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DEWEY: INDIVIDUALITY AS A MARK OF NON-VALUE

The growth and strength of pragmatism is to be attributed to John Dewey's prolific writings and his application of the movement to all phases of life and thought. Dewey achieved fame in logic, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and political, economic, and educational philosophy.

Dewey was a keen and a constant critic of the classical or traditional types of philosophy with their search for ultimate reality and their attempt to find the immutable. Such philosophies have attempted to minimize human experience or to transcend it. In *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey tells us that men have always used two ways to escape danger and gain security. One way has been to appease or to conciliate the powers around them by means of ceremonial rites, sacrifices, supplication, and so on. A second way, has been to invent tools to control the forces of nature to man's advantage. This is the way of science, industry, and the arts, and it is the way approved by Dewey. The aim of philosophy is the better organization of human life and activity here and now. Interest thus shifts from traditional metaphysical problems to the methods, attitudes, and techniques for biological and social progress. The method is that of experimental inquiry, as guided by research in the field of values.

In this paper, I will examine some of the theories of Dewey, whom many regard as the leading exponent of pragmatism. Dewey, though, calls his philosophy instrumentalism, or experimentalism.

Dewey is often called an expositor of the dignity of man. But from where does our dignity come?

Man, is usually said to have intrinsic and instrumental value. Our religious tradition has usually emphasized the intrinsic worth of man, i.e., the worth one attributes to each man because of something peculiar to him. Dewey, however, is not religious, and defines worth in terms of instrumental value, the value which is attributed to a thing because it is good for something. But, can our worth be explained entirely in terms of instrumental value? Before we can decide this we must examine Dewey's account of value.

Instrumentalism contains an axiological postulate of vitalism; ultimate « value » is continuous life-processes. Value results from the selection-rejection processes of intelligent organisms whereby the life-processes of the organisms are sustained and continued (1). This means that the goal of life is life itself. The organism interacts with its environment; it is always falling out of harmony with nature. Life is reduced to a series of wants, needs, desires and their satisfaction. A good life is at least one in which there is success in self-preservation. Value is a consequence of trouble. « Valuation takes place only when there is something that matters; when there is something to be done away with, some need, lack, or privation to be made good » (2). If there are no needs there are no values.

Something is valuable when it is an instrument for the successful integration of organism and environment. It is something which satisfies some need. A car, for example, is not valuable in itself; its value is something which happens to it, for instance, in the presence of a tired, walking man. Value, then, is an adjective standing for a property or quality that belongs to a thing in virtue of specific « transactional » relations, which make it serviceable in « dealing with states of affairs found to be objectionable because of some lack or conflict in them » (3). So a car has the quality of goodness when it relieves the exhaustion of the man who drives it.

Dewey, stresses the role which desire plays in value judgements even though he won't go so far as James had in his voluntaristic mode of pragmatism. But while valuation involves desire, the value of something is not merely in its being selected or rejected. The car may be desired, and even enjoyed, and yet not be of value, especially if it leads to an accident. That something is desired is a fact, but values are facts meeting the approval of judgement. The problem is to evaluate the enjoyment or the satisfaction. When the man lies in the hospital bed, how does the car look then? No matter how much fun I could expect driving the car, if I am blind, I should judge the car unsatisfactory for me.

There are no such things as means-as ends-in-themselves, value is found in a continuum of ends-means. A car is never just a means or an end. To us who want it, the car is an end-in-view, but once attained it becomes a means to other ends, whether it be driven now or traded for a horse. So, to evaluate the car one must examine both the means by which it is attained-money, hard work, and the ends to which it may contribute — pleasure, transportation, or something else.

Therefore things as ends do not have intrinsic worth in the sense that such worth is independent of their relation to other things and so absolute. A value is intrinsic or inherent, « if it actually

belongs to something », say Dewey, but its belonging is a temporal and relational fact whether the thing be considered as a means or as an end (4). That the car has intrinsic value does not mean that it has a type of value which is in some sense distinct from and superior to its instrumental worth. Rather, to attribute intrinsic worth to the car is simply to appreciate that in the present situation it has specific instrumental worth; to see, after it has been tested, it will do. All value is ultimately instrumental.

We may think that a car could have value apart from its use, but Dewey would not agree. Cars, to some, are objects of beauty whose shape delights the eye. For Dewey, however, there is no value in the car. For although the sense of sight is gratified, there is no valuation, and so no value, until we begin to use the car as a means to an end. Until I estimate or value the car in terms of what I can do with it, it has no « value ».

What Dewey saw as the finest of all things, was growth; so much so, that he made this relative but specific notion, and no absolute « good » his ethical criterion.

« Not perfection as a final goal, but the everenduring process of perfecting, maturing, refining, is the aim in living... The bad man is the man who, no matter how good he has been, is beginning to deteriorate, to grow less good. The good man is the man who, no matter how morally unworthy he has been, is moving to become better. Such a conception makes one severe in judging himself and humane in judging others » (5).

And to be good does not merely mean to be obedient and harmless; goodness without ability is lame; and all the virtue in the world will not save us if we lack intelligence. Ignorance is not bliss, it is unconsciousness and slavery; only intelligence can make us sharers in the shaping of our fates. Freedom of the will is no violation of causal sequences, it is the illumination of conduct by knowledge. « A physician or engineer is free in his thoughts or his actions in the degree in which he knows what he deals with. Perhaps we find here the key to any freedom » (6). Our trust must be after all in thought, and not in instinct; — how could instinct adjust us to the increasingly artificial environment which technology has built around us, and the maze of intricate problems in which we are involved?

« ...Morals, philosophy, returns to its first love; love of the wisdom that is nurse of good. But it returns to the Socratic principle equipped with a multitude of special methods of inquiry and tests; with an organized mass of knowledge, and with control of the arrangements by which industry, law, and education may concentrate on the problem of the participation by all men and women, up to the capacity of absorption, in all attained values » (7).

Let us try to decide whether or not our worth can be explained entirely in terms of instrumental value. What has the means-ends method of appraisal to do with the dignity of man? If Dewey is correct, then instrumentality is the first condition for any worth of

person, for everything we have seen so far applies to an appraisal of the human person.

Man is treated by Dewey as a part of nature. He is an intelligent organism in interaction with his environment. His continuous coming into harmony with nature is the stimulus for the development of both his intelligence and his conceptions of value. But man's problem solving and evaluating do not make him a more valuable organism. We value cars, while cars do not value us. But the same type of instrumental value is applied to both. Dewey's theory of value is naturalistic and behavioristic; he rules out God, the non-natural, and the subjective. So men are valued in accordance with the demands of the processes of selection-rejection that are essential to the sustenance and continuation of life-processes in general.

But do not men enjoy a higher status than mere objects (cars, trees)? We do value men as ends-in-themselves, and it is an odd theory which restricts « value » to serviceability. Take the case of the love of a man for a woman. In such cases of value are we mainly concerned with how well the other person is serving our purposes? No, so I can only say that Dewey's theory, instrumentalism, cannot give an adequate account of the intrinsic worth of men. Dewey is not concerned with the uniqueness of the person, except as it relates to the persons' role as a functional element in a teleological system. For in Dewey's theory man has no intrinsic worth other than the instrumental significance which is added to him at particular times and places.

(1) Dewey, « The Field of ' Value ' », *Value: A Cooperative Inquiry*, ed. Ray Lepley (New York, 1949), p. 65.

(2) Dewey, *Theory of Valuation* (Chicago, 1939), p. 34.

(3) Dewey, « The Field of ' Value ' », p. 69; *Theory of Valuation*, p. 47.

(4) Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, p. 27.

(5) Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, pp. 176, 177.

(6) Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 303.

(7) Dewey, *Psychology and Social Science*; I of D. on P., p. 71.