CANADIAN THESES

THÈSES CANADIENNES

NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE

NL 339 (r. 86/01)

Canada

National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

TC –

IS 0-315-23425-3

CANADIAN THESES ON MICROFICHE SERVICE – SERVICE DES THÈSES CANADIENNES SUR MICROFICHE

PERMISION TO MICROFILM – AUTORISATION DE MICROFILMER

• Please print or type – Écrire en lettres moulées ou dactylographier

AUTHOR – AUTEUR

Full Name of Author – Nom complet de l'auteur

Mary Mardon

Date of Birth – Date de naissance

Oct 13 1964

Canadian Citizen – Citoyen canadien

☑ Yes / Oui ☐ No / Non

Country of Birth – Lieu de naissance

Canada

Permanent Address – Résidence fixe

#3 10406 - 97 Ave
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 0B6

THESIS – THÈSE

Title of Thesis – Titre de la thèse

Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience as a Via Media

Degree for which thesis was presented
Grade pour lequel cette thèse fut présentée

Master of Arts

Year this degree conferred
Année d'obtention de ce grade

1985

University – Université

University of Alberta

Name of Supervisor – Nom du directeur de thèse

Dr. Richard Bosley

AUTHORIZATION – AUTORISATION

Permission is hereby granted to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to **microfilm** this thesis and to **lend** or **sell copies of the film.**

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

L'autorisation est, par la présente, accordée à la BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DU CANADA de **microfilmer** cette thèse et de **prêter** ou de **vendre des exemplaires du film.**

L'auteur se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans l'autorisation écrite de l'auteur.

ATTACH FORM TO THESIS – VEUILLEZ JOINDRE CE FORMULAIRE À LA THÈSE

Signature

Mary Mardon

Date

Aug 30, 1985

NL-91 (r. 84/03)

Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience as a via media

by

Mary Mardon

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

PHILOSOPHY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1985

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR Mary Mardon

TITLE OF THESIS **Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience as a via media**

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED MASTER OF ARTS

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED FALL, 1985

Permission is hereby granted to THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

(SIGNED) Mary Mardon

PERMANENT ADDRESS:

#3 10406 97 AVE

Edmonton, Alberta

Canada T5K 0B6

DATED Aug. 30 1985

Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--
We murder to dissect.

--Wordsworth

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience as a via media** submitted by Mary Mardon in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

Richard N. Bosley
Supervisor

Robert H. Burch

Date August 27, 1985

To Ernest, May, Teresa and Austin

Abstract

In this thesis I examine the naturalistic metaphysics of John Dewey as put forward in his major work on metaphysics, Experience and Nature. I attempt to show the strength and persuasiveness of Dewey's position by examining the principle on which it is based, namely the principle of continuity. I argue that Dewey inherited this principle in part from William James, and that Dewey consequently improved upon and refined his inheritance. Throughout the course of this thesis I contrast the principle of continuity with the principle of atomism. I argue that this latter principle is assumed by the British empiricists and also may be seen as having influenced a counter-atomistic response in the monisms of the German critical idealists. Indeed, it appears that both the empirical and the critical-rational traditions have assumed and applied the principle of atomism, the former by *modus ponens* and the latter by *modus tollens*. I introduce Dewey's metaphysics as he intended it to be introduced, as a *via media* in the debate between empirical atomism and idealistic monism. I argue that Dewey's metaphysics is a plausible alternative to the empirical and idealistic traditions, because he rejects the principle of atomism and replaces it with the principle of continuity. Since both traditions assume the principle of atomism and Dewey rejects the principle, he is then in a position to find a "middle way" between atomism and monism and to reconcile each to the other in his metaphysics.

Lastly in this thesis I critically analyze the criticisms levelled against Dewey by Richard Rorty in his article "Dewey's Metaphysics." My ultimate aim throughout the pages of this manuscript is to defend the practice and viability of metaphysical inquiry.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. John King-Farlow, Dr. Wesley Cooper, Dr. Robert Burch, and Dr. Morton Ross, for their help and cooperation. I would particularly like to thank those who quickly commented and returned the drafts of this thesis. It made the task of thesis-writing much easier. I would like to acknowledge my special indebtedness to Dr. Richard Bosley, whose encouragement and stimulation has been felt since the "Pragmatism" seminar where the ideas of this thesis were conceived. My hope is that our "conversation," as Rorty would have us say, will continue after the completion of this thesis. Also, I would like to thank Randall Keen for all his support and encouragement while I was writing this thesis. Finally, I would like to thank Marshall Hopkins for sharing his insight into the arguments on the principle of atomism.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

As one of the most influential American philosophers of the twentieth-century, Dewey and his philosophy have enjoyed the widespread attention that his position and reputation warrant. However his more popular philosophy, such as his philosophy of education, has received much of this attention and discussion while his approach to metaphysics has not received the attention that is its due. Dewey's metaphysics is fascinating in its own right and it also serves as the philosophical basis from which his more popular philosophy is spun. This thesis attempts to center in on this fundamental, yet overlooked, aspect of John Dewey's philosophy.

In Chapter One, I discuss the philosophical link between John Dewey and William James: how James' "radical empiricism" and his conception of the "continuity of experience" (however ill-formulated) may be seen as having influenced Dewey to develop a "metaphysics of experience" based upon a principle of continuity rather than a principle of atomism. Drawing on the discussion in Chapter One of the principle of atomism and the principle of continuity, two opposed conceptions of "experience" corresponding to competing and seemingly irreconcilable traditions, namely atomistic empiricism and monistic idealism, will be discussed in Chapter Two. It will become evident in this Chapter that the importance and significance of Dewey's "metaphysics of experience" is that it is both an

alternative to the traditional metaphysics of the empiricists and the critical rationalists-idealists, and yet also a *via media* between these opposing camps. It is an alternative by offering a metaphysics based on a principle of continuity that accounts for organic interrelation in a pluralistic universe; it is a *via media* between traditions because historically one could have either a metaphysics based on organic monism *or* a metaphysics based on atomistic pluralism, but not some combination of both. It will be argued that this is because the empirical tradition employs a principle of atomism and critical rationalism-idealism reacts to this atomistic picture with monism (or at least a coherence theory of truth which amounts to an epistemological monism). John Dewey was able to break out of and overcome this traditional metaphysical framework, and by so doing, he redefined the purpose, subject-matter and approach of metaphysical inquiry. Chapter Two discusses in depth Dewey's metaphysics as a *via media* between atomism and monism and its significance for the future understanding and practice of metaphysics. I have limited my discussion, in large part, to Experience and Nature because it best illustrates Dewey's fully matured concept of experience.

In this thesis I seek not to define or describe all that falls within the scope of Dewey's "metaphysics of experience." My primary concern in Chapter Three, after presenting Dewey's metaphysics in the mediating light that it emanates, is to defend Dewey's metaphysics against an

ill-formulated and prejudiced interpretation, which itself begs-the-question against Dewey and presupposes a principle of atomism. I will argue that one of those commentators who has *not* ignored or glossed over the metaphysical aspect of John Dewey's philosophy, has, nevertheless, misinterpreted Dewey's position and overzealously credited Dewey with too much of his own perspective on the issue. I will argue that Richard Rorty, however much he has elevated and refined Dewey, has fallen into this group of commentators. The spirit of reconstruction in philosophy, which is Dewey's legacy, is lost in this self-professed disciple. But the tradition resumes...

II. James' and Dewey's Empiricism

In Experience and Nature[1], John Dewey sets out an "empirical metaphysics" that provides the existential foundation for a type of empiricism modelled after William James' "radical empiricism." As will become evident, Dewey's "empirical metaphysics" not only developed out of James' "radical empiricism" but consequently improved upon it. By extending and refining notions like "the continuity of experience" put forward by James, Dewey was led ultimately to write a "metaphysics of experience" in which he drew up a "description of the generic traits of experience." It will be useful, therefore, to examine the major tenets of James' "radical empiricism," particularly the principle of continuity, in order to see Dewey's philosophical achievements contrasting with, and developing out of, the philosophical legacy of James.

"Radical empiricism" claims, in contrast to traditional empiricism under the leadership of Hume, that the "apparent" connections seen[2] in, or believed of, any particular experience are accountable or explanable in terms of experience. According to James' realism, we need not draw on cognitive principles in order to explain or justify

---

[1]John Dewey's Experience and Nature, (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1926). Further reference will be abbreviated Experience.

[2]I would like to draw a distinction between two uses of the word "see": (1) an epistemic use in which we mean something like "believe," and; (2) a physical use of "see" which does not exclusively mean the sense of sight. In the above case, I mean the epistemic use of "see."

connections we find in our experiences. Connections are *in* what we experience *not* in our (epistemic) seeing of it, and therefore can be explained in terms of what we experience. A plausible criticism of the realists is that they do not make this very crucial distinction between the epistemic and experiential use of the word "see"; if they had, they would have realized that their position was less plausible. In section 3 of this chapter, it will be seen that this criticism may not equally apply to Dewey as it does to James. Dewey refined James' realism into a sophisticated account of the "significance" which we place in the object as distinct from and dependent upon coherence with the actual object of the world.

James was an empiricist and as such held that the ultimate criterion of knowledge was experience itself not innate ideas nor *a priori* principles. However, James (and Dewey) disagreed with the tradition as to what was contained in that experience and therefore what could be experientially justified, not merely explained away in terms of customs and habits. James formulated "radical empiricism" as follows:

> ...first of a postulate, next of a statement of fact, and finally of a generalized conclusion.
>
> 1. The postulate is that the only things which shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience....
>
> 2. The statement of fact is that relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are as much matters of direct particular experience...[as]...the things themselves.

> 3. The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a *concatenated* or *continuous* structure.[3]

What made James' formulation unique in the empirical tradition was his metaphysical "statement of fact" that there are relations of "conjunction" and "disjunction" between those things of which we have direct particular experience (above 2). James argues against the assumption that is found explicitly among the empiricists and implicitly among the rationalists, that the directly apprehended universe lacks connection "in its own right" and therefore *needs* the connective support which, for example, the principles of the association of ideas or the categories of the Understanding provide. The conclusion he draws from this argument is that the universe is concatenated or continuous "in its own right." The relationship between metaphysical continuity and conjunctive and disjunctive relations is not clear in James. Neither is it clear how, by asserting the metaphysical continuity of the universe, James accounts for causal relations between things. I believe that James has skirted the issue of accounting for causal connections by offering a new and interesting metaphysical world-view based on continuity. James' "umbrella" usage of the concept or principle of "continuity" is unorthodox and attempts to account for other metaphysical relations, such

---

[3]William James, The Meaning of Truth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp.XII-XIII.

as causality, without justifying this move. I shall argue that James uses "continuity" to generate the possibility of monism.

Even though James' argument appears invalid, his metaphysical conclusion offers an alternative empirical outlook which interestingly contrasts with the traditional metaphysical outlook of the empiricists. James conceives of the directly apprehended universe as continuous by itself without our "trans-empirical connective support." Traditional empiricism usually conceived of the directly apprehended universe as a bundle of separate impressions, custom and habit serving as the string which brings together and ties these separate impressions in this or that shape. So James, and later Dewey, who developed the notion of continuity to greater metaphysical depths as we shall see in Chapter Two, managed to break through the traditional conception of reality to a vision of reality as a concatenated and continuous overlapping of things. How this continuous universe provided the groundwork for explaining claims about causal connections in experience is problematic for James. Presumably, James would account for causality in a manner in which most epistemic realists would, namely that he *sees* things cause other things. However, confusion results from the way James accounts for causation by continuity. But this confusion is incidental to how well James' metaphysical statement of continuity serves as a contrast with a traditional empirical account. We shall see

shortly that the traditional empirical account of experience is based on a principle of atomism and a modified principle of atomism, which is the application of separations and separability among things of our experience. Our experience is, therefore, cast in a fragmentary and atomistic light. To fully contrast the concatenated conception of reality offered by James and Dewey with the disparate conception of reality proposed by the empirical tradition, I will briefly digress into their opposing and underlying metaphysical principles.

A. The Principle of Atomism

The principle of atomism and the modified principle of atomism were first explicitly applied in modern philosophy by Hume[4] but had been assumed and applied throughout the history of philosophy. The principle of atomism is a metaphysical assumption that what is distinct in thought is separate in nature; while the modified principle of atomism is the assumption that what is distinct in thought is separable in nature. The distinction between the two formulations is one of actuality and potentiality, that is, the difference between what is actually separate and what is potentially separate in reality based on distinctions made in thought.[5] An example of an argument where Hume arrives at the principle, and the dire consequences which result from

---

[4]The Pythagoreans and Parmenides were the first to use the principle of atomism in metaphysics.

[5]Refer to charts on page 16.

it, is the following:

> ...as all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, 'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause.[6]

In the passage quoted above, Hume argues against the logically necessity of causation by arguing against causality being demonstrated as necessary through reason. The argument may be summarized as follows:[7]

1. All distinct ideas are separable from each other, that is, we can perform the act of thinking of A without performing the act of thinking of B.

2. The ideas of cause and effect are distinct, therefore we can perform the act of thinking of a cause without thinking of the effect.

3. Since thinking a cause and thinking its effect are separate actions, it is possible to think of a cause *as separate from* its effect.

4. Therefore, reasoning from mere ideas alone can not show that cause and effect are not separate.

One can arrive at the principle of atomism, that where there is a distinction there is a separation, not just the modified principle of atomism, that where there is a

---

[6]D. Hume, Treatise of Human Nature, Second Edition, ed. by Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), Book I, Part III, Section III. Pp. 79-80.

[7]This analysis of Hume's argument has its source in R. Bosley, On Truth (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), Part IV, especially pp. 125-126.

distinction there is a potential separation, from the above argument. Because metaphysics and *a priori* reasoning can not show the falsity of the claim "there are no necessary causal connections," they equally can not show the falsity of the claim "what is distinct in thought is separate in reality." I can hold that what is distinct is separate without pain of contradiction other than what experience can demonstrate. And since experience can not demonstrate the impossibility of there being an effect without a cause, I can hold that a cause is separate from its effect without contradiction. The contentious move that leads to the principle is summarized above in (3). Since one can conceive of a cause without also conceiving of its effect, it is possible, namely it is not logically absurd or contradictory, to conceive of "the actual separation of these objects." The move is contentious because claiming that "I can think of the effect A" without necessarily "conjoining" or thinking of it in combination with cause B, is not sufficient to then move to thinking of them as separated in reality. Saying "I can think of A without necessarily thinking of B" is the same as "I can think of A without necessarily thinking of B, and C, and D,..." (where C and D have no connection with A). To think of things separately in one's mind, that is, to think of the edge of the table one minute and then to think of the table five minutes later, does not give license to conceive of one actually separated from the other. The logical possibility of the actual separation between objects that our ideas

stand for, ought not be made on the basis of our ability to think of one idea or the other. For this could result in conceiving an Herculean separation among things without metaphysics or "reasoning from mere ideas alone" being able to show the falsity of such a position. All of this from merely thinking of one thing without thinking of another.

Another interpretation of the argument is that Hume merely derives separability from the non-contradiction that there should be a separation.[8] The passage which gives rise to this is: "The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity..." If one were to interpret "the separation... is plainly possible" as separability, then the most that would fall out of the argument is the possibility to hold the modified principle of atomism without contradiction. However, Hume seems to conflate or confuse possibility to conceive of something with the power to conceive it as such. Hume does not seem to keep clear the modal distinction between "may conceive of X as..." and "can conceive of X as..." Consider the following:

> 'Tis an established maxim in metaphysics *That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence*, or in other words, *that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible.* We may form the idea of a golden mountain, and from thence conclude that such a mountain may actually exist.'[9]

---

[8] This was suggested to me by Dr. Wesley Cooper.
[9] Hume, Treatise, op.cit., p. 32.

Hume concludes above "that such a mountain may actually exist" but the question is "*can* we conceive of the idea of a golden mountain?" The conclusion assumes that not only *may* we conceive of a golden mountain, but that we *can*; for otherwise, the conclusion that "such a mountain may actually exist" would be underdetermined. "Since we can conceive of a golden mountain, there may be such a thing in existence," follows; but "Since we may conceive of a golden mountain, there may be such a thing" is underdetermined. Given this confusion between possibility and power, we can address the alternative interpretation of Hume's argument against necessary causation in a new light. It is not clear whether "the separation of the idea...is possible" means "we may conceive of the separation" or "we can conceive of the separation." Given the consequent, "the actual separation of these objects is possible," I believe that the more plausible interpretation to "the separation of the idea...is possible" is that "we *can* conceive of the separation." (If it were interpreted "we may conceive of the separation," the consequent would be underdetermined.)

Another argument by Hume which arrives at the principle of atomism a different way than logical possibility, is the following:

> So far from there being any distinct impression, attending every impression and every idea, that I do not think there are any two distinct impressions which are inseparably conjoin'd. Tho' certain sensations may at one time be united, we quickly find that they admit of a separation, and may be presented apart. And thus, tho' every impression and idea we remember be consider'd as existent, the idea

> of existence is not deriv'd from any particular impression.'[10]

In the above argument Hume dismisses the possibility that the idea of existence is derived from a distinct impression as are all distinct ideas we have. The argument goes as follows:

1. Although certain sensations may at one time be united, we find that they admit of a separation, and may be presented apart.

2. Insofar as we have distinct ideas impressed upon us through distinct impressions, there are no two distinct impressions which are inseparably conjoined.

3. Every impression and idea we have had existed at some time as separate and, since our impressions and ideas arise out of experience, there is no distinct idea of existence.

4. Therefore, the idea of existence is not derived from any particular impression.

In order for Hume to claim that we have no idea of eixstence, he must claim that all distinct ideas must have had their cause in separate impressions. Insofar as our impressions are grounded in the world which we experience, that which had caused our ideas to be distinct must have been separate. Not only does Hume find himself evoking the principle of atomism in arguing against the logical necessity of causation, but the reason which explains his use of the principle of atomism in his epistemology is that, in order for our ideas to be distinct, the impressions of the world which went to making those ideas must admit of a separation at one point.

---

[10]D. Hume, Treatise, op. cit., p. 66.

Dewey was aware of the fallaciousness of the principle of atomism as formulated by Hume, and its consequences for the history of philosophy, as is evident in the following passage:

> If Hume had had a tithe of the interest in the *flux* of perceptions and in *habit*--principles of continuity and of organization--which he had in distinct and isolated existences, he might have saved us both from German *Erkenntnisstheorie*, and from that modern miracle play, the psychology of elements of consciousness, that under the *aegis* of science, does not hesitate to have psychical elements compound and breed, and in their agile intangibility put to shame the performances of their less acrobatic cousins, physical atoms.''

In this passage, Dewey nicely contrasts the "distinct and isolated existences" of Hume with the principle of continuity that he advocates. We may suppose that Dewey saw the principle of atomism, as we have just seen it, in Hume's arguments from the fact that Dewey condemns Hume for having paid all his attention to "distinct and isolated existences," ie. distinct and "separate" existences. By paralelling the principle of continuity with the "flux of perceptions," and by linking habit with a principle "of organization," Dewey shows his philosophical sympathies with James. Realists like James and the early Dewey'[2] would think that one would only have to regard the flux of our perceptions and the relations inherent in it, in order to

---

''John Dewey, "The Experimental Theory of Knowledge," in The Influence of Darwin In Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1915), p. 82.

''[2]This quote is taken from an article written in 1906 when Dewey was still a type of *naive* realist; by the time Experience and Nature came along in 1925, Dewey had become a sophisticated sort of realist. He finally set out his realism in Logic: Theory of Inquiry in 1938.

arrive at the principle of continuity which is seen in those perceptions. Also implied in Dewey's connecting habit with a principle of organization is evidence of his early *naive* realism, for our habits are based on ways things are organized in the world as we physically see them.

Implicit in Dewey's emphasis upon "habit" may be a criticism of Hume's use of habit. Habit did not arrive on the scene *deus ex machina* nor, was it completely arbitrary, but rather arose out of our interactions with our environment. This indicates that he would believe that our own habits reflected the organization of the world. Hume's use of habit did not reflect this metaphysical grounding in or similitude with the world. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the consequence of Hume's principle of atomism on the continental tradition was particularly far-reaching, as Dewey indicates in the above passage. Indeed following upon Dewey's train of thought, it will be argued that German idealism may not have developed had it not been for Hume's explicit application of the principle of atomism. (Or at least the idealists may not have been lead astray into framing the atomistic-monistic debate, where connections had to be imposed on "external" reality, conceived as "material not yet rendered sensuous").

B. The Principle of Continuity

The principle of continuity contrasts with the principle of atomism in its underlying significance for metaphysical explanation and epistemological justification. It was first formulated by Aristotle, as follows:

> ...things are called continuous when the touching limits of each become one and the same and are, as the word implies, contained in each other: continuity is impossible if these extremities are two. This definition makes it plain that continuity belongs to things that naturally in virtue of their mutual contact form a unity. And in whatever way that which holds them together is one, so too will the whole be one, eg. by a rivet or glue or contact or organic union.'[13]

The principle of continuity is a metaphysical premise that may be expressed as what is distinct from another in reality is overlapping and not separate from that other. It has also misleadingly stood for a *dependence* between distinct parts and even between altogether separate entities. It will be seen later on that occasionally Dewey does not make a clear distinction between continuity and dependence between distinct things.

In order to set out the structure of the opposition between the principles of atomism and contintuity and the modified principles of atomism and continuity, I will lay out these principles by means of Squares of Opposition.

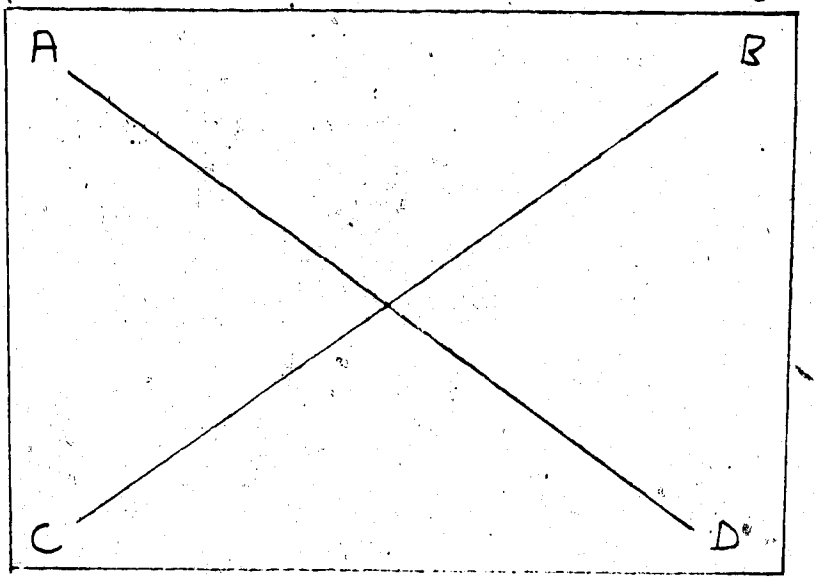
---

[13] Aristotle, **Physics** in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. by R. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), V, 3, 227a10-15, p.307.

ACTUALITY

All distinctions are separate

All distinctions are not separate



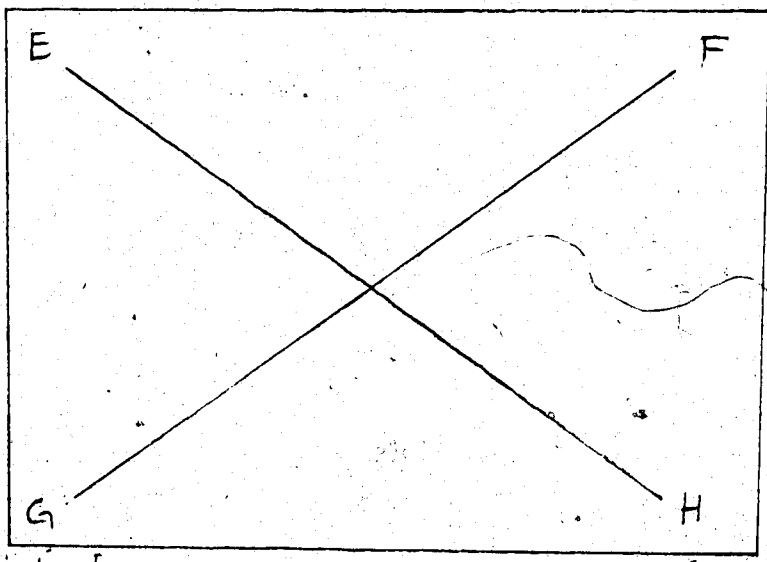
Some distinctions are separate

Some distinctions are not separate

POTENTIALITY

All distinctions are separable

All distinctions are not separable



Some distinctions are separable

Some distinctions are not separable

According to the charts above, Hume holds position A in contrast with Dewey who holds position D. Hume also holds position E, for if distinctions are separate, they are also separable. It is not clear that Dewey holds position H. Dewey holds position D rather than position B because, as will be seen in Chapter Two, he is a pluralist and as such believes that there are some separations. However, he puts forward a position in which some distinctions are not separated but are continuous. On the other hand as we have just seen, Hume is committed to atomism because the separation of impressions (at some time) underwrites the acquisition of distinct ideas. Dewey is not committed to position H because it would be possible for him to argue the separability of distinct things given his evolutionism. For example, although human experience and Nature are continuous and are distinct from each other but not separate, it may be that, over millenia of evolutionary development, human experience will be separated from Nature. (Of course, experience would be radically different from the way we know and live it.) James falls within the above matrix but not as we expect him to. We will presently address where he may fall in.

James and Dewey obtain different results in their use of the principle of continuity which leads one to question whether they are defining it in the same above-mentioned Aristotelian way.''

''I will use Aristotle's definition of the principle of continuity as standard in contrast with Dewey's and James'

As we shall see, Dewey employs the standard notion of continuous as metaphysically distinct and not separate, overlapping parts. James does not. For this reason, I would like to draw a distinction between James' and Dewey's use of contintuity and concatenation (these terms are used interchangeably by both of them).

In its twentieth-century use, "concatenation" comes closer to what Aristotle meant by "continuity," namely where two parts are side-by-side and overlap or interpenetrate in such a way that they share the same meeting point and become one thing (with two distinct parts which are not separate). On the other hand, sometimes by its use "continuity" implies that either everything is one and the same "stuff" or that there is something which threads through everything which makes it continuous and connected. The former definition of concatenation is more compatible with the pluralism proposed by Dewey that contrast an atomistic pluralism by accounting for distinctions which are not separate. The latter definition of continuity is more compatible with an encroaching yet elusive monism which also contrasts Dewey's pluralism.

Consider the following from James:

> [in treating] the problem of the One and the Many in a purely intellectual way...we see clearly enough where pragmatism stands. With her criterion of the practical differences that theories make, we see that she must equally abjure absolute monism and absolute pluralism. The world is One just so far as its parts hang together by any definite connexion. It is many just so far as any definite connexion fails to obtain. And finally it is growing more and more unified by those systems of connexion at least

which human energy keeps framing as time goes on.'[15] Although James argues for a pluralistic over a monistic approach, he nevertheless indicates his underlying optimism for 'absolute monism' by his conclusion above: "finally [the world] is growing more and more unified by those systems of connexion." He gives a half-hearted argument against "absolute" monism based more on his frustration with the tendency of monistic systems to be logically all-encompassing.'[16] It is not clear whether he would argue against a less logically rigorous all-inclusive monism. What is clear is that James believes in the possibility of our pragmatically achieving an absolute standpoint, for he concludes: "Some day, [Pragmatism] admits, even total union, with one knower, one origin, and a universe consolidated in every conceivable way, may turn out to be the most acceptable of all hypotheses."[17] It would appear that James is optimistic in the pragmatic achievement of absolute monism, but only after we develop our systems of connexion more thoroughly. James would be using a modern notion of concatenation (or an Aristotelian definition of continuity) if he were to keep some distinctions that did not involve actual separation in his final world-view. It appears,

---

[15] Pragmatism, op.cit., p. .

[16] The better argument, one would think, would be one based on the tendency of monism to over-emphasize the cognitive aspect of human experiences. However, given his predilection for the "systems of connexion" of which we conceive, he seems to tend toward over-cognizing experience like traditional monists do, so he would not necessarily see this as criticism.

[17] Pragmatism, p. 73.

though, that all *distinctions* as well as separations may ultimately fall away. So it appears as if James is using continuous in a radically different way than is Dewey--not to *preserve* distinctions that are not separate, but for the possibility to *dissolve* distinctions and separations. Further, the ultimate notion of Truth which he arrives at is a Platonic notion of Oneness, "that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge."[18] This notion of Truth clearly serves as the "thread" which weaves in and out ultimately making the "stuff" of reality continuous in a mystical, non-Aristotelian sense, and possibly making it One.

Given Dewey's metaphysical standpoint which will be laid out in the next chapter, James and Dewey did not mean the same thing by "continuous." Dewey, it shall be argued, comes closer to using the principle of continuity to mean concatenism, as above defined. James uses "continuity" not in a technical Aristotelian way but as an instrument to effect the possibility of monism. In this way James may be seen as having himself assumed the principle of atomism and applied *modus tollens*; for his vision is that, ultimately, all distinctions may fall away. James serves as a wonderful contrast to Dewey, for the latter thoroughly embraced the principle of continuity and rejected the principle of atomism; it is not clear whether James did.

---

[18]Ibid., p. 100.

To return to "radical empiricism," we see that partly what makes it "radical" is its employment of the principle of continuity over the principle of atomism. We can now see "radical empiricism" in its relation to traditional empiricism in this light. However, what is its relation to rationalism, particularly Kantianism? The rationalists, like the empiricists, evoke connective principles in order to explain and justify connections in the universe. This superficially indicates that the universe, at least how *we* directly apprehend it, lacks these connections on its own. For Kant, immediate experience consists of a "manifold of unsynthesized intuitions" out of which we construct experience necessarily and universally by bringing order (the categories of the Understanding) and unity (the transcendental unity of apperception) to the manifold. While the empiricist explicitly assumes that the world is in a disparate form, the Kantian makes no such claim as to the nature of the noumenal realm (since the noumenal realm is beyond our phenomenal knowledge). However, there is an implicit assumption as to the nature of "the given" by the rationalist, for *we* bring unity to the manifold of intuition which indicates that the given does not have a unity out of which we are guided. In Kant's defense, we must draw a distinction between the given, as that of which we are immediately and pre-conceptually aware, and the noumenon, the thing-in-itself. For it may be the case that the noumenon has an order (which nevertheless must remain beyond

our phenomenal knowledge and comprehension), while the disparateness of the given originates with the way we receive it through our faculty of intuition. Nevertheless, the fact that we intuite an unsynthesized and un-unified manifold (*ie.* a disordered and disparate given) is assumed by the critical rationalists. This assumption is not strictly speaking a metaphysical assumption. But given its role in getting Kantian epistemology off the ground, and given the aim of Kantian epistemology to *aufheben* (transcend and uplift) metaphysics by offering an analysis of the object of our perception in terms of the cognitive categories of the subject, the assumption that the manifold of intuition *needs* unity and order so that it be fit for human understanding at least *performs* as if it were a metaphysical assumption.

"Radical empiricism" has a similar criticism for rationalism as it had for traditional empiricism, namely that both have misconceived experience as lacking the connections needed for explanation and justification. For empiricists and rationalists, apparent connections can be justified only if these connections were to be imposed on experience. James claims that we do not infer connections or relations among objects by means of "customary connextion" or "categorical necessity" since the connections (or lack thereof) are inherent in the things themselves. We need only appeal to the "direct particular experience" itself to provide metaphysical explanation for our claims of the

connections between objects.

C. Dewey's Theory of Inquiry

Dewey takes up this task and develops it metaphysically in Experience and Nature. Here Dewey sets out an "empirical metaphysics" which provides a general theory of the "involments" or "connections" of things. According to Dewey's Logic: Theory of Inquiry,[19] the words "involvement" or "connection" designate "that kind of relation sustained by *things* to one another in virtue of which *inference* is possible," and "in virtue of which some things are *evidential* of other things."[20] "Involvements" of things and canons of inference are thus closely related:

> Inference is conditioned upon an existential connection which may be called involvement. The problems of inference have to do with discovery of *what* conditions are involved with another and *how* they are involved.... The essential consideration is that the relation is a strictly existential one, ultimately a matter of the brute structure of things.[21]

To what extent does the "ultimately" and "strictly existential" involvements or relations of things play a role in inquiry for Dewey? What is the epistemological status of the "brute structure of things"? Of course Dewey would object to the use of "epistemological status" in this context as he is not so much interested in knowledge or truth but in inquiry. "Inquiry" is defined by Dewey as: "the

---

[19]John Dewey, Logic: Theory of Inquiry (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1938).
[20]Ibid., p. 55.
[21]Ibid., p. 278.

controlled or direct transformation of the indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole." [22] Further, "the heart of the experimental method is determination of the significance of observed things by means of deliberate institution of modes of interaction."[23] Inquiry begins with a "problematic situation" that is "indeterminate in significance" and transforms it into a determinate situation. This indeterminacy in significance does not necessarily reflect an indeterminacy of the involvement of the thing at hand for,

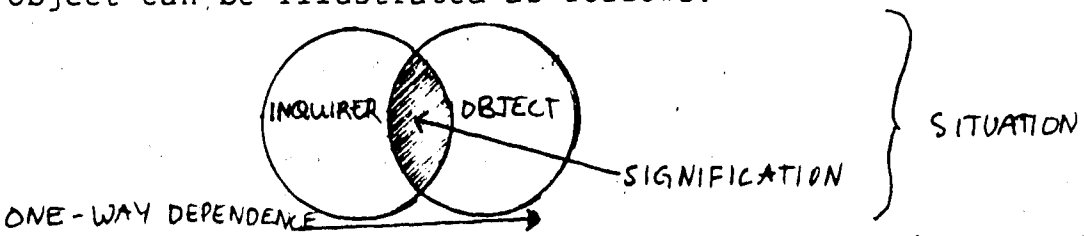
> Even were existential conditions unqualifiedly determinate in and of themselves, they are indeterminate in *significance*: that is, in what they import and portend in their interaction with the organism.[24]

A problematic situation is "such because of the existence of conditions which conflict as to their significance, thus constituting a disordered situation. Hence, a universal property of any inquiry is transformation into a situation unified or continuous in significance."[25] Thus, inquiry aims at the settling of significances which are conflicting in a problematic situation. Within inquiry, "existences are 'related' to one another in the evidential sign-signified function."[26] The sign function requires essential reference

---

[22]Ibid., p. 104.
[23]Ibid., p. 511.
[24]Ibid., p. 427.
[25]Ibid., p. 531.
[26]Ibid., p. 55.

to a sign user and a sign-situation. Through the interaction of the two in and by inquiry, an object is produced or created which did not exist antecedently to inquiry. Thus, we arrive at a distinction between the primary objects of experience and the secondary objects of the inquirer. The relation between the inquirer, the signification and the object can be illustrated as follows:



This is a situation which is unified and continuous where the signification depends upon the inquirer and the object but the inquirer and the object are independent from each other. The whole situation is made continuous by their interaction which yields a significance.

There is a necessary coherence between the basic involvements of things and the significances which we construct out of them. If one validly assigns significances he thereby ascertains the general involvements of those things in virtue of which valid significations may be made.

The distinction between the signification of things and the involvement of things is extremely important. Justification of signification and canons of inference are possible in virtue of involvement relations. Unless there was such a general structure of involvement, which is the subject-matter of metaphysics, there would be no means of justification, nor would the task of formulating hypotheses

be anything more than arbitrary chance. Having a general theory of involvement is thus necessary to be made explicitly for purposes of justification, and to be made at least implicitly for purposes of constructing and guiding inquiry.

III. Dewey's Metaphysics as a Via Media

As was already discussed in Chapter One, Dewey held a sophisticated version of "radical empiricism" that recognized the ways in which connections, continuities and relations were inherent in human experience. He differed from James by developing a metaphysics which described how it was that connections were inherent in experience, and how the world was concatenated *and* pluralistic. In Experience and Nature, Dewey lays out a general theory of the "involvements" or "connections" of things. By "understanding how things in the broadest sense of the term hang together in the broadest sense of the term"[27], Dewey provides the framework from which we can validly infer and assign significances to things. Namely, we validly assign significances to things in virtue of their basic "involvements" which indicated such significances (Or at least those significances are coherent with the basic structuring of the object). For example, the signification that we give a table could be "something that we can sleep on," "something which we eat off of," "something which we dance on," etc., but not "a drinking vessel." For this is not a *valid* signification given the basic structuring of the table. Dewey's metaphysics plays a vital role for his theory of inquiry and the latter supplants and modifies the traditional role and importance of epistemology. In effect,

---

[27]W. Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in Science, Perception and Reality (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), p. 1.

by conceiving of metaphysics as grounding inquiry in the "basic involvements of things," Dewey weds a connective realism to his pragmatism. He thereby added a dimension to his pragmatism which James either lacked or did not make explicit, namely a connective realism which could justify some significations over others because some were validly inferred from the basic involvements of things. Indeed given the malleability which James allows for in nature[28], I believe the stronger claim to be more plausible, that James simply lacked this connective realism. Of course this throws the status of his realism into confusion, if not chaos; however, the contrast with Dewey is made all the more clear.

Out from under a "veil of ideas" because of his realism, Dewey's metaphysics performs two functions: (1) it guides inquiry by understanding the "basic involvements of things"; and, (2) it serves as a background to criticism by providing canons of inference based on the "basic involvements of things," and thereby criteria from which to criticize unjustified significations. Exactly what the "basic involvements of things" consist of will become clear as we examine the "generic traits of existence." Presently, I would like to outline the debate for which Dewey had thought his metaphysics was a "middle way." Although Dewey did not directly address the principle of atomism he clearly rejected it and replaced it with the principle of continuity. My aim in this chapter is to show that framing

[28]See James Pragmatism, op.cit., in particular his definition of thing quoted in Chapter One.

the contrast between Dewey and the tradition as grounded in the principle of atomism and the rejection of the principle is both true to Dewey and an enlightening way of understanding (and responding to) his critics.

As was discussed in the last chapter, both Hume and Kant claimed that connections were imposed on the world by habit and custom or, correspondingly, an experiencing subject. The consequence of holding that connections are not inherent in, but foreign to and imposed on, the *un*experienced world, is that claims about connections in the world have at best a "subjective" validity based on coherence rather than an "objective" truth based on correspondence. In contrast to the tradition, Dewey is not satisfied with the above consequence and, although he is a pragmatist and as such holds to certain pragmatic formulations of truth and meaning, he is also a type of correspondence theorist based on his realism. Of course Kant claimed that, since we have no knowledge of the world "in itself" and we bring the categories of the Understanding to the object, human knowledge and truth precisely consists of how the object "appears to us" necessarily and universally. In this way Kant may be deemed a coherentist, for although he believes that the world "in itself" causes our ideas, we have no way of knowing whether or not our particular idea of the world corresponds to the way it is truly. What Kant explains by means of the categories, Hume explains by means

of customs and habits; both believe they have adequately justified "apparent" connections in the world, one by an *a priori* device, the other by an *a posteriori* device. Both the empirical and rationalistic traditions presuppose a rigid separation between subject and object; this rigid separation ultimately leads to skepticism of the correspondence theory of truth in the one camp, and an idealistic coherence theory of truth in the other camp. Dewey attempts to remedy such a double-edged dilemma by historically analyzing the subject-object separation altogether, from which such question originate as *"what is read into the object by the subject?"*. Experience is recast by Dewey in such a way that questions of truth based on "subjective" or "objective" relation or correspondence arise only in a cognitive context, and do not reflect a real ontological separation between subject and object, that in turn requires a correspondence or causal theory which bridges the two somehow (or a coherence theory which reduces the one to the other).

Dewey's analyses of traditional metaphysical problems with which empiricists and monistic rationalists concern themselves uncover these misformulated theories of the relation (causal or otherwise) between subject and object, and the core of these philosophical misconceptions: namely, their decidedly "one-sided" conceptions of human experience. On the one hand, traditional empiricism ignores the interconnection of human experience in favor of emphasizing

the plurality and diversity of human experiences and, given that what is distinct is separate by the principle of atomism, human experience is fragmentary and atomistic. This misconception of human experience may be seen as a consequence of an application of the principle of atomism, as the principle was laid out in Chapter One. Also the failure of the correspondence theory of truth may be connected with the principle of atomism, and its resulting conception of experience as atomistic. That is, since experience is made up of many parts which are seen as separate (because they are distinct) from one another, it makes the task of drawing connections between them very difficult; and thus the correspondence theorists are hard-pressed to ground causality, for example, in the "blooming, buzzing confusion" of the experienced world. On the other hand, Dewey uncovers the "one-sided" conception of experience of the rationalists. Spurred on by viewing knowledge and truth of the world through the architectonics of various coherence theories of truth, monistic rationalists (*cum* absolutists) emphasize the interrelations of human experience and ignore the plurality of experiences. I will briefly offer an explanation of these traditional conceptions of experience.

As was argued in Chapter One, Hume assumed a principle of atomism that where there is a distinction in thought there is a separation in nature. Since the world is full of distinctions, by *modus ponens*, the world is full of

separations. Hence, an atomistic and fragmentary conception of the world and experiences of that world (since experiences are distinct, therefore separate). As was also mentioned in Chapter One, the Kantians seem to have presumed that the world as it is immediately presented to us lacks order and unity, and is presumably fragmentary and atomistic. But, more importantly, the rationalistic and idealistic monists seem to have assumed the principle of atomism *modus tollens*: (1) Where there is a distinction, there is a separation; (2) There are no separations; (3) Therefore, there are no distinctions. So both traditions seem to be ladened with the same principle.

In an article of 1939 where he reevaluates his own philosophy of the past quarter-century, John Dewey explicitly states:

> "[my philosophy is] a viable alternative to an atomism which logically involves a denial of connections and to an absolutistic block monism which, in behalf of the reality of relation, leaves no place of the discrete, for plurality, and for individuals... [my] theory of experiential situations which follows directly from the biological-anthropological approach is by its very nature a *via media* between extreme atomistic pluralism and block universe monism.[2]

Dewey may be seen as seeking a mean between the excessive particularism of empiricism and the excessive holism of monism by arguing for a certain conception of human experience that takes up aspects of both positions and reconciles their one-sidednesses. Dewey's "theory of

---

[2]John Dewey's "Experience, Knowledge, and Value: A Rejoiner," in The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. by P.A. Schilpp (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1939), p. 544.

experiential situations" is holistic in its approach to a single "situation"--it accounts for the inherent, organic interrelations of the "organism" and its "environment" in a "situation"--yet, it also attests to the uniqueness of each and every "situation," thereby providing a pluralistic framework in which interrelation may be uncovered through a "biological-anthropological approach." Dewey's metaphysics may best be deemed *naturalistic* because of his concretely organic and evolutionistic approach to traditionally abstract and formal metaphysical issues.

In this chapter, I will discursively examine the basic elements of the key concept in Dewey's attempted *media*: his concept of experience and its relation to nature, as set forth in Experience and Nature. We will see that Dewey puts forward a position in which:

1. Experience and Nature are not the same but are other (*viz.* Experience is not identical to Nature);

2. Experience and Nature are distinct but not separate: *viz.* Experience is *continuous* with Nature, by the principle of continuity;[30]

3. Human experience is the most evolved "transaction" and constituent of Nature, and experience and Nature carry on reciprocally "interpenetrating" relations which is evolutionary development.

4. Experience depends upon Nature but not *vice versa*.

5. In light of these relations, Experience is in and of Nature.

---

[30]Just because they are presently not separate does not mean they may not be separate at some future point.

I deal with the criticisms of G. Santayana and R. Rorty levelled against Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics. Santayana criticizes as follows:

> Nature is...simply experience deployed, thoroughly specious and pictorial in texture. Its parts are not (what they are in practice and for living animal faith) substances presenting accidental appearances. They are appearances integrally woven into a panorama entirely relative to human discourse.[31]

Santayana's basic criticism is that Dewey was excessively anthropomorphic by collapsing nature into human experience. One of Rorty's criticisms is that "Dewey's use of the term 'experience' as an incantatory device...blurr[ed] every possible distinction."[32] Both criticisms I aim to dispel through a closer reading and interpretation of the text. The spuriousness of such criticisms will become evident when we see that Dewey posits a distinction but not a separation between experience and nature. If Dewey is discovered to be consistent in his presentation of nature and human experience (for the latter consists of the former) as a plurality of distinct and interpenentrating (hence not separate) "situations," then one may argue that Dewey has indeed found a plausible position that mediates between atomism and monism. Further, Dewey's "naturalistic empiricism" may even be seen to change the structure of debate as it is more intellectually tenable than atomism as a form of pluralism.

---

[31]G. Santayana, "Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics," in Schilpp, op. cit., pp. 243-267.
[32]R. Rorty, "World Well Lost," in Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 16.

Another major criticism of Rorty's is that Dewey "came down with the disease he was trying to cure"[33] This issue will be taken up in Chapter Three. An examination of this criticism reveals that arguing for Deweyan metaphysics as the *via media* between atomism and monism presupposes the possibility and viability of metaphysical inquiry. But does Dewey preempt this possibility in his persuasive polemics against traditional metaphysical problems and questions in Experience and Nature? The issue comes down to: Does Dewey destroy the possibility of metaphysics all together? Or just the viability of certain traditional attitudes toward, and positions in, metaphysics? If the latter is the case, then he does not run the same risk of self-contradiction by positing his own metaphysics. In Chapter Three I examine this issue through Richard Rorty who takes up the above dilemma in "Dewey's Metaphysics." Before we proceed to the interpretation and criticism of Experience and Nature, a brief digression as to the origin of Dewey's concept of Experience is in order.

A. The Reflex Arc Concept

Dewey first formulates his concept of Experience as an "organic coordination" in "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology"(1896).[34] In this article, Dewey criticizes the

---

[33]R. Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics," in New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. by S. Cahn (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1977), p. .

[34]John Dewey's "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," in Pragmatism: the Classical Writings, ed by H.S. Thayer (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 262-274.

traditional psychological formulation of behavior as "stimulus -idea- response," where all of these three elements are seen as independent and separate mechanical processes that constitute experience. The stimulus-response model of behavior arises out of the old metaphysical dualism of matter and mind, where "physical stuff," namely stimulus, and "psychic stuff," namely thought and act responses, are ontologically separate. Stimulus and response are mechanically connected as cause and effect, according to the reflex arc psychologists. Dewey disagrees with the reflex arc paradigm of experience because it does not show experience as a continuous "circuit," but rather the converse, as a "series of jerks." Dewey's disagreement with the stimulus-response model may be summarized as follows:

1. Stimulus and response are not separate processes, but are only <u>functional</u> distinctions within the single concrete whole of an experience, and;

2. Since the "organic coordination" is an on-going process, the functional distinctions of "stimulus" and "response" are not fixed and mechanically related as cause and effect, but rather are organically interrelated and therfore co-constitutive.

I will now briefly examine "The Reflex Arc Concept" article, for we may view it as the inchoation of Dewey's concept of experience which was fully matured in <u>Experience and Nature</u>.

Dewey spells out what he takes to be the stimulus and response of an experience, as follows:

> The circuit [or continuity and reconstruction of experience] is a coordination, some of whose members have come into conflict with one another. It is the temporary distintegration and the need of reconstruction which occasions, which affords the genesis of, the conscious distinction into sensory

> stimulus on the one side and motor response on the other. The **stimulus** is that phase of the forming coordination which represents the conditions which have to be met in bringing it to a successful issue; the **response** is that phase of one and the same forming coordination which gives the key to meeting these conditions which serves as instrument in effecting the successful coordination. They are therefore strictly correlative, and contemporaneous.[35]

These distinctions are necessary when a temporary conflict arises--a break within the continuity of experience--which needs to be overcome through a reconstruction of the individual and ontologically-indivisible "situation." The stimulus and response are "parts played" with reference to reaching or maintaining an end. These functional distinctions are goal-oriented; and distinguishing ends and means is necessary for intelligent and purposive behavior, which is *our* end as rational and free human beings, according to Dewey. Thus, stimulus and response are not ontologically separate but rather "are always inside a coordination and have their significance purely from (their) part played in maintaining or reconstructing the coordination."[36]

Further, stimulus and response are not independently related to each other but are organically interrelated. A stimulus is not a fixed quality but rather depends entirely upon the way in which an activity is being directed at the time.[37] Therefore, depending on the stage of the experience, the "response" might be seen as the "stimulus" as it becomes

---

[35]Ibid. P. 274.
[36]Ibid. P. 265.
[37]Ibid. P. 273.

the means to a further end--to a further activity. In this way, the "response" conditions the "stimulus" and *vice versa* and ultimately, stimulus and response may be seen as correlative and co-constitutive, relative to the stage of the coordination.

Thus, the organic unified coordination, from which we distinguish functional elements by their roles played relative to each other and the stage of the coordination, replaces the stimulus-response model of behavior. Continuity and interrelatedness are restored to experience at a psychological level. However in "The Reflex Arc Concept," Dewey does not account for the relationship nature holds to human experience in the "organic coordination." He criticizes traditional psychology for "break(ing) continuity and leav(ing) us nothing but a series of jerks, *the origin of each jerk to be sought outside the process of experience itself in...an external pressure of 'environment'*."[38] If one were to understand the "stimulus" as nature and the "response" as experience, one could see where confusion might set in as to whether or not Dewey has conflated the two in the "organic coordination." However, this is certainly a misinterpretation of precisely what Dewey wants to point out: that "stimulus" and "response" are merely functional distinctions that do not reflect separations within a unique but whole coordination. Any human experience can (and some must) be reconstituted by means of its

---

[38]Ibid. P. 265.

functional constituents, but the function of nature is not made clear within this organic whole. If nature is understood as the origin of each "jerk" of traditional psychology by being an external pressure Dewey calls "environment," one can see how Dewey might be accused of having reduced reality to human experience--for without some external environment to ground and limit human experience, Dewey may fall into a kind of idealism. Dewey had to account for the fact that we experience nature--not experience itself--and he also had to account for the uniqueness of human experiences within his idea of continuity. Let us now look at Experience and Nature where Dewey's concept of experience and its relation to Nature blossoms.

B. Experience and Nature

In Experience and Nature (1925), Dewey attempts to draw out the relations that exist between experience and nature and thereby address problems which arose out of "The Reflex Arc Concept," by a "descriptive study of the generic traits of existence."[39] Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics, his "empirical naturalism," is a "science" that takes up the theory of being as being[40] and attempts to uncover the most

---

[39] Experience , p. 8.

[40] Dewey admits his indebtedness to Aristotle for being the first to define metaphysics as a "science of being *qua* being"--of identifying the ultimate and irreducible traits of existence. However, Dewey also believes that Aristotle's identification of first philosophy with theology aided in developing a one-sided conception of reality as "stable" and "known," ie. as "divine." The "precarious" or unknown and changing was seen as the "unreal." See Dewey's "The Subject Matter of Metaphysical Inquiry," in On Experience, Nature,

general and distinctive traits of being. Dewey begins his metaphysics with:

> Suppose that we start with no presuppositions save that what is experienced, since it is a *manifestation of nature*, may and indeed, must be used as *testimony of the characteristics of natural events*. Upon this basis reverie and desire are pertinent for a philosophical theory of the true nature of things...[40]

For human beings, experience and nature are found together and we discover nature through the medium of experience. Similarly, Dewey uncovers the "nature of nature" through human experience, for "what is experienced...is a manifestation of nature," and therefore, the "generic traits of experience" also will be necessarily "generic traits of nature."

Dewey seeks to detect and distinguish those traits of nature which are manifested in all and every experience and mode of experience. Dewey is not exclusively concerned with man's cognitive experiences, and in this he indicates his antipathy with Hegelianism (which he once professed) that falsifies human reality by reducing all human experience to cognitive experience. Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics attempts to be *a posteriori*, descriptive and hypothetical. He is not concerned with the origins or causes of our world but merely with describing and exhibiting its generic interrelations. He believes that his metaphysics differs from a scientific account of existence because of its

---

[40](cont'd) and Freedom, ed. by R. Bernstein (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960), p. 215-16ff.
[41]Experience, pp. 19-20.

generality but not because of its subject-matter or method. This is a somewhat contentious position for a pragmatist to take up, as will be discussed later using Rorty as a pivotal point. However, let us now begin our interpretation first with Dewey's expanded notion of experience as "organic coordination."

Dewey's Concept of Experience

Dewey's analysis of "organism" and "environment" within a single concrete experience, may be compared to his analysis of stimulus and response. Dewey states:

> Every experience in its direct occurrence is an interaction of environing conditions and an organism. As such it contains a *fused union* somewhat experienced and some processes of experiencing.[42]

Stimulus and response were seen as functional distinctions which did not reflect a separation. From the viewpoint of an experience, the organism and its environment are interacting in such a way that they become a "fused union" within that experience. Just as stimulus and response were not independent and separate processes, the organism and environment are not. However, are they distinct or distinguishable in the "fused union" of an experience like stimulus and response?

In Experience and Nature Dewey states:

> "Experience is what James called a double-barrelled word. Like its congeners, life and history, it includes *what* men do and suffer, *what* they strive for, love, believe and endure, and also *how* men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do

---

[42] "Experience, Knowledge and Value," op. cit., p. 544.

> suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine--in short, processes of *experiencing* ... It is 'double-barrelled' in that it recognizes in its primary integrity *no division* between act and material, subject and object, but contain them both in an *unanalyzed totality*.[43]

It is clear from the above quote that Dewey believes in an experience's "*unanalyzed* totality," and that subject and object are fused ontologically through their interaction, however much there may be an independence drawn in thought in an "analyzed" experience. But does Dewey mean that if in an experience the organism and environment are not separate, they are *identical* with one another in reality? Dewey's analysis of experience indicates a conception which is something more than a conglomeration of two separate and independent structures (*viz.* subject and object) causally acting upon one another, yet something less than an all-encompassing Absolute. His conception is best set out as: the organism and its environment are distinct parts--combined and "fused" within a single experience. They are reciprocally dependent for their meaning within the experience (just as stimulus and response are reciprocally relative and constitutive). These two elements--a "some*what* experien*ced*" and a "process of experienc*ing*"--are necessary to have an experience, and it is the manner in which they interact with one another that makes a single experience *unique*.

One can see how Dewey's formulation of experience serves as a *via media* between atomism, whose paradigm of

---

[43] Experience, p. 8.

experience is the stimulus-response model, and monism, whose conception of experience is an all-encompassing system in which everything is interrelated through logical implication. By means of this fine *distinction* (as opposed to *separation*), Dewey seems to strike a middle-path between the two extremes in his conception of experience. What is more, Dewey's concept of experience as an interplay of two distinct parts is a structural microcosm of his concept of nature as an interpenetration of many distinct parts. To see this, let us now turn to the three levels or "plateaus" of transactions in Nature. These levels of transactions are different from each other in a way that distinctions may be drawn among them but not separation.

Dewey's Conception of Nature

Of Experience and Nature Dewey explicitly states: "the purpose of this volume (is) to replace...the traditional separation of nature and experience...with the idea of continuity."[44] Experience and nature are not identical but they are not separate. Further,

> Experience is *of* as well as *in* nature. It is not experience which is experienced but nature--stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience; they are what is experienced. Linked in certain other ways with another natural object--the human organism--they are how things are experienced as well. Experience thus reaches down into nature; it has depth. It also has breadth and to an indefinitely elastic extent. It stretches. That stretch constitutes inference.[45]

---

[44]Ibid., p. xx.
[45]Ibid., p. 4a.

Nature is the all-inclusive reality which contains human experience, that "late comer in the history of our solar system,"[46] and the other two more primary levels of transaction, the physico-chemical and the psycho-physical. These levels are distinct but not separate:

> The distinction between physical, psycho-physical and mental is thus one of levels of increasing complexity and intimacy of [transaction] among natural events. The idea that matter, life and mind represent separate kinds of Being is a doctrine that springs...from a substantiation of eventual functions. The fallacy converts consequences of [transactions] of events into causes of the occurrence of these consequences--a reduplication which is significant as to the *importance* of the functions, but which hopelessly confuse understanding of them.[47]

The criticism levied by G. Santayana against Dewey's metaphysics is that it collapses nature into human experience. Santayana says the following of Dewey:

> [the] admitted objectivity of real things [by Dewey] remains internal to the immediate sphere: they must never be supposed to possess an alleged substantial existence beyond experience. This experience is no longer subjective, but it is still transcendental, absolute, and groundless;... As Dewey puts it, these facts of experience simply *are* or *are had*, and there is nothing more to say of them. Such evidence flooding immediate experience I just now called mystical, using the epithet advisedly; because in this direct possession of being, *there is no division of subject and object, but rapt identification of some term, intuition of some essence.*[48]

Santayana clearly misunderstands Dewey to state that "[real things] must never be supposed to possess an alleged substantial existence beyond experience"; or "experience

---

[46]Ibid., p. 3a.
[47]Ibid., p. 261.
[48]Santayana, Schlipp, op. cit., p.256. My italics.

is...transcendental, absolute, and groundless." Experience is grounded in the "brute structure of things" which are certainly given existence beyond experience by Dewey. The statement by Santayana that indicates a glaring misunderstanding is: "there is no division of subject and object, but rapt identification of some term." If one presupposes the principle of atomism, it is clear how one could miss the fine distinction (rather than separation) Dewey is making between the plateaus of human experience and other natural transactions that come to make nature as a whole. Applying the principle of atomism to Dewey's metaphysics by *modus tollens*, as I believe Sanatayana has done, does not do justice to Dewey or the task he has taken on. Rorty is subject to the same criticism based on his refusal to see anything more than "blurred distinctions" in Dewey's concept of experience. But this will be taken up in more depth in Chapter Three.

In distinguishing between the levels of natural transaction, Dewey preserves the uniqueness of human experience and elevates it above a materialistic reduction. Experience is the most evolved expression of nature and "occurs only under highly specialized conditions, such as are found in highly organized creatures which in turn requires a specialized environment."[4] Nature has historically existed independently of experience, but experience has not existed independently of nature. (This

---

[4] Experience, p. 3a.

does not mean it will not at some future point in evolution.) The subject-matter of experience is Nature, and so it depends on Nature in this manner. Human experience is *of* nature. However through evolutionary interaction, experience and nature carry on a reciprocal relation: Experience is the means of discovering the mysteries of nature, while nature continues to evolve as human experience deepens. "Experience presents itself as the method, and the only method, for getting at nature, penetrating its secrets, and...nature empirically disclosed (by the use of empirical method in natural science) deepens, enriches and directs the further development of experience."[50]

On the one hand, Dewey argues interaction, interpenetration and fusion in his conception of experience as a level of transaction that in part constitutes nature. In this respect, he may be seen as having avoided the pitfalls of atomism which is hard-pressed to find account for the interrelation of experiences, and experience and nature. On the other hand, Dewey argues for distinctions between the organism and environment, and the levels of natural transaction. In this respect, he may be seen as having avoided the extremes of monism. The "generic traits of existence" which Dewey spells out in Experience and Nature serve to further reinforce his formulation of reality as a plurality of distinct *and* interpenetrating experiences or events. To see this, let us briefly turn to the "generic

---

[50]Ibid., p. 2a.

traits of nature."

The Generic Traits of Existence

Dewey accounts for the continuity between experience and nature by means of nature's generic traits. All human experience and all natural transactions are pervaded by them: "Qualitative individuality and constant relations, contingency and need, movement and arrest are common traits of existence."[51] These generic traits of Nature are not separate but distinct qualities or characters because they are so intermixed and related to one another for their significance that it makes no sense to think of them as separated. Dewey states:

> If the general traits of nature existed in watertight compartments, it might be enough to sort out the objects and interests of experience among them. But they are actually so intimately intermixed that all important issues are concerned with their degrees and the ratios they sustain to one another.[52]

The task of philosophy, and particularly metaphysics, is to determine "the rate and mode of the conjunction of the precarious and the assured, the incomplete and the finished, the repetitious and the varying, the safe and the sane and the hazardous."[53]

By means of the generic trait of "qualitative immediacy," Dewey reinforces his position on reality as being a plurality of distinct events. He states that "no

---

[51]Ibid., p. 413.
[52]Ibid.
[53]Ibid., p. 76.

matter how linked up [a situation] may be with others, [it] has its *own* quality."[54] So although natural transactions and events manifest a common set of existentially not separated traits and therefore are continuous in Nature, each situation has its own quality which accounts for its distinction from all other events. Dewey's notion of quality does not conflict with his concept of experience as an organic coordination, for the "quality" which makes the situation unique is not exclusively in the subject or object but pervades the whole. Of his notion of quality, Dewey states the following:

> A painting is said to have quality or a particular painting to have a Titian or Rembrandt quality. The word thus used most certainly does not refer to any particular line, color or part of the painting. It modifies all the constituents of the picture and all of their relations. It is not anything that can be had. Discourse may, however, point out the qualities, lines, and relations by means of which pervasive and unifying quality is achieved.[55]

The generic traits of existence are thoroughly mixed so that they can not be separated, and further, are not experienced *per se*, but rather they qualify and pervade the whole given situation. They are the background and foundation of experience, and together they make up the uniqueness of a given situation by their mixture.

The two other traits of existence which Dewey discusses, "the stable" and "the precarious" (which are necessary but by no means exhaustive traits of existence), give Dewey the opportunity to analyse traditional

---

[54]Ibid., p. 97.
[55]John Dewey's Logic: Theory of Inquiry, op. cit., p. 70.

metaphysical conceptions of the real as the known and unchanging. Dewey believes that since the Greeks, and to a certain extent *because* of the Greeks, reality has been coupled one-sidedly with unchanging, known structures, ie. "the stable." He attempts to reconcile what has been taken as the real, "the stable," with what we live with and under, the changeable, ie. "the precarious." Of his own project he states:

> ...a considerable part of my discussion of special topics is an attempt to show that characteristic traits of the subjects dealt with are to be accounted for as "intersections" of "interpenetrations" ...of the immediate and the nexional or mediatory, just as my criticisms of various philosophical theories rests on showing that they have isolated one phase at the expense of the other.[5]

Here we find again that Dewey is attempting a *via media* between the known and the unknown in his conception of reality. His inclusion of the precarious among the generic traits of existence strikes a new path altogether from atomism and monism, both of which identify the real with the known and unchanging (particuarly monism, which reduces all significant human experience to cognitive experience).

Thus, Dewey has found a viable alternative to atomism and monism in his naturalistic metaphysics. Against atomism he argues interaction within the elements that make up human experience and the elements that make up nature. Against monism, Dewey argues for drawing distinctions among situations by means of their unique qualities. He contends

---

[5]John Dewey's "Half-Hearted Naturalism," JP 24 (1927), p. 61.

that, within nature, there are "breaks and incompatibilities." [57] This means that the precarious is a generic trait of existence. Unlike monists, Dewey's conception of nature is not a system in which everything is interrelated through logical implication--there is the precarious to contend with.

---

[57] Experience, p. ix.

IV. Richard Rorty and Dewey's Metaphysics

As was pointed out in Chapter Two, Dewey's striking *via media* between atomism and monism assumes the possibility and viability of metaphysical inquiry, which Dewey preempts to a large extent in his polemical analysis of traditional metaphysics and metaphysical problems. In the 1917 article "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," Dewey wrote:

> It is often said that pragmatism, unless it is content to be a contribution to mere methodology, must develop a theory of Reality. But the chief characteristic of the pragmatic notion of reality is precisely that **no theory of Reality in general, überhaupt, is possible or needed.**[58]

How can Dewey be seen as philosophically consistent when he polemically argues against metaphysics as a traditional philosophical task and, a few years later, finds it necessary to write a tract which defines and describes the "generic traits of existence"? What is meant by "no theory of Reality in general,...is possible or needed"? A few pages later in the same article Dewey prescribes:

> [Philosophy should] free itself from identification with problems which are supposed to depend upon Reality as such, or its distinction from a world of Appearance, or its relation to a knower as such... **Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men.**[59]

The "theories of Reality in general" that Dewey polemicized in Experience and Nature are ones which concern themselves with traditional metaphysical problems and that have either

---

[58] John Dewey's "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," Bernstein, op. cit., p. 59. My italics.
[59] Ibid., pp. 66-67. My italics.

no approach or a wrong approach to the "problems of men." If by "metaphysics" Dewey intends traditional positions on concepts like substance, the subject-object separation, the mind-body problem, etc., and the way in which these problems are posed, Dewey is *not* doing metaphysics in Experience and Nature, and is not inconsistent with the position taken in his earlier article. Dewey takes a big step forward in freeing philosophy from "the problems of philosophers" by aptly analyzing traditional metaphysical problems. However, as is evident from the contents of Experience and Nature sketched in Chapter Two, Dewey's aim is not to destroy metaphysics but to reorient philosophy toward human life--ie. to make philosophy relevant and significant by assigning it the task of developing and cultivating a method to deal with the "problems of men." This method is Dewey's self-same experiential method put forward and employed in Experience and Nature. He says of it in the Preface:

> the method of empirical naturalism presented in this volume provides the way and the only way...by which we can be genuinely naturalistic and yet maintain cherished values, provided they are critically clarified and reinforced. The naturalistic method, when it is consistently followed, destroys many things once cherished; but it destroys them by revealing their inconsistency with the nature of things... **But its main purport is not destructive...**[10]

Therefore, his method is one which takes apart historical positions and analyzes them. But this is not *destructive* to philosophy. Indeed, it is *re*constructive in describing reality after clearing away traditional misconceptions. The

---

[10]Ibid., p. xiv.

success of Dewey's naturalistic method has far-reaching consequences for his theory of inquiry, for Dewey's whole metaphysical program serves as a methodological and existential foundation for moral, scientific and general day-to-day human inquiry. It will therefore be useful to examine the success of Dewey's "empirical metaphysics" through, as it shall be argued, the somewhat blurred eyes of Richard Rorty.

The major problem with the reception of Dewey's "empirical metaphysics" by the critics is that a position which attempts an empirical account of the metaphysical "brute structure of things"[61] appears, if not self-contradictory, at least not intuitively feasible given our tradition. Dewey was aware of the possibility of this reception, for he says on page one of Experience and Nature: "To many the associating of the two words ["empirical" and "metaphysics"] will seem like talking of a round square, so engrained is the notion of the separation of man and experience from nature."[62] Because of certain associations built upon the philosophical tradition, namely the principle of atomism, "experience" and "nature" are usually taken to be separated and Dewey claims that these associations "cannot be dealt with argumentatively." He states that, "one can only hope in the course of the whole discussion to disclose the meanings which are attached to "experience" and "nature," and thus insensibly produce, if one is fortunate,

---

[61] Logic, p. 278.
[62] Experience, p. 1.

a change in the significations previously attached to them."[3] However, Dewey *does* argue against these associations by arguing against traditional conceptions of experience and nature, namely the atomistic and monistic conceptions of experience. Dewey remained within the language of the tradition using concepts like "experience" and "nature." But by no means did he intend the same meaning by these words as the tradition. Dewey wished to eliminate restricted meanings of "metaphysics" by arguing against traditional notions of "metaphysics," and thereby in turn reconstructing "metaphysics" in an enlarged and freer capacity. To understand Dewey as proposing a "permanent neutral matrix" in the pages of Experience and Nature as Rorty does, is to not only misinterpret Dewey's aim in writing this tract, but to misconceive Dewey's method of achieving his aim. We will examine Rorty's misinterpretation presently.

Rorty misleadingly frames Dewey's dilemma as follows:

> ...either Dewey's metaphysics differs from 'traditional metaphysics' in not having a directing bias concerning social values because Dewey found an 'empirical' way of doing metaphysics which abstracts from any such biases and values, or else when Dewey falls into his vein of talking of the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds he is in slightly bad faith.[4]

The way Rorty frames the dilemma is that either Dewey wants an "objective," taken as value-neutral, science of metaphysics or Dewey wants to criticize societal

---

[3]Ibid., p. 1-2.
[4]Ibid., p. 48.

institutions and values as "therapy." Rorty assumes Dewey's quest for generic traits is an evocation of traditional metaphysics by presenting a "permanent neutral matrix for future inquiry."[5] This is not only a misinterpretation of Dewey but shows Rorty's underlying predilection for the logical positivists who attempt to define a value-neutral framework. Rorty seems to miss the whole debate which Dewey believes himself to be addressing, namely philosophy is to be applied to the "problems of men" not the "problems of philosophers." Rorty indicates his bias more obviously elsewhere:

> I claim that analytic philosophy thanks to its concentration on language, was able to defend certain crucial pragmatist theses better than...Dewey..had been able to defend them. By focusing our attention on the relation between language and the rest of the world rather than between experience and nature, post-positivistic analytic philosophy was able to make a more radical break with the philosophical tradition. "Language" is a more suitable notion than "experience" for saying the *holistic* and anti-foundationalist things which...Dewey...had wanted to say.[6]

We will return to this comment of Rorty's later, but suffice it to say that Rorty has distorted the meaning of "experience" assigned by Dewey if he believes that "language" is a more suitable term for what "Dewey had wanted to say" by "experience." Dewey had the chance for such improvement of his theory and he preferred replacement by the word "culture" rather than "language."

---

[5] Ibid., p. 60.
[6] R. Rorty, "Comments on Sleeper and Edel: A Symposium," in Transactions of the Charles Peirce Society, Summer 1985.

Rorty begins his polemics by quoting from Dewey's correspondence written late in life that Dewey wished to write a new edition of Experience and Nature entitled Nature and Culture. Rorty also goes on to say that Dewey "formally abjured his attempts to rehabilitate the word 'metaphysics'."[67] However, Rorty fails to mention that in the passage cited as the so-called "abjuration" Dewey actually says: "while I think the *words* used were most unfortunate, I still believe that that which they were used to name is genuine and important."[68] This is a foreshadowing of Rorty's misunderstanding of what Dewey intends by "metaphysics," "experience" and "nature."

Rorty claims that "it is easier to think of Experience and Nature as an explanation of why nobody needs a metaphysics, rather than as itself a metaphysical system."[69] Rorty claims that the sole worth of the book lies in its analyses of historical metaphysical systems, and criticizes Dewey for "(coming) down with the disease he was trying to cure."[70] According to Rorty, Dewey's problem was in not taking up the task of criticism whole-heartedly: Dewey was able to analyze and take apart the tradition but was unable to replace "philosophy" with conversation, and replace the tasks and responsibilities of philosophy with "playful experimentation."[71] For as Rorty says, "Dewey

---

[67]Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics," op. cit., p. 45.
[68]Dewey, "Experience and Existence: A Comment," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 9 (1949), p. 712.
[69]Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics," p. 46.
[70]Ibid., p. 72.
[71]Ibid., p. 71.

sometimes described philosophy as the criticism of culture, but he was never quite content to think of himself as a kibitzer or a therapist or an intellectual historian."[72] What this statement indicates is that Rorty's conception of philosophy as criticism of culture is radically different from Dewey's conception of philosophy as criticism of culture. By "empirical metaphysics," Dewey takes himself to be laying out the framework in which criticism of culture may take place. Rorty chastises Dewey for "*want(ing)* to write a metaphysical system," and for "waver(ing) between a therapeutic stance toward philosophy...and one in which philosophy was to become 'scientific' and 'empirical' and to do something serious, systematic, important, and constructive."[73] We shall see that Rorty's own stance toward philosophy as conversation (to which he *very* misleadingly subordinates philosophy as criticism) blinds him to what Dewey holds is the fundamental function of philosophy--reconstruction. We will see that this results in Rorty begging-the-question far more often than we can intellectually tolerate.

Rorty points out a troublesome tension in Dewey's thought concerning how the 'generic traits' are recoverable by an 'empirical method'. Rorty opens this discussion by quoting from a passage by Dewey addressed to his critics:

> [Dewey:] '...the method differs no whit from that of any investigator who, by making certain observations and experiments, and by utilizing the existing body

---

[72] Ibid., p. 46.
[73] Ibid.

> of ideas available for calculation and interpretation, concludes that he really succeeds in finding out something about some limited aspect of nature. If there is any novelty in Experience and Nature...[it] lies in the use made of the method to understand a group of special problems which have troubled philosophy.'
>
> [Rorty continues:]...two generations of commentators have been puzzled to say what method might produce 'a statement of the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds without regard to their differentiation into mental and physical'[74] while differing 'no whit' from that employed by the laboratory scientist.'[75]

The method pursued by Dewey is by no means simple; it involves a complex theory of meaning based on experience which is not naturally separated into 'mental' or 'physical' types. It will now be necessary to digress into Rorty's criticisms of Dewey's mind-body analysis in order to show that Rorty has misconstrued Dewey's position.

According to Dewey, mind and matter are "functional characters" not different metaphysical kinds: "Nothing but unfamiliarity stands in the way of thinking of both mind and matter as different characters of natural events, in which matter expresses their sequential order, and mind the order of their meaning in their logical connections and dependencies."[76] This position may be termed "neutralism" and is an outcome of his "objective relativism" whereby questions like 'what is the table *really*?' are meaningless. Rorty criticizes Dewey for developing a "jargon that would apply equally to plants, nervous systems and physicists."[77]

---

[74] Experience, p. 412.
[75] R. Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics," p. 47.
[76] Experience, p. 74.
[77] Ibid., p. 61.

This criticism indicates that Rorty believes that, if there is an independence among subject-matters, there is an independence among the vocabularies we use to describe these subject-matters. But Dewey believes that for a full understanding of a subject-matter one should understand its dependence upon other subject-matters. Tracing and explicating levels of dependence is not to reduce various subject-matters to more basic levels of transaction, but rather to show continuity between seemingly separate disciplines by displaying their dependence upon basic levels of transaction. Rorty criticizes Dewey for "developing a jargon" that could be used "equally" for different subject-matters. But Dewey sees his task as uncovering the levels of dependence among different subject-matters and needs a vocabulary which is more basic than the "independent" vocabularies of different subject-matters. If one were not to conceive of different disciplines as separate but as dependent upon more basic levels of transaction, one could see the viability of a vocabulary which would explicit these relations of dependence. Rorty continues: "Dewey wanted...phrases like 'transaction with the environment' and 'adaption to conditions' to be simultaneously naturalistic and transcendental. ... So he blew up notions like 'transaction' and 'situation' until they sounded as mysterious as 'prime matter' or 'thing-in-itself'."[78] Dewey's concept of situation is not

---

[78]Ibid., pp. 65-66.

all that difficult to understand if one does not assume a separation between the inquirer, the signification, and the object.[7]"

As a slip of the tongue Rorty states, "what qualities do those *two sorts of things* [namely, the "extra-organic things" and "organisms"] have when they are not interacting?"[80] If one was to understand "two sorts of things" as separate things, the "extra-organic thing" and the "organism" are *not* "two sorts of things." I believe that Rorty is playing upon our deeply-engrained atomistic sentiment that, if we draw a distinction between these two things when we talk of them, then they are separate. Rorty says that Dewey "made it sound as if what the table *really* was was neither an ugly brown thing whose hard edges bumped people, nor yet a swirl of particles, but something common to both..."[81] This statement indicates that there are two things of which Dewey attempts to find "something common to both." I will briefly examine the significance of Rorty's search for "something common to both."

A. The Principle of Atomism Returned

In Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty begins his criticisms of the neo-dualists by posing the question, "How do we know when we have two ways of talking about the same thing (a person, or his brain) rather than descriptions

---

[7]See Chapter One, section three.
[80]Ibid., p. 66.
[81]Ibid., p. 66.

of two different things?"[82] A question to keep in mind is: what is the status of "two different things?" Does "different" mean separate? Rorty continues,

> I think that the only reply such philosophers have to offer is to point out that in the case of phenomenal properties there is no appearance-reality distinction. This amounts to defining a physical property as one which any body could be mistaken in attributing to something, and a phenomenal property as one which a certain person cannot be mistaken about.... Given this definition, of course, it is trivially the case that no phenomenal property can be a physical one. But why should this *epistemic* distinction reflect an *ontological* distinction?[83]

One must keep in mind various distinctions which Rorty makes when analyzing this passage. Throughout Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty contrasts "epistemic distinctions" with "ontological distinctions." An epistemic distinction is a distinction we make in the way we talk, while an ontological distinction is a *real* distinction in the world. Given this, the sentence in the passage quoted above reads, "Why should this distinction made in the way we talk reflect a *real* distinction in the way the world is?" But what does Rorty mean by "real distinctions" or "ontological distinctions" among things that are *really* different from each other rather than merely epistemically different? As we have seen in the work of Dewey, we can make a "real" distinction between things without making them separate. Rorty goes on to say, "Why should the epistemic privilege we all have of being incorrigible about how things seem to us

---

[82]R. Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 29.
[83]Ibid.

reflect a *distinction* between two realms of being?"[84] Again, what does a "distinction between two realms of being" mean here? As we have seen in Dewey's metaphysics there are various levels of natural transactions or "realms of being," but these are not separate realms but rather distinct and continuous.

In the following quotation, Rorty replaces talk of "ontological distinctions" with talk of "ontological gaps." There can be no question that a "gap" implies a separation. Hence, "ontological gap" is meant to point out a separation. Rorty continues his analysis of the neo-dualists:

> As long as feeling painful is a property of a person or of brain-fibers, there seems no reason for the epistemic difference between reports of how things feel and reports of anything else to produce an *ontological gap*. But as soon as there is an ontological gap we are no longer talking about states or properties but about distinct particulars, distinct subjects of predication. The neo-dualist who identifies a pain with how it feels to be in pain is hypostatizing a property --painfulness-- into a special sort of particular, a particular of that special sort whose *esse* is *percipi* and whose reality is exhausted in our initial acquaintance with it. The neo-dualist is no longer talking about how people feel but about feelings as little self-subsistent entities, floating free of people in the way in which universals float free of the instantiations.[85]

Why is the above consequent necessary that "the neo-dualist is no longer talking about how people feel but about feelings as little self-subsistent entities, floating free of people?" Why should the character of a mental particular, such as a feeling, be a little self-subsistent entity

---

[84]Ibid.
[85]Ibid., p. 30.

floating free of people? Why must our feelings as special sorts of particulars be independent and separate from ourselves?

Rorty's argument may be reconstructed as follows:

1. As long as feeling painful is a property of person, there is no reason for epistemic differences of reports to produce an ontological gap between mind and body.
2. Once we have an ontological gap between mind and body, feelings are not properties or states of a person but distinct particulars.
3. By identifying a pain with how it feels to be in pain is hypostatizing a property into a special sort of particular.
4. Feelings are particulars whose *esse* is *percipi* and whose reality is exhausted in our initial acquaintance with it.
5. Therefore, the neo-dualist is no longer talking about how people feel, but about feelings as separate ("little self-subsistent") entities and independent ("floating free") of people.

One may explain the above argument as evoking the principle of atomism that what is distinct is separate (or produces a "gap"). Firstly in order to arrive at (1) above, Rorty has implicitly assumed that to make an ontological distinction between mind and body or appearance and reality is to make an ontological gap. He eases right into drawing ontological distinctions on the former page to drawing ontological gaps on the latter page. Secondly for (5) to follow from (2), (3) and (4), Rorty has assumed that a distinct particular is a separate particular. We have seen in the metaphysics of Dewey that it is entirely conceivable to draw a distinction between the person who has the feeling and the feeling as a distinct particular without drawing a separation between the feeling as a distinct particular and the person. This

alternative which Rorty does not seem to be aware of throws the above argument against neo-dualism into question. But more importantly, this missed alternative seems to have colored Rorty's criticism of Dewey's metaphysics in his article. If Rorty has a tendency to draw separations among distinctions then he will miss the force of Dewey's position. If by "situation" Rorty thought Dewey was fudging to find a third separate thing in addition to the subject and the object, Rorty has misinterpreted Dewey. Within a situation which is the interaction of a subject and object comes significations. Within the situation, the subject depends upon the object and the signification is evidence of continuity between the subject and object. How this principle of atomism may be seen at work in Rorty's own position is that since there are no *real* differences or rather separations among things, there must only be epistemic differences, and epistemic distinctions seem entirely a matter of the language we use to frame our conversation. Hence, Rorty arrives at his own brand of cultural monism.

Rorty blames Dewey's wanting "not merely skeptical diagnosis but also constructive metaphysical system-building,"[8] for (what Rorty believes is) Dewey's failure in dismissing the mind-body problem. Rorty states:

> The system that was built in Experience and Nature sounded idealistic, and its solution to the

[8] Ibid., p. 67.

> mind-body problem seemed one more invocation of the transcendental ego, because the level of generality to which Dewey ascends is the same level at which Kant worked, and the model of knowledge is the same--the constitution of the knowable by the cooperation of two unknowables.[17]

A few pages earlier Rorty compares Kant's "constitution of the empirical world by synthesis of intuitions under concepts," with Dewey's "interactions in which both extra-organic things and organisms partake." Such a comparison shows that Rorty misunderstands that Dewey's position is as opposed to Kantian idealism as it is to atomistic empiricism.[18] Rorty persists in assuming the separation which gives rise to the question "..but what is the table *in itself*?" Recently, Rorty has put it another way:

> The idea that brilliant scientific innovators reshape the object rather than merely predicating different attributes of it is a theme common to Dewey..., but the problem for [him] has been to put this idea in a non-idealistic way, one which admits that the objects are there before minds come along, and remain what they were while being known. I think that analytic philosophy gave us a vocabulary which enabled us to avoid the idealistic flavor of Dewey's later works by permitting us to say: Aristotle and Galileo and Darwin were presented with exactly the same objects, but there is no *neutral* epistemological language which permits us to say what those objects were.[19]

There is something to be said for the issue which Rorty is raising; however, he begs the question against Dewey because, since Dewey is an epistemological realist, Dewey need not seek out a "neutral epistemological language"

---

[17]Ibid., p. 67.
[18]See Chapter Two.
[19]Rorty, "Comments," p.20.

(especially since Dewey believes all of human existence is full of value, and therefore value-neutral language is trying to take away from existence). To claim that the analytics said it better than Dewey did is to miss what Dewey said.

Dewey rebelled against traditional philosophy and metaphysics but he did not totally reject its ideal of comprehensiveness and generality. But as Rorty continues:

> Sympathetic expositors of Dewey-as-metaphysician ... cannot, I think, explain why we *need* a discipline at that level of generality, nor how the results of such 'discoveries' can be anything but trivial. Would anyone--including Dewey himself--really believe that there is a discipline that could somehow do for 'the basic types of involvements' something left undone by novelists, sociologists, biologists, poets, and historians?'[10]

What Rorty fails to appreciate is Dewey's keen awareness of the role that a metaphysical framework (of some sort or another) plays in our day-to-day conduct, whether that metaphysical framework be explicitly set out in philosophical terms, or whether it be implicitly at work. This fundamental significance is explained as follows:

> The more sure one is that the world which encompasses human life is of such and such a character (*no matter what his definition*) the more one is committed to try to direct the conduct of life, that of others as well as himself, upon the basis of the character assigned to the world. And if he finds that he cannot succeed, that the attempt lands him in confusion, inconsistency and darkness, plunging others into discord and shutting them out from participation, rudimentary precepts instruct him to surrender his assurance as a delusion; and to revise *his notions of the nature of nature till he makes them more adequate to the concrete facts in*

---

[10]Ibid., pp. 53-54.

which nature is embodied.'[1]

This passage is of vital significance for two reasons, firstly because it explains the role and significance of a metaphysical framework to limit and define conduct and secondly, because it explains how, from "confusion, inconsistency and darkness," we are justified in proceeding to amend our notion of "the nature of nature." But Rorty's criticism still remains untouched: Why do we need something at such a level of generality which provides this guidance and criticism? Dewey argues: "Over-specialization and division of interests, occupations and goods create the need for a generalized medium of intercommunication, of mutual criticism through all-around translation from one *separated* region of experience to another."'[2] The 'generic traits' did not function like Kant's categories as "ultimate origins and ends" of things.'[3] Neither did Dewey want to reduce experience to a nature which was viewed as value-neutral that was "wholly material and mechanistic," for this would be to "denegrade and deny the noble and ideal values that characterize experience."'[4] Rather the purpose of the 'generic traits' was to be the means of communication among "separated regions of experience." Therefore a certain level of generality would have to be achieved. In contrast, in no way does Rorty's vision of philosophy-as-conversation

---

'[1] Experience, p. 414.
'[2] Ibid., p. 410.
'[3] See Dewey's "The Subject Matter..." where he distinguishes the two senses of "ultimate."
'[4] Experience, p. 1.

provide such inroads to integrating "separated regions of experience." For Dewey,

> ...philosophy as a critical organ becomes in effect a messenger, a liason officer, making reciprocally intelligible voices speaking provincial tongues, and thereby enlarging as well as rectifying the meanings with which they are charged.'[5]

This "wide and generous interaction" is a far cry from the traditional foundationalism with which Rorty is trying to yoke Dewey.

Dewey did not believe that the philosophical tradition was valueless, only that some of the tasks it assigned itself were unpragmatic in framing or solving the "problems of men." Dewey's ultimate aim in all his philosophy was to enlarge the vision of man, and, as is evident in his writing Experience, he felt unless philosophy looked beyond the "piecemeal" and attempted to construct a comprehensive perspective for understanding man and reality, philosophy was not doing this.

Dewey addresses the issue Rorty raises in "The Subject Matter of Metaphysical Inquiry":

> If all questions of causation and origin are specific scientific questions, is there any place left for metaphysical inquiry at all? If it then can not be ultimate origin and causation, is metaphysics anything but a kind of pseudo-science whose illusory character is now to be recognized? This question takes us to the matter of whether there are ultimate, that is, irreducible, traits of the very existences with which scientific reflection is concerned. In all such investigations as those referred to above we find at least such traits as the following: Specifically diverse existences, interaction, change. ...they would seem to deserve the name of ultimate, or irreducible, traits. As

---

[5]

> such they may be made the object of a kind of inquiry to which the name metaphysical may be given.''

What Dewey attempts is, on the whole, very positive and edifying: to combine a new method within a comprehensive theory of experience and nature. His self-stated aim is to enlarge man's vision of himself and of reality: metaphysical inquiry seems to be a good way of accomplishing this.

''John Dewey's "The Subject Matter...," in Bernstein, op. cit., p. 47.

V. Concluding Remarks

The persuasiveness of John Dewey's metaphysics lies in the rejection of the principle of atomism and his replacement of it by the principle of continuity. I hope to have shown that some of his critics have begged-the-question against him by either not being aware of this or simply not acknowledging it. I also hope that through the various contrasts and comparisons made between Dewey and James, Dewey and the empirical and critical traditions, and Dewey and his critics, I have shown Dewey's metaphysics to be both plausible and unique. As for the future practice of metaphysics which Rorty attempts to overthrow by philosophy-as-conversation, I believe that if we attempt not to separate ourselves off from other disciplines, we can manage to walk a path between "systematic Philosophy" and "playful experimentation." But moreover, I believe that we do not do without metaphysics; in our day-to-day lives our metaphysics are simply implicit. Metaphysics is not *fach* as Rorty would have us diagnose but lived experience. Just as a definition of truth (however ordinary) serves as a criterion to determine what is true, and as a limit to what will even be considered under that question, metaphysics serves as a criterion of what is and what will be considered under that question. There is a certain psychological necessity for a metaphysics of some sort or other; in most day-to-day cases it is simply *naive* realism. To deny metaphysics is simply to have assumed an anti-metaphysical metaphysics, as I believe

Rorty has done. Dewey has not overlooked the significance and importance of metaphysics. More than this, he has offered us a metaphysics of experience as continuous. For this he should be congratulated. Perhaps the time has come to shift the burden of proof onto those monists and atomists who seem to have assumed a principle of atomism--this includes the anti-Metaphysicians.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dewey's Works and Articles

1. Dewey, John, "Experience and Existence: A Comment," in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 9 (1949), p. 712.

2. ----------, Experience and Nature. Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1926.

3. ----------, "Experience, Knowledge and Value: A Rejoiner", in The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. by P.A. Schilpp. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1939. Pp. 490-560.

4. ----------, "The Experimental Theory of Knowledge," in The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1910. Pp. 77-111.

5. ----------, "Half-Hearted Naturalism", The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 24 (1927). Pp. 57-64.

6. ----------, Logic: Theory of Inquiry. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1938.

7. ----------, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," in On Experience, Nature and Freedom (Collected Essays), ed. by R. Bernstein. New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960. Pp. 19-69.

8. ----------, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology", in Pragmatism: The Classical Writings, ed. by H.S. Thayer. Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1982. Pp. 262-274.

9. ----------, "The Subject Matter of Metaphysical Inquiry," in On Experience, Nature and Freedom, op. cit. Pp. 211-223.

Other Works and Articles

10. Aristotle, *Physica*, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. by R. McKeon. New York: Random House, 1941. Pp. 218-397.

11. Bernstein, Richard, "Philosophy and the Conversation of Mankind," in Review of Metaphysics, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4 (1980), pp. 745-775.

12. Bosley, Richard, On Truth. Washington: University Press of America, 1982.

13. Edel, Abraham, "A Missing Dimension in Rorty's Use of Pragmatism," in Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, Vol. XXI, No. 1,

14. Hook, Sidney, ed., John Dewey: Philosospher of Science and Freedom (A Symposium). New York: The Dial Press, 1950.

15. Hume, David, Treatise of Human Nature, Second Edition, ed. by Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

16. James, William, The Meaning of Truth. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

17. James, William, Pragmatism. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1981.

18. McDermott, John, "Symposium of Rorty's *Consequences of Pragmatism*," in Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (1985), pp. 1-8.

19. Rorty, Richard, "Comments on Sleeper and Edel: A Symposium," in in Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (1985), pp.39-48.

20. ----------, Consequences of Pragmatism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

21. ----------, "Dewey's Metaphysics," in New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. by Steven Cahn. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1977. Pp. 55-74.

22. ----------, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

23. Santayana, G., "Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics", in The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. by P.A. Schilpp. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1939. Pp. 243-267.

24. Schillp, P.A., ed., The Philosophy of John Dewey. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1939.

25. Sellars, W., "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in Science, Perception and Reality. New York: Humanities Press, 1963.

26. Sleeper, R.W., "Rorty's Pragmatism: Afloat in Neurath's Boat, But in Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (1985), pp. 9-20.