

The Life-World

Lived Experience

A contemporary of Dewey's, the prominent British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), began one of his most popular books by distinguishing “sense data” (that which is grasped by the senses), from “sensation,” the awareness that we are experiencing sense data (Russell, 12). Philosophy originates, for Russell, with the careful description of basic experiences, such as that of a table. “To the eye it is oblong, brown and shiny, to the touch it is smooth and cool and hard; when I tap it, it gives out a wooden sound” (Russell, 9). Such a procedure, starting with sense data, had become standard practice in the tradition of British Empiricism. Philosophers were expected to begin by identifying the elemental building blocks of experience. Their next task was to explain the emergence of ideas from these foundational units. Finally, they had to explain how ideas, thus engendered, were related to the external world.

A literary figure born one year before Russell, writing a new sort of novel, offered a different perspective on the nature of experience. When Marcel Proust (1871–1922) recalled the *petite madeleine* soaked in a spoonful of tea, his description had nothing of the cold enumeration of sense impressions that marked Russell's reaction to the table. Proust first described the context that prepared his experience: a cold day, surly mood, boredom, his mother's surprising offer of tea which he rarely drank.

And soon, mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place. (Proust, 54–55)

Eventually, Proust comes to realize that the experience of the tea-soaked madeleine awakened memories of his Aunt Léonie, who used to give him a just such a morsel after Sunday mass. In turn, this set off a train of memories that is one of the literary masterpieces of the twentieth century.

Understanding the nature of experience is no small matter when trying to grasp a philosophical position. John Smith has correctly pointed out that "the reconstruction of experience by the Pragmatists" is "their most important contribution" (Smith, 1992, 17). The contrast between experience as sense data in Russell, and experience as historically and contextually conditioned in Proust, will help us to understand the point of departure for Dewey. "Experience," in Dewey's writings is meant to articulate the inclusive, multi-faceted, that is to say fully human, modes of prehending, reacting to, and interacting with our surroundings. Because, for him, "experience" identifies the mode of human being-in-the-world, Dewey's understanding of it is actually closer to that of the novelist Proust than to that of his fellow philosopher Russell.

Dewey cannot, however, follow Proust, who, after a rich elaboration of his "experience," retreats to his inner self. "I put down my cup and examine my own mind" (Proust, 55). Both Russell and Proust, although initially tethered to their surroundings, soon lose sight of these. The first transforms the life-world into a series of "objective" data that have little to do with the everyday use and enjoyment we make of that world. The second distances himself from immersion in the here and now. His escape is into a "subjective" re-creation of the past.

Deweyan "empirical naturalism" (LW 1:4) combines the multifaceted sensitivity of a Proust with the concern for the here and now of a Russell. Philosophers are, after all, ordinary human beings. They are neither cold, objective accumulators of data, nor detached, subjective revelers in the past. Traditional empiricism, stressing the importance of experience, had taken philosophy in a positive direction. However, representatives of the tradition, like Russell, do not actually begin with ordinary human experience. What they present as fundamental "givens" are really results of a prior Galilean Purification. Such results might best be described, not as "givens" but as "takens." Empiricists, we might say, were not sufficiently empirical.

Ordinary human experience, marked as it is by a qualitative dimension, by affect and memory, by definite interests, is dis-

torted in the reductive empiricism espoused by Russell. The reduction strips away the multiple dimensions of fully human experiencing. What remains are the senses as free-floating receptors working in isolation. The percepta apprehended by these senses are then misleadingly read back into the original context as raw, initial data.

Such a procedure is akin to a linguist claiming that first there were individual letters, then words, then grammar, and finally language. The actual empirical primacy of a living language is dismissed in favor of what has emerged from second-order activities of analysis and abstraction. Analysis and abstraction can isolate and construe elemental units within a language. These *results* should not, however, be read back into the situation as original existential data.

In his introductory chapter to *Experience and Nature* Dewey cites an unnamed philosopher's description of a chair, one analogous to Russell's description of the table. Such a description is revealed to be a model of misconstruing ordinary experience. It embodies two major defects:

1. Experience "is reduced to the traits connected with the *act of experiencing*, in this case the act of seeing."
2. "The other point is that, even in such a brief statement as that just quoted, there is compelled recognition of an *object* of experience which is infinitely other and more than what is asserted to be alone experienced." (LW 1:25)

Proust's experience of the madeleine provides some sense of what is the "infinitely other and more" referred to by Dewey in his criticism of the traditional empiricist construction of experience. The proper starting point for philosophy should be full, concrete human experiencing. There is no need for a Galilean reduction. Human experience, as in Proust, is saturated with memory and affect. The tea-soaked madeleine is a nexus of meaning far surpassing, "infinitely other" as Dewey puts it, the description in terms of sense data.

All of this is important because it helps identify an absolutely crucial difference between Deweyan philosophizing and that of alternative traditions. Philosophies which seize upon different points of departure will be dramatically divergent in their fully worked-out forms. Rather than construe an artificially purified situation, Dewey simply accepts that, although philoso-

phy grows beyond ordinary, lived experience, that is where it must begin.

The first edition of *Experience and Nature* had used strong language to indicate the self-defeating nature of following the Galilean Purification. Philosophers who would substitute products of subsequent abstractive refinement for the "obvious and immediate facts of gross experience," are "unmindful that thereby philosophy itself commits suicide" (LW 1:366–67). History teaches us that philosophers are tempted to "substitute ratiocination and its conclusions for things that are done, suffered and imagined." They "are wont to start with highly simplified premises." This moment, what I have called the Galilean Purification, is undertaken quite consciously. Philosophers have set as their goals "absolute certainty in knowledge of things and absolute security in the ordering of life." Having such goals in mind, they chose initial data and principles "sufficiently simple to yield what is sought" (LW 1:373). This procedure may be self-reinforcing, but it is neither empirical nor fruitful in dealing with actual lived experience.

Unlike the philosophers he criticizes, Dewey does not begin with a prior commitment to achieving absolute certainty. Human knowing is provisional, incomplete, and probabilistic. We rarely act with the absolute security that our choices are *the* absolutely appropriate ones. This is neither cause for despair nor for seeking out artificial forms of security. The human condition, in its fullness, must be taken into account by the philosopher. Experience is what can open the fullness of that condition to us.

Accepting neither the Galilean Purification nor the Asomatic Attitude, Deweyan philosophizing, like that of Charles S. Peirce before him,¹ begins where humans actually find themselves, in the here and now of lived experience. Genuine empirical method in philosophy, Dewey claims, "cautions us that we must begin with things in their complex entanglements rather than with simplifications made for the purpose of effective judgment and action" (LW 1:387). To begin properly, the philosopher must become once again an ordinary human being who lives, enjoys, undergoes, suffers, imagines, hopes, struggles, loves, and plans for the future. On this level, "experience" weaves together the environment, memory, reactions to physical conditions, interests, limitations, and projects envisioned. The opposition of "objective" conditions to "subjective" feeling has no place in such

a scheme. Ordinary experience is woven together from multiple strands that do not assume the opposition of "subject" to "object."

The term "experience," Dewey argues, should be thought of as analogous to "life" or "history," words that blur the sharp boundaries between subjective and objective. "Life" requires the interpenetration of organism and environment. Reflective analysis can isolate the external conditions (air breathed, food taken) from internal ones (lungs breathing and stomach digesting), but such an isolation is the product of abstractive analysis not the concrete condition of actual living. Similarly, "history" is at the same time deeds, triumphs, and tragedies as well as the human retelling and interpretation of those acts (LW 1:19). The two dimensions can be separated in reflective abstraction, as can the alphabet from spoken language. But it must not be thought that the letters of the alphabet are original givens that are then put together synthetically. The original context is best represented by the experiences of ordinary persons. This context, as with the parallel cases of life and history, is one of undifferentiated, multilayered interpenetration.

Genuine empirical method, Dewey insists, "is the only method which can do justice to this inclusive integrity of 'experience.' It alone takes this integrated unity as the starting point for philosophic thought" (LW 1:19). Philosophical activity is a sort of circuit which begins in lived experience and must return there for both application and verification. The special service rendered by the study of philosophy is not, Dewey claims, the study of philosophy itself, but "a study, by means of philosophy, of life-experience" (LW 1:40).

Life-experience, as the example of Proust indicates, is multi-dimensional, complicated, laden with memory, emotion, and qualitative judgment. In the original first chapter of *Experience and Nature*, Dewey himself had reached into literature for examples of how "experience" should be understood. Rejecting the empiricist description of the chair, he offered these alternatives.

Consequently, I would rather take the behavior of the dog of Odysseus upon his master's return as an example of the sort of thing experience is for the philosopher than trust to such statements. A physiologist may for his special purpose reduce Othello's perception of a handkerchief to simple elements of color under certain conditions of light and

shapes seen under certain angular conditions of vision. But the actual experience was charged with history and prophecy; full of love, jealousy and villainy, fulfilling past human relationships and moving fatally to tragic destiny. (LW 1:368)

The Galilean Purification is a prerequisite for taking the physiologist's description as paradigmatic. An inclusive empirical method must avoid the error of first simplifying and then reading the results of that simplification back as original data. Ordinary experience is something to be respected, not an illusion to be overcome. "The most serious indictment to be brought against non-empirical philosophies is that they have cast a cloud over the things of ordinary experience. They have not been content to rectify them. They have discredited them at large" (LW 1:40).

The public perception of philosophers as involved in arcane disputations, removed from the push and pull of ordinary life, disputations which disparage ordinary life-experience, may not be too far off the mark. Dewey wishes more than anything to reposition philosophy away from this overly specialized realm. He wants to return philosophy to its Socratic roots, where its efforts would revolve around the concerns and questions shared by both ordinary citizens and professional thinkers. "If what is written in these pages has no other result than creating and promoting a respect for concrete human experience and its potentialities, I shall be content" (LW 1:40-41).

The Fallacy of Intellectualism

Dewey has a name for the error committed by those who embrace a truncated empiricism. He calls it the "fallacy of intellectualism." "Intellectualism" is defined by Dewey as the view that "all experiencing is a mode of knowing, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such" (LW 1:28).

Two starting points are possible. The correct path is the one which embraces everyday experience. The other believes that "all experiencing is a mode of knowing." It feels compelled to substitute "knowing," the results of intellectual inquiry, for the givens of ordinary experience. What we come to know as the result of specialized inquiries, that table salt is NaCl for example,

should not be substituted for the ordinary experience of salt in all of its dimensions. Experiencing is always wider than knowing. The fallacy of intellectualism has been committed when the rich complexity of nature has been reduced to what a single type of inquiry has to say about it.

Dewey does not use the label "intellectualism" because he embraces some form of irrationalism. He is not deprecating the work of intelligence. He seeks to indicate, rather, the attitude which fails to recognize the primacy of lived experience. It substitutes the refined products of necessarily selective, often eliminative, cognition for the full richness of ordinary experience. By making this substitution it loses an opportunity to expand and enrich our experience. Indeed, it narrows the province of philosophy. "Nature," as he put in the above citation, becomes "transformed" until it is thought of only in terms provided by specialized sciences.

This has led, historically, to the most prominent consequence flowing from "intellectualism": the artificial opposition of philosophy to science. If both disciplines are thought to share the same starting points, and to aim at the same goal, the differences in their results can only be interpreted as conflicting, not complementary, claims about the life-world. Philosophers, lovers of sweeping statements that they are, phrase this as the opposition of "appearance" to "reality."

A classic case of such a false dilemma was described by the physicist Arthur Eddington in his discussion of the "two tables." One was the commonsense table of ordinary experience. It was smooth, hard, colored, and had sharp edges. The other was the table described by a physicist. This one was mostly empty space, constantly in motion, with a small mass, and no clearly defined boundaries. Because he began by assuming that the *results* of a refined process of cognition, physics in this case, should be granted more existential stature, he concluded that the two perspectives were rivals. When forced to choose between them, he did not hesitate: "I need not tell you that modern physics has by delicate test and remorseless logic assured me that my second scientific table is the only one which is really there—wherever 'there' may be" (Eddington, xii).

The "remorseless logic" of which Eddington spoke was not, as he thought, that of physics. It was rather that of philosophy. Specifically it was, rather than "logic," a prior philosophical commitment to both the Galilean Purification and the Plotinian

Temptation. Such prior commitments, assuming that only a single view of reality can be determinative, and selecting the results of a particular inquiry rather than the givens of lived experience as that single view, lead inexorably to positions like those articulated by Eddington: different perspectives are competitors in the quest for the one true depiction of reality.

The best response to intellectualism begins with a rejection of the third faulty presupposition of traditional philosophy, the Asomatic Attitude. Humans are not primarily disembodied sorts of cogitators. They are embodied individuals, participants in multifarious sorts of interactions within the world that encompasses them. Reflective thought, using special methodologies, and exercised for specific purposes, can isolate various dimensions of that original transactional nexus. So long as it is kept in mind that these isolated elements have been selected for purposes of analysis, understanding, or control, no fallacy is committed. Such a procedure reflects embodied intelligence in action, not "intellectualism." Only when it is assumed that the products of cognitive reflection have ontological priority does intelligence in action degenerate into intellectualism. Only then would Eddington's two tables seem opposed to one another.

The Primacy of Interaction

The empirical method, as Dewey understands it, will reveal to us a world quite different from that presented by previous thinkers. One manner in which the Plotinian Temptation had manifested itself was by identifying separate, self-sufficient units as the ultimately real components of reality. Descartes had defined a "substance" as "a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence" (Descartes, 1985, 210). The most fully real things were thought to be independent unities. The more self-sufficient, the more autonomous was an entity, the more it approximated the ideal of full reality. Independent units of all sorts, from pure sense data, to unsplittable atoms, to the autonomous individuals which populated Locke's and Rousseau's states of nature, began to proliferate in philosophical and scientific literature.

So long as the soil within which philosophy germinated was that which had felt the prior working of the Galilean Purification and the Plotinian Temptation, such an emphasis on isolated units was understandable. But with the more fully human

empiricism described by Dewey, the garden could be seen not as the space within which isolated entities could be found, but rather as a network of interconnections.

The crops are rooted *in* the soil, which is aerated *by* earthworms. Insects provide the means of pollination *for* the plants. Rain falls *on* them, and energy is received *from* the sun. The interconnections are real, even though traditional philosophers had failed to give them their due. William James was an important exception. He had already prepared the way by emphasizing the importance of conjunctions and prepositions in our descriptions of experience. "We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* and a feeling of *cold*" (James, 1950, 245–46).

Following James, Dewey suggests that a genuinely inclusive empirical method does not uncover isolated, discrete entities. Ordinary experience reveals entities in varied, multifarious forms of interrelationships. As Descartes himself quickly realized, only a divinity could live up to his definition of substance (Descartes, 1985, 210). So powerful was the Plotinian Temptation, however, that the belief in ultimately isolated units continued to be directive ideals, guiding philosophical reflection for several centuries.

Dewey does not succumb to the Plotinian Temptation because he does not make the coordinate commitment to the Galilean Purification. He feels under no compulsion to turn his back on human experiencing in order to begin with the artificially simplified world of entities in isolation. Dewey simply admits what lived experience prehends, the primacy of entities-in-interaction. His is an ecological stance in the sense that it grasps the reality and importance of interconnectedness. What we directly experience are spheres of interpenetration, conjunctions, reciprocating influences. Isolated entities are *not* raw givens of experience any more than were the sense data of Russell. They are "takens," aspects of experience highlighted for specific purposes. They are the refined products of abstractive mental processes. As such they are unproblematic. They become problematic only when they are claimed to have existential priority and offer a rival to our everyday, ordinary experience. Only then is there a fallacy of intellectualism.

Philosophy's task in part is to provide maps or charts of life-experience. This is the work of that branch of philosophy known as "metaphysics." Its task, as Dewey puts it, is to provide a "ground-map for the province of criticism" (LW 1:309). By "crit-

icism” Dewey means the process of evaluation. For such evaluation, “criticism,” to occur fruitfully in areas such as art, political organization, science, or social relations, the ground-map has to be as carefully articulated as possible.

Traditional philosophers have referred to “being” as that which is charted, described in metaphysics. Dewey employs alternative formulations. He speaks of the “original material” (LW 1:20) or the “affairs of every-day primary experience” (LW 1:36). Science, following the Galilean Purification, can work to pare down the “affairs of every-day primary experience” in order to achieve its aims. Without such a paring away, laboratories would be useless. But philosophy, whose primary concern “is to clarify, liberate and extend the goods which inhere in the naturally generated functions of experience” (LW 1:305), must work always within the milieu of “every-day primary experience.”

The novelty and radicality of Dewey’s position will be overlooked unless we keep firmly in mind that this original material, directly experienced, can best be expressed as entities-in-interaction. The importance of this point for properly understanding Dewey cannot be overemphasized. Interconnection and interdependency are the rule. Isolated entities are mental constructions. They are products of selective emphasis.

Temporality and Possibility

Until Hegel, modern philosophy had relegated temporality to an area of benign neglect. Two twentieth-century thinkers, Bergson and Heidegger, took up the Hegelian lead and made time central to their philosophies. Dewey, too, joins these thinkers in returning time to a place of prominence. He is led to this by his emphasis, also Hegelian, on the interrelatedness of things. A world of entities-in-interaction is a world in which time matters. Such a world is one in which the static terms “thing,” “subject,” and “object” do not capture the fullness of direct experience. Indeed, their very prominence results from minimizing both the preposition-conjunctive dimension highlighted by James, and the temporal dimension within which interrelations take place.

In place of terms with static connotations, Dewey prefers the word “affairs.” “Nature,” he claims, “is an affair of affairs.” The awareness that nature is a “scene of incessant beginnings and

endings, presents itself as the source of philosophic enlightenment" (LW 1:83).

Philosophic enlightenment derives from the awareness of temporality as a concrete presence, not just the "formal *a priori* condition of all our appearances whatsoever" that it was for Kant (Kant, 77). Indeed, it is better to speak of temporality as a quality of experience than to speak of "time" as an autonomous reality apart from the push and pull of natural processes. "Time as empty does not exist; time as an entity does not exist. What exists are things acting and changing, and a constant quality of their behavior is temporal" (LW 10:214). Wherever there is life-activity, entities-in-interaction, there are "affairs," literally "makings." "Affairs" are always in process and these processes, as temporal, lead to growth, change, and development.

A proper appreciation for temporality can only arise when the Asomatic Attitude is overcome. Awareness of the embodied character of human life allows us to appreciate how time is an integral character of experience. Philosophies which begin by assuming a bifurcated human nature can complain that the body is "trapped" in time. They can then seek an escape to an atemporal realm of eternal truths for mind. Dewey's empirical naturalism, by contrast, has no wish to escape from time. It welcomes temporality as an opportunity for growth.

The "affair" which is the individual human life, immersed as it is in temporality, does not have a fixed terminus at which point it can claim to be a completed or finished self. Vital temporality means that the affair which is our life is never completed. There can always be more development, more to learn, change of old habits, and cultivation of new ones. For Dewey, this continual process of development and awareness is summarized by the term "growth."² Since all entities are entities-in-process, they are continually being influenced and altered by the relationships in which they are immersed. The various projects we undertake, relationships into which we enter, and struggles which we undergo, help shape who we are.

When process and change are taken seriously, the affair that is a human being can be understood as a continuously growing self.

Every event as such is passing into other things, in such a way that a later occurrence is an integral part of the *character* or *nature* of present existence. An "affair," *Res*, is

always at issue whether it concerns chemical change, the emergence of life, language, mind or the episodes that compose human history. (LW 1:92)

"Affairs" are never frozen, finished, or complete. They form a world characterized by genuine contingency and continual process. A world of affairs is a world of actualities open to a variety of possibilities.

"Thing," "subject," and "object" may connote entities as complete and finished, but "affair" indicates a process of making. The process of making, in turn, presupposes "possibility," an important corollary of temporality. Where temporality is taken seriously, possibility is elevated to a central category of existence. Indeed, possibility is a theme that plays a focal role in every aspect of Dewey's philosophy. Possibility is a *sine qua non* for knowing and evaluating, as well as the projects undertaken as a result of them. The possible, as that which, though not presently actual, may be brought into existence, bridges the gap between "ideas" and "ideals."

From the standpoint of operational definition—of thinking in terms of action—the ideal and the possible are equivalent ideas. Idea and ideal have more in common than certain letters of the alphabet. Everywhere an idea, in its intellectual content, is a projection of what something existing may come to be. (LW 4:239)

Since Dewey rejects the Asomatic Attitude, it is not surprising that he makes no rigid separation between thought and action, or knowledge and value. Disembodied mental spectators may consider their role to be the detached contemplation of eternal ideals. For Dewey, such an interpretation falsifies how embodied intelligence actually works. Ideas and ideals are proleptic, anticipatory in function. Both involve possibilities.

Knowledge is the awareness of what something is. This, in turn, means a sensitivity to its multiple possibilities. To know something is to be aware of what might happen to it, what behavior to expect, what results will follow, what expectations to assume, under specified conditions. Maple syrup processors know what will happen to the sap under various environmental conditions. They know what an early thaw means, what warmer than typical nights mean for the flow of sap. The burgeoning of

our knowledge grows proportionately with our ability to anticipate what possibilities will be realized under various circumstances. It grows with new circumstances which reveal more about the natural process. Knowledge is not an affair of coming directly into the presence of the "really real" once and for all. Knowing is temporally conditioned. It grows with the varying circumstances as we become more sensitive to the possibilities that can be realized in the varying circumstances in which we and whatever it is we are trying to understand are placed.

The cognate notion of ideals involves the projection of possible conditions, different from the present, conditions which will preserve already attained goods and secure new ones. All moral, social, political reform begins with ideas, the suggestions of altered situations which, if brought into being, could improve our existential situation. The already existing, by that very fact, is excluded from the realm of the ideal. This latter is coextensive with possibilities for change.

Responsibility

A ground-map whose central markers are "affairs," "temporality," and "possibility," is one whose author would have a hard time evading the burden of responsibility. It admits that a variety of possibilities can always be realized. Careful reflection is first needed to determine which should become ends to be achieved, and which discouraged. Such reflection needs to be complemented by a concerted effort to transform the desired possibilities into actualities. A world of affairs is one in which activity, process, and contingency are interwoven. Progress is neither inevitable as the optimist would hold, nor hopeless as would hold the pessimist. A world where possibilities are ever-present is a world in which intelligent participants have to gauge carefully the consequences of their actions. It is a world in which their status as participants cannot be abrogated.

Some philosophers have followed a different path. Resignation to existing conditions and/or withdrawal from them have been prominent avenues of escape. Epicurus (341–270 B.C.), for example, preached the aim of achieving imperturbability by withdrawing from the active life to seek a happiness associated with peace of soul. Descartes, as part of the Hellenistic influenced stream of Modern philosophy, offered an analogous prescription.

My third maxim was always to try to conquer myself rather than fortune, to change my desires rather than the order of the world; and generally to become accustomed to believing that there is nothing that is utterly within our power, except for our thoughts, so that, after having done our best regarding things external to us, everything that fails to bring us success, from our point of view, is absolutely impossible. (Descartes, 1980, 14)

Acquiescence of this sort is absolutely foreign to Dewey. A world of affairs is one of process, activity, and possibilities. Such a world is not one in which responsibility is to be shunned. Larry Hickman's book on Dewey ends with an epilogue, appropriately titled, "Responsible Technology." He cites with approval E. A. Burtt's comments at the centennial celebration of Dewey's birth that "if he had to pick a single word to typify Dewey's philosophical work, it would be 'responsibility'" (Hickman, 196).³ Burtt and Hickman are correct to focus on this term. For Dewey, humans are participants in a world of ongoing, interwoven, contingent affairs. It is incumbent upon them to act in such a way that will encourage the realization of those possibilities appropriate to flourishing sociopolitical life. Such a life can be realized in no other way.

Because his philosophy is rooted in everyday, ordinary experience, sociopolitical concerns are always paramount for Dewey. He admitted in his autobiography that these issues took on for him an importance usually reserved in others for religious concerns (LW 5:154). We can now see why this sort of religious devotion to moral and social issues was no arbitrary choice. The whole orientation of empirical naturalism culminates quite reasonably in the challenge of responsible involvement: the call to participate in channelling the energies of our surrounding world in such a way as to preserve and enhance the goods we already have, while attempting to secure new ones.

Dewey thus distinguishes himself at a stroke from his younger contemporaries, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), and Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947). Each of these thinkers held strong beliefs and cared deeply about social goods. None of them, however, articulated a detailed sociopolitical philosophy consistent with their overall outlook. Dewey, on the other hand, wrote copiously on political

philosophy. These writings, supporting a specific form of democracy, were fully in line with his belief that "in some sense all philosophy is a branch of morals" (LW 1:387).⁴

Evaluating Philosophy

Given the whole orientation of empirical naturalism, it is not surprising that Dewey's criterion for a successful philosophy is to be found in the social and cultural realm of lived experience. The challenge of securing and extending goods is the real test of a philosophy. It is not to be judged primarily by its logical rigor, secure apodictic foundations, success at interpreting the discoveries of science, or the manner in which it identifies the primary causes of existence. The real sign of a vibrant philosophy is its fruitfulness in guiding us toward enhanced human lives. When we want to judge a philosophy, its role in providing the conditions for a flourishing life are paramount.

Does it (philosophy) 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? . . . Does it yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things which the results of physical science afford when applied in every-day affairs? Or does it become a mystery that these ordinary things should be as they are; and are philosophic concepts left to dwell in separation in some technical realm of their own. (LW 1:18)

Professional philosophy fails this Deweyan test miserably. So much of it dwells in the separate, technical realm disparaged in this quotation. Not only is it remote from daily life, but it too often construes itself as a rival to it. "The things of ordinary experience," as Dewey expresses it, become more "opaque than ever before." Socrates is the great model philosopher for Dewey, someone fully immersed in the concerns of living a good life. Philosophy, ultimately, is the quest to secure and enlarge what is good in life. Its task is to render "more significant" our "ordinary life experiences," and to make "more fruitful" our dealings with them.

Modernity's futile quest for certainty has resulted in a factitious bifurcation between that world and the "really real." The rivalry thus established is what leads "cultivated common sense to look askance at philosophy" (LW 1:187). It also allows philosophers to abdicate what empirical naturalism embraces, the responsibility for dealing with important substantive issues.

Nicholas Rescher has speculated about what would happen were philosophy to lose its niche as a well-established field within the world of higher education. One important ramification would occur in the area of publishing. "Textbooks would vanish. Journaldom would collapse. All those articles anthologies would vanish from the face of the earth." In their place, a new sort of philosophical writing would emerge. It would not be one aimed at colleagues or "graduate students seen as prospective colleagues." "One could no longer presuppose knowledge of technicalities or interest in esoterica. One would have to write on basic issues and to do so clearly and interestingly—in a way accessible to readers at large." Such a vision, so removed from the present philosophical climate, did not frighten Rescher. "What a difference! And—come to think of it—one that doesn't sound all that terrible" (Rescher, 355). Had Deweyan empirical naturalism remained a force in American philosophy, no such exhortation would have been necessary.