Chapter 1

The Pepper-Croce Thesis

Of *Art as Experience* Monroe Beardsley has said, "It is, by widespread agreement, the most valuable work on aesthetics written in English (and perhaps in any language) so far in our century."¹ A similar estimate of the book was made by Stephen Pepper shortly after its publication. "I am personally convinced that *Art as Experience* is one of the four or five great books on esthetics," he said, "and is a classic though but five years old."² Yet Pepper himself raised what was to be the greatest critical challenge to the book, claiming that it presented a confused welter of pragmatist and idealist notions. The charge was taken up and developed by Benedetto Croce. Subsequently a number of others have upheld and expanded this view.³

The importance of this controversy exceeds a mere critics' war concerning a secondary issue in Dewey’s aesthetics. One does not have to read far in Dewey to discover the central emphasis he places on art and aesthetic experience. Art epitomizes the resolution of "hard and fast dualisms"; it is the "culmination of nature"; as intelligent action integrating means and ends, art is the "greatest intellectual achievement in the history of mankind"; art is not only the ultimate judgment on a civilization, it is civilization. Finally, as noted, Dewey himself acknowledges that the crucial test for any philosophy’s claim to understand experience is its aesthetics.⁴ Certainly Dewey’s whole philosophy is just that effort to “grasp the nature of experience itself” which should find itself best articulated in an aesthetics. Therefore, any criticism questioning the coherency of Dewey’s aesthetic theory must stand also as a judgment of his philosophy as a whole.

In this chapter I will examine the reasons why Pepper, Croce, and George H. Douglas believed that some or all of the tenets of *Art as

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Experience are inconsistent with Dewey’s naturalistic instrumentalism. The central issue of the Pepper-Croce thesis rests, I contend, on a misunderstanding of Dewey’s theory of aesthetic meaning, particularly that aspect of it described as “the pervasive qualitative whole.” This idea is not only important in Dewey’s aesthetic theory but reflects major concepts and underlying themes of his mature philosophy. One cannot, in fact, claim to understand Dewey as an instrumentalist or as a naturalist without understanding basic issues in his philosophy of experience which become highlighted under the topic of aesthetic meaning. While it is the task of this book to examine in detail the relationship of experience and the aesthetic, this chapter will be concerned simply with showing how the Pepper-Croce thesis is inconsistent and ambiguous. Nevertheless, it provides a valuable means of access to what is the central problem of Dewey’s philosophy, his theory of experience.

1. The Pepper-Croce Thesis and Dewey’s Response

Pepper records that he was at work on a pragmatist aesthetics when Art as Experience appeared in 1934. Since he had been relying on scattered remarks about art in Dewey’s works, Pepper was pleased to find a number of his predictions correct. Yet, he recalls, “I was also amazed to find Dewey saying many things which I had deliberately excluded from my tentative account, believing them contrary to the spirit of pragmatism—things which an organic idealist would have said and which I should have thought Dewey would have rather bitten his tongue than to have said . . .” Pepper concluded that this idealist side stood out more than the pragmatist, and he wrote Aesthetic Quality (1937) to present a purified pragmatic aesthetic.

Pepper’s assessment that Dewey was “reverting to Hegelianism in his later years” seemed to confirm Croce’s own reading of Art as Experience. Croce did not see two incompatible doctrines interwoven in the book, however. He found himself presented with a coherent idealist aesthetic which was inconsistent, of course, with the rest of Dewey’s writings. Welcoming Dewey back to the fold, Croce wondered whether Dewey had “availed himself of some Italian authors” in writing the book. Croce remarked that “an Italian reader is pleasantly surprised to meet on every page observations and theories long since formulated in Italy and familiar to him.” Later, Croce made this insinuation blatant, claiming that Dewey “arrived on almost every point at the same conclusions regarding art which had been reached in Italian aesthetics during the past thirty years.” The “Italian au-
thors” were of course Croce and his disciples, and the “observations and theories” were the ideas presented in Croce’s *Estetica* of 1902, developed in subsequent works. While Croce praised Dewey at least for the “freshness and spontaneity” in his treatment, he confessed ultimately to “discovering his own ideas in a new form.” Thus, Croce encouraged Dewey to drop his “Anglo-Saxon empiricism,” to forget the “fanaticism and emptiness” of his old Hegelian masters, and to ally himself with the left-wing Hegelians.

Before examining Dewey’s testy and unhelpful responses, here are the chief points of Pepper’s and Croce’s evaluations. Pepper’s approach was first to describe in outline the tenets of “the” organicist (i.e. idealist) and “the” pragmatist aesthetics, and then to compare Dewey’s theory against each. According to Pepper, organicist aesthetics emphasizes the implicit coherence in experience on the basis of its inherent rational and internally related structure. Pragmatism, on the other hand, emphasizes that experience is dependent on the environmental context, and so may or may not be coherent. The organicist finds aesthetic value in the greater degrees of coherency while the pragmatist finds value in the intensity of the quality. Pepper erroneously believes that idealist aesthetics is committed ultimately to a harmony theory of beauty, grounded in a subjective state, while pragmatist aesthetics finds its criteria in vividness, contrast, and tension in experience brought about by objective features. Finally, Pepper states that the idealist position holds that in a given instance there is only one work of art, while the pragmatist believes that there are an indefinite number of equally valid though different responses to a work of art, depending on the context.

This procrustean approach might be faulted for many reasons. Pepper seems to believe that any coherent philosophical theory can be categorized under one of a limited number of possible positions (four or five, actually) and measured for the degree to which it lives up to the consistency of that position. In spite of the value of the insight that philosophical theories may be governed by paradigmatic “root metaphors,” this approach certainly fails to do justice to the variety and complexity of positions which can be held on philosophical grounds. This becomes evident in Pepper’s inability to distinguish “organic” from “idealist.” While Dewey’s philosophy does rely on the concept of organism, this concept does not have to be construed in the sense of Schelling or Hegel. It will be seen that Dewey was fascinated by a similar reliance on the concept of organism in the evolutionary biology of his day as well as in the dominant schools of idealism. Because Dewey tried to make naturalism an intermediary theory between
materialism and idealism, he has often been faulted for being (or failing to be) one or the other.

Pepper believed that Dewey could have circumvented his organic terminology by focusing instead on the concept of fusion, the “funding” of experience in an intensely vivid “seizure.” Both Pepper and Croce had remarked on this feature of Dewey’s theory, comparing it to the clear but confused cognition described by such eighteenth-century philosophers as Baumgarten. The ambiguity of equating such a notion with pragmatism is evident from the similarities Croce himself noted between it and his concept of “expression = intuition.”

Pepper was primarily distressed with Dewey’s remarks about the aesthetic experience being “integrated through its inner relations into a single qualitative whole.” Pepper asks whether this is not the organization of implicitly coherent feelings into a whole through their internal relations as commented on by the idealists. “From the vague appearance to the clear reality,” concludes Pepper, “from the abstract and conflicting to the concrete and coherent: thesis, antithesis, synthesis . . . Is this not the very chorus voiced by Schelling, Hegel, Bradley and Bosanquet?” Pepper’s final assessment of Dewey’s aesthetics is that the “vital kernel of a new esthetic struggles to grow . . . But is finally mulched under a rich layer of organicism.”

Pepper found the paradigmatic instance of Dewey’s commitment to organicism in the following passage:

The undefined pervasive quality of an experience is that which binds together all the defined elements, the objects of which we are focally aware, making them a whole. The best evidence that such is the case is our constant sense of things as belonging or not belonging, a sense which is immediate (AE, 194; LW 10:198).

Certainly, this passage describes what might be called the ineffable unity of contexts of experience, an apprehension which locates specific objects of consciousness within a whole situation, itself immediately grasped or felt to be balanced or discordant. This passage contains a lucid summary of what Dewey means by “aesthetic meaning,” but Pepper sees it as implicitly containing the most idealist (and so contradictory) part of Dewey’s aesthetics.

The question, of course, is whether Dewey’s “pervasive qualitative whole”, which unifies and controls experience so that it does have immediate sense or meaning, is necessarily committed to idealist metaphysics. Bertrand Russell, like Pepper, felt uneasy with Dewey’s use of words like “coherence,” “whole,” and “integration.” Dewey objected that his use of these terms was quite dependent on
the primary concept of "situation" in his philosophy. To Russell, Dewey said, "From one angle, almost everything I have written is a commentary on the fact that situations are immediate in their direct occurrence, and mediated and mediating in the temporal continuum constituting life experience." Dewey unfortunately did not elaborate on how situations provided an alternative basis for claiming that an experience could be internally mediated but immediately had or that immediately had experiences led to a complete or total experience which was whole.

Dewey's response to Pepper's criticisms was equally unilluminating. Instead of explaining how his ideas fitted into a naturalistic framework, Dewey tried to turn the tables on Pepper by accusing him of not being a good pragmatist for his deducing the content of aesthetic theories a priori. Though this is, I believe, a justified criticism of Pepper's attitude, Dewey had a tendency in defending his ideas to resort to the posture that his observations were simply innocent discoveries arrived at by a method of empirical inquiry, as if there were no underlying theory to be accounted for. Thus Dewey claimed that "coherence" and "organic unity" were simply features present in experience, to greater or lesser degree, which could be observed to be there. In other words, Dewey maintains that there are some experiences which have the character attributed by the idealists to all experience. The trouble came when this aspect or part of experience was refined into a metaphysical absolute. Another aspect of Dewey's response was to claim that each part of his philosophy was subject to the method appropriate to the subject matter at hand, so that the results arrived at in his aesthetics should naturally be expected to be different from those arrived at in his theory of knowledge and inquiry. However legitimate this emphasis on pluralism in methodology is—especially when its significance in Aristotle's thought is remembered—one is naturally left wondering whether Dewey did have an organized unified philosophical perspective, if not a system in the grand manner.

Croce noted how weak Dewey's response to Pepper was and so took encouragement that Dewey, in spite of himself, was providing evidence for the truth of idealism, especially that of "some Italian authors." To substantiate this, Croce pointed out over a dozen similarities between his own and Dewey's aesthetics. Most of these are, as Dewey himself remarked, rather secondary. Both, for example, distinguish expression from emoting, subject matter from substance in the artwork, or technique from art; both affirm the continuity of ordinary and aesthetic experience and the rhythmic and temporal nature of all
art; both say that the work is a process not a thing and that aesthetic meaning cannot be construed solely in terms of form.\textsuperscript{17} The significant difference was that these ideas were located in vastly different overall theories. Croce proceeded to defend idealism as the only coherent basis for upholding these valuable insights. In \textit{Art as Experience}, Dewey had specifically criticized Croce (as he later did Pepper) for having superimposed philosophic preconceptions upon an “arrested esthetic experience” (\textit{AE}, 294; \textit{LW} 10:299). By this Dewey meant that Croce’s theory of “expression = intuition” could only be understood in terms of Croce’s contention that Spirit alone is real; the concrete intuitions of experience are expressive only because they are created by the mind—they are its states, instead of the passive impressions of an external world. The insights of Croce’s aesthetics were dyed with the color of a metaphysics which Dewey firmly rejected. Croce did not object to this characterization of his position, affirming that “I hold nothing can exist separate from knowing.”\textsuperscript{18} Dewey had not refuted this doctrine, Croce rejoined, and so his criticisms may be dismissed. Croce dogmatically stated that Dewey in fact was theoretically incapable of refuting idealism because he had repudiated “philosophical reflection” for “reconstructive intelligence” which led him into “vicious circles and positivistic tautologies.”\textsuperscript{19} To opt for reflection, of course, would automatically have led him to accept the fundamental commitments of idealism.

Dewey’s short response to Croce’s article was uncharacteristically testy. Once again, Dewey seemed either to substantiate the charges or at least to indicate that his own philosophy was casually inconsistent. Dewey rashly denied that his aesthetics had any relation to his instrumentalism. He couldn’t really do more than comment on Croce’s criticisms, he said, because a reply implied there was some common ground, and there was none in this case. Croce, unlike Dewey, regarded aesthetic experience as cognitive, a form of knowledge superior to science. Asserting the independence of his aesthetic theory, Dewey was led into making the even wilder claim that he “did not write \textit{Art as Experience} as an appendix to or application of my pragmatism . . . or in subjection to any system of philosophy.”\textsuperscript{20} Dewey concluded by complaining that Croce had read traditional empiricist meanings into his position and that the similarities noted by Croce in their theories were “of the order of commonplaces” at least as far as people familiar with the subject were concerned.\textsuperscript{21} The point which Dewey struggled to make, however, is significant: idealism, like other philosophies, treated all types of experience ultimately as forms of cognitive events (here as forms of “self knowledge”). Dewey contend-
ed that the range of non-cognitive but meaningful experiences exceeded that of experiences primarily concerned with the question of truth. “Instrumentalism” was Dewey’s theory to account for those latter situations; it was concerned with a type of experience. But aesthetic experience is not a type for Dewey—it is an inherent possibility of most experience; it is concerned with the fulfillment of meaning, not truth.

Neither Pepper nor Croce was convinced. Pepper reminisced years later that Dewey’s book, in spite of its “greatness,” was “adulterated and confused” so that “my criticism still holds.”22 Croce was more bitter, saying Dewey “was not very courteous in his reply to me, but that has no importance because it is true that he who does not lose control of himself ends by being right and having it recognized.”23 Croce himself launched a vitriolic attack on Dewey in 1952, saying he was not amused to have philosophized “commonplaces” with Dewey, especially since it was these points alone which constituted the value of Dewey’s aesthetics. If they were commonplaces, it was only because of Croce’s influence. Dewey’s commitment to pragmatism prevented him from “demonstrating the luminous affirmations which an inborn sense of the truth has brought him to achieve”; and so Croce concluded with the malicious irony that “empirically and pragmatically Dewey cannot overcome the dualism of mind and nature.”24 Only by regarding nature as a product of mind or Spirit, reaffirmed Croce, could one overcome dualism. This retort was lost on Dewey, who died three months before the article appeared. Croce himself had only a few months to live. The controversy itself has quietly persisted.

II. Douglas’ Evaluation and Further Problems

The controversy received attention after Dewey’s death in articles by Patrick Romanell, Charles E. Gause, and, most recently, by George H. Douglas, who tried to find the common ground that did exist—pace Dewey—between his and Croce’s positions. Douglas also explored why there had been misunderstandings on both sides. Douglas exonerated Dewey from Croce’s insinuation of plagiarism, but he found that Dewey erred in categorizing Croce as Hegelian, probably due to an influential misinterpretation of Santayana’s.25 Douglas confessed to a degree of “residual idealism” in Croce’s writings, but there also was some in Dewey’s, so that the main tenets of the Pepper-Croce thesis were in substance correct. Douglas surprisingly expanded the theory to include Experience and Nature, considered by many to be Dewey’s major book, among Dewey’s deviations from naturalistic
pragmatism into idealist historicism. Like Croce, Douglas was left wondering why Dewey could not bring himself to abandon pragmatism, unless "he never wanted to cut himself loose from the philosophy which had made him a great public figure and for which he is still best known. . . . Of course in the process of maintaining a cleavage between a philosophy of knowing and a philosophy of perceptual experience Dewey was sponsoring a dualism of the sort that he was always inveighing against." In short, then, Douglas supported the charge and carried it to the heart of Dewey’s mature philosophy.

The similarities that Douglas pointed out between Dewey’s and Croce’s accounts are intriguing: both treat aesthetic experience as a form of precognitive experience; both base their aesthetic theories on the concept of expression (or is their common stress on the continuity of aesthetic experience with ordinary experience as secondary as Dewey believed); and both emphasize the importance of activity in organizing experience into objects. Douglas was correct in selecting these features as important concepts, central to the theories of either thinker. The issue is whether they share more than superficial similarities because of the different theoretical contexts which provide their meaning.

Placed against the general philosophies of both men, rather startling differences emerge. Croce, as noted, is strident about the idealist commitments of his philosophy. Croce denies "above all that art is a physical fact. . . . If it is asked why art cannot be a physical fact, it is necessary to state first of all that physical facts lack reality. On the other hand, art . . . is supremely real. Consequently it cannot be a physical fact which is something unreal." Now, while Dewey also insists that the work of art must go beyond the physical art product and be realized in experience, this is only to be understood as incorporating as well as transforming a biophysical as well as cultural environment. There is no artistic activity without interaction with a definite medium, according to Dewey.

Perhaps there is no greater disparity between Dewey’s and Croce’s positions than their respective views of activity. According to Douglas, this should be the central area of their common ground, for both assert that expression, the key concept in aesthetics, is expressive activity. For Croce, expression is the spiritual activity whereby automatic sensations are constituted into objects of conscious perception. Douglas is willing to attribute the same doctrine to Dewey, saying:

Man’s human activity, his spiritual activity, which Croce calls ‘expression,’ forms and structures these impressions, fuses them into a
single whole. Expressive activity focuses the scattered rays of reality, gives meaning to the chaos of animal life. That human spirit is developed out of the flux of animal life by means of individuating expressive qualities is obviously a commonly shared belief of Dewey and Croce.\textsuperscript{29}

Douglas failed to note that experience for Dewey, unlike Croce, emerges from the complex interplay between the biological organism and a physical environment mediated by participating in a culture of symbols. Activity for Dewey is a dynamic phase of adjustment, adaptation and assimilation long before any objects of conscious perception are constituted. It is a feature of an interactive or transactional, natural situation. Activity for Croce is a magical internal product of Spirit, unrelated to anything like an external environment. In short, activity for Dewey is in the world before it is either subjective or objective; for Croce activity is the objectification of a subjective consciousness.

This difference stands out in the stringent distinction Croce draws between theory and practice. Since art is a form of knowledge for Croce, and knowledge is characterized best by theory rather than practice, art and aesthetic intuitions are purely theoretical unless one wills to externalize the intuition into a public object through some practical activity. In other words, though the aesthetic intuition, like any intuition, is an objectification or expression of Spirit, objectification does not necessarily imply externalization. The latter is incidental to the expression, because, for Croce (and unlike Hegel), practice is incidental to theory. Though occasionally Croce speaks as if expression were only realized through some external activity, or as if the work of art and the intuition were the same, this is not so. For example, Croce seemingly appropriates Hegel’s criticism of the “beautiful souls,” those who claim to have great aesthetic inspirations but either lack the technique to realize them or refuse to do so because that would degrade the work. Instead of a Deweyan—or Hegelian—respect for practical technique, however, this is really a defense by Croce of the superior intuition of the artist which precedes embodiment in a medium. “It is usual to distinguish the internal from the external work of art,” remarks Croce, “the terminology seems to us infelicitous, for the work of art (the aesthetic work) is always internal.”\textsuperscript{30} Croce’s theory, even to one barely acquainted with Dewey’s philosophy, must seem a paradigmatic instance of the classic split between theory and practice which Dewey vigorously rejected, not to mention a fairly conservative form of Hegelianism itself. The difference is evident in the following passage from \textit{Experience and Nature}:
To call action thought in constituting objects direct is the same as to say that it is miraculous. For it is not thought as idealism defines thought which exercises the reconstructive function. Only action, interaction, can change or remake objects. The analogy of the skilled artist still holds. His intelligence is a factor in forming new objects which mark a fulfillment. But this is because intelligence is incarnate in overt action . . . (EN, 158; LW 1:126).

As for the observation that both Croce and Dewey treat art and aesthetic perception as a type of precognitive experience, this too does not bear scrutiny. Croce himself had tried to link Dewey’s observation that “tangled scenes of life are made more intelligible in esthetic experience; not, however, as reflection and science render things more intelligible by reduction to conceptual form, but by presenting their meanings as the matter of a clarified, coherent, and intensified or ‘impassioned’ experience” (AE, 290; LW 10:295) with the traditional notion of experience which is “cognitio inferior, clara sed non distincta.”31 Croce’s theory owes much to this idea; for him, aesthetic intuition is a primary, precognitive type of knowledge. Intuitions can be worked up into self-articulate concepts, and can sink back from the level of cognition to aesthetic intuition.32 Art, like philosophy, for Croce, is part of “science,” not natural science, obviously, for that is tainted by practical activity and consequently is “impure.”33 Rather, science refers to the science of Spirit, Geisteswissenschaft; and so art becomes an inferior way in which Spirit comes to know itself. “Intuition gives us the world,” he says, “the phenomenon; the concept gives us the noumenon, the Spirit.”34 In the concept, Spirit becomes self-conscious, so that intuition is “expression in and for itself.”35 However “precognitive” art is for Croce, it is a moment of Spirit’s self-knowledge.

One of the major points stressed throughout Art as Experience is Dewey’s complaint that previous philosophers have done injustice to aesthetic experience by trying to turn it into a form of knowledge. It is ironic that the very passage Croce quoted above was taken from an extended criticism of this theory which mentioned Croce by name.36 As will be seen, not only is there a place for what may be called “prereflexive” experience in Dewey’s thought, but art and aesthetic experience arise from it, since the fulfillment of aesthetic experience as consummatory is really a “postcognitive” rather than a “precognitive” state. Experience is mediated by intelligence so that its meanings fuse and become funded in “an experience” which carries its critical, intellectual phase within the pervasively felt qualitative unity. In other words, aesthetic meaning for Dewey is “supracognitive” rather than

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precognitive. This is a crucial point in understanding how Dewey can claim that aesthetic experience is expressive of meaning and produces "the sense of disclosure and heightened intelligibility" (AE, 289; LW 10:294), without advocating a cognitive theory of art.

Again it seems clear that Dewey's idea of the pervasive qualitative whole marks a central aspect of his theory which has led critics to connect it with idealism. This can be further brought out, though Douglas fails to note it, by Croce's and Dewey's uses of the term "intuition". "Intuition," states Croce "is the undifferentiated unity of the perception of the real and simple image of the possible." It is simply a whole, unanalyzed perception unrelated to questions of its reality, relationships or implications, much like Santayana's use of "essence." It is the immediate object of Spirit's activity. For Dewey, aesthetic or consummatory experience is also ultimately intuited, which is to say that the pervasive qualitative whole is realized throughout the whole developing experience as the binding or grounding of all the phases so that they belong together—they are all parts of an experience. This quality is not directly the object of consciousness, but it is what focuses and contextualizes consciousness. In other words, for Dewey "Intuition . . . signifies the realization of a pervasive quality such that it regulates the determination of relevant distinctions or of whatever . . . becomes the accepted object of thought" ("Qualitative Thought"; PC, 101; LW 5:249).

Whereas intuitions for Croce are preanalyzed and unrelated essences, for Dewey they are the immediate or significant sense of the situation within which all analysis and relating are contained. Though superficially one might say that aesthetic meaning is intuited for Croce and Dewey, this is at best misleading and ambiguous. The full understanding of Dewey's theory of situations, context, and sense is necessary before what he means by "intuition" will be clear. But from these simple comparisons it should be evident that there are profound differences underlying the apparent similarities between his thought and Croce's. It is also plain that Douglas was only able to maintain the Pepper-Croce thesis by ignoring these fundamental dissimilarities.

III. Conclusion: The Significance and Scope of the Problem

Much of the force behind the Pepper-Croce thesis comes from a failure to understand Dewey's aesthetics in the context of his general philosophy. To show that the thesis is founded on misunderstandings and confusions is not to disprove it, however. Many philosophers
have had difficulties with Dewey’s ideas, and after a certain point, no matter what special topic is being examined, a certain similarity or pattern in the criticisms emerges. In Dewey’s metaphysics, for example, there is a problem about his “phenomenological” versus his “naturalistic” approach or between his theory of quality and his theory of relation. The controversy began almost at the beginning of his instrumental period and persisted until his death and beyond.

The nature of the problem can be brought out by contrasting statements. “In every work of art,” he says, “. . . meanings are actually embodied . . .’” (AE, 273; LW 10:277). Elsewhere, however, he says, “Genuinely to think of a thing is to think of implications that are no sooner thought of than we are hurried on to their implications” (EN, 118; LW 1:98). Again, we hear, “Quality is quality, direct, immediate and undefinable,” whereas, “Order is a matter of relation, of definition, of placing and describing” (EN, 110; LW 1:92). “It cannot be asserted too strongly,” claims Dewey, “that what is not immediate is not aesthetic (AE, 119; LW 10:123); elsewhere he says that “Immediacy of existence is ineffable” (EN, 85; LW 1:74). How can the aesthetic have meaning if it must be both mediated and ineffable? Dewey repeatedly insists that aesthetic experience is one of enjoyed meanings, yet he seems to have severed meaning from immediacy completely. Thus, while the Pepper-Croce thesis may have rested on ambiguities, there is good evidence that Dewey’s theory itself contained ambiguities or contradictions or both. Perhaps, in short, Dewey was grafting a pragmatist branch onto an idealist trunk and roots so that this strange fruit was the result.

My thesis, however, is that Dewey did present a coherent, viable philosophy of experience and aesthetic meaning, though, surely, not a tidy one. This is not to deny that Dewey was frequently ambiguous or vague or that he contradicted himself. These features, however, have been so over-emphasized that I believe it is worthwhile to attempt a systematic and sympathetic reading of his thought. The difficulty of Heidegger’s writing or the fragmentary presentation of Wittgenstein’s later thought tend to postpone the reader from making hasty, premature criticisms. For better or worse, Dewey’s rambling, matter-of-fact tone, which tries to present rather extraordinary ideas in ordinary American street-English, often gives the reader the impression that he has grasped the thought when he has grasped the ordinary sense. The fact that Dewey availed himself of terms deeply embedded in the very tradition which he was overthrowing, like “experience,” “nature,” “metaphysics,” “organism,” and so on, represents, I think, his genuine desire to co-opt the habits of speech. If
his new meanings, in other words, could succeed in attaching themselves to the old terms, he would have gone far in changing the very "form of life" of the culture, diverting it from its dualistic habits to more constructive ones. Dewey, it must be recalled, wrote for a much broader audience than philosophers do today. That such an enterprise backfired is no great surprise, but the result has been a systematic misreading of Dewey's thought. How often, for example, is Dewey presented as a "naturalist," i.e., someone who believed that all man's higher functions could be reduced to and explained by organic laws of biology, chemistry, and physics, or that it was the genuine thrust of his theory of experimental intelligence that all questions, including those of value, should be handed over to research scientists for resolution? Such a misreading is reflected in the attempts to treat Dewey as a half-hearted or unsystematic positivist-utilitarian—positions to which he was deeply opposed. Before, however, we undertake an examination of his mature philosophy, it will be illuminating to explore the outlines of his first idealistic system, focusing on those problematic ideas raised by the Pepper-Croce thesis. It will then be easier to determine whether there are skeletons—or ghosts—lurking in the cellars and attics of his later thought.