ON THE ORIGIN OF VALUE AND CONTROL: JOHN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF CONSUMMATORY VALUES

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Although often criticized unfairly for having a pernicious, subjective ethics, John Dewey's ethical insights allow for forms of control over the creation and living of values that can have significant benefits for the reconstruction of our values, politics, or educational theories. There are methods of control which have the potential to make the world more conducive to our interest in meliorating the situations of life without sacrificing ethical norms or the reality of moral experience. Dewey's overarching ethical project is to apply intelligent methods of control to affect meaningful stabilities in experience. To understand this project, we must also understand what Deweyan philosophy means by value, valuation (or the development of a consummatory value) and control.

Dewey's denotative empirical method is a development in pragmatic philosophy that emphasizes the importance of experience in its immediacy and seeks to make inquiry into the had experiences of an organism the starting point of philosophy. Dewey turns philosophy toward a method that is based on the experiences of organisms in a world without any *a priori* content or appeals to extra-empirical authority. There is no appeal to anything outside of experience. Dewey's denotative-empirical method works to show that what is real includes values and instability.[1] Before we proceed, it is important to emphasize that for Dewey, the role of metaphysics is to provide a map of the generic traits of existence. Dewey's goals are simply to work out what traits existence has by means of experience of that existence.

Values in their immediacy are, according to Dewey, experienced as real.[2] They are, employing his term, "had" parts of experience. In *A Common Faith* Dewey writes:

> There are values, goods, actually realized upon a natural basis—the goods of human association, of art and knowledge. […] We need no external criterion and guarantee for their goodness. They are *had*, they exist as good, and out of them we frame our ideal ends.[3]

Goods are parts of experience from which later investigation and inquiry can provide knowledge. On Dewey's account, had goods are real things and, at least in their immediacy, exist in a robust sense. When Dewey states that goods are *had*, he is simply stating that in immediate experience there are features of experience in which we find goods which we desire. This experienced immediacy is antecedent to any knowledge. For example, before reason, intelligence, or knowledge have any claim on my experience of affection for a friend, that affection *is* real and it *is* a good. Dewey holds that "[a] good is a good anyhow, but to reflection those goods approve themselves, whether labeled beauty or truth or righteousness, which steady, vitalize and expand judgments in creation of new goods and conservation of old goods."[4] We find ourselves in a complex matrix of goods. The good of commodious and selfless civic life, the good of self-serving greed and the good of unhampered hedonism are all goods and only in the *interaction* of these goods can anyone of them be determined by the intellect to be better or worse. Immediate values become valuable or detrimental for conduct.

In *Art as Experience* Dewey discusses how consummatory experiences are had. This is an important contribution to his philosophy because this emphasizes the aesthetic and immediate nature of most of our experience and sets it within the limitations of the situation, or as it is called by Dewey, "*an* experience."[5] We shall see here how immediate value becomes a consummatory value. With the aid of this work in aesthetics, we not only get a description of how it is that experience is meted out and had but we also gain the insight that the moral actor must be an artist—seeking to deliver consummatory experiences of significant meaning and richness in his or her activities.[6]

A consummatory experience is an experience of a particular pervasive and whole quality. However, specific moments of experience are consummatory, which points to the holistic nature of meaningful experiences. Dewey contrasts consummatory experience with that of experience taken as undifferentiated bombardment, writing:

> We have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory[.] […] Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience.[7]

Meaning becomes possible in the consummation of experience into a situation of self-sufficiency. Qualitative immediacy is the organism's access to the fringe of experience—where inquiry has not yet started to make warrant assertions. However, it is always part of the situation. Here the environment can expand and grow meaningful. The fringe of experience is important for meaning because it is here where growth of ordered richness, and our ability to control aspects of value, becomes a possibility.

Emotions are of a fundamental import in a consummatory experience because emotions give us access to the non-cognitive fringe of experience. A consummatory experience "has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement."[8] Any intellectual

activity is itself pervaded by emotions and thus any consummatory experience has a deeply emotional quality. Dewey goes so far as to claim that "no intellectual activity is an integral event (is *an* experience), unless it is rounded out with this quality."[9] Cold calculations and simple knowing do not reach the level of consummatory experience without some emotional content. Meanings are always emotional. Dewey argues that emotion "provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience."[10] Abstract intellectual activity is an abstraction that ignores the whole of experience. When we become integrated in a situation, when our experiences have a pervasive consummatory quality—the emotional richness of the situation returns. Emotions are not antithetical to intelligent activity. Our emotional states are the living immediacy of a situation.

Growth becomes an important consideration for our moral lives. Thomas Alexander holds that "There is […] a dynamic, rhythmic and growing nature to all interaction experience exemplifies this in a heightened degree, and this aspect of experience itself becomes the basis for aesthetic experience."[11] An organism with a growth-orientation attends to a network of coordination with an environment that can become larger and more meaningful. Alexander holds that potency is in the noncognitive immediate fringes of any situation, writing:

> The organism determines its environment—it literally transforms a physical context into an environment. In this sense, acts radically transform the world, for they mark the release of new potentialities for existence. […] An environment then becomes a meaningful world.[12]

The meaningfulness of a situation and the potential for growth in that situation are intimately linked.

Because we find ourselves in interaction with an environment and not as something *other* than the environment, Alexander can point out that growth in Deweyan philosophy occurs "[b]ecause the environment contains random, novel, and potentially disruptive elements, [and any] activity must be one of continued readjustment and modification[.]"[13] Note that we get a definition of growth in this quotation—active, continual readjustment in an environment. Careful attention can begin to show normative elements within experience. To put it hypothetically: If we act, then we will change the future possibilities of experience; when future possibilities of experience change, they can be more or less conducive to experiences of meaningfulness. If we can exert any intelligent control over the future of our interactions with an environment, we should attempt to make more goods (such as meaningfulness) a possibility. Therefore, the ethical question becomes: How it is that growth occurs best and how can I act in such a way in this situation? As in any inquiry, there are better and worse ways of solving moral problems.

We must be careful to distinguish between a value and a valuation or, as we will come to make the distinction, between problematic goods and consummatory values. Just because something is immediately valued in experience does not mean that it is necessarily a good thing for a particular organism in a particular situation. Valuation does not end with immediacy; doing so would limit the future possibilities of activity and be unintelligent and dangerous behavior. As we find ourselves in an environment

with limited control we must employ intelligent methods to affect some melioration.

Gregory Pappas is careful to distinguish the difference between the immediacy of valuing and the reflective act of valuation. He writes:

> *Valuing* is the direct, spontaneous, and pre-cognitive operation where we appreciate something by its immediate quality before it is subject to reflection. […] Reflection is comparative and attentive to conditions, relations of means and ends, consequences, implications, and inferences. The reflective process of arriving at this kind of judgment of value is called *valuation*.[14]

We note that a value and a valuation are different because a valuation is the result of inquiry employing intelligent methods. We find the virtue of honesty valuable because on reflection we discover that it is typically productive of meaning in our interactions. The more intelligent and effective this inquiry, the better the valuation that occurs.

Immediate goods, as real parts of a situation, can be developed by inquiry into valuations and to the extent that we are able to have some control over values. James Gouinlock reminds us that in Deweyan pragmatism:

> Value is neither an isolated entity, nor a phantom of subjective mind, nor a transcendent form; but is an eventual function in nature, produced with the contrivance of intelligence and activity. Experienced values […] are always eventual of a situation. That function of experience and nature which Dewey designates by the term "value" is the consummatory phase of a situation which is initially problematic.[15]

Value is a generic trait of all experience. Value as the result of a consummatory experience simply points to value as the intellectualized (in a wide sense) result of activity due to a problematic situation.

Gouinlock emphasizes the ambiguity of Dewey's language when it concerns value.[16] For example, euphoria is experienced immediately as valuable and so the drug addict experiences value in a chemical-induced euphoria. However, we do not need to go so far as to claim that the addict's chemical dependency is something that should be considered *valuable*. Chemical dependency could cause the environment to be less meaningful, to cause a contraction of live possibilities. Gouinlock goes on to discuss the movement of "problematic goods" to "consummatory value." He holds that the term "consummatory value" "refers to the actual consummation of a history in which intellectual procedures have been operative and have directed an action (which is the end-in-view) which succeeds in unifying the energies of the situation."[17] Only when the energies of a live organism in a situation considers growth of experience, engages problematic goods, and inquires into the situation, can we claim to have consummatory values. This consummatory value is a consummatory experience, and therefore has great aesthetic and meaningful dimensions.

Gouinlock articulates Dewey's denotative empirical method as it pertains to value as a process where methods of intelligence are employed to create consummatory values. In this special case the term "method of intelligence" is used by Dewey for

his method, which is a development of the methods I have been explicating. Inquirers make "use of the stable traits of the situation [as] indispensable evaluation."[18] Any value is weighed against the stable parts of experience. In this process of inquiry we gain insight, through dramatic rehearsals and habits, into the possibilities and ends-in-view related to the problematic value. We then decide, or act, in such a way as this value is accepted, sought after, or modified with other values making a problematic good a consummatory value.[19]

Dewey argues that the history of science shows a movement from a perspective of acceptance to one of control.[20] Here, science as a *specific* activity runs parallel to all human activity generally and can help us to illustrate how inquiries in general can control an environment. The methods of the natural sciences, for Dewey, are not the one-size-fits-all model on which to form all inquiries. Rather, the methods and results of the natural sciences give us a good example of a specialized and highly developed inquiry. We do well to note the intelligence of the methods of science but must realize that other special instances of inquiry are not the exact same as the method of inquiry developed by sciences. Physical objects, the subject-matter of science, are of a different sort in our situations than values and thus moral inquiry requires its own unique, although intelligent, methods of inquiry.

Control should not carry with it a negative connotation of destruction of ecologically sound systems, of forcing an external will on the objects of nature, or of manipulation for selfish ends. Instead, some control of the environment becomes a possibility for creatures like us because of the organism's continuous re-constitution of an environment and the possibilities to guide future activity and inquiry. We control, in the Deweyan sense, the environment when we allow "natural" processes as much as when we interrupt them. Dewey's reconstruction of philosophy changes what is intended by control from that of a subject imposing a will on the world of objects to the intelligent interaction of an organism with an environment. "Control" becomes the ability to have some influence over experience and how one constructs their moral environment. Dewey, in *The Quest for Certainty*, sees control as the ability to intelligently reconstruct experience (and therefore the self[21]) so that there are greater possibilities for meaning.[22] Control does not flatten meanings that are already there—it organizes experience so that more meanings are possible.

The import and meliorative quality of control is evident in a long quote from *The Quest for Certainty*:

> The pattern supplied by scientific knowing shows that in this one field at least it is possible for experience, in becoming genuinely experimental, to develop its own regulative ideas and standards. Not only this, but in addition the progress of knowledge of nature has become secure and steady only because of this transformation. The conclusion is a good omen for the possibility of achieving in larger, more humane and liberal fields a similar transformation, so that a philosophy of experience may be empirical without either being false to actual experience or being compelled to explain away the values dearest to the heart of man.[23]

Notice that in this work, as in all of his mature philosophy, Dewey conscientiously maintains that values are unproblematically real and important parts of experience. His goal is to enable the actor to have some control over these in his or her experience. Control here does not point to simple manipulation or expediency but to experimentation of the sort that we can get involved with the objects of experience. So, contra methods of simply observation and reporting, Dewey suggests a method that gives us the possibility for some control over our moral lives that does not simply sit back and accept the sufferings of values as they appear accidentally.

If one seeks goals that flatten out the richness of experience or ignores values, then the activity suggested by this form of control is of an unintelligent sort. The criticism that Dewey's philosophy emphasizes rude instrumentality over emphasizes part of the process of what it is to control an environment. Doing so ignores the import of growth of experience, growth of the self, and growth of the environment. Simply put, the organism controls the environment because the individual constitutes the environment as it exists in it while the environment constitutes the individual. This is due to the feedback process of learning, developing, and growing all the while constituting the environment by means of symbols, habits, and continued inquiry into experience. The question is not whether to control or not to control the environment, but rather the extent of intelligence and reason (in the Deweyan sense) we can bring to bear on our environment. We are in control and we can either bring methods of dogmatism and intelligence to bear or we can bring re-creative and intelligent methods to bear. It is the denotative empirical method, and its permutations through Dewey's thought, that argues that we have reason to maintain that methods of intelligent control yield better more meaningful results than haphazard uncontrolled activity. It is the human condition to be presented with problems—without problematic situations we would not have the experience we have—and taking control is not a manipulation but is rather what occurs when we inquire. We are forced to act—even "inactivity" or attempting to ignore problems by an organism living in an environment is still a form of activity with consequences. The question becomes what we can do to cause better, more meaningful results when we are forced to act by the fact that we find ourselves always organically and constantly linked to an environment.

Thus, because values are real and we have possibilities of intelligent choosing, we do not create a debasement of value when we act and control an environment. In fact, other persons are nodes in the environment of particularly rich value which have a constitutive role in our own individuality. It is no surprise that in our inquiries we discover that we should treat others with very high regard. This philosophical insight leads us to the conclusion that value is real wherever it occurs and we are have many reasons in experience why we should consider other people valuable and regard their valuations in a richer and more extended extent that we should value the less dynamic parts of experience. We are driven to this conclusion because it is only in community with others that we can come to be, that others have experiences like our own, and that the valuings of others and thus their whole moral life is an important enough consideration that we are moved to include this complexity in our deliberations.

Notes

1. Gregory Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008) 26-30.

2. See John Dewey, "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism," *The Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924,* vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1977), MW 3:158. Dewey postulates that experience in its immediacy and entirety is the only manner in which we can come to know what is real. Therefore, he holds that all parts of experience must be investigated as integral clues to what is real. The emphasis on all the parts of experience means we cannot ignore feelings or the non-cognitive parts of experience. Dewey's immediate empiricism will be developed through his career, but the primacy of experience as the totality of our access to what is real is consistent throughout.

3. John Dewey, *A Common Faith, The Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989), LW 9:33. (My emphasis.)

4. LW 1:311.

5. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, *The Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989), LW 10:63. (My emphasis.)

6. Some clarification on the role of the artist might be helpful. The artist's role is to create objects, in whatever media they work, that bring about a consummatory experience. Dewey writes:

> In short, art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience. Because of elimination of all that does not contribute to mutual organization of the factors of both action and reception into one another, and because of selection of just the aspects and traits that contribute to their interpenetration of each other, the product is a work of esthetic art. Man whittles, carves, sings, dances, gestures, molds, draws and paints. The doing or making is artistic when the perceived result is of such a nature that *its* qualities *as perceived* have controlled the question of production. The act of producing that is directed by intent to produce something that is enjoyed in the immediate experience of perceiving has qualities that a spontaneous or uncontrolled activity does not have. (LW 10:54-55)

This activity is the creation of an object that has aesthetic qualities that moves those that participate with the art-object to have a consummatory experience. An art object is not the whole of experience, rather the artist's role is to select and emphasize part of experience to bring about a whole meaningful situation. An artist must select, manipulate, and emphasize to show create the possibility for a consummatory experience (LW 10:52). Dewey emphasizes that this activity is one that requires a great amount of intelligence because the manipulation of experience requires a significant savvy and understanding of experience. For the purposes of living a moral life, the moral agent should act as an artist to artistically construct consummatory experiences.

7. LW 10:42.

8. LW 10:45.

9. LW 10:45.

10. LW 10:49.

11. Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1987) 27.

12. Alexander 33.

13. Alexander 29.

14. Pappas 104-105.

15. James Gouinlock, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Value* (New York: Humanities P, 1972)

125.

16. Gouinlock 126-129.

17. Gouinlock 135.

18. Gouinlock 129.

19. Gouinlock points out while that there is no problem of value in general but that the philosopher does have a task in articulating manners to criticize how we go about articulating and seeking valuable experiences. Thus, Gouinlock can write:

> The philosopher's role is neither to invent nor legislate values. Rather, it is to learn the status of value in nature so that the instrumentalities to secure, enrich, and extend values may also be determined. And just as the philosopher should attempt to clarify and criticize the procedures and criteria of inquiry and knowing, so also he should determine how existing norms, principles, and ideal are derived from immediate goods, intellectual and practical habits, and beliefs about value. (Gouinlock 162)

This distinction between critic and creator is important as it not only meets with Dewey's approval that the philosopher ought to take up the problems of all people and not only the specialized and often esoteric problems of the professional philosophic community. The professional philosopher must be careful to acknowledge that people in general, and not philosophers only, are living lives wherein value is generated. Gouinlock also notes the social context of this project:

> The task is not to determine how one man can most successfully exploit another, but how the richest and most inherently satisfying life activity can be shared, as much as possible, by all. (Recall that there is not justification in moral philosophy for regarding some persons, a priori, as inherently entitled to advantage. In any case, Dewey's reflections were guided by his love of democratic values.) (Gouinlock 162-163)

As we have seen the dichotomy between subject and object has been replaced with a complex organic relationship of feedback and coordination of an organism in an environment. This environment includes other organisms like ourselves who have valuable projects and robust experience. Because of the permeability of the organism by the environment, which always includes other organisms, the problem of selfishness versus altruism are not of concern as a philosophic underpinning of value. Instead, the organism values rich life activities that enhance the environment and therefore the organism. This must always include the needs and values of others because, as we will see in later discussions, the needs and values of others are continuously constitutive (and re-constitutive) of the individual organism.

20. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, *The Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988) 60-86.

21. Dewey's theory of the individual is that the self develops from its interactions with an environment which includes culture. See John Dewey, *Individualism: Old and New, The Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, vol. 5, Jo Ann Boydston, ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984) and John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, *The Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, vol. 9, Jo Ann Boydston, ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1985). The Work of George Herbert Mead is also helpful and consistent with a Deweyan Pragmatism. See George Herbert Mead, "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control" and "The Social Self" in *Selected Writings.* Andrew J. Reck, ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1964).

22. LW 4:29.

23. LW 4:86.