflicts must be resolved in a manner other than they would be in a non-democracy. In an undemocratic society, the ruling party or individual would be able to resolve such conflicts to their (or his/her) satisfaction without any appeal to either group’s interests.

The resolution to such conflicts in a democracy will involve the “laboratory habit of mind,” but this is not a feature of democracy that occurs automatically. The resolution in every case in a democratic society, it would appear, is to identify the public interest

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

and make it “effective.” In the first case (that of the munition manufacturer and the public), Dewey claims that the resolution will be had by a “public and scientific” weighing of the claims. In the second case (that of the finance-capitalist and the idle worker/hungry consumer), “violent strife” can be avoided by a public “adjudication” of the conflicting interests that will, in turn, make the public’s interest more effective.

If this process were automatic or inherent in a democratic society, there would be no need for the “experimentalist” Dewey champions. The public airing and adjudication of competing claims would occur as a part of the inherent machinery of democracy. Since the democracy with which Dewey was concerned had survived more than a hundred years,²⁸⁴ it is true that there must have been some sense in which this had been happening. If nothing else, popular elections and majority rule would have resolved such conflicts. But Dewey must have believed that a more intelligent means of resolution existed and that the democratic process could be improved. If that was not his conclusion, one must wonder what advantage there could be to talk of “experimentalism.” In short, if Dewey thought that the status quo was sufficient or that conflict resolution was ideal in democracies, why should his philosophy have had any political examples or goals? Why, in fact, should it even have been worth teaching, publishing, or pursuing?

Recall that Dewey’s proposed test of philosophy is whether it “end[s] in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render[s] them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our

²⁸⁴ In fact, Dewey had witnessed the centennial in 1876 when he was just seventeen. His father had also fought in for the Union in the Civil War, and one wonders how his father’s involvement in that conflict (as well as his absence in the first four years of Dewey’s life) affected his views about the stability of American democracy.

dealings with them more fruitful.”²⁸⁵ In order for his philosophy to pass this test with respect to these examples of conflict and resolution, we must assume that Dewey believed the means of conflict resolution in democracy could be aided and made “more significant, more luminous” by virtue of his own empirical philosophy.

As Dewey aged, his writings became more and more political, and it seems clear that he thought his own empirical philosophy could help improve society at large, as well as (or, perhaps, by means of improved) moral philosophy, aesthetics, and logic. The “experimentalist,” then, adds something new to democracy when he “see[s] to it that the method depended upon by all in some degree in every democratic community be followed through to completion.”²⁸⁶ The implication seems to be that “the method” (and I must presume it is the “experimental” or “scientific” method to which he refers) may have its beginnings in the nature of democracy, but that it will not be followed through to its completion without the efforts of the “experimentalist” or the adoption of the laboratory habit of mind.

These are, indeed, specific examples of conflicts that could be better resolved by the use of the “experimental” or “scientific” method, but how, exactly, does this method work? Or, in other words, what precisely does the “experimentalist” **do**? One part of the experimentalist’s work might be “bringing the conflict into the light of intelligence,” and, in fact, that fits very nicely with Dewey’s words near the end of *Experience and Nature* where he describes his own philosophy as the method of “intelligence.”²⁸⁷ This would

²⁸⁵ LW1, 18.

²⁸⁶ LW11, 56. In contrast to a number of remarks made in the various introductions for the Collected Works, I do not find Dewey’s prose to be always “forceful and clear” (MW14: ix), and I find this particular sentence to be a good example of the lack of clarity in much of Dewey’s writing. This sentence is undoubtedly intended to be a “forceful” example of the value of “experimentalism,” but it is almost incoherent as written.

²⁸⁷ LW1, 326 and elsewhere.

also explain Dewey's own actions and his work outside of the academy in popular magazines and in political causes. Yet there must be more to this method than simply "bringing" such conflicts "to light." Once the conflict has been exposed to a larger audience, what is the experimentalist's next step?

In the first example, Dewey speaks of "scientifically" weighing the "respective claims" of those engaged in the conflict. What does it mean, precisely, for the experimentalist to weigh, "scientifically," the claims of the munitions manufacturers and the public? The answer to this question is not clear, yet it is crucial if Dewey's philosophy is to be successful.

Art as Experience

We might expect one of the most interesting applications of the scientific or experimental method to a traditionally "non-scientific" field to appear in one of Dewey's best-known works, *Art as Experience*. Dewey envisions his own philosophy as revolutionary in the sense that it will change the way philosophers look at their own subject matter, and aesthetics would thus reasonably be an area of philosophy where the innovative nature of his pragmatism could be demonstrated. An explanation of how the scientific method might operate in art should provide valuable insight into Dewey's conception of philosophical thinking.

Though Dewey acknowledges that the growth of science as a part of the modern world has had detrimental effects on art, he noted that there were also "favorable" effects of science that could be seen through art. Given that Dewey hoped, in *Art as Experience*, to restore the connection between art and primary experience, it is not surprising that he

thought science would play some role in this restoration. Indeed, that is the first “favorable” fact he references with respect to science and art: “science tends to show that man is a part of nature....”²⁸⁸ Thus, science can provide a useful model for aestheticians and artists, and Dewey argues that the relationship between man and nature has “always been the actuating spirit of art.”²⁸⁹ Be that as it may, however, this tells us little about how the experimental method might be applied to art and how that application will be particularly valuable.

Dewey continues, identifying other parallels between art and science. Science grows from the need to solve problems, and, according to Dewey’s aesthetic theory, so does art. Science also shows us the way our surroundings resist us, and this resistance, once experienced, “will furnish new materials for fine art.”²⁹⁰ Dewey also credits science with “liberating the human spirit” and drawing attention to experience, and both of these things are beneficial to art.²⁹¹ Again, this tells us that science and its products have been “favorable” to art, but this does not tell us how the “experimentalist” will approach art and how he might bring the scientific or experimental method to art itself.

This is an important distinction, too: if Dewey’s work does no more than demonstrate that science has had positive effects on culture and academic disciplines and fields of study, he might well fall prey to Richard Rorty’s suggestion that he was little more than a “kibitzer” or “an intellectual historian.”²⁹² Modern science has undoubtedly been very influential in many respects, but relating this fact hardly makes one philosophically interesting or original. There must be more to Dewey’s discussion of the

²⁸⁸ LW10, 341.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 342.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Rorty (1982), 73.

relation of art and science than the fact that one has had a positive or negative influence on the other. Instead, he must make good on his word and provide some evidence for the claims he makes throughout his work, that the methods of the natural and physical sciences should be brought to bear on ethics, art, economics, politics, and other fields. If this claim is true, there should be explicit examples of how this should be done (given that it is a new way of philosophizing) and the consequences for doing so. If it is true that art can benefit from the “laboratory habit of mind,” Dewey should be prepared to defend this claim and one would expect him to make this defense in his most significant work on art.

Though he does appeal hopefully to the notion that “the experimental outlook” will “become thoroughly acclimatized” in “common culture” and that “the experimental attitude” will become “thoroughly naturalized,”²⁹³ Dewey hardly gives us any insight as to the specific activities of the experimentalist in the reconstructed aesthetics he envisions. The one possible clue he provides is this: “But to judge justly, we have to see science as things will be when the experimental attitude is thoroughly naturalized. And art in particular will always be distracted or else soft and overrefined when it lacks familiar things for its material.”²⁹⁴ The suggestion is that, once the experimental attitude has been “thoroughly naturalized,” art will have “familiar things for its material” and will thereby avoid the danger of becoming “distracted or else soft and overrefined.” The experimentalist, then, will effect the introduction (or re-introduction) of “familiar things” as the material for art.

²⁹³ LW10, 342.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

Of course, this conclusion is the product of implication, not an explicit statement made by Dewey. A reconstruction of aesthetic theory and of art, as Dewey sees it, will bring about the end of the bifurcation of the “useful” and “fine” arts which he laments throughout his work. It will end the subjugation of those who are seen to be merely “means” or “instruments,” existing to support those who seek “higher” ends such as contemplation. According to Dewey, art that has been the beneficiary of the “laboratory habit of mind” will make the world a better place for the “mass of men and women who do the useful work of the world.”²⁹⁵ Undoubtedly, Dewey’s vision of a world where the activities of the “common” man and woman are seen as part of a continuum with the work of the greatest painters and sculptors is one that is both hopeful and appealing. But it is not at all clear, at least not in *Art as Experience*, how his own philosophy or the activities of the “experimentalist” can effect that change.

Dewey does describe the artist as an “experimenter,” but this is something that is apparently true of artists by their nature, not by design:

There is...a tendency among lay critics to confine experimentation to scientists in the laboratory. Yet one of the essential traits of the artist is that he is born an experimenter. Without this trait he becomes a poor or a good academician. The artist is compelled to be an experimenter because he has to express an intensely individualized experience through means and materials that belong to the common and public world. This problem cannot be solved once for all. It is met in every new work undertaken. Otherwise an artist repeats himself and becomes esthetically dead. Only because the artist operates experimentally does he open new fields of experience and disclose new aspects and qualities in familiar scenes and objects.²⁹⁶

This is, unquestionably, an engaging description of the artist as “experimenter,” and it certainly qualifies as an example of the experimental method as it is applied to art. But

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 347.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 148-149.

this is most decidedly **not** an example of how the experimental method might conscientiously be employed to improve the quality of art or of aesthetic theory. This is an account of how the experimental method **already** operates in art because the artist is “born an experimenter.” This sheds no light on how I, as one interested in the study of art, might make use of the experimental method, and, while I trust that Dewey has an answer to this query, I am unable to find it in this volume.

Experience and Nature

In many ways, *Experience and Nature* is Dewey’s most important work with respect to the scientific or experimental method and its role in his philosophy. It might be argued that *Experience and Nature* is simply Dewey’s most important work on any topic. John Herman Randall, Jr., in his memorial remarks at a tribute to Dewey at Columbia, called it his “best book,”²⁹⁷ and, even in a critical review of the book, George Santayana called it “the weightiest and most incisive account he has given of his philosophy.”²⁹⁸ Sidney Hook said that it was “both the most suggestive and most difficult of [Dewey’s] writings....”²⁹⁹ It will serve our purposes here because of its significance in Dewey’s corpus of work, but also because it provides several instances of the experimental method in application.

First, Dewey provides not only examples of how the scientific method can be applied to areas outside the natural and physical sciences, he also provides an example of how the experimental method is applied **in** the physical sciences. This might sound odd and seem redundant to the current thesis, as I have already stipulated that there are many

²⁹⁷ Randall (1953), 3.

²⁹⁸ Santayana (1925), 343.

²⁹⁹ Hook (1988), vii.

instances of this in Dewey's work. While it is difficult to find examples in Dewey's work of the experimental method applied in non-traditional fields, however, it is almost as difficult to find **specific** examples of the experimental method applied in a scientist's work. For the most part, Dewey's descriptions of the scientific method as used in science are general accounts of how the experimentalist or scientist operates, not how a specific scientist (say a chemist, physicist, or biologist) conducts his or her work. *Experience and Nature* cites the work of Bacon, Newton, and Einstein and discusses how the work of each shaped (or should have shaped) philosophical thinking.

The example in the opening chapters of *Experience and Nature* is a geologist, and while the description of his work is rather lengthy, it is worth excerpting almost in its entirety:

A geologist living in 1928 tells us about events that happened not only before he was born but millions of years before any human being came into existence on this earth. He does so by starting from things that are now the material of experience. ...The geologist did not leap from the thing he can see and touch to some event in by-gone ages; he collated this observed thing with many others, of different kinds, found all over the globe; the results of his comparisons he then compared with data of other experiences, say, the astronomer's. He translates, that is, observed coexistences into non-observed, inferred sequences. Finally he dates his object, placing it in an order of events. By the same sort of method he predicts that at certain places some things not yet experienced will be observed, and then he takes pains to bring them within the scope of experience. The scientific conscience is, moreover, so sensitive with respect to the necessity of experience that when it reconstructs the past it is not fully satisfied with inferences drawn from even a large and cumulative mass of uncontradicted evidence; it sets to work to institute conditions of heat and pressure and moisture, etc., so as actually to reproduce in experiment that which he has inferred.³⁰⁰

Again, it is worth remembering that Dewey is explicit elsewhere that he does not expect the philosopher to engage in precisely the same sort of activity that the geologist (or other

³⁰⁰ LW1, 12.

scientist) does. Instead, there is a “logic” to the geologist’s activity that ought to be shared by the philosopher. Foremost among the other things that a geologist does is that he “habitually treat[s] experience as a starting point.”³⁰¹

Thus, the philosopher will have to treat experience as a starting point. That much is clear. Further, the philosopher will want to look at a great deal of evidence before and after drawing conclusions. In some manner, the philosopher should attempt to reproduce “that which he has inferred,” though clearly, that will not come in the form of a laboratory experiment (even if it should be accomplished with the “laboratory habit of mind”). It is this final step that seems to demand of Dewey that he provides an example, even if simple and therefore artificial, of how this might work in practice. We can understand the “logic” of the experiment as an attempt to test in practice that which we have inferred in theory, but how, precisely, does this work for the philosopher? Where is the “laboratory” of the philosopher? What sorts of “experiments” does he or she conduct? Or, as Richard Rorty suggests, is “talk of ‘observation and experiment’...as irrelevant to the accomplishment of the project [in *Experience and Nature*] as it was to the great predecessor of all such works of philosophy-as-criticism-of-culture, Hegel’s *Phenomenology*”?³⁰²

The geologist begins and ends with experience: he takes observable facts about the nature of his surroundings, he thinks about them and classifies and compares them with other facts, and then, using the hypothesis he has drawn from this reflection, he tests his inferences in a laboratory through experiment. The experiment, though it entails artificial surrounding and control, provides further experience. It is a link between the

³⁰¹ Ibid., 13.

³⁰² Rorty, 74.

primary experience which prompted the geologist's activities and the reflection he engaged in with the intent to solve some problem. But the problem itself demands that he returns to primary experience with the results of his reflection. This is generally true of the work of scientists, Dewey thinks, but it is seldom true of the work of philosophers.

Perhaps, then, given the nature of the book, it is not surprising that we find in *Experience and Nature* something resembling concrete examples of the experimental method applied to the work of philosophers. Though most of these examples do not follow the specificity of the description of the geologist, they come as close as anything Dewey provides elsewhere. The first example appears in Dewey's discussion of "selective emphasis" and its place in the "empirical method." If philosophy is to follow the logic and model of the experimental method, it will (as scientists themselves do) "state when and where and why the act of selection took place, and thus enable others to repeat it and test its worth."³⁰³

The philosopher must begin her work by explaining why a particular topic has been chosen for study, and, further, the philosopher must then continue to acknowledge any simplifications in the subject matter or prejudices and biases of which she is aware:

Selective choice, denoted as an empirical event, reveals the basis and bearing of intellectual simplifications; they then cease to be of such a self-enclosed nature as to be affairs only of opinion and argument, admitting no alternatives save complete acceptance or rejection. Choice that is disguised or denied is the source of those astounding differences of philosophic belief that startle the beginner and become the plaything of the expert. Choice that is avowed is an experiment to be tried on its merits and tested by its results. Under all the captions that are called immediate knowledge, or self-sufficient certitude of belief, whether logical, esthetic or epistemological, there is something selected for a purpose, and hence not simple, not self-evident and not intrinsically eulogizable.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ LW1, 34.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 35.

The “empirical” philosopher must endeavor to acknowledge choices as well as prejudices and biases. The very act of admitting that there are choices made by the philosopher in her work constitutes an experiment, according to Dewey. The empirical method in philosophy begins with acknowledging the simple fact that one subject was chosen for study over another. A treatise on morality must begin with an explanation of its origin or the author’s impetus for undertaking it. Without such an explanation, the treatise can only be an “affair of opinion and argument.” This is an important claim: Dewey is arguing that the work of philosophers can only be legitimately philosophical if it is prefaced by the proper “evolutionary” account. This account justifies what follows as truly “intelligent” or philosophical, instead of mere bias and opinion on the author’s part. To be more, it must be anchored in primary experience. The philosopher must “State the purpose so that it may be re-experienced, and its value and the pertinency of selection undertaken in its behalf may be tested.”³⁰⁵

In the physical and natural sciences, the scientist provides a detailed account of the environment in which he conducts his experiments. In philosophy, the philosopher must give as detailed an account as possible of the environment in which she conducts her work. In the same way that the historical method applied to morality will help ascertain the origins of moral custom and principle, the philosopher’s acknowledgement of the choices she made (or the problem she intended to solve) in taking up a particular subject will help ascertain the origins of her conclusions. In short, it will give others the opportunity to test her conclusions against the problems they are intended to solve. If the conclusions fall short—that is, if the conclusions of the study fail to solve the problem they are meant to address—others can reject the work of the philosopher. In the same

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

manner, if the geologist concludes that the earth's core is composed of a particular mineral and he documents his work, and if other geologists test his results by repeating his work and fail to conclude that this mineral exists at the earth's core, his work will be rejected by science. A philosopher whose work addresses the problem of the relationship of the mind and body and draws conclusions which do not "render" "ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments" "more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful,"³⁰⁶ should suffer a fate similar to that of the geologist whose conclusions cannot be verified by his peers.

That this is not the case in philosophy is, unfortunately, evidence of the philosopher's emphasis on the "cognitive" or non-empirical and her refuge in the same. Dewey charges philosophers with a sort of "malpractice:" that is, they take up questions that are of no relevance to "ordinary experience" or, if they should deign to address those things which are of interest to the "common man," they do so in such a way that their work can never be subjected to testing. Sixteen years earlier, in his important essay "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy,"³⁰⁷ Dewey described the sort of philosophy that **could** be subjected to testing: "a philosophy that humbles its pretensions to the work of projecting hypotheses for the education and conduct of mind, individual and social, is thereby subjected to test by the way in which the ideas it propounds work out in practice."³⁰⁸ As long as philosophers busy themselves with things that hold no interest for the mass of people and as long as their results are little more than the "plaything of the expert," philosophers cannot be found to be **wrong**. They are, sadly, a bit like the emperor's courtiers: at once assuring everyone that his new clothes are splendid while

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 18.

³⁰⁷ MW4, 3-14.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 13.

they stand unperturbed by the murmurings of those around them who protest that they do not even **see** these clothes. The alternative, an empirical philosophy, shows that “In having modesty forced upon it, philosophy also acquires responsibility.”³⁰⁹

As damning a criticism as this might be and as interesting as Dewey’s general account of the value of empiricism in philosophy is, this is still a far cry from the specificity of the example of the geologist, the munitions manufacturer, or the finance-capitalist. That sort of specificity is not to be found in *Experience and Nature* in brief examples, however. The remainder of the work includes the best concrete examples he provides anywhere of the ways in which the empirical method might operate in philosophy, but these examples are also provided in some of the most complex and dense prose Dewey has to offer anywhere. In each chapter, he takes some problem from the history of philosophy and examines traditional and conventional approaches to these problems, then he subjects these approaches to criticism from the standpoint of an empirical philosophy. He considers metaphysical problems like the nature of existence (“Existence as Precarious and Stable”) and “the question of laws, mechanical uniformities, . . . ends, purposes, uses and enjoyments.”³¹⁰ He also takes up epistemological problems (“Nature, Mind and the Subject,” “Nature Life and Body-Mind,” “Existence, Ideas and Consciousness) and, in a chapter that anticipates his later work, *Art as Experience*, aesthetics (“Experience, Nature and Art”). Thus, it is fair to say that, if one seeks to find Dewey’s concrete examples of the experimental method in operation in traditionally non-empirical fields, *Experience and Nature* is the best resource

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ LW1, pp.42 ff., 5.

available for this. Whether these examples are sufficient to support Dewey's conclusions regarding this method is a question I will return to in my conclusion.

Logic: The Theory of Inquiry

Dewey's *Logic* was one of the final substantial works of his life. Indeed, Dewey may well have regarded it as the most important book he ever wrote.³¹¹ Though the subject of the work is, like so many of Dewey's works, a proposed reconstruction (this time in logic), the theme of the experimental method, its success and its significance pervades the *Logic* as it does the remainder of his work. In his introduction to the volume³¹² in the *Collected Works*, Ernest Nagel describes the *Logic* as a continuation of the project Dewey had begun more than thirty five years earlier in an essay cited above, "Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality."³¹³ Nagel notes that Dewey's concern in "reconstructing" logic was to give it the benefit of the successes of the methodology of science.

Dewey believed that, in order for logic to be relevant to the modern world, it must avail itself of the advantages of the methods of modern science. He argued that, in the same way little progress had been made in moral theory because it had rejected or ignored empiricism, logic had not progressed since Aristotle's time. Despite the fact that Aristotle operated from an ontological foundation that science (and, more specifically, Darwin) had rendered foreign to modernity, modern men still accepted a logic based on this ontology. Nagel calls the *Logic* "the outcome of a prolonged effort by Dewey to

³¹¹ In his biography of Dewey, Jay Martin cites a meeting between Herbert Schneider and Dewey in 1938 during which, Dewey told Schneider, "I've just handed the publisher what I regard as my chief work, ... my formulation, the best I can do it, of my life's work." (Martin, 425)

³¹² EW12.

³¹³ MW3, 3-39. See Chapter 5 above.

analyze and codify the general principles he thought were operative in what he believed were the most successful attempts—namely, those in the natural sciences—to gain reliable knowledge.”³¹⁴ The *Logic* is thus an ideal place to look for Dewey’s account of the experimental method and its application outside of the natural and physical sciences. Not only is the book arguably the most developed work of his philosophy, but it also explicitly addresses Dewey’s conception of the experimental method. Moreover, Nagel suggests that the book itself is a “hypothesis” and that Dewey acknowledged he would have to rely on his successors to finish the “testing” of his hypothesis for him (Dewey was seventy nine when the book was published).³¹⁵

Beyond the experimental or scientific method itself, Dewey depends on the natural and physical sciences to support his account of logic. He devotes the first part of the *Logic* to establishing the importance of biology to any logical theory. Though this does not provide us with a concrete example of the practical application of the experimental method, it does reiterate Dewey’s conviction that there is no disconnect between the natural and the intellectual. This serves as a reminder to those who have been overly influenced by non-empirical philosophy: “It is obvious without argument that when men inquire they employ their eyes and ears, their hands and their brains. These organs, sensory, motor or central, are biological.”³¹⁶ In the same way that it is appropriate (and obligatory) for the philosopher to make use of the facts of biology, chemistry, and physics when describing human inquiry, it is appropriate (and obligatory, if progress is to be made) for the philosopher to make use of the methods of those disciplines.

³¹⁴ Nagel (1991), vii-viii.

³¹⁵ Ibid., viii.

³¹⁶ LW12, 23.

If *Experience and Nature* provides Dewey's account of the traditional problems of philosophy as they might be treated by the "experimental method," the *Logic* stands as one long example of the experimental method in application. In short, Dewey believed that inquiry was experiment, and in the *Logic* we see that there need be little concern for **how** the experimental method might be applied in philosophy. The fact is, according to Dewey, we cannot help but experiment when we philosophize. The problem is not that experimentalism has not been applied to philosophical matters, but that philosophers have not acknowledged this application. Still, this does not exempt Dewey from the responsibility of providing concrete examples of precisely how experimentalism works in logic, epistemology, moral theory, or aesthetics, and the *Logic* does an admirable job of answering this obligation.

In a chapter entitled "The Pattern of Inquiry," Dewey attempts to lay out the pattern by which inquiry takes place and how this pattern has been adopted, to its credit, by modern experimental science. But how should that pattern work with a topic that has traditionally been considered to be within the purview of philosophy? One such topic might be that of reasoning or, as Dewey describes it as a part of this pattern of inquiry, the process of "developing the meaning-contents in their relations to one another...."³¹⁷ Not only does this subject provide an example of how inquiry applies the experimental method in practice, but Dewey follows this example immediately with a comparison of the process to "scientific reasoning."³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Though perhaps that should be amended to "philosophy *and* psychology," and there are good reasons for thinking that Dewey would have considered the two fields as one (not the least of which is that most philosophy departments—including the one he did his graduate work in at Hopkins and the one he chaired at Chicago—during his early career were departments of philosophy *and* psychology).

³¹⁸ LW12, 115.

According to Dewey's example, in the course of our primary experience, we are regularly presented with an "indeterminate situation" or a situation that involves us in a "troubled state of affairs."³¹⁹ Changes or obstacles in our environment cause us, as biological beings, to attempt to restore an "equilibrium" or, in philosophical terms, stability or certainty. The recognition that equilibrium needs to be restored, even if at a subconscious level, begins the process of inquiry. We judge a situation to be "problematic"³²⁰ and therefore in need of some sort of resolution, and we do everything within our power to produce such a resolution. Meaning is, for Dewey, the result of this process, and we can only gain meaning through a return from the "cognitive" stages of problem-solving to the pre-cognitive or "primary" experience. Our return to the unstable nature of "ordinary" experience may present many possible meanings to us for the products of our reflection. If we accept the first (or any) meaning that is suggested, inquiry has come to an end.³²¹ If, however, we engage in "reasoning," we will compare possible meanings to others in our accepted "system" of meanings. We will try to restore the continuity to our habits and the system of meanings which was already a part of our being prior to our encounter of the "indeterminate situation."

Though an important part of the process of inquiry is reflection and abstraction, the conclusion of the process is a return to ordinary experience. This is the only way that meaning can be had. Dewey details the process of reasoning:

If such and such a relation of meanings is accepted, then we are committed to such and such other relations of meanings because of their membership in the same system. Through a series of intermediate meanings, a meaning is finally reached which is more clearly *relevant* to the problem in hand than the originally suggested idea. It indicates operations which

³¹⁹ Ibid., 109, 111.

³²⁰ Ibid., 111.

³²¹ Ibid., 115.

can be performed to test its applicability, whereas the original idea is usually too vague to determine crucial operations. In other words, the idea or meaning when developed in discourse directs the activities which, when executed, provide needed evidential material.”³²²

It requires little imagination to make the connection between this description and “scientific reasoning.” The possible meaning or meanings serve as “an hypothesis,” and this hypothesis is “developed in relation to other conceptual structures until it receives a form in which it can instigate and direct an experiment that will disclose precisely those conditions which have the maximum possible force in determining whether the hypothesis should be accepted or rejected.”³²³

Inquiry is itself a form of experimentation; thus, it follows that any field which conscientiously utilizes inquiry (in the same way that individuals do instinctively and through habit) will also engage in a form of experimentation. An empirical philosophy would engage in experimentation if it treated theories and conclusions as hypotheses. It should next develop that hypothesis “in relation to other conceptual structures until it receives a form in which it can instigate and direct an experiment” which will allow the hypothesis to be tested. Upon testing, the hypothesis will either be accepted or rejected. In the end, of course, it matters little whether we actually call a particular conclusion or theory in philosophy a “hypothesis.” Dewey was, I believe, less concerned with nomenclature than he was with methodology. The important question is whether the conclusion or theory is subject to verification by other philosophers and, ultimately, by those who will benefit from enlarged meaning in ordinary experience (i.e., everyone). In order for such verification to occur, philosophy cannot continue as a non-empirical study.

³²² Ibid. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

³²³ Ibid., 115-116.

Instead, it must be acknowledge the methods of experimentalism that occur in inquiry itself.

Experimental Economics

One might imagine that philosophy is one of the few academic or intellectual disciplines that might survive as a non-empirical discipline in a world that relies heavily on the practical problem-solving efficacy of the natural sciences. Certainly, the humanities, more generally, might seem less conducive to the use of hypothesis, experimentation, and verification by testing. It seems, however, less likely that the same might be said for the social sciences. As “sciences,” we might expect that empiricism, a “laboratory habit of mind,” and the testing of conclusions constitute the “tools of the trade.” Dewey certainly gave the social sciences more credit in this respect than he did philosophy. Yet his repeated calls for the “naturalization” of the experimental method were not more influential in the social sciences than they were in philosophy. Though there are likely more parallels between the methods of the natural and physical sciences and the social sciences than there are between the former and philosophy, “experimentation” has not, until recently, been regarded as one of the standard tools of economics. Even now, after the recent awarding of the Nobel Prize in economics to an experimentalist, there are many economists who are suspicious of the work of their peers which emerges from “laboratories.”

Nonetheless, the use of experimentalism in economics is an important example for Dewey’s theory of pragmatism. If, as Dewey suggests, the experimental method can be brought to bear on fields that have, traditionally, been “non-empirical,” there is further

support for the use of this method in philosophy. In short, if philosophy can be shown to be one of the few areas that has not made use of the experimental method in light of the progress it has generated in other fields, Dewey's case for its application in philosophy (despite the paucity of examples he himself provides) may well be strengthened. His claim that the lack of progress in moral theory is striking and instructive next to that of the physical, natural and social sciences will undoubtedly be supported if the method can be shown to have effected progress in traditionally non-empirical social sciences.

Beyond the natural sciences, experimentalism has certainly been used in psychology, but it was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that it made an appearance in economics. Then, economists began applying the "laboratory methods of inquiry to the study of motivated human interactive decision behavior in social contexts governed by explicit or implicit rules."³²⁴ "Explicit" rules are those rules which govern a particular example or experiment. For instance, an experimenter may instruct a subject that he or she is not allowed to conduct trades with a particular sort of individual or group. Explicit rules may also be the laws which govern commerce, whether generally or in a particular context. Some auctions, for example, have very specific rules about how bidding occurs. "Implicit" rules, on the other hand, "are the norms, traditions and habits that people bring to the laboratory as part of their cultural and biological evolutionary heritage...."³²⁵ Explicit rules, then, can generally be controlled by the experimenter while implicit rules, generally, cannot be controlled.

The purpose of using experiments in economic study is to better understand "motivated human interactive decision behavior in social contexts governed by explicit or

³²⁴ Smith (2003), 1.

³²⁵ Ibid.

implicit rules.” Thus, the purpose of experimental economics is, as much as possible, to replicate the conditions of “ordinary” experience. Ordinary experience is full of rules, whether those rules are explicit (as in the case of actual laws and rules created and enforced by governments) or are of the implicit variety, the sort that also comprise part of human nature as Dewey understands it: “norms, traditions and habits.” And what experimental economics has come to show, in fact, is that incentives do matter.

This is hardly a revolutionary claim: behavioral economists have been making this very claim for a long time. It is precisely the sort of claim of which Dewey would have been skeptical because it seems overly simplistic: of course incentives matter, but what **sorts** of incentives matter? Recall that Dewey was critical of the notion of *homo economicus* or the “economic man” who is motivated solely by selfish (or self-interested) desires. The suggestion that the dynamic nature of human behavior and life can be reduced to one fundamental, fixed desire was something that Dewey rejected. How, then, has experimental economics progressed where non-empirical economics has not? More importantly, how might experimental economics support Dewey’s call for the naturalization of the “laboratory habit of mind” in traditionally non-empirical fields?

Experimental economics has indeed established that incentives matter, but there is a proviso to this conclusion:

But the incentives to which people respond are sometimes not those one would expect based on the canons of economic [or] game theory. It turns out that people are often better, and sometimes worse, at achieving gains for themselves and others than is predicted by standard forms of rational analysis. These contradictions provide important clues to the implicit rules that people may follow and can motivate new theoretical hypotheses for examination in the laboratory.³²⁶

³²⁶ Ibid.

Experimental economics demonstrates, by use of empirical methods, that the assumptions and theories made by economists and political scientists **do not**, in fact, hold up in simulations of “ordinary” experience. Moreover, the result of work in experimental economics proves that much of the theorizing that occurs in traditional economics does not fully capture the details of “ordinary” experience. Laboratory experiments in economics have shown that there are implicit rules followed by individuals that have often not been accounted for by economic theory. That is, for many years, economists have turned from the facts of ordinary experience, reflected on them and attempted to systematize them, but they have not bothered to check their conclusions and systems against the facts that served as the original impetus for reflection.

Importantly, experimental economics has challenged traditional notions of “rationality” as held by economists. Faced with a result that would be unexpected by traditional economics—for instance, “people in certain contexts choose outcomes yielding the smaller of rewards”—the experimentalist does not reject this fact and revert to the accepted theory of economic rationality in order to figure out what is “wrong” with the subject. The experimentalist “ask[s] why, rather than conclude that this is irrational.”³²⁷ Experimental economics has, in a manner that Dewey would undoubtedly have applauded, attempted to understand the individual as he or she is. And such an understanding requires acknowledgement of imperfection, uncertainty, and, in the traditional economic sense, irrationality.

The role of uncertainty and risk were of concern to Dewey, and he, like experimental economists, worried that this characteristic of human existence had not been adequately represented in the work of non-empiricists. Vernon Smith, one of the fathers

³²⁷ Ibid.

of experimental economics, might have paraphrased Dewey when he wrote, “Acknowledging and recognizing the workings of unseen processes are essential to the growth of our understanding of social phenomena, and we must strive not to exclude them from our inquiry, if we have any hope of understanding data inside or outside of the laboratory.”³²⁸ According to Smith, experimentalism and its application are the keys to understanding “social phenomena,” and Dewey would have agreed. Whether Dewey was successful in his claim that this method could be applied to philosophical matters is, I think, an open question. Whether the application of the experimental method in economics will be revolutionary or not is, however, a matter that has been authoritatively decided. I will return, in my conclusion, to the subject of experimental economics and its potential as a “pragmatic economics.”

³²⁸ Ibid., 2.

CHAPTER VIII

CERTAINTY, UNCERTAINTY, AND RISK

Certainty, uncertainty, and risk are all concepts that are familiar to the game theorist, but they are also significant for Dewey's pragmatism. On this subject as much as any other, economists and Dewey seem to be in agreement, and it seems odd that Dewey would not have taken advantage of this agreement. It is clear that Dewey had a good deal of familiarity with economic literature and that concerns about economic issues are at the heart of his later work in particular. Yet Dewey never availed himself of the writings of economists that might have further supported his arguments for reconstruction in philosophy. Economists, unlike philosophers, had already acknowledged the "precarious" existence that he attempted to describe and put forward for philosophers in *Experience and Nature*. Much of the work being done in economics during Dewey's life included efforts to explore the details of this precariousness while, at the same time, providing useful predictions and observations about economic activity.

The "Precarious" and Unstable Nature of Existence

In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey's first description of the precarious nature of existence is striking:

Man finds himself living in an aleatory world; his existence involves, to put it baldly, a gamble. The world is a scene of risk; it is uncertain, unstable, uncannily unstable. Its dangers are irregular, inconstant, not to be counted upon as to their times and seasons. Although persistent, they are sporadic, episodic. It is darkest just before dawn; pride goes before a fall; the moment of greatest prosperity is the moment most charged with

ill-omen, most opportune for the evil eye. Plague, famine, failure of crops, disease, death, defeat in battle, are always just around the corner, and so are abundance, strength, victory, festival and song. Luck is proverbially both good and bad in its distributions.³²⁹

Though Dewey does include these final words about the existence of “abundance, strength, victory, festival and song,” this is not a particularly encouraging account of the situation in which man finds himself. For someone who has often been accused of being naively optimistic, Dewey has certainly here provided a bleak description of existence.

Though bleak, the picture Dewey paints is hardly unique. As cited above, Frank Knight made a similar observation in his book *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit*, published four years before *Experience and Nature*: “It is a world of change in which we live, and a world of uncertainty. We live only by knowing *something* about the future; while the problems of life, or of conduct at least, arise from the fact that we know so little.”³³⁰

Near the beginning of *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey’s words sound very similar: “The distinctive characteristic of practical activity, one which is so inherent that it cannot be eliminated, is the uncertainty which attends it. Of it, we are compelled to say: Act, but act at your peril.”³³¹ Knight, an economist at the University of Chicago, criticized Dewey freely in his own work, but there is not a single instance of Knight’s name in Dewey’s *Collected Works*. It would be safe to assume that Knight fell into the category of “laissez-faire” economists or liberals that Dewey repeatedly criticized, but as the above shows, there was at least one thing upon which the two agreed: the precarious nature of human existence and the fact that human action is plagued by risk and uncertainty.

³²⁹ LW1, 43.

³³⁰ Knight (1948 – first published in 1921), 199. The emphasis is Knight’s.

³³¹ LW4, 6.

Both Knight and Dewey agreed, in fact, that in this “scene” of risk, uncertainty, and instability, the lot of man is that he still must act. He can do so blindly or by following his passions, or he can do so by intelligent action. For Dewey, the latter meant that, while acknowledging the biological foundation of human behavior and the significant role of habit, the best philosophy will be one which allows us to reflect upon both human nature and habit and to employ the products of that reflection in future “ordinary” experience. For Dewey, these facts about the world should give philosophers important direction. It is neither possible nor desirable to ignore the “precarious” nature of the human condition. Without misfortune, fortune would have little meaning for us, and so we should never wish that the elements of uncertainty and risk be entirely removed from our lives. Moreover, philosophers who focus all of their efforts on identifying or discovering the “fixed and final” and the “certain” are not only misled, they are also doomed to fail in their efforts because of “the fundamentally hazardous character of the world.”³³²

The question that interests Dewey as well as the economist is this: what is the best way (whether that means the most moral or the most rational way) for individuals to behave in a world that continually surprises us and reminds us that we will never be able to escape risk and uncertainty? How are we to make decisions about our behavior when we can see that, as time progresses and the environment changes, a decision that seems good today may be disastrous tomorrow? One possible response would be to abandon as futile the attempt to make any decisions. We might instead do just what we want to, whenever we want to because the alternative is to have our hopes and plans constantly dashed by fortune. In short, we would “ally” ourselves with “destiny” because we cannot

³³² LW1, 45.

conquer it.³³³ Or, if we like, we might choose the path of the non-empirical philosophers Dewey disparages throughout his work. We might ignore altogether the fact that the world is an uncertain and risky place. We would instead build entire systems of thought based on the notion that the highest end we might achieve would be knowledge of the “fixed and final” or absolute certainty. In doing so, we might assuage the fears that come from a frank view of the world’s “hazardous character,” but we would be living a lie—one that might lead us to irreconcilable conflicts. Moreover, this approach would require us to dismiss the contrary empirical evidence provided by our senses about the uncertain nature of existence.

The economist, at least, takes the “facts of the world” as given, and he quickly moves on to the practical questions of human behavior and decision. Dewey must have seen the advantage to this approach, though he never makes any explicit statement to that effect (at least not with respect to economics). Obviously, he is highly laudatory of the efforts of natural and physical scientists, and there are numerous examples in his work of calls for similar methodology to be applied to “social problems,”³³⁴ but most of Dewey’s references to economics suggest that he believes there is still much to be done to accomplish the “naturalization” of the empirical method in the “social sciences.” Yet Dewey must have viewed the economist’s work as part of the “other course,” the attempt to “invent arts and by their means turn the powers of nature to account....”³³⁵

³³³ LW4, 3.

³³⁴ LW15, 235. There are, of course, many others. This is simply one representative example.

³³⁵ LW4, 3.

Thinking and the “Quest for Certainty”

As far as the philosopher is concerned, however, the “ultimate evidence of genuine hazard, contingency, irregularity and undeterminateness in nature,”³³⁶ Dewey argues, is that human beings **think**. Thinking is the result of a breakdown in instinct and habit. Without hazard, contingency, irregularity and “undeterminateness,” we should be able to rely on the instinct and habits that regularly drive our behavior. Our action would continue unimpeded, and there would be no need to leave “ordinary experience” and engage in reflection in order to improve our ability to “construct freer and more secure goods”³³⁷ or to derive meaning from our experience. Dewey recurs, in *Experience and Nature*, to the importance of experimentalism and its role in facing the hazards of an uncertain and risky world: “Reflection occurs only in situations qualified by uncertainty, alternatives, questioning, search, hypotheses, tentative trials or experiments which test the worth of thinking.”³³⁸ Again, without the presence of uncertainty in our “ordinary experience,” thinking and reflection would be superfluous to the behavior of human beings. According to Dewey, philosophy has thus traditionally provided an account of existence which is exactly the reverse of the facts.

From the Greeks forward, philosophers have disparaged “ordinary” experience, and they have suggested that this experience can teach us little (if anything) about the nature of existence. Reality, as Dewey’s characterization of the argument goes, is an “ordered whole,” it is a “rational system,” and if we simply remove ourselves from the constant distractions of “ordinary” experience long enough, we might just be able to catch a glimpse of this “system.” Behind the commotion and disturbance of everyday

³³⁶ LW1, 62-63.

³³⁷ Ibid., 325.

³³⁸ Ibid., 62.

life, there lies something “fixed and final,” something “immutable” and unchangeable. To put it simply, beyond the uncertainty of daily existence, there is something better, something “absolute and unshakeable,”³³⁹ and it can be grasped if we just look for it in the proper way. We can leave the world of commotion and disturbance behind—if we develop the right skills and tools.

But thinking and reflection are **not** tools that exist in order to verify the fixed and final and that which is certain, and Dewey is at pains to prove this to his reader. The “life of the mind” is not, despite appearances, a life which has its origin in some insight into objective truth or reality. The “life of the mind” is an outgrowth of the uncertainty which suffuses the human condition. To be sure, according to Dewey, it is a perversion of this fact: thinking and reflection are **caused** by the necessity of living meaningfully in a world that is not “a rational system,”³⁴⁰ but the notion that thinking and reflection should therefore replace (and are superior to) the facts of our “ordinary experience” is, nonetheless, a response generated by fear. As Stephen Toulmin summarizes this response:

He [Dewey] saw the Platonist demand for certainty and necessity as having its own emotional origins: it was an “escape from peril.” These origins were partly cultural, being the product of superstitions that went back ultimately to the astrotheology of the Ancient Empires, but they were also partly personal—an expression of an urge for a psychological security which the world of practical life does not provide.³⁴¹

Dewey did not condemn this urge: he claimed that men are “compelled to seek for security” because they do live in a “world of hazards.”³⁴² What he could not abide, however, was the failure of philosophers to “intellectually disrobe” and acknowledge its

³³⁹ LW4, 5.

³⁴⁰ LW1, 60.

³⁴¹ Toulmin (1988), x.

³⁴² LW4, 3.

influence on their thinking. The “life of the mind,” as philosophy has historically undertaken it, is the natural desire for “escape from peril” taken to an unhealthy extreme. There were other attempts to escape from peril which preceded philosophy: principally, superstition, mythology, drama, and poetry, and Dewey is not critical of these. These attempts, however, always remained checked by the demands of survival, and it was not until men developed the leisure to “philosophize” that they tried to forget that they too were subject to these demands.

Dewey’s criticism of the history of philosophical thinking about the nature of existence was sharp, particularly in his more mature work. He believed that the denial or dismissal of uncertainty and risk evidenced “*the philosophic fallacy.*”³⁴³ This fallacy, of which too many of his predecessors were guilty, was a “conversion of eventual functions into antecedent existence....”³⁴⁴ The “real” world, for Dewey, is the world of “ordinary experience,” the world in which most of us find ourselves on a daily basis. Yet philosophers have converted this world into one that cannot tell us anything about reality and, in fact, will stand in the way of us knowing about reality. Instead, the “eventual function,” reflection and “secondary experience,” had been taken to be the primary or antecedent act. Reflection, as a consequence of “*the philosophic fallacy,*” was argued to be the true nature of man, the identity to which he should return, forsaking the distractions of sensory and “ordinary” experience.

This fallacy is the impetus for *Experience and Nature* and, it might be argued, the whole of Dewey’s philosophy. Dewey was disgusted by what he thought philosophy had become: a refuge for those who were afraid to acknowledge and to live honestly in a

³⁴³ LW1, 34. The emphasis is Dewey’s.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

world of contingency.³⁴⁵ Not only would the experimental method oblige us to return to the world of “ordinary” experience, but it would also demand that we acknowledge that world to be one which was unstable and, ultimately, beyond our control. We would still have to live under the “strain of uncertainty,”³⁴⁶ but we would be able to derive meaning from our existence by a means other than escaping from it.

The Role of Philosophy in an Uncertain World

As Richard Rorty rightly acknowledges, however, John Dewey would never have jettisoned philosophy as a superfluous or outmoded activity. While Rorty argues that philosophy should be “therapeutic” and that its mission is to “make itself obsolete,”³⁴⁷ he also notes that Dewey “never quite brought himself to adopt [this] Bouwsma-like stance....”³⁴⁸ The work of philosophy and of inquiry cannot be separated from the facts of human existence. “Uncertainty,” wrote Dewey, “is primarily a practical matter.”³⁴⁹ Philosophy exists as the product of uncertainty, and so it should ultimately be a practical discipline. Dewey was, “first and foremost,”³⁵⁰ a philosopher, and, accordingly, he endorsed the aims of philosophy, if not always its methods:

The trouble, then, with the conclusions of philosophy is not in the least that they are the results of reflection and theorizing. It is rather that philosophers have borrowed from various sources the conclusions of special analyses, particularly of some ruling science of the day, and imported them direct into philosophy, with no check by either the empirical objects from which they arose or those to which the conclusions in question point.³⁵¹

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 46.

³⁴⁶ MW12, 81.

³⁴⁷ Rorty (1982), 82.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ LW4, 178.

³⁵⁰ Toulmin (1988), viii.

³⁵¹ LW1, 37.

Dewey bore no ill will toward those who engaged in “reflection and theorizing.” These activities were an integral part of the only intelligent response to the “uncertain, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and hazardous” “world of empirical things.”³⁵²

The “quest for certainty,” as Dewey described it, had laudable goals. It does aim at “the security of values, of the things which are admirable, honorable, to be approved and striven for.”³⁵³ Such things are things of “general human import” and concern all people, not just “professional philosophers.”³⁵⁴ In that sense, Dewey does not begrudge those who believe the “quest for certainty” is the way to attain such things. In the spirit of the “laboratory habit of mind,” it might even be said that the quest, as traditionally taken up by philosophers, represents a first hypothesis, a first test as it were, of the means for achieving that which is “admirable, honorable” and for a “security of values.” Like all hypotheses, however, this quest (or these means) had to be tested and re-tested and offered up for the consideration and verification of others.

And here, finally, is where thinkers like Descartes had failed, according to Dewey. The “urge” to “escape from peril” that caused Descartes to undertake his meditations was perfectly natural and certainly compelling. Dewey believes this is the way inquiry generally begins. Further, the meditations lend themselves easily to interpretation as experimentalism. Descartes began with a problem, he formulated a hypothesis about the means of solving the problem, and he undertook testing. To this point, Dewey cannot fault his motivations or his efforts, and he cites approvingly Descartes’ understanding that “there had to be some warrant for the application of ideas

³⁵² Ibid., 43.

³⁵³ LW4, 25.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

to nature.”³⁵⁵ In order to follow through with the experimental method, however, Descartes would have had to return the products of his meditation to the facts of primary experience. He would have had to have subjected his conclusions to testing and re-testing in ordinary activity, and this, Descartes explicitly acknowledges, he cannot do.

The quest for certainty must end at the facts of ordinary experience because these facts prove repeatedly that certainty (as philosophers have sought it) is not something to be attained in this world (as we know it). Instead of turning his powerful intellect to the question of how we might live more intelligently in **this** world, Dewey thought that Descartes (and many of his predecessors and successors) had ultimately rejected his empirical data in favor of a hopeless quest. The quest for certainty, as Dewey understood it, is “an effort to transcend belief”³⁵⁶ where belief is distinguished from knowledge. Knowledge provides access to the world of ideas or forms, but belief is thought to be on a par with opinion, the shadows of Plato’s cave. Knowledge is thus superior to belief, and it is thereby the object of philosophers’ study. “The quest for certainty” embodies that distinction. The quest for certainty is a quest to replace every bit of opinion or belief with knowledge or “complete assurance.”³⁵⁷

If certainty is equivalent to “complete assurance” and the quest for certainty seeks the replacement of all beliefs with “knowledge,” certainty (as traditionally understood by philosophers) can only be a matter of theory and never a part of the world of “practical action.”³⁵⁸ Recall Dewey’s words: “Uncertainty is primarily a practical matter” and “all

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 46.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

matters of practical action involve an element of uncertainty....”³⁵⁹ Non-empirical types of philosophy are the only sorts of philosophy that can seek certainty since they are also the only philosophies which make no reference to matters of practical experience. Dewey’s claim is a strong one: by definition, practice involves uncertainty, and the only way to avoid that uncertainty is to leave the world of practice. The quest for certainty, in short, is a quest to escape the difficulties of practical action, and such an endeavor can never pass Dewey’s test for philosophy. Worse yet, it is an endeavor that can never really be a part of ordinary experience, nor can it therefore constitute the whole of human life. It is an attempt to move beyond “contingent probability,” and, according to Dewey’s characterization of the world of human experience, we cannot move permanently beyond contingent probability. Does the quest for certainty render “ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments” “more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful”?³⁶⁰ It cannot do this because it refuses to accept “ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments” as legitimate objects of knowledge.

The consequences for this sort of philosophy and those who have practiced it are rather unappealing. *Reconstruction in Philosophy* is a book that often provides the most strongly-worded criticisms that Dewey makes of philosophical investigation as it has traditionally been conceived and pursued. On the subject of philosophy which has divorced itself from the world of practical action, he is particularly disparaging:

Thus arises that appearance of abstract definition and ultra-scientific argumentation which repels so many from philosophy but which has been one of its chief attractions to its devotees. ¶ At the worst, this has reduced philosophy to a show of elaborate terminology, a hair-splitting logic, and a fictitious devotion to the mere external forms of comprehensive and minute demonstration. Even at the best, it has tended to produce an

³⁵⁹ LW4, 178, 21.

³⁶⁰ LW1, 18.

overdeveloped attachment to system for its own sake, and an over-pretentious claim to certainty.³⁶¹

Philosophy has not only divorced itself from the world of ordinary experience and practice, but it has also made itself repulsive to those engaged in that world. And this, for Dewey, may be the most disheartening result of the “quest for certainty” since he is an advocate for philosophy—empirical philosophy—as the means to sustained, intelligent action.

If thought is the result of the uncertainty of existence, then philosophy is the attempt to organize thought in the manner best suited to face this uncertainty. Philosophy is as much the consequence of uncertainty as is fear. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey’s positive account of what philosophy might yet be is as pointed as his negative account of what it had, unfortunately, become: “...it will be seen that the task of future philosophy is to clarify men’s ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own days. Its aim is to become so far as is humanly possible an organ for dealing with these conflicts.”³⁶² We must acknowledge that strife and conflict can never be permanently resolved, but we are not thereby consigned to sit idly by and let the “commotion” and “disturbances” of experience command our lives. There is hope for mitigating the “social and moral strife,” and this hope lies in a philosophy that bridges the gap between reflection and ordinary experience.

The Social and Economic Obligations of Dewey’s Pragmatism

It is worth taking a moment to connect Dewey’s epistemological and metaphysical claims to his moral concerns since, for Dewey, there can be no separation

³⁶¹ MW12, 91.

³⁶² LW4, 94.

between these things. As Dewey's career advanced and he was invited to lecture around the world, his work increasingly reflected his interest in class difference and the accompanying economic and moral problems. As noted above in Chapter V, Dewey saw the "quest for certainty" as a part of the movement that had effectively disparaged the world of practice and, more importantly, the actions of those who live in it. There is a social aspect to the traditional epistemology and metaphysics of non-empirical philosophy, and it recalls Dewey's criticisms of Aristotle. As the body of knowledge human beings possess develops from the superstitious, dramatic, and poetic to the "matter-of-fact," there is also a distinction between the "social classes" which possess each kind of knowledge: "The religious and poetic beliefs having acquired a definite social and political value and function are in the keeping of a higher class directly associated with the ruling elements in the society."³⁶³

In the same way that Aristotle could speak of natural slavery, the non-empirical philosopher can dismiss the experimental method and those who practice it because they "are likely to occupy a low social status."³⁶⁴ This method, according to such philosophers, could never provide anything like "true knowledge,"³⁶⁵ and the only scholars who can have a claim to legitimate activity are those who are engaged in seeking true knowledge. This is not to suggest that artisans, industrial workers, and experimental scientists are engaged in pointless activity. Even non-empirical philosophers must recognize the value of indoor plumbing, penicillin, and warm clothes since "the requirements of continued existence make indispensable some attention to the actual facts

³⁶³ MW12, 86.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ LW4, 22.

of the world.”³⁶⁶ Though they might seek to escape the disconcerting “facts of the world,” non-empirical philosophers are no less subject to the fact that “the environment does enforce a certain minimum of correctness under penalty of extinction.”³⁶⁷ Even so, while they might acknowledge the utility of those who provide material comforts and they may also acknowledge that their own existence is, in turn, dependent upon such people, those engaged in the quest for certainty have nonetheless played a distinctive part in denigrating these same activities and the livelihood of those who perform them.

Once again, Aristotle serves as the focus of Dewey’s criticism and as an example of how the misdirected quest for certainty has affected those well beyond the confines of academic philosophy:

So because of impatience and because, as Aristotle was given to point out, an individual is self-sufficient in that kind of thinking which involves no action, the ideal of a cognitive certainty and truth having no connection with practice, and prized because of its lack of connection, developed. The doctrine worked out practically so as to strengthen dependence upon authority and dogma in the things of highest value, while increase of specialized knowledge was relied upon in everyday, especially economic, affairs. Just as belief that a magical ceremony will regulate the growth of seeds to full harvest stifles the tendency to investigate natural causes and their workings, so acceptance of dogmatic rules as bases of conduct in education, morals and social matters, lessens the impetus to find out about the conditions which are involved in forming intelligent plans.³⁶⁸

The result can hardly be a surprise for anyone familiar with Dewey’s writings. Though Dewey did not believe that these problems had their origin in philosophy alone, he did argue that philosophy’s glorification of the “ideal” of the impractical led to an increased stratification of class, the decline of education, and, in general, a world where intelligent action (as Dewey defines it) is unlikely to occur very often.

³⁶⁶ MW12, 85.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ LW4, 32.

By the same means that philosophy has been so detrimental to moral and social issues, however, Dewey believes it has the opportunity to be the means of radical improvement in the world of ordinary experience: “That which may be pretentiously unreal when it is formulated in metaphysical distinctions becomes intensely significant when connected with the drama of the struggle of social beliefs and ideals.”³⁶⁹ What is needed in philosophy is a re-focusing or, as Dewey so frequently put it, a “reconstruction.” Philosophy must turn itself away from the “somewhat barren monopoly of dealings with Ultimate and Absolute Reality”³⁷⁰ and bring its powerful tools to bear on the risk and uncertainty which are characteristic of human existence. An empirical philosophy will “do justice”³⁷¹ to the facts of experience, and it will do so by embracing the uncertainty and risk from which non-empirical philosophy has fled.

Empirical philosophy, in short, will have social and economic obligations. Dewey’s frequent writing on policy issues was not, as some might imagine, merely an attempt to influence public opinion in favor of his own “pet” projects. Rather, his contributions to public dialogue were a necessary part of his pragmatism. His philosophical thinking obliged him to be a part of the world of “ordinary experience,” and that world is rife with social and economic problems that require intelligent action. Dewey’s work in public forums was an attempt to bring the methods of his pragmatism to bear on the facts of ordinary experience, and, as a pragmatist, he was obliged to do no less.

We have already looked at what it might mean to apply the methods and successes of the experimental sciences to other disciplines, including philosophy. But

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 94.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ LW1, 19.

how will philosophy, which has for so long been fascinated with the fixed and final, abandon the task which has preoccupied it since Plato's time? What will replace this quest, and what role will "certainty" play in it? Is it possible, then, in Dewey's pragmatism, to have "certainty" of any kind? Is "certainty" redefined, like so many other terms, to have a distinctive meaning in Dewey's philosophy? Does Dewey speak of a "certainty" that can be achieved in human practice yet is not susceptible to the sort of "certainty" which motivates the "quest" Dewey describes as having so many ill-effects?

The "reconstructed" philosophy will be one whose study will "render" "a special service" to individuals precisely because it will turn away from its old subjects and become a study of "life-experience."³⁷² Dewey describes empirical philosophy as a sort of "intellectual disrobing," and, as noted above, that disrobing represents an important parallel to the experimental method. Instead of noting specifics like temperature and pressure in the laboratory environment, however, the "intellectual disrobing" of empirical philosophy will ask us to "inspect" our intellectual habits and prejudices. Philosophy will become a "critique of prejudices" where "prejudices" are the "absorbed borrowings" which have come to settle in our experience.³⁷³ The quest for certainty is one such "prejudice," and it is one that Dewey believes will be abandoned when properly "disrobed" and shown for what it is and what it has accomplished (or, as the case may be, not accomplished). If economists treat certainty, uncertainty, and risk as differing degrees of probability, **traditional** philosophical thinking will have had little to do with economics: "Variant philosophies may be looked at as different ways of supplying

³⁷² Ibid., 40.

³⁷³ Ibid.

recipes for denying to the universe the character of contingency which it possesses so integrally.”³⁷⁴ The “classic” or non-empirical philosopher cannot stomach contingency.

Probability and the “Reconstructed” Philosophy

A reconstructed philosophy, however, would treat certainty, uncertainty, and risk very much like economists do. Questions of “certainty,” “uncertainty,” and “risk” are not, as non-empirical philosophers would have us believe, matters of degree in knowledge of the immutable. Instead, they are terms which deal with probability, and Dewey argues that a “courageous” philosophy would acknowledge this. He cites Butler’s declaration that “probability is the guide of life,” and adds that philosophers have not, traditionally, been “satisfied with anything that is merely probable.”³⁷⁵ Though it goes against the history of philosophical inquiry, Dewey encourages his philosophical peers to “satisfy” themselves with that which “is merely probable.” Not only must philosophers be satisfied with the probable, they should embrace it in the same way that they had formerly attached themselves to certainty and the “fixed and final.” It may well be the case that “philosophy can proffer nothing but hypotheses,”³⁷⁶ but hypotheses, though they may be nothing more than conjectures about probability, will nonetheless help “render men’s minds more sensitive to life about them...”³⁷⁷ The method and the focus may be different, but deriving meaning from our environment was the ambition from which philosophy was originally born. Empirical philosophy is simply a return to that aim and the use of hypotheses an update of the methods used to achieve it.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 46.

³⁷⁵ MW12, 91.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 92.

In the place of “certainty,” empirical philosophy will use hypotheses to “enlighten” “the moral forces which move mankind” and contribute “to the aspirations of men to attain to a more ordered and intelligent happiness.”³⁷⁸ A “more ordered and intelligent happiness” is the most “certainty” we can hope for in a world which is characterized by uncertainty. Does this mean that, equipped with the products of philosophical activity that we will be able to control everything around us and to eradicate the precariousness and instability? To answer this question in the positive is simply to repeat the mistakes of non-empirical philosophers. Instead, Dewey believes that philosophy must become a “method of intelligence,” and it should take part in the sorts of activities that define that method: “The striving to make stability of meaning prevail over the instability of events is the main task of intelligent human effort.”³⁷⁹

We cannot eradicate instability, but we can attempt to derive meaning from our existence in such a way that this meaning will improve the probability that we will achieve our goals or learn to exercise some control over the hazards in our environment. Those hazards and dangerous instability will always remain as a part of human existence, but we can hope to reduce the size of that part significantly. We must always, however, remember that the nature of such uncertainty is that new hazards may surprise us at every turn.

Dewey never speaks of achieving “certainty.” At best, we can work to “mitigate” uncertainty and risk. This is a task in which philosophy can play an important role, but philosophers must have the courage to take up that role:

Upon the side of wisdom, as human beings interested in good and bad things in their connection with human conduct, thinkers are concerned to

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 94.

³⁷⁹ LW1, 49.

mitigate the instability of life, to introduce moderation, temper and economy, and when worst comes to worst to suggest consolations and compensations. They are concerned with rendering more stable good things, and more unstable bad things; they are interested in how changes may be turned to account in the consequences to which they contribute. The facts of the ongoing, unfinished and ambiguously potential world give point and poignancy to the search for absolutes and finalities.³⁸⁰

It might seem surprising that Dewey would begrudge non-empirical philosophers even the “point and poignancy” of their search. But the above description is the sort of quest that Dewey feels ought to replace the quest for certainty. There is no doubt that we would prefer “absolutes and finalities,” and, in truth, there is little harm in searching for them. The danger comes when the search consumes us to the point that we miss the other products of this search. Instead of “certainty,” this search can provide “a thing which is stably good in quality and hence worth of persistent and continued choice....”³⁸¹ **That** is a meaningful product and one that is unquestionably the result of reflection and cognitive activity. Too often, however, philosophers have lacked the courage to take the next step: “the effort to give [the thing which, upon reflection, is ‘stably good in quality’] some such stability in **observed existence** as it possesses in quality when thought of.”³⁸²

There is some irony in the fact that “certainty”—or, the next best thing on Dewey’s terms, some stability—must be achieved through precisely the opposite course which philosophers have traditionally taken. The only way to effect improved stability in an unstable world is to apply the results of reflection (results gathered in the decidedly stable and safe environment of cognition and reflection) to the commotion and disturbance of that world. Dewey’s argument is that philosophers can introduce some measure of stability into an unstable world and, even when they fail in this respect (as

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 51.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid. The emphasis is mine.

they inevitably will because of the nature of existence), they might still prove themselves useful in providing “consolations and compensations” for disappointments. Again, however, this would require that philosophers actually acknowledge disappointments and the legitimacy of “ordinary” experience.

It is not sufficient to object to Dewey’s account of uncertainty on the grounds that Dewey is talking about the precarious nature of everyday existence and most of the philosophers he criticized were concerned with a technical matter of rationality. We cannot criticize Dewey by arguing that, like Knight, when he speaks of “uncertainty,” he means the fact that we do not know what will happen tomorrow or that we cannot be sure of the consequences of our actions. Other philosophers, the objection might continue, are interested in exploring the relationship between belief and knowledge, what it means to say that we possess knowledge of something, how we can say of something that we are certain about it. The description of these seemingly different approaches to certainty and uncertainty may be accurate, but Dewey has anticipated the objection by arguing that these two things describe the same process. The only difference is that Dewey’s pragmatism places an obligation on the philosopher to consider certainty, uncertainty, and risk in the context of “ordinary experience” and to evaluate any conclusions in terms of their effects on this type of experience. The non-empirical philosopher feels no such obligation and, in fact, rejects the notion that such a test is legitimate. If we want a criterion for knowledge, the non-empirical philosopher argues, “ordinary” experience is the last place we will look for it. Dewey, on the other hand, believes that ordinary experience is the **only** place we will find our criterion.

Uncertainty, Philosophy, and “Pragmatic Economics”

Dewey’s understanding of certainty, uncertainty and risk bears some resemblance to that of economists. For Dewey, “certainty” could only ever be a matter of probability, and for the economist, the “perfect information” that would guarantee “certainty” is a model. As noted above in Chapter II, few economists would actually argue that, in fact, consumers have “perfect information” about every decision they make. Like other economic models and scientific constructs, however, this assumption helps to clarify and explain other behavior and assumptions. Economists do not believe that conditions of “certainty” obtain in reality, and, in this respect, Dewey would undoubtedly agree. For an economist, “uncertainty” entails having too little information to determine the probability that a given action will lead to a given result. One can imagine that Dewey believes such situations do obtain in reality; that is, situations in which there is too little information to determine what the results of a particular action are likely to be. The hazardous nature of the world would suggest that this is the case, but Dewey would amend this by saying that the number of such situations could be greatly decreased by intelligent action.

A “reconstructed” philosophy requires the philosopher to be a part of the world of ordinary experience, and Dewey was, therefore, obligated to involve himself in public affairs like the Pullman Strike, Jane Addams’ Hull House, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the League of Nations, the Trotsky hearings, and so many others. In an address to the Graduate Department of Philosophy at Columbia in 1947, Dewey outlined his understanding of the work of the philosopher:

The principal task of philosophy is to get below the turmoil that is particularly conspicuous in times of rapid cultural change, to get behind

what appears on the surface, to get to the soil in which a given culture has its roots. The business of philosophy is the relation that man has to the world in which he lives, as far as both man and the world are affected by culture, which is very much more than is usually thought.³⁸³

To fault Dewey for the fact of his writing on public policy and his actions in political and economic issues is to fault Dewey's philosophy. I will do neither, but I will conclude this thesis by suggesting that Dewey may not have taken this obligation in the spirit which his work on "intelligent action" and the "experimental method" demanded. In particular, his own understanding of and familiarity with economics required him to frame a "pragmatic economics." Unfortunately, his work in economics was anything but pragmatic on his own terms.

³⁸³ LW17, 466-467.

CHAPTER IX

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FULFILLMENT

I will end this thesis where it began: with questions about the nature of John Dewey's pragmatism and its use of and relationship to economics. There is, to be sure, much more to be said on the subject, but I will attempt in this final chapter simply to address the claims I made in my introduction:

1. According to Dewey, philosophy **must** concern itself with economics.
2. Those who practice the "scientific" or "experimental" method face the same pitfalls that Dewey identifies in the history of "non-empirical" philosophy, and that scientists and social scientists have been subject to "*the philosophic fallacy*" in their own work.
3. The "experimental method," while central to Dewey's philosophy, is an underdeveloped theme in his work. It is not clear how that method is to be applied nor is it clear how it will enable Dewey to meet the challenge of his own "test" of philosophy: Does it render the facts of ordinary experience more meaningful?
4. The obligations of Dewey's pragmatism required him to be more systematic with respect to the relationship between philosophy and economics. Nonetheless, there is work being done today in experimental economics that may stand as an illustration of the sort of empiricism that Dewey advocated throughout his work.

Though economists disagree as to whether their discipline is positive or normative and whether their own conceptions of "the good life" play a significant role in their work, it is clear that a "pragmatic economics" would require its practitioners to "intellectually disrobe" and inspect those conceptions.

Dewey believed that a philosopher could not help the fact that his own prejudices, education, and environment played a role in the work that he did. All that could be hoped

for was that this role would be acknowledged and, ideally, understood. Dewey's own references and interest in economics should, I think, continue to prove useful in determining whether Dewey himself took part in this "intellectual disrobing" and inspection.

Philosophy and Economics

The sheer volume of references that can be found in Dewey's work demonstrates conclusively that he was preoccupied with economic issues throughout his life. These references occur not only in Dewey's denser, more philosophical works such as *Experience and Nature* and *Human Nature and Conduct*, but also in essays he wrote on returning from Japan and China, in lectures he gave regarding education, and in articles published in the popular press.³⁸⁴ Moreover, Dewey explicitly tells us that "Philosophy which does not take into account the economic enterprise and its human consequences is an escapist intellectual gymnastic."³⁸⁵ I think there is little that is controversial about the claim that Dewey believed philosophy **must** concern itself with economics, and, if such controversy exists, a brief reading of the attached appendix will quickly resolve it.

What is perhaps more interesting about the relationship between philosophy and economics is, on Dewey's view, that economists must concern **themselves** with philosophy. That is, economists cannot afford the luxury which Lionel Robbins insists they have by studying only the "is" and not the "ought." Economics and moral matters are not disparate, according to Dewey. It is worth citing Robbins words explicitly, though they appear above in Chapter II:

³⁸⁴ See MW11; LW11, 226; MW15, 110 (among others).

³⁸⁵ LW1, 359.

The proposition that the price of pork fluctuates with variations in supply and demand follows from a conception of the relation to pork to human impulses which, in the last resort, is verifiable by introspection and observation. We can ask people whether they are prepared to buy pork and how much they are prepared to buy at different prices. Or we can watch how they behave when equipped with currency and exposed to the stimuli of the pig-meat markets. But the proposition that it is *wrong* that pork should be valued, although it is a proposition which has greatly influenced the conduct of different races, is a proposition which we cannot conceive being verified at all in this manner.³⁸⁶

I would hope that my thesis has definitively shown that, while Dewey never specifically responded to Robbins' in print,³⁸⁷ he would have raised serious objections to this statement.

First, Robbins insists that questions of “ought” are not to be determined by economists. The economist’s jurisdiction is that of “introspection and observation.” A proposition like “the price of pork fluctuates with variations in supply and demand” can be subjected to empirical observation, this observation can be documented and reflected upon, and the proposition can be verified or rejected. This is the business of economists, according to Robbins. The other proposition—“that it is *wrong* that pork should be valued”—is, Robbins acknowledges, significant in its own right and something that **someone** should consider, but that “someone” would not be economists because they are unable to evaluate propositions which cannot be verified through “introspection and observation.”

If we accept Dewey’s methodology and the arguments which support it, we can boldly say that this dilemma, of the positive or normative nature of economics, has been

³⁸⁶ Robbins (1946), 148. The emphasis is Robbins’.

³⁸⁷ Robbins book was first published in the 1920’s and was both influential and controversial among economists. There is no question that Dewey would have had access to it while he was in his sixties and that his older brother, Davis, would have been familiar with it. Thus, the suggestion that he might have responded to it in print is not an absurd one.

resolved. Dewey's pragmatism relies on the experimental method, and this method, though it is not identical to the one used in the natural and physical sciences, is built on the facts of "ordinary" experience as they are constantly observed (by philosophers, economists, or biologists). The "logic" of the experimental method which Dewey so admires is that it finds both its impetus and its termination in "ordinary" experience. The **only** way to determine moral claims, from a pragmatic perspective, is to observe that which occurs in fact, reflect upon it, and test the products of this reflection in practice. Whether this method can work in philosophy is a question I have raised in Chapters VI and VII, and I will take it up again in the third section of this chapter. The point at present, however, is that if we accept Dewey's claims about the power of the "laboratory habit of mind" when applied in moral theory, Robbins must be wrong: the "ought" proposition can be verified in the same manner that economists verify the "is" proposition.

Economists, as much as philosophers, are obligated to consider **both** the proposition that "the price of pork fluctuates with variations in supply and demand" **and** "the proposition that it is *wrong* that pork should be valued." Robbins claims that the verification of the "is" proposition occurs through observation: "We can ask people whether they are prepared to buy pork and how much they are prepared to buy at different prices. Or we can watch how they behave when equipped with currency and exposed to the stimuli of the pig-meat markets." Dewey would undoubtedly respond by noting that, while we might ask someone how he or she might behave under hypothetical circumstances, we must still test any hypothesis against their behavior in fact. And, while we might watch how people behave in fact, we must endeavor to remember that

their behavior is the dynamic result of a complicated process that begins with instinct and is shaped by culture from the moment of conception (according to Dewey). Economists forget this at the risk of theorizing that human behavior can be reduced to a few simple motives and desires. Human behavior **cannot** be reduced to a few simple motives and desires, and a pragmatic economics would acknowledge this fact.

In the same way that a philosophy “which does not take into account the economic enterprise and its human consequences” would be “an escapist intellectual gymnastic,” an economics which does not take into account the complex facts of human behavior and activity would be similarly “un-pragmatic.” The sort of economics that Robbins describes is no more useful in “rendering the facts of ordinary experience more meaningful” than is a philosophy which ignores the facts of ordinary experience in favor of a “fixed and final Reality.” Instead of attempting, perhaps arbitrarily, to reduce the facts of human behavior and action to a few simple motives and desires, the pragmatic economist will understand an individual’s preferences as things which are in flux as the individual moves through different environments and attempt (as all biological beings do) to navigate the disturbances of daily life. For the economist, preferences are “given” and any further discussion of preference must occur outside the realm of economic theory. For the pragmatic economist, preferences are dynamic, and any further analysis which involves preference must be conducted with this in mind. This analysis must also be conducted within the province of economics if economics is to contribute to making the “facts of ordinary life more meaningful.”

Thus, a pragmatic economics should be able to address the proposition “that it is *wrong* that pork should be valued.” This is not meant to imply that a pragmatic

economist should be able to confirm or deny that pork should not be valued. But it is clear, from Dewey's remarks on philosophy as well as economics, that the philosopher and the economist should both have something meaningful to say about this proposition. Robbins believes that the economist must be silent on this issue, yet Dewey would argue that both the economist and the philosopher are obligated, by the nature of their disciplines, to address this proposition. The economist, like the philosopher, should be able to speak intelligently about what people should or should not do. Again, this does not mean that the economist is obligated to tell people that they are wrong to purchase or to not purchase pork on moral grounds. However, the economist should attempt to look at human behavior as something more than utility maximization or "rational" action. If Dewey is right, the sort of observation scientists engage in will aid the economist in achieving a better understanding of the reasons why people do or do not value pork. According to Dewey, that sort of improved understanding should be important to those who study economics. Likewise, that sort of understanding should be important to those who consider themselves philosophers.

Like philosophers, economists are obliged to engage in "intellectual disrobing." Intelligent "furthering of culture," according to Dewey, requires the philosopher or economist or biologist to "divest" himself, at least temporarily, of "the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our own time and place."³⁸⁸ Economists are welcome to debate whether or not their own conceptions of the "good life" and human fulfillment play a role in the work they do as economists, but for Dewey this debate is one whose outcome has been predetermined. There is simply no question that these conceptions affect the professional work of economists as they affect every

³⁸⁸ LW1, 40.

aspect of human life. The key to intelligent action is not dissociating these conceptions from professional work or adopting a value “neutral” economics. Instead, Dewey argues that intelligent action requires the economist to acknowledge the influences and habits which play an important role in the work that he does.

If economics is at all concerned with “human nature,” then philosophy must also be concerned with economics. It is not coincidental that some of Dewey’s most detailed discussions about the business and activity of economics and economists appear in his writing on human nature. In the same way that human nature cannot be understood without reference to habit, an understanding of economics must include attention to the habits of human activity. Again, a “pragmatic” economics would be one based on a realistic understanding of human nature, not on an understanding of human nature as something which must be subjugated. Even if the economist believes that men, by native instinct, have a desire to accumulate wealth or possessions, Dewey will argue that the force of habit will play a significant role in any economic institution or arrangements. Thus, it is specious for any economist or any economic theory to claim that a particular set of institutional arrangements are, by nature, necessary.

Philosophers, according to Dewey, have traditionally used theories of the intransigence of human nature to rationalize existing social and economic institutions, and economists have been similarly affected by such theories. A pragmatic economics would take a broader view of human nature; specifically, that view would be open to the possibility (as Dewey describes it) of “changing human nature.” As Dewey described “current economic psychology” in *Human Nature and Conduct*, it had reduced all human behavior to motives of “personal gain.” In a like (and not unrelated) manner,

philosophers had long argued in favor of a notion of human nature as something that consisted of nothing more than a set of natural, static instincts. Philosophers and economists alike, according to Dewey, should address themselves to a reconstruction of their notions of human nature. This reconstruction would require both groups to acknowledge the relatively strong influence of habit over such instincts, and, at the same time, this reconstruction would acknowledge the difficulty of isolating such instincts in an environment that is, from birth, subject to many influences.

Non-Empirical Social Science

Philosophers are not the only ones who have to worry about the dangers of prolonged reflection. Though Dewey calls the tendency to mistake consequents (reflection and secondary experience) as antecedents “*the philosophic fallacy*,” I think this is itself a mistake, and I think Dewey recognized this late in his life. If the act of reflection or “cognitive experience” carries with it the danger that turning away from ordinary experience will be so satisfying that one is unwilling to return to the facts of ordinary experience, this is no less a problem for theoreticians in economics, physics, sociology, and psychology than it is for philosophers. To be sure, Dewey was probably most comfortable criticizing philosophers because he was himself a professional philosopher, but those who practice the “scientific method” are human, and to be human is to wish to escape the contingent and hazardous character of existence. Philosophers may have been more explicit in their attempts to find transcendent truth and thus “escape from peril,” but novelists, physicists, and economists are motivated by the same desire.

The economist's attempts to "separate and isolate the economic from the moral and political"³⁸⁹ reflect this desire.

The business of moral and political life is a messy one, and, despite attempts by brilliant thinkers to systematize these aspects of life, the fact remains that ordinary experience continues to be hazardous and uncertain. The problem that Dewey identifies in his criticism of philosophers' "quest for certainty" is one which plagues theorizing in general. Any activity which attempts to find order in an inherently disorderly world will, at some point, come into conflict with ordinary experience. The nature of an economic model, as noted in Chapter II above, is that it does not always resemble the "real world" and may, in fact, seem ludicrous to non-economists because it has so little resemblance to the facts of ordinary experience. One way to counteract this problem is to call it to the attention of those who engage in "cognitive" activity so that they are aware of it and note it wherever possible.

Another way to respond to the dangers of theorizing is to demand of those who engage in it that they test their results in the arena which first prompted their attempts at "problem solving." This can be done by virtue of the "experimental method," according to Dewey. I will leave aside, for the moment, the problem of how, precisely, the experimental method is to be applied in philosophy, and I will stipulate that Dewey's claims regarding this method are accurate and that the progress he foresees in traditionally "non-empirical" fields will, in fact, be achieved. Even with that stipulation, however, I wonder whether Dewey's conviction, that the empirical method must be "naturalized" or brought to bear on all fields, is right.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 358.

Surely, there has been progress in economics recently because of the use of the experimental method, and I will say more about that in the next section of this chapter. But the fact that this progress has occurred and, that in many respects, economists have proven themselves increasingly better at providing the “means of control, of enlarged use and enjoyment of things,”³⁹⁰ does not mean that economists (or philosophers, for that matter) were previously **wholly** unsuccessful in this respect. Dewey himself recognized the importance of using the “evolutionary” or “historical” method in moral theory. Moral progress will not be had by a complete break with the history of moral conduct, and, even if we envisioned such a break as necessary for progress, Dewey reminds us that the force of habit and the “lag” in human behavior is tremendous.

In the same manner, we must acknowledge that “better” “objects”³⁹¹ and intelligent action do not appear from thin air, unaccompanied by a history of inquiry. The work of experimental scientists was, in at least some respects, the product of the work non-experimental scientists. Similarly, the work of an “empirical” philosopher like Dewey is possible, at least in part, because of the work of people like Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. The work of Vernon Smith, an experimental economist, is, at least in part, possible because of the work of non-experimental economists like Lionel Robbins.

I will not disagree with Dewey when he says that “cultivated common sense” looks “askance at philosophy” because “so many philosophies” have terminated “in conclusions that make it necessary to disparage and condemn primary experience.”³⁹² I have no doubt that “cultivated common sense” does look askance at much current work in philosophy, in the same way, undoubtedly, that men of “cultivated common sense”

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 17.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 63.

³⁹² Ibid.

hundreds of years ago had little interest in debates about how many angels might fit on the head of a pin. But I am not entirely comfortable with the notion that “cultivated common sense” should be the final test of the value of a philosophy or of a science. If cultivated common sense were applied to the principles and theorems of quantum physics and funding for research in quantum physics were dependent on the approval of common sense, I fear that there would be little left of the field.

Do the products of a theoretical study improve the course of human life and do they help us to exercise control over that which is unstable in life? This is, I grant, a fine test of the products of reflection and certainly a useful way in which to judge the value of a given study. If philosophy cannot produce anything which helps us to exercise control over some of the instability in our lives, then there is no question that it will eventually fade into complete irrelevance. However, I wonder if it is always immediately clear which products of reflection will be useful in making the things of ordinary experience more “fruitful.” The fact that the conclusions of a study or experiment do not solve the problem they were intended to solve does not mean that these conclusions are useless, will **always** be useless, or that they will be useless in **every** field.

In short, as Dewey himself recognized “Philosophy, like all forms of reflective analysis, takes us away, for the time being, from the things had in primary experience as they directly act and are acted upon, used and enjoyed.”³⁹³ Dewey’s claim is that philosophy, unlike other forms of reflective analysis, never makes the “return journey” to the facts of primary experience. This claim is based, in large part, on the fact that other forms of “reflective analysis” employ the experimental method in order to ensure that the “return journey” occurs. The reconstruction of philosophy Dewey called for is dependent

³⁹³ Ibid., 26.

on our ability to use the “experimental method” in traditionally non-empirical fields like philosophy. And, thus, we have returned to the problem of the application of the experimental method in philosophy (and the non-physical and natural sciences).

The Application of the Experimental Method

As I have already noted, I think that Dewey’s development of the experimental method as a philosophical principle is an important contribution to pragmatism. It is one of the central features of his philosophy, and he refers to it throughout the middle and later works with consistency. What he does not do, however, is provide enough specific examples of how this method might operate in philosophy or, for that matter, other fields that he considered “non-empirical.” And this, I think, is a serious problem. If the experimental method is central to our understanding of Dewey’s pragmatism and his criticisms of the history of philosophy are based on its “non-empirical” nature, the success of his philosophy is, I believe, ultimately dependent on his ability to show that the experimental method will pass his “first-rate test of the value of any philosophy”³⁹⁴ where others have failed. The use of the experimental method in philosophy, whatever that entails, must “render” our “ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments” “more significant, more luminous” and “make our dealings with them more fruitful.”

Dewey must realize that the use of the experimental method, though standard in the natural and physical sciences, will not come naturally to philosophy. His criticism of the history of philosophy is based on his conviction that philosophers have been unwilling to use the experimental method and have repeatedly sought to avoid trials of their conclusions in “ordinary experience.” Thus, he **must** see that the use of the

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 18.

experimental method in philosophy will be a “tough sell.” If so, why would he then fail to provide more specific examples of precisely how this method will operate on traditional philosophical problems? With the exception of *Experience and Nature*, his examples are few and far between, and, when they exist, they are hardly very specific or concrete.

Even if we grant that *Experience and Nature* provides the best set of specific examples of the experimental method brought to bear on the perennial problems of philosophy, there are those who will dispute that there is anything “experimental” about that work. Most notably, of course, Richard Rorty has challenged Dewey’s claim that his method in *Experience and Nature* “differs no whit from that of any investigator who, by making certain observations and experiments, and by utilizing the existing body of ideas available for calculation and interpretation, concludes that he really succeeds in finding out something about some limited aspect of nature.”³⁹⁵ As Rorty notes, “...two generations of commentators have been puzzled to say what method might produce ‘a statement of the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds without regard to their differentiation into mental and physical’ while differing ‘no whit’ from that employed by the laboratory scientist.”³⁹⁶

A more generous reading would be that Dewey provides a detailed account of the experimental method in the sense that he identifies those traits in scientific work and reasoning that illustrate the “logic” necessary to employ experimentalism in philosophy. Among those traits are “genetic” accounts of phenomena, the ability and information necessary for others to repeat and verify results, isolation and abstraction of phenomena,

³⁹⁵ Dewey, John (1927), 361.

³⁹⁶ Rorty, 73.

a bridge of the gap between general statements and particular events, and, finally, an insight into the continuity of the process of inquiry. Though it might still be objected that this account of the experimental method is not terribly specific, this would at least meet part of Rorty's objection. One must, of course, regret Dewey's claim that this method differs "no whit" from that of the laboratory scientist since, elsewhere, he is clear that the experimental method provides the "logic" necessary to make philosophy empirical, and he does not indicate that he expects philosophers to do exactly what laboratory scientists do.

But even this more generous reading, that Dewey **does** give a detailed account of what the experimental method entails, will not save him from the objection that there are few clues to demonstrate precisely how this method will be applied. To speak in general or even specific terms about the experimental method is not the same as providing concrete, clear examples of that method in action in philosophy. That Dewey does not provide such examples is, I fear, a problem that throws the success of his philosophy into question. Moreover, it seems clear that Dewey realized there was little hope for an empirical philosophy in his lifetime, but he did see the potential for the experimental method in other disciplines. And I find it odd that, given his reliance on matters of economic concern in his philosophy and his knowledge of political economy, he would not have turned to practical examples of how the experimental method might operate in economics.

In 2002, just a day before he was told he had been awarded the Nobel Prize in economics, Vernon Smith and I discussed John Dewey. Though Smith was somewhat familiar with Dewey's work and certainly knew him by reputation, he was surprised to

learn that Dewey advocated the use of the experimental method in economics **or** philosophy.³⁹⁷ When I suggested to Smith and his colleagues at the Interdisciplinary Center for Economic Science at George Mason that Dewey might have anticipated their research and that the connection could be useful for their attempts to improve interdisciplinary work in economics, they all nodded and smiled at me. As if to justify the lack of enthusiasm in their response to me, Smith explained that “*lots of people*” have “*talked*” about experimentalism in economics, but few have done anything about it.

It should be noted that Smith is truly an interdisciplinary scholar, and, in addition to his interests and research in anthropology, sociology, and biology, he has looked more carefully at Dewey’s work since the conversation I have described. The point of this anecdote, however, is not to give credit to Smith’s broad interests or to glorify the work of an economist who has been praised by far more interesting and authoritative thinkers than me. What is interesting about this exchange is that Smith was undoubtedly right, and it seems a terrible shame: ‘*lots of people,*’ Dewey not least among them, may have considered the possibility that the experimental method would lead to important progress in economics. I suspect, however, that few of these other people had spent as much time and effort as Dewey did thinking and writing about this possibility. Sadly, however, there is, as Smith pointed out, little to suggest that his work had any influence whatsoever on the development of experimental economics.

I would not presume to condemn Dewey’s work because it did not directly lead to an important development that could later be connected to it by an observer. That would be absurd, and I suspect there would be no end to such things because Dewey was a philosopher with many interests and many outlets for his interests. But I do believe that,

³⁹⁷ Personal, unrecorded conversation at the ICES Center at George Mason University in October, 2002.

had Dewey provided more specific examples of how the experimental method might be applied to philosophy or to economics or to other fields, his critics might have been able to respond more clearly to his work. Though Dewey might never have convinced his critics that he was right, the ensuing conversation and exchanges might have provided the impetus for the earlier development of experimental economics and, one might even hope, experimental philosophy. Though Dewey's influence in social and educational issues cannot be doubted, his influence in professional philosophy most certainly has been doubted. There may be many reasons that his work was not as influential as it might have been in professional philosophy, but primary among those must be that he was not pragmatic **enough** in his writing and in his lectures. His philosophy, I am afraid, may not have been able to pass the very test he set for it.

Dewey and "Pragmatic Economics"

Since I have attempted to criticize Dewey because he was not pragmatic enough, it is only fair that I should be held to the same standard. What could it mean to speak of a pragmatic economics? What, specifically, might Dewey have meant by the application of the experimental method to a traditionally "non-empirical" field? As I have noted above, I believe the work of experimental economists is the closest example we may have to Dewey's philosophy in practice. Thus, to provide an example of what it would mean to speak of a pragmatic economics, I will rely on the work of Vernon Smith who is widely recognized as a pioneer of experimental economics.

In an important article in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Smith outlines seven reasons that economists should conduct experiments:

1. To test a theory, or discriminate between theories
2. To explore the causes of a theory's failure
3. To establish empirical regularities as a basis for new theory
4. To compare environments
5. To compare institutions
6. To evaluate policy proposals
7. To use the laboratory as a testing ground for institutional design.³⁹⁸

Note the similarities between Smith's justification for bringing the "laboratory habit of mind" to economics and Dewey's claims about the value of experimentalism in traditional non-empirical fields.

First, Smith believes that economists should employ the experimental method in order to test and evaluate various economic theories. In addition, experimentation in economics will help explain why a particularly theory failed. Dewey's test for philosophy is whether or not it renders our ordinary life-experiences more significant and more meaningful. Smith argues that the conclusions of economics theories should be tested against "experimental observations." Using the conclusions of economic theory, economists must test the predictions based on these conclusions against empirical observations of human behavior. Quite simply, "the greater the frequency with which the observations hit these 'predictions,' in the context of a design in which hits are unlikely to occur by chance, the better the theory."³⁹⁹ In fact, Smith's work in experimental economics has demonstrated that a number of the assumptions traditionally made by game theorists do not, in fact, hold true in empirical testing. Dewey would undoubtedly have suggested the same criteria for evaluating economic or philosophical theory: both the economist and the philosopher are trying to establish validity,⁴⁰⁰ and this can only be accomplished by testing theories and assumptions against empirical evidence. Theory

³⁹⁸ Smith (1994), 113-115.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁰⁰ See page 146 above.

alone cannot demonstrate a theory's failure; thus, in addition to evaluating theories, experimentation is necessary to determine why theories fail.

Dewey criticized economists (and theorists more generally) for attempting to reduce the explanation of human behavior to a few simple assumptions. As if to confirm this criticism, Smith recognizes that "Microeconomic theory tends to build upon simplifying assumptions, and to eschew attempts to model many of the complex trading and contracting institutions that we observe."⁴⁰¹ In short, non-empirical theory is not equipped to deal with the complexities of human behavior, but laboratory observation is so equipped:

But in the laboratory, especially with computerization, institutions with complex trading rules are as easy to study as are simple single unit auctions. This makes it possible to range beyond the confines of current theory to establish empirical regularities which can enable theorists to see in advance what are the difficult problems on which it is worth their while to work.⁴⁰²

Neither Smith nor Dewey believes that theory should be abandoned or that it is not worthwhile to engage in theorizing. But one of the values of experimentation is that it may provide direction for further theorizing and make the work of the theorist more efficient (albeit non-empirical).

Vernon Smith's experimentation in economics has produced results which are remarkable in the degree to which they differ from traditional non-empirical economic theory. One of the results of his experimentation is that "economic agents can achieve efficient outcomes which are not part of their intention..."⁴⁰³ As Smith notes, this was the conclusion of another important thinker named Smith: Adam Smith. Yet this

⁴⁰¹ Smith (1994), 114.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 118.

conclusion was largely treated as “just one more theory” by most professional economists until the middle of the twentieth century. The empirical work done by Vernon Smith and other experimental economists has demonstrated that this particular theory articulates an important aspect of human behavior. This is a theory which is valid because it obtains in reality, and, unlike the frustrating nature of many economic models, even the most uninformed observer can examine Vernon Smith’s results to determine that Adam Smith’s conclusions provide valuable insights into human behavior. This is no longer a theory that must be accepted on faith or anecdotal evidence, and, through their work in the laboratory, the experimentalists have returned the objects of reflection to primary experience.

Vernon Smith’s work has also provided insight into notions of fairness and unfairness,⁴⁰⁴ and he has also reflected on the nature of methodology in economics and the nature of experimentation.⁴⁰⁵ Fairness, unfairness, methodology of social science, the nature of science: these are all issues which have occupied the attention of philosophers for hundreds (if not thousands) of years. Dewey, in particular, was interested in these issues, and he was frustrated by the lack of progress in philosophical investigation in these matters. He advocated the adoption of “the laboratory habit of mind” in philosophy, and he repeatedly called for philosophy to become an empirical discipline. He further argued that traditionally non-empirical fields would benefit by the use of experimentation.

I believe the work of Vernon Smith demonstrates conclusively that Dewey was right about this last claim. Without question, Smith’s experiments have forced game

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 124-126.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 126-129.

theorists and other economists to reconsider their conclusions. There is no question in my mind that if Dewey were alive today, he would point to Smith's work as a testament to the value of experimentation in a traditionally non-empirical field. He would, I believe, have called Smith's work "pragmatic economics." I am just as confident that he would have been unsettled by the results of much of Smith's work because these results are often in sharp contrast to Dewey's own conclusions about human nature and rational behavior. In other cases, Smith's findings support Dewey's claims. But, if Dewey took seriously the notion that philosophers must attempt to become more empirical in their work and to follow the "intelligent method" (i.e., they must become pragmatists), he would be forced to adapt his own thinking to accommodate Smith's findings. He could not, on the one hand, laud the practice of assessing the results of reflection in "common" experience and, on the other hand, dismiss the products of this practice when he did not like them. To do so would be to fall victim to the same sort of mistake for which he criticized so many other philosophers.

While Dewey might have been surprised by many of Smith's findings, he would not have been surprised by the skeptical reception Smith's work has often received from other economists. Although Smith is a Nobel laureate, there have been many (including other Nobel laureates) who have questioned the legitimacy of employing the experimental method in economics.⁴⁰⁶ Like philosophy, economics is a field that has long shunned the use of experimentation or empirical observation. Unlike philosophers,

⁴⁰⁶ One of the most popular textbooks used for introductory economics courses at the college level, Paul Samuelson and W.D. Nordhaus' *Principles of Economics*, dismisses experimentalism in economics within the first ten pages: "One possible way of figuring out economic laws... is by controlled experiments.... Economists... cannot perform the controlled experiments of chemists or biologists because they cannot easily control other important factors. Like astronomers or meteorologists, they must be content largely to observe." (Samuelson and Nordhaus, 8)

however, economists have slowly been forced to accept the fact that their experimentalism has an important role in the study of economics. Perhaps one of the reasons that philosophers have been slow to accept a similar conclusion about their own discipline is that Dewey, the main proponent of experimentalism in philosophy, never actually entered the laboratory as Smith did. Smith devised and conducted experiments, and he published his results, despite the ridicule he often received from those in his profession. He reflected on the nature of experimentalism in economics, and he detailed how the results of these experiments made the work of economists more accurate and meaningful. Ironically, Dewey spent a great deal of time reflecting on the value of experimentalism in philosophy and he claimed that it would make the work of philosophers more meaningful, but I have argued that he never devised or conducted the experiments that might have given this claim adequate support. Whether this is because it is impossible to devise and conduct such experiments or because Dewey never realized the value of doing so, the result is, unfortunately, the same: philosophers have largely ignored Dewey's call for "empirical philosophy."

Conclusion: Human Development and Fulfillment

Again, it would be ridiculous to criticize Dewey for not anticipating the work that Vernon Smith would later undertake in economics. Had Dewey been thoroughgoing in his attempts to develop and conduct experiments in philosophy, it is quite likely that Smith would have had more familiarity with Dewey's work because of its relation to his own. It is doubtful, however, that such familiarity with Dewey and a subsequent reliance on his arguments regarding the value of experimentation would have made Smith's work

any more legitimate in the eyes of other economists. It is just as unlikely that Smith's work would have served to convince philosophers that Dewey's work demanded further attention. The fact that there has been little or no scholarly research that has compared and combined Dewey's work with Vernon Smith's is indeed regrettable, but it is also something that can be corrected. This dissertation is, in part, an attempt to begin the correction.

While Dewey cannot be criticized for failing to anticipate Smith's work, he certainly can and should be criticized for failing to meet the obligations of his own evaluative criteria. Throughout his work, Dewey was interested in economic life and the day-to-day economic conditions of the common man. He refers to many of the difficulties of economic life throughout his work. Being "subject to the whims of a foreman or to impersonal authority" is, for the laborer, detrimental to his "self-respect."⁴⁰⁷ Work in modern industry, according to Dewey, is dehumanizing for many who must do it: "Under a régime of highly centralized finance and industry, the mass of individuals, who are subordinates, tend to become cogs in a vast machine whose workings they do not understand, and in whose management they have no part or lot."⁴⁰⁸ In 1935, Dewey decried the fact that "millions have no work, no security and no opportunity either to produce or to enjoy what is produced."⁴⁰⁹ He attributed this situation to an unwillingness to treat "intelligence, skill and character" as social goods, and, throughout his work, he identified this unwillingness with various social, political,

⁴⁰⁷ LW7, 391.

⁴⁰⁸ LW11, 252 (From an essay entitled "Freedom" that was first published in the National Education Association's *Implications of Social-Economic Goals for Education: A Report of the Committee on the Social-Economic Goals of America*).

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 159 (From a speech broadcast on January 16, 1935 in New York City).

and philosophical developments. As I have noted above, Aristotle was complicit in this problem because of his view of human nature and the notion of “natural slavery.”

There can be no complaint that Dewey was not concerned about the economic conditions of ordinary experience. From the numbing effects of the repetition inherent in many contemporary factory jobs to the destruction of family units to the demise of meaningful individualism, John Dewey made every effort to document the economic problems that plagued the average human being. For this, he should be commended since, as he noted, philosophers had not historically been as attentive to such things as they might (or should) have been. In this respect, Dewey was unquestionably a pragmatist.

But in other respects, Dewey was himself insufficiently Deweyan. He praised the experimental method and its ability to make ordinary experience more “fruitful” and “luminous.” Yet clues as to how this method will be used by philosophers to correct the evils of modern economic life are few and far between in the thirty seven volumes of Dewey’s collected works. Dewey commiserated the fact that “cultivated common sense” would always “look askance at philosophy” because it had become too remote from everyday experience. He understood that modern life brought with it many challenges, often economic, and that human development and fulfillment were constantly in danger of being stunted by the dulling tendencies of a commercial culture. Surely, “cultivated common sense” would welcome nothing more than prescriptions for remedying this situation, and Dewey’s claims about the nature of experimentation and the “intelligent

method” should have held great promise for rescuing philosophy from its “remoteness from the concerns of daily life.”⁴¹⁰

Dewey was, however, unsuccessful on this count, and the sad irony is that he was unsuccessful precisely because he failed to follow his own methodology. He understood the value of the experimental method and he conveyed, in great detail, its potential for constructing “freer and more secure goods.”⁴¹¹ But he never provided the same degree of detail when suggesting exactly how the “intelligent method” would be utilized by philosophers in order to bring about all of these very desirable consequences. In speaking of his “reconstruction” of philosophy and comparing the improved empirical philosophy to the non-empirical philosophy of tradition, Dewey wrote:

Carelessness and routine, Olympian aloofness, secluded contemplation are themselves choices. To claim that intelligence is a better method than its alternatives, authority, imitation, caprice and ignorance, prejudice and passion, is hardly an excessive claim. These procedures have been tried and have worked their will. The result is not such as to make it clear that the method of intelligence, the use of science in criticizing and re-creating the casual goods of nature into intentional and conclusive goods of art, the union of knowledge and values in production, is not worth trying. There may be those to whom it is treason to think of philosophy as the critical method of developing methods of criticism. But this conception of philosophy also waits to be tried, and the trail which shall approve or condemn lies in the eventual issue.⁴¹²

The conception is, as yet, untried in philosophy, and this is regrettable both for the discipline and for Dewey’s legacy.

⁴¹⁰ LW1, 18.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 325.

⁴¹² Ibid., 326.

Appendix:

A Catalogue of References to “economics”

Ethics – 1908 (MW5)

- 29 “The Kinship and Family Groups are also **Economic** and Industrial Units”
- 77 In a chapter entitled “Sociological Agencies in the Transition,” section I, entitled “**Economic** Forces”: “The action of **economic** forces in breaking up the early kinship group or joint family may be noticed in the history of many people. The clan flourishes in such conditions of hunting life or of simple agriculture as were found among Australians and Indians, or among the Celts in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. It cannot survive when a more advanced state of agriculture prevails.”
- 78 “But we get a broader view of **economic** influences if we consider the methods of organizing industry which have successively prevailed. In early society, and likewise in the earlier period of modern civilization, the family was a great **economic** unit. Many or most of the industries could be advantageously carried on in the household.
- 112 Though no explicit reference to “economics,” a chapter entitled “Commercial and Political Individualism” discusses the relationship of the Greeks to commercial interest.
- 178 In a chapter entitled “Moral Differentiation and the Social Order”: “Two processes went on side by side in the movement we have traced. (I) The primitive group, which was at once a kinship or family, an **economic**, a political, a religious, an educational, and a moral unit, was broken down and replaced by several distinct institutions, each with its own special character.”
- “*The Family*.—When the family was largely determined by status, when it was an **economic**, a political, and a religious unit, it had a strong support.”
- 179 “For while savages have often practiced infanticide for **economic** reasons, it is doubtful if any savage family ever equaled the more refined selfishness and cruelty of the child labor which modern families have furnished and modern society has permitted.”
- 179-
180 “*The Economic and Industrial*.—The **economic** lost powerful restraints when it became a separate activity divorced from family, religious, and, in the view of

some, from moral considerations. It has worked out certain important moral necessities of its own. Honesty, the keeping of contracts, the steadiness and continuity of character fostered by **economic** relations, are important contributions. Modern business, for example, is the most effective agency in securing sobriety. It is far more efficient than ‘temperance societies.’ Other values of the **economic** and industrial process—the increase of production, the interchange of services and goods, the new means of happiness afforded by the increase of wealth—are obvious. On the other hand, the honesty required by business is a most technical and peculiarly limited sort.”

- 180 “The maxim ‘Business is business’ may be made the sanction for any kind of conduct not excluded by commercial standards. Unless there is a constant injection of moral valuation and control, there is a tendency to subvert all other ends and standards to the purely **economic**.”
- 181 “*The Religious Life*.—When freed from interdependence with kinship, **economic**, and political association, religion has an opportunity to become more personal and more universal. When a man’s religious attitude is not fixed by birth, when worship is not so closely bound up with **economic** interests, when there is not only religious ‘toleration,’ but religious liberty, the significance of religion as a personal, spiritual relation comes to view. The kinship tie is sublimated into a conception of divine fatherhood.”

Contributions to *Cyclopedia of Education* (MW6)

“Altruism and Egoism”

- 367 “By the latter part of the eighteenth century this type [Hobbes’] of moral philosophy was elaborated to a point where it became the psychological foundation for the **economic theory** of Adam Smith and the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham—the two most influential doctrines of the time. Adam Smith made sympathy the basis of ethics and intelligent self-interest the basis of economics, and bent his energies to proving that if intelligent self-love, or the reasonable desire for personal comfort and profit, were left free from arbitrary political regulations, it naturally brought men together in natural agreement (contracts) so that each man, in serving himself, served his fellow. In this way, under the guidance of the ‘invisible hand’ of Providence, men in seeking their own interests promoted unconsciously the welfare of society as a whole even more efficaciously than if they had sought to do so from motives of conscious philanthropy.”
- 367-
368 “Jeremy Bentham furnished the natural pendant to this doctrine. Without committing himself upon the psychological question of whether sympathy is as innate as self-love, he held that the sole moral criterion is the tendency of acts to

promote universal happiness, so that benevolence is the ultimate virtue. He also held that men's need for the approval, esteem, and aid of others is so great that ultimately the dictates of universal benevolence and of intelligent self-love coincide. In promoting the happiness of all, the individual is taking the best means to secure his own greatest happiness, and vice versa. Thus Bentham's moral doctrine effectively supplemented the **economic theory** of Smith."

"Vocational Education in the Light of the World War" (MW11)

- 62 Dewey is suggesting possible uses for the "large cantonments and buildings and various resources" left unused from the first World War: "Now upon this physical basis that we have spent millions of dollars securing, an education should be built which comprises the four essentials of preparation for a vocation, namely: Physique, **economic** efficiency, social competency and a trained capacity for the consumption and for the employment of labor. A thorough-going solution of the **economic** and industrial problem from the labor point of view in this country is a national scheme of socialized education applying to the youth between the older ages, just as we have already made our more elementary system universal and conscriptive."
- 63 "By the second element, **economic** efficiency, I mean industrial training in its stricter sense. The plan that we already have, can, if imaginatively and wisely used, be made the basis for instruction in agriculture, various kinds of farming, various forms of productive industry, manufacturing distribution, household management of different forms. The aims should not, of course, be immediate, highly-specialized efficiency that is so immediate and so specialized as to limit future growth or to predestine individuals to occupy simply a particular niche. It should be aimed, rather, at a discovery of personal aptitude to practice familiarly with fundamental processes of industry and should be devoted to the development of as much initiative, as much variety, as is possible." Dewey continues after this for several pages on the importance of vocational training for industry.

"America in the World" (MW11)

- 70 A piece on the fact that, on Washington's birthday (Feb. 22, 1918), the United States is debating entering the war: "While once there was enough to do in conquering a wilderness, we have now come to the end of the pioneer period, and have a margin of energy to draw upon.¶ The change has, of course, been brought about by that same development of industry and commerce which has annihilated distance, drawn all peoples into closer relations, and made the affairs and interest of one nation the concern of all, for weal or for woe. The fact that the interdependence which the new industry and the new methods of transportation

and intercommunication have brought about should first reveal itself in strains and alignments for conflict does not alter the essential fact that the world for the first time now finds itself a round world, politically and **economically** as well as astronomically.”

- 71 “Of late we have been afflicted with national bashfulness, with a shy self-consciousness as to noting even that there is an American idea, lest we be guilty of spread-eagleism. We have assumed a self-depreciatory, almost apologetic, attitude towards the rest of the world. But unless our contribution to the present world struggle is to be confined to military and **economic** force, it must be that we have an idea to contribute, an idea to be taken into account in the world reconstruction after the war.”

“Internal Social Reorganization after the War” (MW11)

- 74 Dewey describes the difficulties that have arisen as a result of the first World War and possible responses to these “weaknesses” in the existing social order: “All other wars have been, to a large extent, wars of armies, wars of those who have been expressly mobilized for military service; but it is the commonest of commonplaces about the present war that the men on the front, the men in the trenches, the men in uniform, represent merely the first line of that larger army which includes practically the entire organization of all of the people. Now, it is because this war has thrown such a strain upon the entire **economic**, industrial and social organization, that it is so fraught with symptoms of change.”

“Liberalism in Japan” (MW11)

- 160 A section titled “The Economic Factor”

“Even the most hardened upholder of the impotency of intellectual and moral forces might however concede that *without* certain changes of mental attitude and disposition, there are certain alterations of society which cannot be accomplished, that intellectual changes are at least a negative condition, a sine qua non. And this concession will be met not with an admission but an assertion that it is fortunate for the prospects of liberalism in Japan that the intellectual modifications already dealt with are accompanied and reinforced by active and aggressive **economic** changes.”

- 164 “In intellectual circles there is animated discussion of whether Japan must in its **economic** development pass through the stage of antagonism of capital and labor characteristic of Western development.”

“The liberals who have come most under the influence of Western ideas contend that the principle [the principle of ‘kindness’] is only a belated feudal relic and is bound to fail. They hold that it is morally as well as **economically** necessary for the laborers to assert themselves; that they cannot develop unless they organize and win their rights for themselves, instead of accepting concessions from benevolent patrons. This is known as the principle of ‘rights.’ But the feudalists of the chosen, unique-nation type counter by saying that it is only the materialism of the West that has made the development of industry take the form of struggle for liberties and rights; that the superior moral standards of the Orient are capable of applying the principle of kindness and sympathy to the growth of industrial relations and thus escaping the class war which has disgraced Western civilization.”

- 165 “In one of the private universities a teacher gave his class in advanced political **economy** a chance to vote as to whether they would take up for study Commercial Expansion, Labor Movements, or Socialism. The vote was a hundred for the last topic, to three for the first.”
- 166 “There have been of late many arrests for possession and circulation of ‘revolutionary’ literature. There are even those who prophesy a political revolution on an **economic** basis in Japan within the next five years. But they seem to me too sanguine.”

“On the Two Sides of the Eastern Sea” (MW11)

- 176 “It would hardly be good taste in Japan to allude to the report that influential Chinese ministers are in constant receipt of Japanese funds and these corrupt officials are the agencies by which political and **economic** concessions were wrung from China while Europe and America were busy with the war. But in China nobody even takes the trouble to deny it, or even to discuss it.”
- “In speaking of the feeling of weakness current in Japan about Japan itself, one must refer to the **economic** situation because of its obvious connection with the international situation. In the first place, there is the strong impression that Japan is over-extended.”
- 179 The Chinese economic situation in comparison to that of the Japanese: “If the **economic** straits of Japan are alluded to, it is only as a reason why Japan has hurried her diplomatic coercion, her corrupt and secret bargainings with Chinese traitors and her industrial invasion.”

“The Discrediting of Idealism” (MW11)

- 183 “There is another force, an immense force, which might have been used in behalf of the war ideals of the United States, a force which might still be employed through less effectually. There is the **economic** and financial force of the United States. It may be doubted whether the world has even seen such a spectacle as that of the last few years. The United States has extended money and credit almost ‘without stint’ to governments of Europe irrespective of whether they were supporting the announced policies of the United States, nay, even when those governments were doing what they could to undermine American ends.”

Reconstruction in Philosophy (MW12)

- 177 The belief in fixed values has bred a division of ends into intrinsic and instrumental, of those that are really worth while in themselves and those that are of importance only as means to intrinsic goods. Indeed, it is often thought to be the very beginning of wisdom, of moral discrimination, to make this distinction. Dialectically, the distinction is interesting and seems harmless. But carried into practice it has an import that is tragic. Historically, it has been the source and justification of a hard and fast difference between ideal goods on one side and material goods on the other. At present those who would be liberal conceive intrinsic goods as esthetic in nature rather than as exclusively religious or as intellectually contemplative. But the effect is the same. So-called intrinsic goods, whether religious or esthetic, are divorced from those interests of daily life which because of their constancy and urgency form the preoccupation of the great mass. Aristotle used this distinction to declare that slaves and the working class though they are necessary *for* the state—the commonweal—are not constituents *of* it. That which is regarded as *merely* instrumental must approach drudgery; it cannot command either intellectual, artistic or moral attention and respect. Anything becomes *unworthy* whenever it is thought of as intrinsically lacking worth. So men of ‘ideal’ interests have chosen for the most part the way of neglect and escape. The urgency and pressure of ‘lower’ ends have been covered up by polite conventions. Or, they have been relegated to a baser class of mortals in order that the few might be free to attend to the goods that are really or intrinsically worth while. This withdrawal, in the name of higher ends, has left, for [178] mankind at large and especially for energetic ‘practical’ people the lower activities in complete command.”
- 178 “No one can possibly estimate how much of the obnoxious materialism and brutality of our **economic** life is due to the fact that **economic** ends have been regarded as *merely* instrumental. When they are recognized to be as intrinsic and final in their place as any others, then it will be seen that they are capable of idealization, and that if life is to be worth while, they must acquire ideal and intrinsic value. Esthetic, religious and other ‘ideal’ ends are now thin and meager

or else idle and luxurious because of the separation from 'instrumental' or **economic** ends. Only in connection with the latter can they be woven into the texture of daily life and made substantial and pervasive."

"The other generic change lies in doing away once for all with the traditional distinction between moral goods, like the virtues, and natural goods like health, **economic** security, art, science, and the like. The point of view under discussion is not the only one which has deplored this rigid distinction and endeavored to abolish it."

200- "We began by pointing out that European philosophy arose when intellectual
201 methods and scientific results moved away from social traditions which had consolidated and embodied the fruits of spontaneous desire and fancy. It was pointed out that philosophy had ever since had the problem of adjusting the dry, thin and meagre scientific standpoint with the obstinately persisting body of warm and abounding imaginative beliefs. Conceptions of possibility, progress, free movement and infinitely diversified opportunity have been suggested by modern science. But until they have displaced from *imagination* the heritage of the immutable and the once-for-all ordered and systematized, the ideas of mechanism and matter will lie like a dead weight upon the emotions, paralyzing religion and distorting art. When the liberation of capacity no longer seems a menace to organization and established institutions, something that cannot be avoided practically and yet something that is a threat to conservation of the most precious values of the past, when the liberating of human capacity operates as a socially creative force, art will not be a luxury, a stranger to the daily occupations of making a living. Making a living **economically** speaking, will be at one with making a life worth living. And when the emotional force, the mystic force one might say, of communication, of the miracle of shared life and share experience is spontaneously felt, the hardness and crudeness of contemporary life will be bathed in the light that never was on land or sea."

Human Nature and Conduct (MW14)

9 Freedom and economics and morality: "one has to turn from moral theories to the general human struggle for political, **economic**, and religious liberty, for freedom of thought, speech, assemblage and creed, to find significant reality in the conception of freedom of will. Then one finds himself out of the stiflingly close atmosphere of an inner consciousness and in the open-air world. The cost of confining moral freedom to an inner region is the almost complete severance of ethics from politics and **economics**. The former is regarded as summed up in edifying exhortations, and the *latter as connected with arts of expediency separated from larger issues of good.*" (my italics)

- 11 “A morals based on study of human nature instead of upon disregard for it would find the facts of man continuous with those of the rest of nature and would thereby ally ethics with physics and biology. It would find the nature and activities of one person coterminous with those of other human beings, and therefore link ethics with the study of history, sociology, law and **economics**.”
- 46 “The conditions which determine the nature and extent of the particular grouping in question are matters of supreme import. But they are not as such subject-matter of psychology, but of the history of politics, law, religion, **economics**, invention, the technology of communication and intercourse.”
- 78 “Like Greek slavery or feudal serfdom, war and the existing **economic** regime are social patterns woven out of the stuff of instinctive activities. Native human nature supplies the raw materials, but custom furnishes the machinery and the designs.”
- 79 “An infantile logic, now happily expelled from physical science, taught that opium put men to sleep because of its dormitive potency. We follow the same logic in social matters when we believe that war exists because of bellicose instincts; or that a particular **economic** regime is necessary because of acquisitive and competitive impulses which must find expression.”
- 82 “History does not prove the inevitability of war, but it does prove that customs and institutions which organize native powers into certain patterns in politics and **economics** will also generate the war-pattern.”
- “The case of **economic** institutions is as suggestive as that of war. The present system is indeed much more recent and more local than is the institution of war. But no system has ever as yet existed which did not in some form involve the exploitation of some human beings for the advantage of others. And it is argued that this trait is unassailable because it flows from the inherent, immutable qualities of human nature. It is argued, for example, that **economic** inferiorities and disabilities are incidents of an institution of private property which flows from an original proprietary instinct; it is contended they spring from a competitive struggle for wealth which in turn flows from the absolute need of profit as an inducement to industry.”
- 83 “Those who attempt to defend the necessity of existing **economic** institutions as manifestations of human nature convert this suggestion of a concrete inquiry into a generalized truth and hence into a definitive falsity.”
- 84 “The idea of a thing intrinsically wholly inert in the sense of absolutely passive is expelled from physics and has taken refuge in the psychology of current **economics**. In truth, man acts anyway, he can’t help acting.”

- 86 “How then does it come about that current **economic** psychology has so tremendously oversimplified the situation? Why does it recognize but one type of motive, that which concerns personal gain? Of course part of the answer is to be found in the natural tendency in all sciences toward a substitution of artificial conceptual simplifications for the tangles of concrete empirical facts.”
- “The social peculiarity which explains the emphasis put upon profit as an inducement to productive serviceable work stands out in high relief in the identification of work with labor. For labor means in **economic** theory something painful, something so onerously disagreeable or ‘costly’ that every individual avoids it if he can, and engages in it only because of the promise of an overbalancing gain.”
- 87 “The alleged need of an incentive to stir men out of quiescent inertness is the need of an incentive powerful enough to overcome contrary stimuli which proceed from the social conditions. Circumstances of productive service now shear away direct satisfaction from those engaging in it. A real and important fact is thus contained in current **economic** psychology, but it is a fact about existing industrial conditions and not a fact about native, original, activity.”
- 88 “War and the existing **economic** regime have not been discussed primarily on their own account. They are crucial cases of the relation existing between original impulse and acquired habit. They are so fraught with evil consequences that any one who is disposed can heap up criticisms without end. Nevertheless they persist. This persistence constitutes the case for the conservative who argues that such institutions are rooted in an unalterable human nature.”
- 89 “The existing psychology of the industrial worker for example is slack, irresponsible, combining a maximum of mechanical routine with a maximum of explosive, unregulated impulsiveness. These things have been bred by the existing **economic** system. But they exist, and are formidable obstacles to social change. We cannot breed in men the desire to get something for as nearly as nothing as possible and in the end not pay the price. We satisfy ourselves cheaply by preaching the charm of productivity and by blaming the inherent selfishness of human nature, and urging some great moral and religious revival. The evils point in reality to the necessity of a change in **economic** institutions, but meantime they offer serious obstacles to the change. At the same time, the existing **economic** system has enlisted in behalf of its own perpetuity the managerial and the technological abilities which must serve the cause of the laborer if he is to be emancipated. In the face of these difficulties other persons seek an equally cheap satisfaction in the thought of universal civil war and revolution.”
- 89 “Is there any way out of the vicious circle? In the first place, there are possibilities resident in the education of the young which have never yet been taken advantage of. The idea of universal education is as yet hardly a century old, and it is still much more of an idea than a fact, when we take into account the

early age at which it terminates for the mass. Also, thus far schooling has been largely utilized as a convenient tool of the existing nationalistic and **economic** regimes. Hence it is easy to point out defects and perversions in every existing school system. It is easy for a critic to ridicule the religious devotion to education which has characterized for example the American republic. It is easy to represent it as zeal without knowledge, fanatical faith apart from understanding. And yet the cold fact of the situation is that the chief means of continuous, graded, **economical** improvement and social rectification lies in utilizing the opportunities of educating the young to modify prevailing types of thought and desire.”

99 “Critics of the existing **economic** regime have divided instincts into the creative and the acquisitive, and have condemned the present order because it embodies the latter at the expense of the former. The division is convenient, yet mistaken. Convenient because it sums up certain facts of the present system, mistaken because it takes social products for psychological originals. Speaking roughly we may say that native activity is both creative and acquisitive, creative as a process, acquisitive in that it terminates as a rule in some tangible product which brings the process to consciousness of itself.”

100 “An increasingly large portion of **economic** work is done with machines. As a rule, these machines are not under the personal control of those who operate them. The machines are operated for ends which the worker has no share in forming and in which as such, or apart from his wage, he has no interest. He neither understands the machines nor cares for their purpose. He is engaged in an activity in which means are cut off from ends, instruments from what they achieve. Highly mechanized activity tends as Emerson said to turn men into spiders and needles. But if men understand what they are about, if they see the whole process of which their special work is a necessary part, and if they have concern, care, for the whole, then the mechanizing effect is counteracted. But when a man is only the tender of a machine, he can have no insight and no affection; creative activity is out of the question.”

“From the standpoint of orthodox **economic theory**, the most surprising thing about modern industry is the small number of persons who have any effective interest in the acquisition of wealth. This disregard for acquisition makes it easier for a few who do want to have things their own way, and who monopolize what is amassed. If an acquisitive impulse were only more evenly developed, more of a real fact, than it is, it is quite possible that things would be better than they are.”

101 “Acquisition is necessary as an outcome, but it arises not from love of accumulation but from the fact that without a large stock of possessions one cannot engage effectively in modern business. It is an incident of love of power, of desire to impress fellows, to obtain prestige, to secure influence, to manifest ability, to ‘succeed’ in short under the conditions of the given regime. And if we are to shove a mythological psychology of instincts behind modern **economics**,

we should do better to invent instincts for security, a good time, power and success than to rely upon an acquisitive instinct. We should have also to give much weight to a peculiar sporting instinct.”

- 147 Why utilitarianism “took its onesided course (and thereby provoked an intensified reaction to transcendental and dogmatic morals)”: “We can deal with only one factor, the domination of intellectual interest by **economic** considerations. The industrial revolution was bound in any case to give a new direction to thought. In enforced liberation from other-worldly concerns by fixing attention upon the possibility of the betterment of this world through control and utilization of natural forces; it opened up marvelous possibilities in industry and commerce, and new social conditions conducive to invention, ingenuity, enterprise, constructive energy and an impersonal habit of mind dealing with mechanisms rather than appearances.”
- 151 “We do not eat money, or wear it, or marry it, or listen for musical strains to issue from it. If by any chance a man prefers a less amount of money to a greater amount, it is not for **economic** reasons. Pecuniary profit in itself, in other words, is always strictly instrumental, and it is of the nature of this instrument to be effective in proportion to size. In choosing with respect to it, we are not making a significant choice, a choice of ends.”
- 151-
152 “We have already seen, however, there is something abnormal and in the strict sense impossible in mere means, in, that is, instruments totally dissevered from ends. We may view **economic** activity in abstraction, but it does not *exist* by itself. Business takes for granted non-business uses to which its results are to be put. The stimuli for **economic** activity (in the sense in which business means activity subject to monetary reckoning) are found in non-pecuniary, non-**economic** activities. Taken by itself then **economic** action throws no light upon the nature of satisfaction and the relation of intelligence to it, because the whole question of satisfaction is either taken for granted or else is ignored by it.”
- 152 “In short the attempt to assimilate other activities to the model of **economic** activity (defined as a calculated pursuit of gain) reverses the state of the facts. The ‘**economic** man’ defined as a creature devoted to an enlightened or calculating pursuit of gain is morally objectionable because the conception of such a being empirically falsifies empirical facts. Love of pecuniary gain is an undoubted and powerful fact. But it and its importance are affairs of social not of psychological nature. It is not a primary fact which can be used to account for other phenomena. It depends upon other impulses and habits. It expresses and organizes the use to which they are put. It cannot be used to define the nature of desire, effort and satisfaction, because it embodies a socially selected type of desire and satisfaction.”

“The reason that it is so easy and for specific purposes so useful to select **economic** activities and subject them to separate scientific treatment is because

the men who engage in it are men who are also more than business men, whose usual habits may be more or less safely guessed at.”

- 153 “Support of family, of church, philanthropic benefactions, political influence, automobiling, command of luxuries, freedom of movement, respect from others, are in general terms some of the obvious activities into which **economic** activity fits. This context of activities enters into the real make-up and meaning of **economic** activity. Calculated pursuit of gain is in fact never what it is made out to be when **economic** action is separated from the rest of life, for in fact it is what it is because of a complex social environment involving scientific, legal, political and domestic conditions.”
- 186 “Yet the whole tendency of modern **economic** life has been to assume that consumption will take care of itself provided only production is grossly and intensely attended to. Making things is frantically accelerated; and every mechanical device used to swell the senseless bulk. As a result most workers find no replenishment, no renewal and growth of mind, no fulfillment in work. They labor to get mere means of later satisfaction. This when procured is isolated in turn from production and is reduced to a barren physical affair or a sensuous compensation for normal goods denied. Meantime the fatuity of severing production from consumption, from present enriching of life, is made evident by **economic** crises, by periods of unemployment alternating with periods of exercise, work or ‘over-production.’
- 187 “The history of **economic** activity thus exemplifies the moral consequences of the separation of present activity and future ‘ends’ from each other. It also embodies the difficulty of the problem—the tax placed by it upon thought and good will. For the professed idealist and the hard-headed materialist of ‘practical’ man, have conspired together to sustain this situation. The ‘idealist’ sets up as the ideal not fullness of meaning of the present but a remote goal.”

“If War Were Outlawed” (MW15)

- 110 “We have been thinking in terms of gradual approaches, of ‘steps’ towards an eventual abolition, by arbitration treaties; conciliation courts, reduction of armaments; condemning the guilty nation after war has broken out; political combinations to enforce peace by coercion through superior force; educating the moral sentiments of the people; **economic** reforms to do away with causes of national rivalries, etc.”
- 111 “The argument that it is fantastic to outlaw war until the **economic** causes that bring about war have been radically altered puts the cart before the horse. It is fantastic to suppose that serious attention to the causes of **economic** evils is going to be possible as long as men live under the shadow of the war system.”

111-

112 “How can the most ardent devotee of any project of basic **economic** and social reorganization expect to get even a fair hearing for his ideas as long as the shadow of war is over every social question?”

“War and a Code of Law” (MW15)

125 “The history of diplomacy demonstrates that the issue of immigration is not the *cause* of war; friction on this point is merely utilized to arouse popular feeling to the point of supporting a war that is really waged for quite other reasons—in this case presumably **economic** causes connected with control of the Asiatic mainland.¶ It may be replied that to form a code that would regulate such **economic** conflicts would be even more difficult than one regulating immigration. The answer to this objection is that it would be totally unnecessary.”

“No one can conceive either Japan or the United States publicly avowing that its real object was the **economic** control or monopoly of China, and going to the Court for a decision on that case.”

126 “To get a picture of the dependence of the possibility of securing support for war upon covering up **economic** causes with idealistic reasons, we need only recall that at one time the mere suggestion that the late World War was at bottom an **economic** conflict was almost enough to land its author in jail.”

“The School as a Means of Developing a Social Consciousness and Social Ideals in Children” (MW15)

155 “It seems to me necessary also to say something regarding the causes of social divisions that come from **economic** and industrial forces. Here, too, largely by the fortune of our geographical position, and our wealth of unused territory, we have not had until recently class divisions and conflicts. We do not have them yet in anything like the extent of the Old World. But it is a commonplace that these **economic** and industrial divisions and the problems relating to them, the problems of capital and labor, are looming larger in our life than they have in the past.”

156 “We cannot teach isms, **economic** or social, in the schools. It is highly desirable that they be kept out of the schools. But does not the average boy or girl leave school today with altogether too innocent and naïve a state of mind about the evils and the problems he is going to meet, whether or no, when he gets out of school?”

“I believe in respecting the innocence and the hopefulness of children and youth. They have a right to enjoyment and to respite from the hard **economic** and political struggles and problems of life. I do not mean that these things should be forced upon them prematurely. But out instruction in history and geography and

our social studies in general should be intellectually more honest, they should bring students into gradual contact with the actual realities of contemporary life and not leave them to make acquaintance with these things in that surprised way which even college students coming from some of the educational institutions in this country may run across them today.”

“I think these things can be presented in a spirit which will appeal to all of the idealism which is fortunately so common in our American youth, to make them realize that they are sharers in this making of the country, that these problems to be faced are like the obstacles our forefathers had to face, so that while geographical pioneering must stop in this country, there is still a call for pioneers in improving the welfare of the mass of the people, and that the accepting of this new **economic** problem is an opportunity which all of the children and youth of the country are called upon as they go into life to deal with together.”

“Culture and Professionalism in Education” (MW15)

194 “At the present time there is no social class predestined to play the major role in politics and in social management. Actual control has passed largely into the hands of practical business men, but this class is not a closed class but is every changing its personnel with the ups and downs of **economic** fortune. The masses have been politically emancipated and in theory at least share in the control of society and state.”

195 “The decline of the traditional leisure class has given a shock to the studies and intellectual interests associated with it. The **economic** and political elevation of the masses has intensified the studies and interests which have been in the past the pre-occupation of the masses while it has also afforded facilities for realizing their practical ambitions.”

“Syllabus: Social Institutions and the Study of Morals” (MW15)

240 “I. Illustration of domination by blood-ties of all interests, the submergence of **economic**, political and scientific interests. See, for some facts, though they are not in every reference linked up with the moral consequences of the kinship bond, Westermarck, chs. 20, 25, 26, 34; Sumner, *Folkways*, ch. 13; Hobhouse, *Morals in Evolution*, Vol. I, ch. 3.”

240-

241 “3. At the present time in the west the **economic** group and its patterns of activity and interests have similarly exaggerated place. Note the prevalent complaints of materialism, commercialism, mechanism, individualistic egotism, competition in their bad moral consequences. More analytically almost all of the writings of

Veblen point out the present dominating influence of considerations derived from modern industrial society.”

- 241 “If complete separation [of compartments of modern life] were possible, there would be impoverishment of life, but not conflict. Since it never becomes complete, (because the consequences of one group activity carries over into the others, as noted above in the case of **economic** groups), there is a rivalry of standards and ideals, and a disorderly mixture of values and efforts: unrest, discontent, exaggerated love of change and rapid movement are symptoms. Note also the separation of the secular, temporal, etc., from the spiritually significant.”
- 242-
244 “VI. I. Much controversy about the individual and society is due to the many different meanings of the terms, so that ‘Individualism’ for example, is employed in at least seven meanings:....(5) An **economic** doctrine and policy: the theory of ‘laissez-faire,’ a minimum of legislative and administrative political action, limited to ‘justice’ legalistically defined. Frequently held in conjunction with political natural rights theory—government limited to protection of natural rights of liberty and property and its interference in industry and commerce illegitimate; a doctrine capable of being asserted independently, as by Bentham and the utilitarians on the ground that such government interference is unwise.”
- 244 “(6) The ethical doctrine of self-interest, or egoism, based upon the psychological notion that the sole motive of action is self-love, or private pleasure. May be used to support political and **economic** individualism, as these have just been defined, or to justify the need of a strong central power—as with Hobbes.”
- 245 In theories that emphasize “individualism,” there are ambiguities. Individualism “may be identified exclusively with the institutional, conventional, authoritative control, with the goods or values that are common, with mutual support, service, etc., and thus prized or condemned indiscriminately.” (p. 244) One such theory: “(4) The doctrine that all moral good is common, shared, usually associated with the idea that **economic** goods as such are competitive and divisive, and hence to be subordinated by collective action to the moral good. See T.H. Green, *Principles of Political Obligation*, pp. 44-47, 123-24; *Prolegomena*, pp. 210-31.”
- 251 Also in the syllabus, a section entitled “**Economic** analysis”: “IV. Criterion and Ideal. The limit of the biological cycle is something that may indifferently be termed productive consumption or consummatory production. When this becomes a conscious object or meaning, it supplies a criterion for evaluating any particular **economic** state and operation. Does it tend toward integration of production—(energy expended in modification of environment) and consumption—(the return consequence of external modification into life-activity)—or toward their separation? Division of occupations and exchange of services and commodities makes possible a separation not found upon the simpler plane, so that securing and maintaining the integration becomes an object of

deliberation and endeavor—a problem increasing in scope and acuteness as **economic** operations are more and more mediated.”

- 253 In Section VI., “Application of Criterion for Judgment”: “2. Restriction and perversion is thus evident when the state of **economic** processes (I) Results in drudgery on one hand and enjoyments without antecedent expenditure of energy on the other. The problem is that of the intrinsic reward of the occupation itself: artistic activity in contrast with mechanical and external expenditure of energy: Liberation and enslavement.”, etc.
- 254 In the same section: “3. Obvious traits of the present state of **economic** affairs are (I) The scope and complexity of processes intervening between initiation of a productive activity and its enjoyed consummation.”, etc.
- “B. Historical: The rise of **economic** social philosophy, into independence of and superiority to political and ethical theories.”
- 255-
256 “Note especially the primacy of wants, passions, with respect to reason and understanding, and the definitely **economic** origin and function of government. Also that, morally, while ordinary prudence and sympathy as restricted generosity are natural virtues, justice and allied virtues,—keeping promises, etc.—are of social-**economic** origin.”
- 256 “Other **economists** developed the ‘iron law’ of wages, and the natural tendency of the reward of the laboring class to each the subsistence level; ‘the dismal science.’ The idea of natural laws hardened into something fatalistic.”
- 257 “IX. Philosophy of historical evolution; succession of stages controlled by **economic** considerations; classic political **economy** as a reflection of the capitalistic stage of private industry; political state as a consequence and instrument. ‘Scientific’ socialism. Dialectic of fall of present regime.”
- 258 “III. That which was termed natural by the earlier **economic** school was in reality a compound of physical forces and social customs, legal and otherwise, which determined the direction and consequences of the physical forces, as far as there was any social regulation. The ‘natural’ theory, while nominally non-ethical, operated to supply an ethical justification of certain tendencies and policies; what is inevitable is accepted; futility of contravening natural laws. On the other hand, there is an equal fallacy in arguments which hold the **economic** philosophy responsible for the present industrial regime—Tawney’s *Sickness of an Acquisitive Society*.”
- “The most that can be said is that the philosophy was unable to supply suggestions for dealing with the practical evils and tended to disguise and protect them. Falsity of the **economic** theory shown by difference of actual facts and theoretically deduced facts; but the facts themselves have independent sources.”

- 259 “2. The conclusions of intelligence, collectively organized and transmitted, have intervened. The industrial revolution is the product of the scientific revolution. Any conception which ignores intellectual discovery, invention and organization as **economic** factors is in that far mythical. Psychological factors could never have produced the existing situation nor can they explain it.”
- “3. The present social situation on its **economic** side is mixed; in no sense is it a pure manifestation of a single principle. The adherent of the theory of natural laws and rights is entitled to some extent to reply to criticisms that his theory has never as yet been tried. Customs, traditions, legal and political institutions inherited from the pre-industrialized period have entered into and modified the workings of the newer **economic** forces. There is a cultural lag. (Ogburn, *Social Change*). What is called ‘natural’ is actually a compound of physical forces needing direction, and of social artifices adapted to past conditions.”
- 260 “4. Widening and diversification of the environment. As a consequence of **economic** developments a gratuitous non-**economic** environment develops; things to which persons have free access as a matter of course. Surplus **Economy**, Simon Patten’s view. Parks galleries, libraries, schools; cheap reading matter, pictures, transportation.”
- 261 “2. Political-legal: property not an **economic** fact, but an **economic** fact affected by legal considerations. Hence the attempt to derive the system of property holding and distribution from wants assumed to be purely psychological is mythical. For the *formation* of wants and their external expression is always conditioned upon legal-political arrangements subject to collective regulation because of collective origin.”
- “Even admitting that legal-political structures are effects of prior **economic** activities and relations, they have properties and powers of their own.”
- 262 “(3) Prevalence of insecurity and fear; large proportion of **economic** failures; situation stimulates excess desire for money as protection against future breakdown of social position, stimulation of speculative undertakings. (4) Arbitrary wants for power and luxury in upper class, and hazardous character of all arbitrary wants. Ostentatious waste and conspicuous consumption. (Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*).”
- 263 “VII. Values and Valuations. The fundamental problem is the relationship which exists between human goods (values) and **economic** satisfactions (values). Two theoretical possibilities, namely, that human values determine **economic** values, or that the two kinds of value exist independently in separate regions, not in accord with facts. The theoretical possibility that **economic** values and valuations determine an adequate system of human values—that welfare and wealth coincide—is negated in the existing situation by the fact that the **economic** system

is one of internal oppositions and conflicts, so that the human equivalent is one of mixed utilities and disutilities.”

“We first consider the classic theory according to which a free and competitive **economic** system effects at least a rough equivalence of personal and social good.”

264 “The phenomena of the market (price-system) thus constitutes a balancing together of all wants and satisfactions of all **economic** units such that the last possible increment of value is squeezed out and assigned to its proper place.” ‘Putting a price on each article is the act of the collective organism in estimating the importance to itself of each of its own products....It is the act of society in **economizing** its productive forces and turning them where they will do the most good.’ (Clark, *Distribution of Wealth*, p. 46)”

“The essential fallacy is that the theory assumes that original and natural wants determine the **economic** phenomena of production and exchange. In fact, before they become **economic** wants—effective demands—they are reshaped by the existing distributive-exchange system. The market and business determine wants, not the reverse; the argument moves in a vicious circle.”

264-

265 “I. Ambiguous middle term: want as psychological and want as actual demand—accompanied by ability, that is, to make an effective offer. (Chapman, *Political Economy*—preference as objective selection and rejection; actual buying and selling. P. 34; ‘assuaging of most intense cravings,’ p. 36)”

265 “Only with respect to the objects of a distributed system of activities does each object have a definite value. So far as this system is not apprehended in thought, it exists in the system of *habits* as these are determined by the **economic** status of the person in an objective **economic** system; the standard of living appropriate to a certain **economic** class. The other is found in the amount of energy demanded to maintain the standard of living, which assigns place to each particular want and satisfaction. The measure of this energy is money. Retrospective fallacy. Suffering, pain, loss not inherently commensurable with welfare, gain; becomes so only when converted into an objective social measure.”

266 “VIII. Fundamental Moral Problem in Industry. As a conclusion, we are obliged to reject two theories; the first, that the **economic** system naturally and automatically effects (in its main tendencies) an equivalence of individual and social goods, of personal values and social services; second, the theory that it is possible to segregate moral and **economic** values, treating the former as ideal, or ‘spiritual,’ and the latter as purely ‘material,’ implying that the problem can be solved by a subordination of the material to the moral by animating the material industrial system with motives and ideals, derived from an independent moral source. This latter is impossible, because ideals and motives take concrete shape

under the influence of social forces in their **economic** phases; otherwise they are too vague, 'general,' divorced from effective power."

267 "Concepts of (i) efficiency (**economy**) in any undertaking and utilization of any material and energy, (ii) coordination in the distribution of various activities, and (iii) increased release of energies and multiplication of wants as opportunities and means of progress, are the consequences of **economic** development. In short, rationalization of human activity, the change from an instinctive to a reasoning plane, is essentially the product of **economic** requirements. The latter have enforced recognition of the significance of ways-and-means in connection with consequences, and of consequences as varying with ways-and-means in this relation; money as a mathematical device, rendering accounting and auditing possible. (See Mitchell, *Jn. Pol. Econ.* 18, pp. 97 and 197, especially the latter, on 'The Rationality of **Economic** Activity.')

"The essential problem is then one of bringing consumption within the truly **economic** region, rather than of reducing the scope of the latter."

268 "In fine, consumption is the field both of merely personal tastes, whims, at their maximum and of influence of custom at its maximum. Hence resistance to cooperative organization and to scientific determinations. **Economic** theories of values-in-use assimilate them to the objects of the relatively rationalized processes of production for distributive exchange; esthetic and moral theories of good usually isolate value from social forces."

"Hence, they define value exclusively in terms of immediate liking; or define the true or moral good in terms of transcendental or non-empirical satisfactions; or of goods determined in terms of satisfaction of wants antithetical to those wants which are exercised in **economic** activities; altruism as opposed to self-interest, etc.; duties as opposed to rights."

268-

269 "In contemplating the possibility of subordination of distribution-exchange to productive consumption, we note the following gaps which if they were supplied would modify the consequences of the **economic** system. ¶ 1. There is no human—or psychological—science in existence comparable to physical science; control of external energies has outrun control of psycho-physical energies. ¶ 2. Publicity in its genuine sense is not an **economic** force. The remoteness and complexity of the **economic** situation makes adequate knowledge of what is happening throughout it, essential; at present the needed information is lacking or is possessed by a few in a one-sided way."

269 "4. Consumers are not organized so as to make their wants **economically** effective. There is a certain amount of collective bargaining in manufacturing and transportation, but very little in the relation of consumers to producers and distributors."

Experience and Nature – 1921 (LWI)

Chapter 9: “Experience, Nature and Art”

- 270 “The presence in art, whether as an act or a product, of proportion, **economy**, order, symmetry, composition, is such a commonplace that it does not need to be dwelt upon. But equally necessary is unexpected combination, and the consequent revelation of possibilities hitherto unrealized. ‘Repose in stimulation’ characterizes art. Order and proportion when they are the whole story are soon exhausted; **economy** in itself is a tiresome and restrictive taskmaster. It is artistic when it releases.”
- 273 The mode of art “which in quantity bulks most largely as fine art” is art in “the name of” a particular form of art (e.g. “the production of buildings in the name of the art of architecture; of pictures in the name of the art of painting;”, etc.): “It is reminiscent rather than commemorative of the meanings of experienced things. Its [this mode’s] products remind their owner of things pleasant in memory though hard in direct-undergoing, and remind others that their owner has achieved an **economic** standard which makes possible and cultivation and decoration of leisure.”
- 275 “The notion that means are menial, instrumentalities servile, is more than a degradation of means to the rank of coercive and external necessities. It renders all things upon which the name of end is bestowed accompaniments of privilege, while the name of utility becomes an apologetic justification for things that are not portions of a good and reasonable life. Livelihood is at present not so much the consequence of a wage-earner’s labor as it is the effect of other causes forming the **economic** régime, labor being merely an accidental appendage of these other causes.”
- 292 “But it still remains true that the origin of the art-process lay in emotional responses spontaneously called out by a situation occurring without any reference to art, and without ‘esthetic’ quality save in the sense in which all immediate enjoyment and suffering is esthetic. **Economy** in use of objective subject-matter may with experienced and trained minds go so far that what is ordinarily called ‘representation’ is much reduced. But what happens is a high funded and generalized representation of the formal sources of ordinary emotional experience.”

The “Unfinished Introduction” – 1949

- 356 “The identification of the distinctively human with the inner and private made psychology or whatever was taken to be the science of the inner and private a prime factor in originating and propagating the creed of **economic** laissez-faire liberalism or individualism.”

357 “The appeal to natural law and natural right undeniably played a part in promoting greater freedom in the conduct of **economic** affairs. It also undeniably had anti-social consequences. It degraded political law and rights to the level of sheer artificiality, totally devoid of moral authority. Any attempt to regulate or control **economic** enterprise in the public interest was denounced as interference by merely man-made legislation with the beneficent operations of ‘natural law’ and hence necessarily destructive of ‘freedom.’”

“Scientific **economists** do not make the mistakes of the neo-medievalists. But in their own peculiar ‘scientific’ ways, they also fly in the face of facts.”

358 “The subject-matter of full-fledged ‘scientific’ **economics** has been identified with aspects of life **economists** designate as *material*. The consequence of this identification or definition is to separate and isolate the **economic** from the moral and political.”

“I doubt if it is possible to overstate the importance of the dualism thus set up, as if on basic ontological ground, between the sphere of **economic** activity and the sphere of moral-political interests and values. If any construction of a theoretical nature could be more disastrous to human welfare (in the broadest sense of the term) I confess ignorance as to what it could be. Nothing could more effectively make moral philosophy irrelevant and more completely reduce political philosophy to futility.”

“It is a fact that modern means of production and distribution of commodities are the consequences of technologies made possible by physical (or material) science. But it is also a fact that the sphere of **economic** activity—the **economic** enterprise in all its vast and intricate complications—is inextricably enmeshed in social life, that it serves human needs, personal and institutional, and is to be judged by how well or ill it serves them.”

359 “Scientific **economists** are inspired by a dehumanized conception of the nature of science, still widely prevalent. The great majority of those who now attribute the scientific backwardness of social subjects to absence of proper methods of inquiry advocate, as the remedy for this grievous state of affairs, the outright adoption of the techniques of inquiry that have proved themselves in dealing with physical subject-matter. They are unmindful of the fact that these techniques have worked successfully just because they were designed for experimental operations with subject-matters from which human (value) considerations were explicitly ruled out.”

“**Economists** are only one class of ‘scientific’ inquirers into human subjects who cannot professionally admit the part played by need, purpose and an unceasing valuing (as distinct from evaluating judgments) in the generation and management of human affairs.”

“But whatever reasons scientific **economists** may use to justify excluding from their professional concern the human consequences of **economic** enterprise, philosophy cannot agree that **economics** is a domain having its own independent subject-matter and career without denying its claim to be comprehensive in scope. Philosophy which does not take into account the **economic** enterprise and its human consequences is an escapist intellectual gymnastic.”

“The full bearing of this discussion of **economic** activity in its relations to the problems which are dominant in life and which therefore should be dominant in philosophy will be postponed till certain other philosophic questions have been considered. As we shall see, the challenge offered to philosophy can be met only by resolute willingness to reformulate its problems with the systematic thoroughness demanded by the conditions of the present crisis.”

The Quest for Certainty – 1929 (LW4)

- 32 “So because of impatience and because, as Aristotle was given to pointing out, an individual is self-sufficient in that kind of thinking which involves no action, the ideal of a cognitive certainty and truth having no connection with practice, and prized because of its lack of connection, developed. The doctrine worked out practically so as to strengthen dependence upon authority and dogma in the things of highest value, while increase of specialized knowledge was relied upon in everyday, especially **economic**, affairs. Just as belief that a magical ceremony will regulate the growth of seeds to full harvest stifles the tendency to investigate natural causes and their workings, so acceptance of dogmatic rules as bases of conduct in education, morals and social matters, lessens the impetus to find out about the conditions which are involved in forming intelligent plans.”

“Human Nature” – 1932 (LW6)

- 29 “The significance of the idea of human nature for the social sciences gathers about three questions: (1) Are contemporary political and **economic** institutions necessary products of human nature? Or, more generally, does the very constitution of human nature show that certain social arrangements are likely to be successful while others are doomed to failure?”
- 33 “After the decay of Athenian culture at the time when the stoics were the ruling school of thought it was assumed as axiomatic that men are equal by nature and that differences among them are differences of status due to convention, to political organization and to **economic** relations, which are instituted rather than natural.”

- 34 “The doctrine [of equality at birth] in its original form did not have radical implications regarding existing institutions. The conception that political and **economic** inequality was based not on nature but on institution carried with it no attack on the latter.”
- 36 A survey of accounts of human nature: “With the rise of the new industry and commerce, however, an important variation was introduced. The **economists** who set out to give intellectual expression to the rising industrialism started from the affective side of human nature in accordance with prevailing English doctrine. They developed, however, a much more systematic theory than had ever been developed of the nature and operation of wants, out of which came a new conception of natural law. **Economic** activity, on this view, is basic; from it are derived the natural, in the sense of non-artificial, laws of human conduct. Society is the product of the efforts of human beings to satisfy their wants, since division of labor, exchange and permanent property are involved in this satisfaction. Government and political action exist in a secondary way in order to give security to the free play of **economic** forces. In its early stage the theory was thoroughly optimistic in its anticipations of the future of society when freed from the artificial regulations of political action. The conception of natural harmony was implicit or explicit. The land and rent theory of Ricardo and the population theory of Malthus introduced factors of inevitable disharmony and conflict which later gave a pessimistic turn to the view entertained of the workings of human nature.”
- 38 “The present controversies between those who assert the essential fixity of human nature and those who believe in a great measure of modifiability centre chiefly around the future of war and the future of a competitive **economic** system motivated by private profit. It is justifiable to say without dogmatism that both anthropology and history give support to those who wish to change these institutions. It is demonstrable that many of the obstacles to change which have been attributed to human nature are in fact due to the inertia of institutions and to the voluntary desire of powerful classes to maintain the existing status. With regard to the possibility of **economic** reconstruction history demonstrates the comparative youth of the present regime; and revolutionary societies may be regarded as social laboratories in which is being tested the possibility of securing **economic** advance by means of other incentives than those which operate in [38] in capitalistic countries.”

Ethics – 1932 (LW7)

- 28 “The Kinship and Family Groups are also **Economic** and Industrial Units”
- 71 In a chapter entitled “From Custom to Conscience” in a section called “Sociological Agencies in the Transition”: “1. The action of **economic forces** in breaking up the early kinship group or joint family may be noticed in the history

of many peoples.... A certain amount of individualism will appear wherever the advantage for the individual lies in separate industry and private ownership.”

“But we get a broader view of **economic** influences if we consider the methods of organizing industry which have successively prevailed. In early society, and likewise in the earlier period of modern civilization, the family was a great **economic** unit. Many or most of the industries could be advantageously carried on in the household.”

103 No specific references to “economics,” but a section on “Commercial and Political Individualism” among the Greeks.

128 No specific references to “economics,” but a section on “Roman Society” that discusses the importance of commerce and its negative and positive effects on morals.

136 In the chapter “Factors in Moral Consciousness” in a section on “The Medieval Period”: “The church attempted and to a considerable degree exercised a restraining power over the two great spheres of politics and **economics** which later claimed independence of at least the then prevalent moral standards.”

“In the *economic* field the church aimed to govern the excessive greed of gain. In particular it condemned usury. At that time men did not ordinarily borrow money in order to invest it in profitable enterprise. The borrower was usually a man caught in some misfortune. To take advantage of his necessity was not fair.” More about the details of financial transactions and the church’s relationship to them.

141 In the chapter “Factors in Moral Consciousness” in a section entitled “The Renaissance and Reformation to the Revolutions”: “4. The *economic development* in this period saw the change from the feudal system of service to the system of money payment. This was a step toward greater **economic** liberty. The discoveries of new trade routes to the Far East, and of the New World, tended to increase the wealth of merchants and to some extent of other classes.”

142 “Along with the growth of commerce and industry came a new theory as to the place of trade in national life, and as to the method of regulating **economic** affairs. A policy of **economic** liberty gradually took shape, which was the natural analogue of civil and religious liberty.”

“The distinctive feature of modern **economic** life has been the tendency to abandon all restriction imposed by an outside moral standard, and to substitute a system of free bargaining, free contract. This is one aspect of the complex system called capitalism, although the full development of capitalism was not reached in this period.”

- 149 In the subsequent section, “Since the Revolutions”: “The growth of political democracy and the widening of educational opportunity have made for a deepening and broadening of moral consciousness. Another political development has added rather to its perplexities. The power of nationalism has increased. Culture tradition, **economic** advantage, pride in national strength, fear of other nations, military armaments on a vast scale, constant pressure from military personnel, imperial expansion of the great powers—all have contributed to a war of spirit which culminated in the Great War, and still threatens the peace of the world and the existence of civilization.”
- 150 “Space admits of but the bare mention of three outstanding effects of the industrial revolution which set moral problems for present and future, viz., the new alignment of classes, the autocratic or oligarchic organization of the **economic** system, and the unequal distribution of the vast wealth produced. More subtle and perhaps more fundamental than any of these have been the changes in valuation of goods, in the meaning of a good life, of success and excellence, which the direction of our energies toward the hitherto unexpected resources of nature has brought about.”
- 331 In a section of “Morals and Social Problems” entitled “Historic Individualism”: “We shall here attempt to illustrate what has been said by reference to the movement termed ‘individualism’ in a particular sense determined by historical causes.¶ 1. In **economics**, it is the notion that individuals left free to pursue their own advantage in industry and trade will not only best further their own private interests but will also best promote social progress and contribute most effectively to the satisfaction of the needs of others and hence to the general happiness.”
- 331-
332 “3. Since the doctrine has an ‘ideological’ support, it also signifies a certain general philosophy, which may be called that of the ‘natural’ *versus* ‘artificial.’ **Economic** activities on this view are natural and governed by natural laws. Men naturally seek to satisfy their wants; labor or the expenditure of energy is naturally **economized** so that there will be the utmost return for the minimum outgo; to make the future secure men naturally abstain from consuming all they produce, thus laying by capital to increase their future productivity.”
- 332 ““Since the output of work is greatest when there is the skill which comes with restriction of effort to one field, division of labor is inherent in the development and this division brings about exchange and trade. There results a general interdependence in which each is forced to find the line of work in which he is most productive and to do the things which, in order to bring the most return to himself, will best serve the needs of others. In contrast with the ‘natural laws’ of this **economic** process, political laws are artificial; the first are implanted by nature (often conceived of as vice-regent of God) in the human frame. The second are man-made. The presumption is always in favor of natural laws and their workings and against human ‘interference.’”

“4. To this idea of natural laws, identical with **economic** laws, was joined an ideal of natural *rights*.”

333 “The doctrine of **economic** *laissez faire* then presented itself as an unshackling of human initiative, energy, and inventive skill, as opening a definite road of progress. Established organization on the other hand represented inertia, sloth, and repression.”

334 “The doctrine of the superiority of ‘natural laws’ to man-made law led to an abdication of effort at intelligent control; **economic** processes were supposed to work of themselves and to a beneficent end. The idea of natural rights was interpreted by courts to forbid legislation which in any way was interpreted by courts to forbid legislation which in any way disturbed the *status quo* in the distribution of property, or which, in the interest of workers, limited the power of free contract—the legal fiction being that all parties to an industrial arrangement were equally free to enter or not into the arrangement.”

“Meantime the original circumstances, **economic** and political, under which the philosophy of so-called individualism grew up and had had, upon the whole, a useful effect, changed completely. Industrialism supplanted agrarianism as the ruling force.”

356 In “Morals and the Political Order” in a section entitled “Some Special Political Problems”: “Moreover, as long as **economic** conditions were simple, as long as comparative, though of course not absolute, equality of industrial opportunity existed, there was no great motive for special interests to get hold of governmental agencies in order to use them for their own ends.”

“**Economic** questions as such are considered in later chapters. Here we have to note that, putting the matter in the most moderate terms, industrial development during the past century, occurring largely since the Civil War, has put a tremendous strain upon the governmental machinery which was created before it took place. Most political issues of the present arise out of **economic** conditions; they have to do with the distribution of wealth and income, the ownership and control of property.”

357 “In any case, there is a problem of value of a moral nature beneath all these politico-**economic** questions. The question of how far and by what means political agencies shall be used to promote social welfare is itself ultimately a moral question.”

“While honest differences of judgment arise among persons equally well-intentioned on the subject of both social end and political means, we may be sure upon one point: Political thought and action will be confused and insincere as long as the importance of **economic** issues in political life is kept from view. Recognition by the general public of their central position in political theory and

action would clear the air and make honest differences of conviction more to the point and more fruitful. As long as those who wish to preserve intact certain privileges, of which they have become possessed, successfully prevent the recognition of the presence of **economic** issues, and of the human import of the decision of **economic** questions, the workings of professedly democratic governments will be so crude and one-sided as to give ground for attack on the whole democratic idea in politics.”

“Because political questions are now **economic** in nature, because governmental action affects seriously the conduct of manufacturing, trade, banking, railways, those who have large pecuniary stakes in the success of these industrial undertakings, have a business motive for getting control of the agencies of government.”

- 360 In a section entitled “Liberty of Thought and Expression”: Dewey describes the threat to liberty from dictators and fascists, then says “The opposite attack on freedom comes from those who are already entrenched in power, **economic** and political, and who fear that general exercise of civil rights, such as freedom of speech, writing, press, assembling, although guaranteed by the Constitution, will disturb the existing order.”

“Direct and violent encroachments on liberty of thought and speech are perpetrated by police and by organized bands of persons when suggestions for important social change in **economic** lines are put forth.”

- 362 “But as a matter of fact, a genuine democracy will always secure to every individual a maximum of liberty of expression and will establish the conditions which will enable the minority by use of communication and persuasion to become a majority. The real culprit is always some powerful minority which prefers to use methods of suppressive force or of perversion and degradation of opinion by means of propaganda. One minority, entrenched **economically**, does suppress and misrepresent another minority which is at an **economic** disadvantage.”

- 364 “Historic democracies have perhaps erred in overlooking the educative effect of legal and **economic** institutions and in exaggerating the educative office of a special instrument, the schools.”

- 366 “On the other hand, **economic** limitations prevent many persons, probably the greater number, from effective access to the means of real cultivation of their capacities. They are taken up with the bare processes of making a living, and even when they have leisure they have not been educated to make a significant use of it.”

- 373 “Ethical Problems of the **Economic** Life”

“The **economic** problems of life may not be more important now than heretofore, since it has always been necessary for man to get a living; but they certainly stand out in more striking fashion.”

“If one looks more closely he sees other signs of the **economic** influence. The shops provide necessaries and luxuries in profusion unknown at earlier times; transport is swift, night is made day, enormous sums of money are transferred; loans of millions and tens of millions are arranged.”

“Men of eminent ability are found increasingly in the world of industry, commerce, and finance, whereas in earlier periods they were likely to be found in State or church. The power wielded by those highest in **economic** fields is actually greater, at least in times of peace, than the power exercised by religious or political leaders.”

374 “The primacy of **economic** power in our time is due chiefly to the discoveries and inventions which have given man such control over natural resources and forces, such new techniques through machines, and such advantages from association and cooperation, as the world has not previously known. These have changed the conditions of our work, have made a greater plenty, have brought people to live in cities instead of in rural conditions, and have occasioned tensions and conflicts between **economic** and political interests.”

“Let us consider some of the chief ethical problems which these various phases of **economic** life have forced upon our attention.” Several sections follow, the first of which is entitled “Production, Capitalism, Competition”.

375 “2. The single word which includes in large measure the outstanding features of the present methods of production and **economic** organization is *capitalism*.”

378 “In the language of the **economist**, Henry Clay,....”

379 No reference to “economics” but: “Thorstein Veblen saw the machine as bringing about a division of society into two classes—those who work with machines, and those who do not.”

381 “3. One of the unsolved problems of capitalism is that of insuring measurable *stability and security*. Under feudal **economy** there might be a shortage of crops and consequent scarcity, but there was little chance for unemployment.”

382 “The situation is aggravated by the resistance of business and the Federal government to any attempt to deal with unemployment as a national rather than as a local problem. No doubt **economy** of administration and greater local responsibility are secured.”

“Charity seems a gracious help when flood, fire, earthquake, or pestilence comes as a calamity that could not have been anticipated, but to resort to charity to remedy a situation which ought to be prevented by the **economic** system is a confession of weakness.”

423

424 In a chapter entitled “Toward the Future” in a section called “Tendencies within the Capitalistic System”: “Another tendency, to which Professor Carver has directed attention, is called by him ‘the present **economic** revolution in the United States.’ ‘It is a revolution,’ he claims, [block quote] that is to wipe out the distinction between laborers and capitalists by making laborers their own capitalists and by compelling most capitalists to become laborers of one kind or another, because not many of them will be able to live on the returns from capital alone. This is something new in the history of the world.”

426 Same chapter, section entitled “Radical Alternatives to Capitalism”: “Russia and Italy at the present time are conducting great experiments in **economic** systems. It is still too early to attempt to a judgment as to the outcome, but we may use these as illustrations of other methods than capitalism.”

427 “2. Italy is attempting an experiment of a different sort. Where as in Russia political power is subordinated to the control of an **economic** class, in Italy **economic** interests are subordinated to national power. After a short trend toward socialism the Fascist Revolution under Mussolini reversed the balance of power and proceeded to supervise or administer the **economic** life in a way to subserve national power and prestige. On the one hand employers, on the other workmen, were admonished that nothing in business policy or workingmen’s efforts must interfere with efficiency of **economic** operations and national strength.”

428 Same chapter, section entitled “If Capitalism Is to Continue”: “The extreme individualism of *laissez faire*, with competition as the only regulator of the **economic** process, has been shown to be no longer tolerable in present conditions.”

428-

429 “In a system such as obtains in Western Europe and the United States, the masters of the **economic** system and those of the political system form two distinct groups selected on different principles. **Economic** leaders are chosen principally by competition in the market. This selects men of certain types of ability, and gives them wide scope for the exercise of that ability to organize which is so largely responsible for the efficiency of modern business and industry. Leaders in the political sphere are selected by votes on the basis of their ability to win public approval. They represent a distinctly different phase of society, and a distinctly different interest from that represented by **economic** leaders. Perhaps the interests of the public are safer when control is thus divided than when it is concentrated in one hand.”

430 “A further and perhaps the main reason why **economic** socialism has as yet made little headway in the United States is the great and liberal scale on which public education has been conceived and measurably carried out in the United States.”

“It is moreover evident that though for certain ends we may properly rely upon law and public administration, there are other ends which can be gained only through education and a change of attitude both in producers and in consumers. We may roughly divide the field into [list of problems]... (5) problems of juster distribution of the enormous gains in **economic** processes—juster both as measured by service to the community, and as measure by the requirements of a functional society.”

444 In a chapter entitled “Recent Changes in Society and Ideas Which Affect the Family”: “As the family is probably the oldest among human institutions—older than government as a separate factor, and probably older than separately organized religion—it is also eminently the institution which concerns men and women in daily living. Rooted biologically in sex it has drawn strength from **economic**, religious, political, and artistic sources. Shifts from the maternal to the paternal type, or from polygamy to monogamy, have been so gradual as to tend toward greater strength rather than toward a lessening of permanence and community of relationship. The gradual lengthening of the period of education has been an influence toward a continuance of the bond of common interest in children, which has made for greater unity between parents. At the present time, however, a conjunction of forces seems to be working in the opposite direction. **Economic**, political, religious conditions form a background for revolutionary ideas.”

“**Economic** changes, and the urban life which is largely the result of them, are the first and perhaps the most serious underlying factor in the situation. The family and home of former times, while rooted in sex and parental relations assumed a pattern largely shaped by the need of division of labor between husband, wife, and children, and by community of property, particularly of a stable dwelling, the home.”

444-

445 “The industrial revolution sent both men and women into factories. It took even children in large numbers. The first effect of industrial change was therefore upon the working class—the **economically** poorer strata of society—in which the work of both man and wife was necessary to maintain existence and support children.”

“Inventions such as the telephone called for women operators; business development made room for stenographers, clerks, secretaries, and well-to-do classes have come to enjoy the outside contacts and **economic** independence which such employments make possible. Public education fits them for efficient service.”

457 In a chapter entitled “Special Sources of Friction and Needs for Adjustment,” in a discussion of sources of unhappiness for marriage: “Among the sources of unhappiness with respect to which conditions have improved in recent years may be included **economic** and ‘political’ attitudes. Among those which have come more acutely to consciousness are those of sex.”

“Under **economic** conditions a distinction must first be made between industry and business. Industry has thus far affected chiefly the less well-to-do and the less highly educated.”

“It [the opportunity for careers] has thus made these women less ready to accept marriage and domestic life, except on the basis of affection. **Economic** stress is no longer so important as in the days when the alternative was marriage or dependence on upon some male relative. At first the alternatives of marriage *or* a career seemed mutually exclusive. No doubt it is still frequently difficult to do justice to both, but that it is not impossible is being proved by an increasing number.”

458 “In another respect, **economic** conditions have improved with the general advance of woman to suffrage and citizenship, namely, in provision for a proper distribution of family income between husband and wife without the necessity for the wife’s ‘asking the husband for money.’ No one of mature years likes to be put in the position of asking another for money.”

“Education and New Social Ideals” (LW11)

167 “In the true and original tradition, the ideal of liberty applied to all individuals and applied to them in every walk of life. The reactionary interpretation put forth with such subsidized energy today by the so-called Liberty League and all those interests it stands for, confines the realization of the ideal of liberty to the privileged few, the few privileged in **economic** position. It con-
168 fines the manifestation of liberty to just one channel of expression: Ability to make money in a society where control of **economic** forces is concentrated in the hands of the few.”

“There is a similar prostitution and degradation of the ideal of equality. The original and genuine American tradition was based on the idea of securing equality of opportunity for all; establishing the basic conditions through which and because of which every human being might become all that he was capable of becoming. This high conception has been distorted into the notion that because laws are nominally the same for all, therefore equality already exists; although the slightest exercise of common sense discloses the actual equality of opportunity is impossible when vast **economic** inequality is the established rule.”

“The demand for a *new social order* is in fact a demand for the existence of **economic** and political conditions that will allow the realization of the *old democratic ideas* of liberty for all and of equality of opportunity to all for person development.”

- 170 “Unless the schools are free to produce these changes in belief and purposes; unless those who conduct the schools, administrators and teachers, have a full grasp of the reality of true American ideals; unless they can detect the sham forms in which these ideals masquerade; unless they perceive the **economic** and political obstacles that now prevent the realization of original ideals of democratic freedom and equality, the changes that are bound to come about sometime will come attended with a maximum of violence and bloodshed.”

“Education, the Foundation for Social Organization” (LW11)

An address delivered at the opening of the Horace Mann Centennial Celebration at Antioch College and taking as its subject matter Mann’s Fourth of July oration from 1842

- 227 “One does not have to read between the lines to see that the state of the nation was not a happy one, morally, **economically**, or politically in the early [eighteen] forties.”
- 232 “I do not suppose that the **economic** history of any country has been so marked by speculation as that of the United States. In some respects it has doubtless accelerated our **economic** growth. But it has not been conducive to steadfastness nor to stability of social customs. As a people we are more eager than sturdy; more hasty in action than ready to reflect upon what should be done; prone to snatch at nostrums and quack remedies in both physical and social ailments. The spirit of speculation has fallen in with the spirit of waste; together they have fostered reckless disregard of life itself and have encouraged recourse to crime.”
- 233-
234 On “civics courses”: “These courses have not been realistic. They have left the future citizen ignorant of the forces that operate in political life and of how such forces act. They have said little or nothing, and done still less, about bosses and machines and the devices by which they get power. They leave the future vote hopelessly ignorant of the ways in which politics are inevitably interwoven with **economic** and financial forces in our national life.”
- 234 “The only question is whether the schools, which means finally teachers and administrators, will passively wait and accept whatever the movement of **economic** and other social forces imposes upon them, or whether they will recognize that they have a positive function: that of laying foundations for those

attitudes, purposes, and ideas which will enable a democratic society to maintain itself, progressively and aggressively.”

- 235 “Today it is not, then, the absence of educational agencies, but the very existence of schools, of libraries, of forums of discussion, of the radio, that presents the problem. For example, while, as I have just said, the demands of society have created a movement toward industrial and profession education, and while this movement is about the only unifying strand that can be detected in the great expansion of the public school, it cannot be said that the movement has been based upon any study of **economic** trends and their attendant consequences. It has been piecemeal and *ad hoc*. The crisis that came upon us in 1929, but had been preparing ever since the War and before, proves the existence of great **economic** dislocation and strains.”
- 236 “Until there exists among teachers as a body some coherent, definite, and unified idea of what democracy means, and what social consequences, including **economic** and industrial, are compatible with the democratic way of life, there will be more talk than reality in discussions about the function of education in the maintenance of democratic institutions.”

Experience and Education (LW13)

22-

- 23 In traditional education: “The school environment of desks, blackboards, a small school yard, was supposed to suffice. There was no demand that the teacher should become intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, **economic**, occupational, etc., in order to utilize them as educational recourses. A system of education based upon the necessary connection of education with experience must, on the contrary, if faithful to its principle, take these things constantly into account. This tax upon the educator is another reason why progressive education is more difficult to carry on than was ever the traditional system.”

Freedom and Culture (LW13)

- 69 In Chapter 1, “The Problem of Freedom,” in a discussion about how Jefferson’s “fear of the growth of manufacturing and trade” has “come about and to a much greater degree than he could have anticipated”: Proof is decisive that **economic** factors are an intrinsic part of the culture that determines the actual turn taken by political measures and rules, no matter what verbal beliefs are held. Although it later became the fashion to blur the connection which exists between **economics** and politics, and even to reprove those who called attention to it, Madison as well

as Jefferson was quite aware of the connection and its bearing upon democracy. Knowledge that the connection demanded a general distribution of property and the prevention of rise of the extremely poor and the extremely rich, was however different from explicit recognition of a relation between culture and nature so intimate that the former may shape the patterns of thought and action.”

“**Economic** relations and habits cannot be set apart in isolation any more than political institutions can be. The state of knowledge of nature, that is, of physical science, is a phase of culture upon which industry and commerce, the production and distribution of goods and the regulation of services directly depend. Unless we take into account the rise of the new science of nature in the seventeenth century and its growth to its present state, our **economic** agencies of production and distribution and ultimately of consumption cannot be understood. The connection of the events of the industrial revolution with those of the advancing scientific revolution is an incontrovertible witness.”

72 The “relation of this and that constituent of culture to social institutions”: “The question is whether any one of the factors is so predominant that it is *the* causal force, so that other factors are secondary and derived effects. Some kind of answer in what philosophers call a *monistic* direction has been usually given. The most obvious present example is the belief that **economic** conditions are ultimately the controlling forces in human relationships. It is perhaps significant that this view is comparatively recent.”

73 “Because of the present fashion of **economic** explanation, this political view may now seem to have been the crotchet of a particular set of historical scholars. But, after all, it only formulated an idea consistently acted upon during the period of the formation of national states. It is possible to regard the present emphasis upon **economic** factors as a sort of intellectual revenge taken upon its earlier all but total neglect. The very word ‘political **economy**’ suggests how completely **economic** considerations were once subordinated to political. The book that was influential in putting an end to this subjection, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, continued in its title, though not its contents, the older tradition. In the Greek period, we find that Aristotle makes the political factor so controlling that all normal **economic** activities are relegated to the household, so that all morally justifiable **economic** practice is literally domestic **economy**.”

“The rise of totalitarian states cannot, because of the bare fact of their totalitarianism, be regarded as mere reversions to the earlier theory of supremacy of the political institutional factor. Yet as compared with theories that had subordinated the political to the **economic**, whether in the Marxist form or in that of the British classical school, it marks reversion to ideas and still more to practices which it was supposed had disappeared forever from the conduct of any modern state. And the practices have been revived and extended with the benefit of scientific technique of control of industry, finance and commerce in ways which show the earlier governmental officials who adopted ‘mercantile’

economics in the interest of government were the veriest bunglers at their professed job.”

74 “Is there any one factor or phase of culture which is dominant, or which tends to produce and regulate others, or are **economics**, morals, art, science, and so on only so many aspects of the interaction of a number of factors, each of which acts upon and is acted upon by others? In the professional language of philosophy: shall our point of view be monistic or pluralistic? The same question recurs moreover about each one of the factors listed:—about **economics**, about politics, about science, about art.”

“For these psychological theories have been marked by serious attempts to make some one constituent of human nature *the* source of motivation of action; or at least to reduce all conduct to the action of a small number of alleged native ‘forces.’ A comparatively recent example was the adoption by the classic school of **economic theory** of self-interest as the main motivating force of human behavior; an idea linked up on its technical side with the notion that pleasure and pain are the causes and the ends-in-view of all conscious human conduct, in desire to obtain one and avoid the other. Then there was a view that self-interest and sympathy are the two components of human nature, as opposed and balanced centrifugal and centripetal tendencies are the moving forces of celestial nature.”

99 “There is now raised the question of what was actually back of the formulation of the democratic faith a century and a half ago. Historians of the events that led up to the Declaration of Independence, the creation of the Confederation, and the adoption of the Federal Constitution tell us that what actually moved the leaders of the Rebellion against Great Britain were specific restrictions placed on industry and trade, together with levying of obnoxious taxes; and that what figured in doctrinal formulation as limitations upon inherent rights to freedom were in fact burdens imposed upon industrial pursuits from which persons of prestige and influence suffered **economic** losses.”

100 “Nor have these historians drawn the conclusion that **economic** forces are the only forces that move men to collective action, and that the state of forces of production is the ultimate factor in determining social relations. Historians have not ventured so afield into broad generalizations. But in their capacity as historians they have pointed out the effect of specific **economic** factors in producing the Revolution; and of changed **economic** conditions, after the confusion of the period of the Confederation, in producing special provisions of the Constitution. They have called attention to the enduring influence upon political events of conflict of interests between farmers and traders. They show, for example, that the difference in the policies advocated by the Republican and Federal parties respectively during the first thirty or forty years of the Republic represent a difference in the interests of agricultural and commercial sections and groups: conflicts reflected in the party attitudes toward centralized and decentralized government, the power of the judiciary, especially of the supreme

court, free trade and protective tariff, foreign policies with regard to France and Great Britain, etc.”

100-

101 On the difference in temper between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, referring to the conditions that prevailed at the writing of the Constitution: “...the most urgent need of men of established position to be protection of established **economic** interests again onslaughts of a populace using liberty as a cloak for an attack upon order and stability. There was also need of compromise to unite various sections in a single federal government.”

101 “Marxist social philosophy has made a sweeping generalization where historians have been content to point out specific **economic** conditions operating in specific emergencies. The Marxist has laid down a generalization that is supposed to state the law governing the movement and final outcome of all the social changes with which historians are occupied in detail. The generalization to which historians have pointed is rather a practical maxim: If you wish to secure a certain political result, you must see to it that **economic** conditions are such as to tend to produce that result. If you wish to establish and maintain political self-government, you must see to it that conditions in industry and finance are not such as to militate automatically against your political aim.”

“Whether the effect of the **economic** factor upon political conditions is taken in its moderate or its extreme form, the facts involved tremendously complicate the problem of democratic freedom as it existed when the Union was formed. The original democratic theory was simple in its formulation because the conditions under which it took effect were simple.”

102-

103 “There are now persons who think that the anti-democratic effect of **economic** development has so far destroyed essential democracy that only by the democratization or ‘socialization’ of industry and finance can political democracy be restored. Whatever be thought of this view, its existence marks an immense change in conditions. To the Founding Fathers control of production and distribution of commodities and services by means of any political agency whatsoever would have seemed the complete nullification of all they were fighting for.”

104 “Whether one is a believer in the necessity for increased social control of **economic** activities or in allowing the maximum possible of private initiative in industry and exchange, both sides admit that impersonal forces have been set in motion on a scale undreamed of in the early days of the Republic.”

105 “When conditions that make for unemployment are as extensively ramified as they are at present, political action assumes an importance for workers, employed and unemployed, that it does not have when conditions are settled and opportunity for employment is fairly general and secure. There are movements in all industrialized countries to provide work by governmental projects; there are

schemes for offsetting, by doles and official relief, evils that have resulted from the failure of industrialists and financial captains to provide the means of livelihood. The chiefly palliative nature of these measures is an evidence that symptoms rather than causes are dealt with; and this fact is in turn further proof that fundamental **economic** conditions are so far out of control that emergency measures are resorted to.”

- 106 On the relation between economics and politics: “Since the evils are attributed more or less to the action of the party in power, there is a succession of swings back and forward as the relative impotency of this and that party and of this and that line of policy to regulate **economic** conditions, sufficiently to prevent widespread disaster, becomes clear. This impotency of existing political forms to direct the working and the social effects of modern industry has operated to generate the distrust of the working of parliamentary institutions and all forms of popular government.”

“As the activities increase of the groups which are radical from the standpoint of the possessing class, and especially as they fail to effect a fundamental remedy of the situation, the activities of the favored **economic** class increase. When disorders appear on any considerable scale, the adherence of the middle class to the side of ‘law and order’ is won. Ironically enough, the desire for security which proceeds from the two groups of very different **economic** status combines to increase readiness to surrender democratic forms of action.”

“The danger of the rise of an American Fascist movement in this country comes from a similar source. It is absurd to suppose that the class having relatively the superior **economic** status can promote a dictatorship unless it has strong popular support—which means the support of those relatively at a disadvantage.”

- 107 “In brief, **economic** developments which could not possibly have been anticipated when our political forms took shape have created confusion and uncertainty in the working of the agencies of popular government, and thereby have subjected the idea of democracy to basic strain. The change in conditions goes far beyond the particular consequences which Jefferson feared as a result of growth of manufacturing and trade at the expense of agriculture.”

“That the general trend is toward increase of public control of private industry and finance in the United States as in other countries is undeniable. But the movement is not clear-cut in theory nor are its consequences consistent in practice. In fact, there is one thesis of Herbert Spencer that could now be revived with a good deal of evidence in its support: namely, the **economic** situation is so complex, so intricate in the interdependence of delicately balanced factors, that planned policies initiated by public authority are sure to have consequences totally unforeseeable,—often the contrary of what was intended—as has happened in this country rather notably in connection with some of the measures undertaken for control of agricultural production.”

- 109 “The assertion that men are free and equal by nature unconsciously, possibly deliberately, took advantage of the prestige possessed by what is ‘natural’ in the first two senses to reinforce the moral force of the word. That ‘naturalness’ in the moral sense provided the imperative ethical foundation of politics and law was, however, the axiomatic premise of democratic theory. Exercise of liberty which was taken to be a moral right has in the course of events, especially **economic** events, seriously threatened the moral right to legal and political equality. While we may not believe that the revolutionary effect of steam, electricity, etc., has nullified moral faith in equality, their operation has produced a new difficult problem.”
- 110 “The point which is here pertinent is that early theory and practice assumed an inherent, and so to say pre-established, harmony between liberty and equality. As liberty has been practiced in industry and trade, the **economic** inequalities produced have reacted against the existence of equality of opportunity. Only those who have a special cause to plead will hold that even in the most democratic countries, under the most favorable conditions, have children of the poor the same chances as those of the well-to-do, even in a thing like schooling which is supported at public expense. And it is no consoling offset that the children of the rich often suffer because of the one-sided conditions under which they grow up.” Dewey then continues with an interesting discussion of the relationship between liberty and equality, with specific examples drawn from commerce and labor relations.
- 112 “Any adequate discussion of the present relations of politics and **economics** would have to extend to conditions in village, city, county, state and nation, and its conclusions would fill volumes. Its conclusions would enforce in detail the thesis that the interconnections and interdependence of industry and government puts a radically new face upon the problem of democratic politics.”
- 114 “I am not saying the problem cannot be solved democratically nor that ‘socialization’ of industry is bound to be followed by the regimentation so freely predicted by adherents of *laissez-faire* individualism. What I am saying is that the issue of democracy has taken a new form, where not much experience is available about the relation of **economic** factors, as they now operate, to democratic ends and methods.”
- 115 “The discussion of this chapter has been one-sided in its emphasis upon the **economic** phase of our culture. But industrialization and commercialization play such a part in determining the qualities of present culture that the primary need for analysis of its conditions is made especially clear. The facts that justify **economic** emphasis do not prove, however, that the issue of cooperative democratic freedom can be settled by dealing directly and exclusively with the **economic** aspect, if only because command of the means which would be needed to effect desirable changes in industry and in the distribution of income can be achieved only by the

aid of correlative changes in science, morals and other phases of our common experience. The facts bring out in sharp outline that as yet the full conditions, **economic** and legal, for a completely democratic experience have not existed. Upon both the negative and the positive side, the facts suggest the importance of critical examination of the theory that attaches supremacy to **economic** factors in isolation. The significance of interaction will appear more clearly in the contrast.”

116 ff. Chapter entitled “Totalitarian **Economics** and Democracy”

117-

118 On Marxism: “For its adherents, by reason of the very nature of the theory, readily become so absolutistic in their attitude that they can see only a display of class-bias, unconscious or deliberate, in any criticism of their theory—an attitude now summed up in calling any opposition pro-Fascist. With those not committed it may promote understanding if I say that the criticism is not aimed at denying the role of **economic** factors in society nor at denying the tendency of the present **economic** regime to produce consequences adverse to democratic freedom. These things are rather taken for granted. Criticism aims to show what happens when this undeniable factor is isolated and treated as *the* cause of *all* social change. One may hold that if there is to be genuine and adequate democracy there must be a radical transformation of the present controls of production and distribution of goods and services, and may nevertheless accept the criticisms to be made—indeed may make or accept the criticisms *because* one believes the transformation is required.”

118 “The Marxist isolation of one factor (one which actually operates only in interaction with another one) takes the form of holding that the state of the forces of **economic** productivity at a given time ultimately determines all forms of social activities and relations, political, legal, scientific, artistic, religious, moral. In its original formulation, there was an important qualification which later statements have tended to ignore. For it was admitted that when political relations, science, etc., are once produced, they operate as causes of subsequent events, and in this capacity are capable of modifying in some degree the operation of the forces which originally produced them.”

On the tendency to ignore this qualification and the reason this inattention was intentional: “The only way to decide would be to investigate, and by investigation in the concrete decide just what effects are due, say, to science, and just what to the naked, so to say, forces of **economic** production. To adopt and pursue this method would be in effect to abandon the all-comprehensive character of **economic** determination. It would be put us in the relativistic and pluralistic position of considering a number of interacting factors—of which a very important one is undoubtedly the **economic**.”

“Marx would have a distinguished historic position if the qualification were admitted in even fuller extent than he allowed for. He would not have been the

first by any means to recognize the importance of **economic** conditions in determination of political and legal forms. Their close connection was almost a commonplace of the political philosophy of Aristotle. It was restated in a different form by English writers who influenced the ideas of the founders of the American republic.”

119 “The great merit, however, of the Marxist simplification, for those who accept it in its extreme form, is the fact that it combines the romantic idealism of earlier social revolutionaries with what purports to be a thoroughly ‘objective’ scientific analysis, expressed in formulation of a single all-embracing ‘law,’ a law which moreover sets forth the proper method to be followed by the oppressed **economic** class in achieving its final liberation. ... This law is that of the existence of classes which are **economically** determined, which are engaged in constant warfare with one another, the outcome of which is direction of social change toward the liberation of producers from the bonds which have kept them subjugated in the past.”

“It is quite possible to accept the idea of some sort of **economic** determinism. But that acceptance does not constitute one a Marxian, since the essence of the latter is the view that class warfare is the channel through which **economic** forces operate to effect social change and progress.”

120 “To Marx the **economic** movement is necessarily as self-determined toward its ultimate goal as the movement of logical categories had been in the Hegelian system.”

121 “The forties of the last century were also the time of promising radical political movements, all of which had a marked **economic** slant, while some were avowedly socialistic and communistic, especially at that time in France.”

122 “All of these circumstances put together, it is not surprising that Marx saw in the Hegelian dialectic a principle which, when it was given **economic** interpretation, provided a sure basis for a science of social changes, while at the same time, it furnished the revolutionary movement a supreme directive for its practical activities.”

“The fact then that the dialectical formula was borrowed from the most metaphysical, in a non-scientific sense, of all modern philosophers was no deterrent to the vogue of Marxist synthesis, since its practical character seemed to be vouched for not only by actual **economic** conditions and by Marx’s predictions, but in particular by the increase in class conflict that was taking place.”

122 “Moreover, Marx’s study of the concrete facts of the factory system in Great Britain backed up his general theory with a considerable number of **economic** generalizations which proved sound on any theory:—such as the existence of

economic cycles with crises of increasing severity, a tendency toward combination and concentration, etc.”

“Similarly the monolithic and in itself speculative Marxist doctrine took on immediate practical coloring in connection with existing **economic** conditions and new forms of oppressions they had produced. There is nothing novel or peculiar in a combination of theory and practice in which practical events give definite color to an abstract theory, while the theory serves as a fountainhead of inspiration to action, providing also rallying cries and slogans.”

125 “Laissez-faire individualism indulged in the same kind of sweeping generalization but in the opposite direction. Doubtless, in accordance with the law of the union of opposites, this background played its part in creating a cultural atmosphere favorable to Marxism. But two opposite errors do not constitute one truth, especially when both errors have the same root. With some disregard for historic facts, the Marxist doctrine might even be regarded as a generalized version of that aspect of classic **economic** theory which held that completely free competition in the open market would automatically produce universal harmony of persons and nations, Marx converting competition of individuals into war of classes.”

126 “One can find evidence that, under a regime of governmental, in stead of social, control, **economic** classes marked by great inequality of income are growing up. Such questions of fact are not settled by argument.”

129 In this same chapter, Dewey turns to criticisms of Marxism: “The large measure of sympathy shown by liberals in our own country toward Russian totalitarianism—to the extent of asserting the country is essentially a democracy with which common cause should be made against Fascist states—is not surprising. ...More influential still is the fact that those persons who see the obstructive power of the existing **economic** system in our country are moved by the fact that one country has done something about overthrowing that system.”

129-
130 “While nothing said discounts the effect of **economic** factors upon other components of culture (and certainly not upon political ones at the present time), nevertheless democratic methods are proved, even if they lack adequate substance, to be indispensable to effecting **economic** change in the interest of freedom. In common with many others, I have from time to time pointed out the harmful consequences the present regime of industry and finance has upon the reality of democratic ends and methods. I have nothing to retract. But conditions in totalitarian countries have brought home the fact, not sufficiently realized by critics, myself included, that the forms which still exist encourage freedom of discussion, criticism and voluntary associations, and thereby set a gulf between a country having suffrage and popular representation and a country having dictatorships, whether of the right of left—the differences between the two latter growing continually less as they borrow each other’s techniques.”

- 130 “Subordination of the political to the **economic** has a meaning for those trained to take for granted the operation of an indefinite plurality of social tendencies, many of which are neither political nor **economic**, that it cannot possibly have in countries that are without the democratic tradition.”
- 131 “When we assume that we are following common sense policies, in the most honorable sense of common sense, we may in fact, unless we direct observation of conditions by means of general ideas, be in process of being led around by the nose by agencies purporting to be democratic, but whose activities are subversive of freedom: a generalized warning which, when translated into concrete words, should make us wary toward those who talk glibly about the ‘American way of life,’ after they have identified Americanism with a partisan policy in behalf of concealed **economic** aims.”
- 133 On the criticism of Marxism as an “appeal to the motive of self-interest”: “But actually it comes close to reversing actual Marxist doctrine—the doctrine that the state of the forces of production is the sole causal force. For according to this view, all the factors of human nature are shaped from without by ‘materialistic,’ that is **economic**, forces.”
- On the “matter of classes and of class-*consciousness*”: “Physical conditions thus demarcate **economic** classes, and throw into relief the conflict of interests between employers and employees, together with the community of interests, if only in misery, that bind together the latter.”
- 134 “The fact is that Marx and every Marxist after him unconsciously assumes the existence and operation of factors in the constitution of human nature which must cooperate with ‘external’ **economic** or ‘material’ conditions in producing what actually happens. Explicit recognition of these factors would have the theory a different practical slant.”
- 137 In Chapter 5, “Democracy and Human Nature,” in a discussion of how human nature and democracy have been linked: “The third act...now playing, is that of recovery of the moral significance of the connection of human nature and democracy, now stated in concrete terms of existing conditions and freed from the one-sided exaggerations of the earlier statement....¶ The practically effective statement of the point of view is found in **economic** theory, where it furnished the backbone of laissez-faire **economics**; and in the British liberalism which developed in combination with this **economic** doctrine. A particular view of human motives in relation to social events, as explanations of them and as the basis of all sound social policy, has not come to us labeled psychology. But as a theory about human nature it is essentially psychological. We still find a view put forth as to an intrinsic and necessary connection between democracy and capitalism which has a psychological foundation and temper. For it is only because of belief in a certain theory of human nature that the two are said to be Siamese twins, so that attack upon one is a threat directed at the life of the other.”

138-

139 On Mill and those like him who spoke of the “laws of the nature of individual man”: “The essayed an intellectual formulation of principles which would justify the success of the tendencies which present day revolutionaries call the bourgeois capitalism they are trying to overthrow. But it expressed the individualistic ideas that animated the **economic** and political theories of the radicals of the time....The books were elaborations of ideas that were propounded in electoral campaigns and offered as laws to be adopted by parliament.”

“Does Human Nature Change?” (LW13)

289 “I do not think, moreover, that anyone will deny that **economic** conditions are powerful among the social causes of war.”

290 “Fellow feeling and the desire to help those in need are intense during war, as they are at every period of great disaster that comes home to observation or imagination. But they are canalized in their expression; they are confined to those upon our side. They occur simultaneously with manifestation of rage and fear against the other side, if not always in the same person, at least in the community generally. Hence the ultimate failure of pacifist appeals to the kindly elements of native human nature when they are separated from intelligent consideration of the social and **economic** forces at work.”

“An even more burning issue emerges when any fundamental change in **economic** institutions and relations is proposed. Proposals for such sweeping change are among the commonplaces of our time. On the other hand, the proposals are met by the statement that the changes are impossible because they involve an impossible change in human nature.”

“As a matter of fact, **economic** institutions and relations are among the manifestations of human nature that are most susceptible of change. History is living evidence of the scope of these changes. Aristotle, for example, held that paying interest is unnatural, and the Middle Ages reechoed the doctrine. All interest was usury, and it was only after **economic** conditions had so changed that payment of interest was a customary and in that sense a ‘natural’ thing, that usury got its present meaning.”

“Education, Democracy, and Socialized **Economy**” (LW13)

304 This is an article that responds to articles by Boyd H. Bode and John L. Child in *Social Frontier*. “The articles agree on the fundamental points that *all education takes its directions from a social aim*, and that in this country *the social aim is set*

by the democratic principle. We then find that Dr. Bode believes that Dr. Childs is so devoted to a certain scheme of **economic** reform that he would make the schools an instrument for accomplishing ‘a specific program for social reform,’ a course which is said to commit educators to trying to promote democracy by conditioning its movement in a certain direction fixed in advance of, and independently of, conclusions reached by democratic procedures.”

304-

305 “On the other hand, we find that Dr. Childs believes that Dr. Bode’s refusal to consider the relation of the **economic** order of society to realization of the democratic principles leaves him in a kind of educational vacuum, since teachers are to study **economic** and social problems but are to refuse to reach and adopt definite conclusions about them.”

305 “As far as I can see, two questions are raised in this clash of views. One of them is: ‘What in fact is the relation between *realization* of the ideas and principles of democracy and the **economic**, industrial, and financial order of society?’

“Independently, then, of what these writers say about positions taken by the other, two issues emerge: (1) *What relation, if any, exists between the actual or effective realization of democracy and the **economic** structure of society?* (2) What does the democratic end involve as to methods to be adopted in instruction, so as to avoid, especially, undemocratic inculcation of ready-made conclusions on one hand and aimless vagueness on the other hand?”

“*If the relation between the **economic** organization of society and the realization of the democratic principle is simply a matter of adoption of ‘a specific reform,’ then insistence, if it should exist, that educators should use the schools to promote this reform conflicts with the professed democratic aim. But the ‘if’ covers a good deal of ground. The belief that there is an *inherent* connection between the *realities* of a democratic society, under present conditions, and a change in **economic** affairs in the direction of greater control and planning exercised in the social interest does not seem to be correctly described as a ‘specific social and **economic** reform.’”*

305-

306 “Doubtless there are those who think of it as an end in itself and hence something to be attained independently of the effect upon democracy; there is a political party which, until recently, has held that it can be effected only by a period of a class dictatorship in which democracy is abrogated. But all this is quite different from the position that the democratic end and ideal demands for its *own* adequate realization a pretty thoroughgoing change in the **economic** structure of society, one to be brought about by democratic methods and not by means of suppression of democracy.”

306 “now, quite apart from the solution this problem may receive, it should be clear that *the question at issue is one of fact, not one that can be settled by an analysis of the concept of democracy*—even though it must be settled in accordance with

conclusions reached in analysis of that conception. I am not going to argue here for the thesis that under conditions as they now exist it is democracy itself which demands basic reconstruction of **economic** institutions. But when the issue is looked at as one of fact, *it is a question of the bearings of the existing economic order upon the liberty, equality, and, possibly, fraternity that are so intrinsic to the democratic idea that without them democracy becomes a farce.* Furthermore, the problem of the existence of opportunity to work and of the obligation to render useful service in work is, in the minds of many, an **economic** question which has moral implications that are fundamentally important for the realization of democracy.”

307 “Now, whatever may be the actual conclusion reached in discussion of these questions, it ought to be clear that the issue cannot be assumed in advance to be one of the relation of merely external mechanical devices to democracy as an intrinsic moral end. This position, if it be taken, begs the exact question at issue, namely, *whether or not the economic structure of society bears, under present conditions, an inherent relation to the realization of the democratic idea.*”

308 “*If teachers who hold that there is an intrinsic relation between actualization of democracy and social planning of economic institutions and relations hope to bring others to the same conclusions by use of the method of investigation and free co-operative discussion, I see nothing undemocratic in the procedure.* It looks to me like an educational procedure, and, moreover, to be of the same sort that teachers who have been led to accept the conclusion might then use with their own students.”

309 “My intention is to indicate the need of clarifying the issues involved and freeing them from irrelevant accretions. For the present it seems to me that perhaps this can best be accomplished by stating a number of principles in hypothetical form and exploring the consequences that follow from them as hypotheses. *If* democracy as a moral principle is *independent* of **economic** institutions, we shall be directed to a different solution than *if* the two are closely connected. Discussion of the alternative ‘ifs’ or hypotheses will take us, it seems to me, out of cloudy generalities.”

“The **Economic** Basis of the New Society” (LW13)

316 “The urgent and central question at the present time is whether the needed **economic**-social changes (with which legal and political changes are bound up) can be effected in ways which preserve and develop what was fundamental in earlier liberalism, or whether social control is to be instituted by means of coercive governmental control from above in ways which destroy for a time (a time whose length cannot now be measured) all that was best worth conserving in older democratic ideas and ideals: Intellectual and moral freedom; freedom of

inquiry and expression; freedom of association in work, recreation and for religious purposes; the freedom of intercourse among nations, which always hampered by tariff-walls and fear of war, is now deliberately suppressed in many countries by a multitude of new technical devices.”

“The Unity of the Human Being” (LW13)

- 323 “We have no words that are prepared in advance to be fit for framing and expressing sound and tested ideas about the unity of the human being, the wholeness of the self. If we ask an **economist**, ‘What is money?’ the proper official reply is, that it is a medium of exchange. The answer does not stand in the way of a great deal of money being accumulated by using it to obstruct the processes of exchange.”

“What is Social Study?” (LW13)

- 338 “Questions of family life, of politics and **economics**, of war and peace, are obviously social questions. The problem I am raising is how far such materials can be understood and be educative in the full sense without a background of study of matters which lie outside the social as thus limited.”

“No one would deny, I suppose, that many political questions at the present time have **economic** roots. Issues of the relation of capital and labor, of concentration and distribution of wealth, of **economic** security and unemployment, occupy the attention of our legislative bodies. They are primarily **economic** questions but they find their way into political action because their impact upon human relations and their public consequences are intense and widespread. Can the student stop when he has traced these political themes to their **economic** sources? Or does understanding of the **economic** situation demand going further?”

338-

- 339 “It would probably be admitted on all hands that the present **economic** situation is a historical development, and that while present facts may be amassed in quantities, the information thus gained needs to be placed in an historic setting if it is to be intelligently grasped and used. Many, perhaps all, of the **economic** questions have also definitely geographical aspects. The problem of the farmer comes to mind, for example, and that of the railways as means of distribution of products.” Other examples.

- 339 “The reference that was made in an earlier paragraph to the historic context of **economic** questions suggests in turn the scientific background. The industrial and commercial change which has taken place in the world in the last century, in the past forty years, is the product of the great change which has taken place in

physical, chemical, and more recently biological science. The prime factor in the **economic** and political history of this period is what is known as the industrial revolution. The story of that revolution is the story of new technologies in the production and distribution of goods, which are themselves the result of a scientific revolution. Any vital comprehension of existing **economic** and political issues demands insight into processes and operations that can be grasped only through understanding of fundamental physical and chemical operations and laws.”

“Contrary to Human Nature” (LW14)

258 On the practice of using the concept of “human nature” and its “unchangeability” as justification for defeating proposed “projects for bringing about social change:” “The use of the idea of the unchangeability of human nature as a means of opposition to special projects for political and **economic** change belongs in the latter class. That the new project is contrary to some traits of human nature *as they exist at the time* is certain. For the proposed policy is only one for a change; therefore of course it goes against those particular habits which have been formed by the very conditions it is proposed to alter.”

261 “If the idea [of needs as demonstrative of human nature] is applied to proposals for change in existing **economic** habits, its meaning will become clearer. **Economic** systems must, if they are to be in accord with *constant* requirements of human nature, be such as to meet the need for support of healthy vigorous life. To suppose that the present ‘capitalistic’ system (which is demonstrably the product of special historic conditions), is the only one which can effect this result is to fall, on a large scale, into the same kind of error which tribes or families fall into, on a small scale, when they think that only the particular foods to which they have become accustomed are fit for human consumption.”

“But the need for food does not stand alone. ‘Man does not live by bread alone.’ The value of a proposed change in **economic** habits and relations must be considered in its bearing upon other needs, many of which are less tangible than the need for food. It must be analyzed, for example, in its bearing upon the need for companionship, for freedom of choice, for rivalry or emulation, for security, etc. Doubtless the conditions of the problem are rendered more complex by this approach than when some single idea is used as an adequate standard for accepting and urging a particular policy. But all history and all experience show that simplifications which end in leaving out of account some of the conditions which are active anyway defeat themselves.”

‘
“Anti-Naturalism in Extremis” (LW15)

60 “I mention one further instance of the contrast between the relative bearings of anti-naturalism and naturalism in connection with social problems. Because of the influence of a low view of human nature and of matter a sharp line has been drawn and become generally current between what is called *economic* and what is called *moral*;—and this in spite of facts which demonstrate that at present industry and commerce have more influence upon the actual relation of human groups to one another than any other single factor. The ‘*economic*’ was marked off as a separate compartment because on the one hand it was supposed to spring from and to satisfy appetites and desires that are bodily and carnal, and on the other hand *economic* activities have to do with mere ‘matter.’”

“Whether or not Karl Marx originated the idea that *economic* factors are the only ultimate causative factors in production of social changes, he did not originate the notion that such factors are ‘materialistic.’”

“How, What, and What For in Social Inquiry” (typescript) (LW16)

337 “Look, for instance, at the sharp division that is currently accepted as gospel truth between *moral* subject-matters and *economic* subjectmatters. The separation is now so thoroughly established as to be regarded as virtually ‘self-evident.’...At the very time when the moral (i.e., the human) consequences of industrial and financial arrangements are most in need of systematic critical scrutiny they are brought under the cover of being necessary because of the essence of the matter, while on the other side the human, or moral, principles and standards which were fixed in situations radically other than those which now prevail are given thoroughly factitious, artificial authoritative prestige.”

“Philosophy’s Future in Our Scientific Age: Never Was Its Role More Crucial” (LW16)

369 “The fine arts, as well as those of political and *economic* life, had indeed been so completely subordinated to religious-ecclesiastical arts that they seemed to be a part of the very order of nature. The new arts continually encroached on the old system until they crowded the authority of the sacred arts into a narrow place, where they became specialized and technical.”

370 “In philosophy, the net result was the creation of dualisms that are the intellectual manifestations of the divisions in life between that which is judged low and that which is regarded as supreme in value. Even today this insulation prevails between the subjectmatter of *economic* theory and the subjectmatter of moral

theory. It prevails in spite of the fact that most moral problems are now what they are because of the conditions and problems of our **economic** life.”

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