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John Dewey's Instrumentalism: A Cultural and Humanist View of Knowledge

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A Thesis
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My thesis is an attempt to show the brilliance and novelty of John Dewey's theory of knowledge, instrumentalism. The main objective of my thesis is to explain Dewey's theory of knowledge, which he coined *instrumentalism*, and to describe how instrumentalism as a theory of knowledge overcomes the pitfalls of competing theories within the philosophical tradition. Shortly, Dewey's theory of instrumentalism does not assume that ideas are mental entities nor that ideas are true if they somehow match or fit with the object in question; thus Dewey's theory presents a different view opposed to what we have usually called coherence, or correspondence theories of knowledge. Dewey also argued that consciousness and thinking are functions of a complex organism in transaction with its environment, thus consciousness is an instrumentality not a thing-in-itself.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My thesis is an attempt to show the brilliance and novelty of John Dewey's theory of knowledge, instrumentalism. In this introduction I will explain the reasons for including the chapters within my thesis. The main object of my thesis is to explain Dewey's theory of knowledge, for which he coined the term *instrumentalism*, and to describe how it overcomes the pitfalls of competing theories within the philosophical tradition. Dewey's theory of instrumentalism does not assume that ideas are mental entities nor that ideas are true if they somehow match or fit with the object in question; thus Dewey's theory presents a different view opposed to what we have usually called coherence, and correspondence theories of knowledge. Dewey also argued that consciousness and thinking are functions of a complex organism in transaction with its environment, thus consciousness is an instrumentality not a thing-in-itself.

As Dewey scholars know, Dewey was a professed Hegelian at the beginning of his philosophical career. Though he distanced himself from Hegel in his later years, many of Hegel's main philosophical tenants remained as foundations of Dewey's overall philosophical outlook. The main tenants of Hegel's philosophy of which the young Dewey was enamored were the notions that consciousness was a development and not a fixed object, and also that consciousness is closely intertwined with the cultural beliefs of a given time. Further, the chapter on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* which I have included in this thesis reveals that consciousness and sense experience are closely related. In other words, unlike many traditional idealists for whom sense-experience was viewed as unrelated to consciousness and thinking, sense experience for Dewey and Hegel must be viewed as the grounds by which consciousness first emerges and the grounds by which our thinking must be tested.

What's more, one of Dewey's most profound realizations was that the growth of consciousness entails a growth of sense experience. I interpret Hegel's chapter on sense-certainty within the *Phenomenology* as presenting an argument similar to contemporary pragmatist Mark Johnson. Johnson writes in the opening chapter of his book *The Body in the Mind*, "the centrality of human embodiment directly influences what and how things can be meaningful for us." Thus our sensory, bodily experience forms the basis for our thinking. Johnson goes on to say, "our reality is shaped by the patterns of our bodily movement, the contours of our spatial and temporal orientation, and the forms of our interaction with objects. It is never merely a matter of abstract conceptualization and propositional judgments."[1]

The next chapter takes into consideration the different meanings of the term pragmatism within two of the fundamental works of Dewey and Quine. The chapter serves a dual purpose. First, it serves to distinguish Dewey's pragmatism from Quine's vision of pragmatism as a kind of conservatism. Quine's pragmatism simply seeks to keep our rational beliefs consistent with one another, while Dewey's pragmatism espouses social progress and cultural amelioration. Secondly, the chapter sets out some of the main tenants of Dewey's instrumentalism and details his theory of propositions. In the end, the chapter describes how Dewey's instrumentalism differs from the traditional idealistic, or coherence view and empiricist theories of truth and knowledge.

The final chapter of the thesis uses Plato's *Theaetetus* and the problems of knowledge within it as a contrasting point of view to Dewey's instrumentalism. The chapter also examines how Dewey can be called a humanist. In the chapter, I discuss how the character of Protagoras within the *Theaetetus* intimates many ideas Dewey himself held. The chapter explains how Dewey explained truth and error and how though values may be relative to the perceiver, they are not wholly subjective. In the end, the paper reveals Dewey's technical philosophical view of knowledge and truth. As Dewey writes in his

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[1] Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), xix.

early book of essays, *Essays in Experimental Logic*, reflection and knowledge are not separated from the immediate experience of sense. Instead, "reflection busies itself alike with physical nature, the record of social achievement, and the endeavors of social aspiration. It is with reference to *such* affairs that thought is derivative; it is with reference to them that it intervenes or mediates."[2] Thus, knowledge is a social matter and has as its subject-matter both "physical nature" and cultural context.

[2] Dewey, John. *Essays in Experimental Logic*. Ed. Hester, Micah and Talisse, Robert (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 2007), 40.

CHAPTER 2

SENSE-EXPERIENCE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS: HEGEL AND THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

Though interpretations differ as to the intent and purpose of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, scholars agree that at base the text reveals Hegel's conception that knowledge is a process, and self-consciousness a development. After the *Preface* to the text, Hegel begins his monumental project by positing general "forms" of consciousness that consciousness moves through in its formation of knowledge. Though it may seem in reading the *Phenomenology* that Hegel meant to describe consciousness as a linear progression from (*sense-certainty, perception, to force and the understanding)* to the realization of self-consciousness, to reason, to spirit, I find this to be a mistaken assumption. I think that Hegel intended to view his various "forms" of consciousness such as *sense-certainty*, or *perception*, not as isolated steps which are overcome, but as modes of *one* consciousness which grows out from itself and its world. The problem with a linear view of conscious growth is that such a view implies that each form would be static and distinct from each other form. I believe Hegel's point however was to show the variegated quality of consciousness and how growth entails a kind of focusing and control of all modes working together. In this paper, though the *Phenomenology* may not describe a linear development of consciousness, I will maintain that Hegel meant us to view sense-experience as the source and origin of consciousness. Instead of accepting skepticism, Hegel meant to overcome the Kantian "critical viewpoint," as Jean Hyppolite refers to it, by showing how self understanding, or self consciousness, grows from interaction between organism and environment. For this purpose, I will discuss *how* and in *what* ways sense experience will serve as the building block for the development of self-consciousness and spirit.

The Kantian critical viewpoint overcome by Hegel

We must understand sense-certainty to form the content and context for our knowledge although this kind of experience is not in itself a form of knowledge. Knowledge for Hegel is a kind of *mediation* between subject and object, however, reflective knowledge within the Hegelian scheme does not remove us from the absolute. The mode of experience, *sense-certainty*, is the content of which consciousness makes use. We can even say that *sensuous experience is the subject-matter for conceptual knowledge*. It is not necessary for consciousness to forget sense experience as an illusory phenomenon so as to gain true knowledge. Instead, consciousness must reconstruct its experience to gain understanding. As Hyppolite describes, the "equality" of immediate sense-certainty because of its unmediated character, will as well be the endpoint sought in the phenomenology. However as the endpoint of the phenomenology the simple immediacy of sense-certainty will be "reconquer[ed] reflectively," and this reflective reconquering will be self-consciousness coming to know itself as knowledge of the absolute.[3]

It is impossible to understand Hegel's intent in the *Phenomenology* without understanding what he felt was his own position in reference to his philosophic predecessors, namely Fichte and Kant. Hyppolite calls the position of Kant and Fichte the "critical point of view." Kant in his epistemological philosophy sought to critically look at the instrument of knowledge and to inspect consciousness as though it were a fully developed, self-consistent deducible object. Thus, for Kant, the absolute, or objective truth was set apart from human cognition and knowledge. As the function of mind for Kant was to synthesize what was presented phenomenally, he was necessarily forced to uphold a distinct split between the subject and object of knowledge. Hyppolite writes, "If knowledge is an instrument, then that implies that the subject and the object of knowledge are separate. The absolute would then be

[3] Hyppolite, Jean. *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit (*Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

distinct from knowledge. The absolute could not be self-knowledge, nor could knowledge be knowledge of the absolute."[4] So to combat Kant's view, for Hegel, the absolute will no longer only be substance, or what stands outside as objectivity in contrast to the individual mind, but the absolute will be subject as well. The purpose of Hegel's phenomenology is to show the way in which absolute knowledge is essentially, "self knowledge in the knowledge of consciousness," and "phenomenal knowledge will be the knowledge which the absolute gradually has of itself."[5] But, if Hegel does not wish to start his philosophy from the viewpoint of a subjective instrument of knowledge, what will his starting point be?

Hegel sought to ground his philosophy of consciousness by describing the evolution of the subjective conscious through an interaction with nature, or in Hegelian language, the absolute. Kantian philosophy both began and ended with the subjective viewpoint, or critical viewpoint. The critical viewpoint asserts that knowledge of the absolute is somehow skewed, adulterated, or too thoroughly mediated by the subject's consciousness to gain the truth of its absolute object. The point being, that Kantian philosophy introduced a split between consciousness and nature, subject and object that cannot be overcome if we again start from this critical perspective.

As Hyppolite often discusses, one of Hegel's great influences was Schelling. From Schelling Hegel adopted the view that "instead of halting at the point of reflection, at the knowledge of knowledge, it is necessary to immerse oneself in the object to be known, whether it be called nature, the universe, or the absolute reason."[6] Hegel does not begin with the position that the subject is cut off from nature, or the absolute, but states that the subject is within the absolute and that subject and object are identical in nature. Hyppolite puts it as "it is necessary to pass beyond the critical point of view…to

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4 Hyppolite, 5-6.

5 Hyppolite, 7.

6 Hyppolite, 5.

start straight off with the identity of the subjective and the objective in knowledge."[7] Thus, Hegel devotes the first systematic and developmental chapters of the phenomenology to the basic experience of sense-certainty. *Instead, of beginning straight ahead with the subjective "I" Hegel shows us how the subjective "I" is revealed through the progression of natural consciousness, or the progression of sensuous experience to self-consciousness.*

Thus, subjective, or individual consciousness will be the development of a natural consciousness through, within, and as the absolute coming to self-knowledge. Kant's philosophy proposed that isolated from the subjective consciousness' attempts to grasp the truth was an objective world of absolute substance, or things in themselves. This Truth, was incapable of being grasped by any individual consciousness. Thus, the absolute for Kant lay outside the confines of the instrument of knowledge. For Hegel, the absolute does not lie beyond the grasp of consciousness. Instead, every consciousness is a part, is a development of the absolute itself, so to find truth we only need to look to the development which is revealed to us. So for Hegel we will see that we must return to "phenomenal knowledge, that is knowledge of common consciousness, and" claim "to show how it necessarily leads to absolute knowledge, or even, how it is an absolute knowledge which does not yet know itself as such."[8]

Hegel presents us with an entirely new depiction of the individual self and how it comes to be. Hyppolite rightly argues that to understand Hegel's system, we need to re-conceive of what the individual "I" truly is. As I have already discussed in length, for Kant the 'I' is always subjectively isolated from the truth of the absolute. Since this will not be the case for Hegel, we need a new way of describing the development and nature of the "I," or individual consciousness. Hyppolite writes, "If we

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[7] Hyppolite, 5.

[8] Hyppolite, 7.

are to grasp the whole of Hegel's thought, we must understand the starting point of his philosophy: the intuition of life or of the I which develops by opposing itself and rediscovering itself."[9] The overall goal for Hegel in starting his first systematic and developmental chapters with sense-certainty will be to show that consciousness is led to self-consciousness "by itself, by a kind of internal logic of which it is not aware and which the philosopher discovers by following its experiences."[10] The concept within each of the movements of consciousness will as well be "nothing other than the subject, that which is only by virtue of self-development, opposing itself to itself, and rediscovering itself in that opposition."[11]

Reflective knowledge as opposed to the immediate experience of sense

Hegel begins his chapter on sense-certainty by stating that, "the knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate, or what simply *is*."[12] Immediate experience for Hegel is much different than what we may call reflective knowledge. Experience as sense-certainty is not discriminatory. Reflective knowledge, which occurs as consciousness mediates sense-experience, is signified when consciousness analyzes determinate aspects of an experience and reformulates them to inform future experience. Instead of being reflective, our "approach to the object," within immediate sense experience, "must also be *immediate* or *receptive*," as "we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself."[13] Immediate experience, or sense experience, is in essence an experience of the largest whole, or the absolute, "for it has not as yet omitted anything from the object, but has the object before it in its

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[9] Hyppolite, 81.

[10] Hyppolite, 79.

[11] Hyppolite, 80.

[12] Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 58.

[13] Hegel, 58.

perfect entirety."[14] However, if we seek to formulate sense-certainty into a kind of knowledge we will find that for Hegel the truth of sense-certainty is always the most abstract and barren concept, for the concept developed through sense-certainty will only be the pure universal, or "*it is*." Hegel writes,

> Consciousness, for its part, is in this certainty only as a pure 'I'; or I am in it only as a pure 'This', and the object similarly only as a pure 'This'. I *this* particular I, am certain of *this* particular thing, not because I, *qua* consciousness, in knowing it have developed myself or thought about it in various ways; and also not because *the thing* of which I am certain, in virtue of a host of distinct qualities, would be in its own self a rich complex of connections, or related in various ways to other things. Neither of these has anything to do with the truth of sense-certainty: here neither I nor the thing has the significance of a complex process of mediation; the 'I' does not have the significance of a manifold imagining or thinking, nor does the 'thing' signify something that has a host of qualities. On the contrary, the thing *is*, and it *is*, merely because it *is*.[15]

Because of its concreteness, its sheer tangibility, sense-certainty first seems to consciousness to be the truest of knowledge. However, this is not the case as the truest concept will be the most developed manifestation of the subject in reference to its object. As this rather long quote tells us, there is no development or mediation within sense-certainty as immediacy. The object of sense-certainty is not a thing of which "in knowing it [I] have developed myself, or thought about it in certain ways." Instead, the object of sense-certainty is presented in its entirety as pure being.

However, sense-certainty as experience is not left to be undeveloped as natural or sensuous consciousness always seeks to transition and develop towards self-consciousness. Thus, in the chapter on sense-certainty Hegel shows us what begins to happen to consciousness when reflection begins to mediate the pure immediacy of sense-certainty. For Hegel, once reflection begins through consciousness what is presented to consciousness is no longer "merely this pure immediacy," but "an actual sense-certainty," or an "*instance* of it." Reflection or mediation thus has the character of isolating instances from the "pure immediacy", so that they may be analyzed and understood by

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[14] Hegel, 58.

[15] Hegel, 58.

consciousness, by becoming opposed to consciousness as a determinate object. When we reflect upon the content of sense-certainty, and make of it an "actual sense-certainty," or "an instance" of it we find that what was once a pure whole, or immediacy breaks apart into a subject and object, or as Hegel states, "pure being at once splits up into what we have called the two 'Thises', one 'This' as 'I', and the other 'This' as object." When we split up immediate reflection into subject and object, we are thus mediating the experience through consciousness. As Hegel writes, "when *we* reflect on this difference, [the difference of subject from object] we find that neither one nor the other is only *immediately* present in sense-certainty, but each is at the same time *mediated*."[16]

Once again, the point of the paper is to uncover both *why* Hegel begins the first developmental chapter of the *Phenomenology* with an explanation of sense-certainty, or sense experience and *how* the chapter on sense-certainty fits into the larger scope of the whole text. One of the greatest advantages that Hyppolite provides his reader with is his insight into Hegel's intentions and purposes, specifically with regard to the historical philosophical tradition. Hegel's chapter on sense-certainty then ought to be read as a rebuttal to the conclusion reached by Parmenides that *Being* is an undivided whole without movement and that sense experience fails to grasp in the end the truth of Being.[17] Sense-certainty necessarily does fail to reach truth for Hegel, but not because sense-experience is a complete illusion. Instead, sense-experience must be viewed as the beginning of the development of consciousness. Sensory experience is the foundation out of which individual self-consciousness arises. Perhaps we might say that the abstract universal stumbled upon through sense-experience will be developed and fulfilled through the progression of consciousness so that when we reach the final conclusion of the *Phenomenology*, Absolute Knowing, the concept as universal will be fully developed, mediated, and enacted within an individual.

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16 Hegel, 59.

17 Hyppolite, 89.

Though the position of Parmenides cannot be equivocated to the position of Kant, he as well espoused that individual consciousness fails to grasp objective truth. Hyppolite writes that "just as Parmenides had to distinguish opinion from being so sensuous consciousness must distinguish its aim (*Meinung*) from being."[18] Sensuous consciousness must "distinguish its aim from being" because its aim is to begin conceptualization of immediate being which at this point in its development it cannot reach. The aim of sensuous consciousness, the aim which it can reach, is to establish the observation and statement that "It is." For Hegel, "language, as we see, is the more truthful," the recognition of a blank "Here" and "Now," the statement "it is" when uttered by sense consciousness cannot mean what is said. Hegel writes, "we do not *envisage* the universal This or Being in general," but, "we *utter* the universal."[19]

When sense consciousness makes a simple observation such as "Here is a tree" as Hegel remarks, or "Now is night," we are able to realize that this simple observation relies on an individual "I" which is responsible for making the observation. In other words the truth of a sense observation for an individual lies in "the object as *my* object, or in its being *mine* [*Meinen*]; it is, because *I* know it."[20] However, "in this relationship sense-certainty experiences the same dialectic acting upon it as in the previous one. I, *this* 'I', see the tree and assert that "Here' is a tree; but another 'I' sees the house and maintains that 'Here' is not a tree but a house instead."[21] Thus, we see that the universal of sense consciousness fails itself because though it feigns itself as containing all the content of immediacy it finds itself as truly holding only a small part. Again, when the universal of sense-certainty is put into linguistic form it takes the form of "it is," or "here is night," but what sense certainty contains within

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[18] Hyppolite, 90.

[19] Hegel, 60.

[20] Hegel, 61.

[21] Hegel, 61.

this proposition is not really the true concept corresponding to what "it is" really means.

Sense consciousness thus continues to develop itself as Hegel walks us through the process. What I have up to this point explained is sense consciousness *pointing out* an instance of sense consciousness. When sense consciousness points out an instance of experience and names it "here is tree," then finds that this observation is fallible or incomplete because "here is also house" from another perspective, sense consciousness realizes that "The Here, which was supposed to have been pointed out, vanishes in other Heres, but these likewise vanish. What is pointed out, held fast, and abides, is a *negative* This."[22] Sense consciousness points out and names the instance, but the part of the instant which abides and is a universal is "a negative This." Further, "the Here that is *meant* would be the point; but it *is* not: on the contrary, when it is pointed out as something that is, the pointing-out shows itself to be not an immediate knowing [of the point], but a movement from the Here that is *meant* through many Heres into the universal Here which is a simple plurality of Heres, just as the day is a simple plurality of Nows."[23]

Perhaps I should try to define more properly a *universal*. In the simplest terms a universal is a proposition which circumscribes all members of a class. Within the context of sense-certainty and of the previous quote, Hegel offers us up a unique envisagement of the universal. In terms of sense-consciousness the universal arrived at is called the abstract universal as it has been undeveloped through mediation. Furthermore, the universal of sense-certainty is a "negative This." The abstract universal of sense-certainty takes on the character of being a *negation* due to its being realized as what abides through the vanishing of multiple 'heres.' As the example goes, 'here is a tree' in one instance, while in another instance 'here becomes house.' Thus, it is that through the varying instances of here, what is found or observed to be changes and vanishes away. However, 'Here' as the universal that

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[22] Hegel, 64.

[23] Hegel, 64.

abides does not vanish away. However, the 'Here' as a negative This, as the abstract universal, still remains an empty statement void of content. All consciousness gains through the universal of sense certainty remains to be the empty statement 'It is.'

Broader foundations of Hegel's philosophy and conclusion

At this point, I'd like to place sense-certainty within the larger context of Hegel's philosophical purpose. Robert Stern describes three possible views Hegel might have been advancing by beginning the text with a description of sense consciousness. The first could be a "commitment to epistemic foundationalism, which posits direct intuitive experience as giving us the kind of unshakeable hook-up to the world on which knowledge is built."[24] This commitment would help Hegel to answer the flaws he saw within Kant such as consciousness being a kind of instrument. If *intuitive experience*, or sense experience provides us with an "unshakeable hook-up to the world," then we no longer need to view consciousness as an instrument which falsifies sense experience. As well, Stern believes that Hegel could have had a "commitment to empiricism, according to which intuitive knowledge is prior to conceptual knowledge."[25] Lastly, perhaps "a commitment to realism, which holds that if the mind is not to distort or create the world, it needs to be in a position to gain access to the world in a passive manner without the mediation of conceptual activity."[26]

As Stern argues, Hegel probably wished to assert all three of these commitments in varying degrees and more. Hegel most assuredly forwards an empirical approach within the chapters of sense-certainty arguing that "intuitive knowledge is prior to conceptual knowledge." As I have already discussed, the intuitive knowledge provided through sense-certainty forgoes mediation and is thus not

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[24] Stern, Robert. *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Routledge Press, 2002), 44.

[25] Stern, 44.

[26] Stern, 44.

considered conceptual knowledge for Hegel. As Stern writes, sense consciousness is "a form of consciousness that thinks the best way to gain knowledge of the world is to experience it directly or intuitively, without applying concepts to it: what Hegel calls 'immediate' rather than 'mediated' knowledge, which involves 'apprehension' rather than 'comprehension.'"[27] In fact, what we have seen is that sense-consciousness attempts to intuitively grasp 'instances' of sense-certainty, such as the instance 'here is tree.' Stern explains that with this grasping sense-certainty is trying to grasp individual, particular entities. However, as we have seen these individual grasps of instances only vanish away. Thus for Hegel, "apprehension does not transcend the universal, for in apprehension we are just aware of the object as a 'this,' which does not constitute the object's distinctive particularity, but rather its most abstract and universal character."[28] By the time Hegel has developed sense-certainty to perception consciousness is ready to understand experience in terms of "universality as well as individuality."[29] However, within the dialectic of sense-certainty consciousness only is able to feign specificity. When sense-consciousness thinks itself as grasping individuals consciousness turns on itself and we realize that we only grasp the abstract universal. As Hyppolite writes, "the object of sensuous certainty, far from being immediate existence, is an abstraction, the universal as the negation of every particular this; it is the first negative manifestation of the universal in consciousness." So instead of grasping individuality, sense consciousness arrives at a "negative manifestation," a "negation of every particular this." Because sense-consciousness does not introduce mediation into its dialectic, its object, the universal of sense consciousness remains ineffable.

To bring the paper full circle we must now reconsider the question of *why* Hegel would choose to begin the developmental chapters of the *Phenomenology* to the dialectic of sense-certainty? Stern

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[27] Stern, 43.

[28] Stern, 50.

[29] Stern, 51.

writes that for Hegel "there is little reason to adopt the critical theorist's approach as a 'natural assumption' at the outset, *prior* to philosophical inquiry."[30] Hegel did not internd to provide a philosophy which merely inspected and criticized consciousness as an instrument of knowledge, but instead wanted to provide a vision of consciousness as something which is developed through the natural processes of life. Thus, Hegel begins the phenomenological project of describing the development of consciousness from naïve consciousness to philosophical consciousness by describing how sensuous experience provides the first steps for consciousness to take in its development. By beginning his project with sensuous certainty Hegel can show how "consciousness moves towards it [knowledge] of its own accord, as it seeks to make good on its own internal problems."[31]

The "critical theorist" approach which is evident in philosophers from Descartes to Kant sets up consciousness at the outset as a fixed, fully developed mechanism. That the mechanism of consciousness is a fixed and fully developed conception for Kant is evident through his categories of knowledge. Kant's philosophy does not seek to describe how the categories of knowledge are formed through a developmental process, but instead views these categories as necessary conditions for the synthetic processing of truth through the medium of consciousness. In Descartes, the origin of his philosophy begins with the pure *cogito*, or individual consciousness after the opening passages of hyperbolic doubt. Thus, the critical theorist approach attempts to deduce philosophical axioms from what is seen as a fully developed consciousness. Hegel instead of taking this approach reveals how the individual subject comes to be through a process of interaction with the world.

In this paper, it has been my goal to describe the movements within the dialectic of sense-certainty, and to show how these first movements of consciousness serve as the springboard to the development of self-consciousness. Hegel insists that the task of consciousness is to ascend to the level

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[30] Stern, 40.

[31] Stern, 41.

of universality in thinking while being able to at the same time see this universality manifest itself within the manifold complex which is existence. In the end this project of mine should allow us to realize a few basic conceptions of Hegel's philosophy.

First, Hegel did not wish to denigrate sense experience as something transient and inconsequential. Sense experience forms the basic experience out of which consciousness begins to develop itself. Further, since consciousness is not merely an "instrument of knowledge," or a "medium" for transmitting knowledge, there is no reason to sharply delineate between what we might call truths of reason, and truths of objective fact. The truths of reason which consciousness finds the through the development of the dialectical process are formed from the originative experiences of sense-consciousness. Eventually self-consciousness is able to come to a point in which as Hegel would say "concept corresponds to object, and object to concept." However, this equilibrium, or culminating *moment*, which is knowledge, is not a static correspondence, but instead a dynamic process of development which is achieved through the opposition of subject to object, individual to world.

CHAPTER 3

PRAGMATISM, PROPOSTIONS, AND TRUTH: COMPARING QUINE AND DEWEY

Pragmatism and science have become two of the most used and misunderstood concepts within 20th and 21st century philosophy. These concepts were integral to the philosophies of Quine and Dewey, although the two perhaps view them in drastically different lights. In Dewey's *The Problem of Truth* and Quine's *Two Dogma's of Empiricism* both struggle to form a new notion of truth based in the scientific method which does not fall prey to the fallacies of the traditional correspondence, or "consistency" models.[32] In this paper, I will first describe what I think to be the central theme of Quine's *Two Dogmas* and to find out what "pragmatism" means within his work. Then I will show how already in 1908, Dewey's notions of truth, science, and pragmatism far outrange Quine's in scope and originality.

Main themes of Quine's 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' essay and his idea of pragmatism as conservatism

Quine begins his article *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* by stating that two of the most commonly held philosophical beliefs are that there is a difference between truths which are analytic or synthetic and the dogma that "each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience," which is the doctrine of empirical reductionism.[33] Analytic statements are those which are true due to self-consistency within the linguistic form, not to any reference to fact. On the other hand, synthetic statements are generally regarded as true in their reference to observation or fact. As Quine describes, analyticity and synthetic truths can be thought to correspond to Leibniz's "distinction between truths of reason and truths of fact."

Quine's eventual position is that the boundary between analytic and synthetic truths is an

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[32] Dewey, John. *The Essential Dewey Vol.* 2. Ed. Alexander, Thomas M. and Hickman, Larry A.,(Indiana University Press, 1998), 111-112.

[33] Quine, W.V. Quintessence. Ed. Gibson, Roger F. Jr (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 31.

imagined one. As he writes, his suggestion is that "it is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement. Taken collectively, science has its double dependence upon language and experience, but this duality is not significantly traceable into the statements of science taken one by one."[34] By this Quine means that statements are not made true merely by linguistic and logical self-consistency nor by merely reference to fact. Instead, analyticity and syntheticity are both in play whenever we are looking for the truth of a statement, and that we must not only look for the truth of single scientific statements, but we must look to the "whole of science," as Quine describes it, for truth.

Like Dewey, Quine as well argues that meaning must be understood in terms of use. In other words, the meaning of a thing, or object in the world is not merely the name of the thing. The meaning of a thing determines the way in which the object is used within a social context. The meaning of a thing points to some future experience, or use. For example, the meaning of the word "proton" for a scientist is to allow for further study of the molecular structure of things. The concept of proton allows for further understanding and communication within a social context. As Quine writes, "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body."[35] Truth is meaningless isolated from a social context. Hypotheses are made true not only for the individual that makes them but so they may be communicated and used within society at large. Although Dewey argues for this idea more extensively, both Quine and Dewey understand this integral part for any theory of truth, that truth is socially borne.

Quine speaks of science as a collection of beliefs and statements which must be "kept squared with experience."[36] In other words, science and our cultural beliefs must always be readjusted

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[34] Quine, 51.
[35] Quine, 49.
[36] Quine, 52.

according to new experience. Thus, Quine states "no statement is immune to revision."[37] No statement is ever completely self-consistently true forever, nor made conclusively true through experience. Instead, statements must be revised as new information and new experiences arise. As well, as the needs of society change so must our truths.

In terms of Quine's use of the concept of pragmatism, he writes that he holds a "more thorough pragmatism" than Carnap and Lewis, his philosophical predecessors within the so-called analytic tradition. He writes that, "each man is given a scientific heritage plus a continuing barrage of sensory stimulation," and that when this scientific heritage is changed to accommodate new experience rationally then we are being pragmatic.[38] To me, Quine's "pragmatism" does not garner the thoroughness of Dewey's pragmatism, as in this quote pragmatism seems to mean a kind of utility, or efficient system of keeping our system of beliefs consistent with one another. Quine seems to be equating rationality with being pragmatic. For Dewey, our scientific heritage and cultural beliefs are attenuated correctly when they allow for a deeper and diversified number of ends to be reached, not just when our ideas remain consistent. I do not believe this is what Quine here has in mind with the use of the word "pragmatic." Thus, to be pragmatic for Dewey is much more than mere consistency within our rational beliefs. To show this will be the purpose of the rest of this essay.

Dewey's larger vision of pragmatism

In his essay *The Problem of Truth* Dewey argues for pragmatism as a third approach to philosophy and understanding truth, as opposed to what have traditionally been called the idealist (consistency) and realist (correspondence) methods of philosophy. Much of the article is a so-called history of these traditions. While, in the third part of the essay Dewey seeks to set pragmatism apart from these two schools of thought as a method for doing philosophy which accepts the scientific

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37 Quine, 51.
38 Quine, 53.

method and seeks to make philosophy again instrumental within our common societal life.

Dewey begins the article by discussing the way in which truth traditionally, and rightly has meant what is adopted by cultural custom in terms of "regulating the affairs" of individuals within a society. He writes, "Truth, as a noun singular, practically always means a conclusion to which one should pay heed, a general view of things upon which one should regulate one's affairs."[39] As I remarked earlier, we as philosopher's can no longer afford to make truth an abstract rational concept, or a property of statements which correspond to an object correctly, instead we must be able to enlarge common sense notions of truth to become philosophical. Truth-telling is much more than accurately reporting the facts of a given situation. Instead, telling the truth is giving an honest account of things which may be used for further societal benefit, diversification, and integration. As Dewey puts this, "to represent things as they are is to represent them in ways that tend to maintain a common understanding; to misrepresent them is to injure…the conditions of common understanding."[40]

Reductionist or correspondence theories of truth fail to realize that when a statement is made in reference to fact, the statement is no mere copying of the thing referenced. This is analogous to the discussion I lightly touched upon about the concept of meaning in Quine's work; statement-making, or meaning-making, is not merely naming a thing, but giving an account of how one might understand something in a future experience. When a child learns to recognize a ripe apple as being red in color, he is not merely recognizing the inherent qualities of the apple, but is instead realizing how to make a statement about the apple which has a reference within social and communicative situations. Red apples mean ripe apples, apples which are good to eat, and which will serve their purpose. In other words, "the report, the communication, is not the thing over again; it is an account, a taking stock of the thing…in terms of something beyond the thing itself." Further, "this something beyond is the place the

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[39] Dewey, 102.
[40] "Dewey, 103.

thing occupies in the current scheme of social customs."[41]

Thus, Dewey frees us from the epistemological commitments of the empirical correspondence tradition that a true idea must be a correct copying into some mental entity of the thing in question. As Locke argued that a true idea must be an idea linked correspondently to direct perceptions, Dewey removes us from this one-to-one correspondence impossibility to see that instead the meaning of a thing is beyond the thing; it cannot be a mere copying. Instead, when we report, or make statements and propositions in reference to things, we are always referencing some future experience, or social communication.

To understand the intent of Dewey in taking up a third method of philosophy, namely pragmatism, we must better understand what is meant by the idealistic (consistency) schools and the realist (correspondence) schools. Dewey writes that by idealist he means the method of philosophy which assumes that truth is the "complete, comprehensive, self-consistent meaning of existences."[42] Dewey and Quine both realize the problem with this definition of, or method of understanding truth. For Quine, the idealist position is that there are analytic propositions which hold self-consistently true with no reference to external affairs. Dewey constantly argues that the flaw with this notion of truth lies in the fact that propositions do not stand by themselves. As I have already remarked, a proposition intends to reference something beyond itself, a proposition does something because it is always a tentative hypothesis that must be worked out. Thus, self-consistency within a proposition is only what Dewey calls the *formal* mark of truth as opposed to *material* truth which "means that the consistent idea or judgment states something existing, outside its own existence, in the way that thing actually is."[43] Of course then the material notion of truth corresponds to the realist method.

Quine, on the other hand criticizes the self-consistency, idealistic notion of truth by arguing that

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41 Dewey, 105.
42 Dewey, 111.
43 Dewey, 112.

if we really inspect our notions of analytic and synthetic truths then we find that they begin to dissolve into one another. For Quine, there are two types of statements traditionally believed to be analytic statements. The first of these are those that we would call *"logically"* true. His example of this type of statement is the proposition that "No unmarried man is married." We here see that this type of statement need not reference anything outside of itself to be made true. Instead, the terms within the statement make the statement self-consistently true. As Quine puts this, the statement remains logically true, "under all reinterpretations of its components other than the logical particles."[44] The logical particles here being 'un' and 'no.' Thus, as Quine rightly argues no matter what the interpretation of 'man' is within the sentence the statement remains true. However, the sentence is a tautology, a truism, as it references only itself. For Dewey the statement "no unmarried man is married" is not *intellectually speaking* a proposition. It is just a mere statement as it is not tentative and does not allow itself to be worked out in future experience as a hypothesis. As Dewey writes, the pragmatist position holds that "a statement, a proposition, in just the degree in which it has a genuinely intellectual quality, implies a doubt concerning its own truth and a *search* for truth, an inquiry for it." Furthermore, "the proposition which asserts or assumes its own truth is either a sheer prejudice, a congealed dogmatism; or else it is not an *intellectual* or logical proposition at all, but simply a linguistic memorandum."

Differing views of Quine and Dewey on pragmatism

Let me now turn to Quine's closing remarks about science and pragmatism in the *Two Dogmas* essay. He describes that pragmatism figures into our decisions when we must account for an experience which goes against any theoretical truth models of a current time within science. He writes that we have a "vaguely pragmatic inclination to adjust one strand of the fabric of science rather than another in accommodating some particular recalcitrant experience." He goes on to say that,

[44] Quine, 32.

"conservatism figures in such choices, and so does the quest for simplicity."[45] I think it is plain to see that within these remarks Quine is equating pragmatism to conservatism, especially in reference to our cultural system of beliefs. Once again, pragmatism for Quine is tied to the quest for simplicity of natural laws and the efficiency of amending paradigms instead of replacing them with wholly new ones, as well there seems to be no societal component for Quine's philosophical pragmatism. I do not think we can afford to equate the pragmatism of Dewey and Quine.

It is perhaps best in the end to see Quine as a kind of idealist in the way that he uses the term pragmatism. He writes that "total science," or what we might say for him would be something like the totality of natural laws, must be "kept squared with experience" at the edges, and that the rest of the system "with all its elaborate myths and fictions, has as its objective the simplicity of laws."[46] The object of these models is to make sense of the universe within one kind of framework, one realm of laws, in other words, "the simplicity of laws." I thus call Quine an idealist because he does seem to think that truth is a kind of self-consistent, simple, logical, mathematical natural law. This law would be the total of science and would be unified by the most abstract models. However, Quine also fits into Dewey's discussion of the realist position, as Quine seems to believe that some mental "idea," or conception must roughly correspond to the conditions in question for a statement to be made true, and due to the fact that he argues that there is no sharp divide between analytic and synthetic statements which is a position Dewey would necessarily hold. The difference between analytic and synthetic statements for the Deweyan pragmatist lies in the point of view from which we are seeking truth. As discussed earlier, the *formal* mark of truth, the mark of logical self-consistency necessarily means that a proposition has a higher likelihood to be true, but this mark of truth is not the common sense, nor the honest intellectual's notion of what it means for something to be truthful.

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[45] Quine, 53.
[46] Quine, 52.

For the rest of the essay I want to discuss Dewey's conception of pragmatism, the way in which the theory is scientific, and the purpose of pragmatism and science in liberating human purpose. One main argument of Dewey's in describing his version of pragmatism in contrast to realist and idealist theories is that both realist and idealist philosophies have generally regarded truth to be found in a proposition by testing the proposition against antecedent conditions. For example let us take the proposition "Julius Caesar was killed by Brutus." For the realist, or correspondence theorist this sentence is made true if we can count as verification the records of history which say this is a past event. For the idealist, truth exists "ready-made" within the proposition if it is logically true, although it must as well be previously verified."[47] But for the pragmatist propositions are forward looking. Dewey writes, "every proposition is a hypothesis referring to an inquiry still to be undertaken (a proposal in short) its truth is a matter of a career, of its history; that it becomes or is *made* true (or false) in process of fulfilling or frustrating in use its own proposal."[48] But really, for Dewey as I have already remarked, this kind of statement is not an intellectual proposition at all. It is merely a piece of rote memorization, a dogma, a fact.

Instead, a proposition is a hypothesis; a truly intellectual proposition holds within it the method for testing and finding the truth of what is sought. If we investigate this idea further, we also realize that there is no end to a hypothesis. For example, the hypothesis that material bodies are made of atomic and subatomic particles has not yet played out its career. Each hypothesis, subsequent experiment, and results phase only lead to another more diverse, deeper hypothesis. Knowledge does not move toward a monistic whole, but instead requires increased diversification and deepening of understanding. The purpose and method of science is not conservatism as Quine remarked, but to get at truth at whatever cost necessary, no matter what dogmas may stand in the way. The purpose of Dewey's pragmatic

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47 Dewey, 114.
48 Dewey, 114.

philosophy is not to merely amend paradigms to keep our system of beliefs consistent, but to revolutionize both belief and behavior through directed inquiry.

Dewey, when articulating his version of pragmatism within *The Problem of Truth* essay, constantly argues that the problem with the realist, correspondence, empirical tradition lies in the fact that the theory must posit some "unique and undefinable meaning for this particular case of correspondence."[49] Namely, the correspondence theorist must posit a mental entity, or "idea," which corresponds directly to the thing for which it represents. However, if we inspect the situation this is not what an idea is at all, instead to *know* something is to know how that something would probably react as a functioning factor within a given situation.

I must as well comment upon the notion of the progression of knowledge toward truth within Dewey's work and his conception of pragmatism. By now it should be clear that for the Deweyan pragmatist, a proposition is *intellectual* in proportion to its tentative quality. A proposition is forward looking and intends to use experience of antecedent conditions to hypothesize what will happen under different future conditions. Thus, for the pragmatist statements and ideas that were once propositions grow into facts, or furthermore *truths*. The distinction between facts and truths lie in the way they are used within a social or interactive context. As Dewey writes, "after all a catalogue is not the truth of things,"[50] and thus facts are mere rote memorandums of previous events, while truths and knowledge have bearing upon current and future social situations and the way in which individuals within these situations interact. However, the strictly scientific hypothesis is social as well as the scientist is setting up a situation in which he wants the independent factors to act in a certain way. And, the scientist himself and his hypotheses and propositions play a factor in the experience themselves. As Dewey deftly writes, both the proposition and the "things to which the meaning or statement is applied, upon

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[49] Dewey, 118.
[50] Dewey, 102.

which it is used, therefore constitute an indispensable factor in the way it works out, whether to failure or success, and so of its being *made* true or false."[51]

Conclusions

Dewey ends *The Problem of Truth* essay with an explanation of how the scientific method, and thus the pragmatic method have played a role in the social change and liberation of the 20th century. Prior to the scientific revolution of the 19th and early 20th centuries human purpose was subjugated to long traditions of religious dogmatism and authoritarian rule. However, science in its method created for the first time a new society in which human purpose could be reevaluated, criticized and reconstructed. Dewey writes that "the role of scientific truth in the social medium is an emancipation of goods, purposes and activities, producing the transition from a stationary society to a progressive society."[52] Furthermore, progress is not merely gaining greater control of the world around of us. Instead, a progressive society will be "one that makes provision for continual enrichment of its own substance," and this is "impossible without continuous variation of its concrete aims."[53] Thus, a progressive society seeks new purposes and ends instead of relying on the laurels of past tradition and thinking. Because of these statements from Dewey I view his version of pragmatism and the pragmatism of Quine to be wholly different. While Quine argued that pragmatism is necessary to amend our scientific heritage, Dewey's pragmatism seeks to have a social impact, to create a progressive society where new and novel experiences are created and enjoyed. Pragmatism *and* the scientific method are conjoined in that they both view intellectual propositions to be hypotheses which are directed at achieving certain future ends.

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51 Dewey, 118.
52 Dewey, 123.
53 Dewey, 125.

CHAPTER 4

PLATO, PROTAGORAS, AND PRAGMATISM: HOW DEWEY'S HUMANIST PHILOSOPHY OVERCOMES THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE *THEAETETUS*

Reading a philosopher who wrote millennia ago poses its own challenge due to the breadth of time which history hath wrought in the meantime, but on the positive the discussion is much the richer and the perspective for the modern writer on Plato enlarged. Philosophers today also have our numerous Platonic doctrines by which to interpret our texts perhaps serving as a boundary impeding a full understanding of the complexity and vast array of ideas investigated within each dialogue. Specifically, within the *Theaetetus*, Klaus Oehler commenting on F.C.S Schiller's 1908 essay on the subject writes that "the tone that Plato employs in attributing a certain argumentation to Protagoras is strikingly tentative, hesitant, and insecure; the same holds true for his presentation of the conclusions drawn from the arguments." As well, "it is not correct, according to Schiller, that the argumentation of the speech is refuted."[54] What Oehler refers to as Plato's "hesitant" and "strikingly tentative" tone in reference to his presentation of Protagorean philosophy within the *Theaetetus* should be attributed to Plato's general tendency in the end to hold to his inherent idealist entrenchments. I find that Protagoras's speech and subsequently Plato and the young Theaetetus' discussion about it to be the most substantive and relevant content for the purposes of this paper. I will discuss how Protagoras's character in the *Theaetetus* intimates integral parts of Dewey's philosophy. The *Theaetetus* reaches no certain conclusion, like so many of Plato's dialogues, and I want to propose like Oehler and others that Protagoras's character and the philosophical view he heralds, and the pragmatist, what we might call humanist philosophy of Dewey which seems to be a furthering of Protagorean views is able to solve the problems of knowledge proposed by Plato in the *Theaetetus*.

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[54] Oehler, Klaus. "Protagoras from the Perspective of Modern Pragmatism." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 38/1/2 (Winter/Spring, 2002), 207.

General Outline of Theaetetus and Plato's method

In P.S. Burrell's 1932 article, "Man the Measure of All Things: Socrates Versus Protagoras*"* Burrell realizes that often the most fruitful method for reading Plato's dialogues at large is to "by a careful study of the form and content of the argument in close connection, with the aid of such hints from other dialogues as seem relevant, endeavor to find out what particular aspect of truth the dialogue was designed to establish." As well, Burrell argues that often Plato's dialogues were written in such a way as to not establish a truth, but to disavow some position or previously held belief of the interlocutors.[55] The objective of the *Theaetetus* is to establish a definition of knowledge, and to disavow the young Theaetetus of his view that "knowledge is perception." As Burrell writes, "the burning question seems to be *what* exactly" the "typical observer observes – a sensum (sense datum), or state of the subject, or a thing of which the sensum is a sign or gesture," and whether "the sense are public and objective, or private and subjective, or public and private."[56] These questions are as well the foundations of modern philosophical discourse. Since the main issue of the *Theaetetus* revolves around whether or not perception can be equated with knowledge, the question of whether sensory experiences are objective or subjective, public or private will be of utmost importance.

The *Theaetetus* can be broken up into three parts. The first part consists of Socrates discussing his art of 'widwifery' and the beginning discussion of "knowledge as perception," and the first testing of this principle as it relates to Protagoras' *homo mensura* principle. The second part consists of Protagoras' speech and a reconsideration of his philosophy. The third part details more distinct arguments for *what* exactly *knowledge is*, though a determinate conclusion is never reached. Socrates' "maieutic" method, his art of midwifery, is meant to allow a student, or interlocutor's own ideas and

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55 Burrell, P.S. "Man the Measure of All Things: Socrates Versus Protagoras (I)." *Philosophy* 7,25 (January 1932), 28.

56 Burrell, 29-30.

beliefs to be tested.[57] Socrates wishes to deliver the young Theaetetus of a "wind-egg" or help him to develop his own "fertile truth."[58] Though Socrates in the *Theaetetus* uses the slightly comedic term midwifery to describe his method of doing philosophy, the method which he describes in the dialogue also is the same method by which Socrates actually practiced and which Plato carried on in writing the dialogues at large. As Burrell described the Platonic method, "the testing process consisted in the process of cross-examination by question and answer to determine whether any given view was self-consistent or self-contradictory. If the latter, the interlocutor could be convinced that he was mistaken, and did not know what he thought he did know." He goes on to say that with this method comes humility and thus an ability to find and know the truth, and that "this method was a novelty, the discovery of Socrates. It was the critical or logical method."[59] At once, the Socratic method, the method of midwifery, was a brilliant stroke of genius which has persisted through to the modern scientific method, but in reference to the dialogues because of the method at some points it is hard for the reader to determine what Plato himself actually meant to argue, or by which position he stood. As I said, by the end of the *Theaetetus* no conclusion is made to what knowledge is due to Socrates' insistent testing through the logical method, and because Plato fails to see the strength of humanist philosophy due to his inherent idealist entrenchment.

Throughout the literature authors remark that due to Plato's idealist bent he consistently missed the strength of what we now call "humanist" or "pragmatist" philosophies which Protagoras definitively heralded, if we are to take as accurate the presentation of his theories in the *Theaetetus*. Oehler remarks, "Plato's lack of comprehension is proven by the fact that Protagoras's theory contains the solution to the very problem with which Plato struggles in the *Theaetetus*, namely the problem of

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[57] Burrell, p. 32

[58] Plato. *Complete* Works. Ed by. Cooper, John M. (Hackett Publishing, 1997), 167, 150c.

[59] Burrell, 32.

truth and error."[60] Oehler also adeptly observes that Plato failed to see the strength of Protagoras's humanist philosophy as a theory of knowledge, or overall philosophical outlook because he "limits the *homo mensura* principle to sense perception."[61] So, what "solution" is revealed in reference to truth and error in Protagorean, humanist, or pragmatist philosophies and what would be the problem with Plato limiting the concept of *homo mensura* to only sense perception?

In reference to the problem of truth and error Protagoras in his speech claims that the difficulty lies in the fact that we have misinterpreted what "truth" means. He does this by saying that all perceptions are *true* as they are experienced; we can also judge which perceptions are *better* than others, and thus we may also speak of evil and wise men. So at first, just because humanism claims that 'man is the measure' we are not left in skepticism with regard to good and evil, or with a complete subjectivity of values. Plato writes, "when a man's soul is in a pernicious state, he judges things akin to it," and conversely, "giving him a sound state of the soul causes him to think different things, things that are good." Further, "in the latter event, the things which appear to him are what some people, who are still at a primitive stage, call 'true'; my position, however, is that one kind are *better* than the others, but in no way *truer*."[62] John E. Booden in his 1911 article "From Protagoras to William James" describes why asserting that values are relative or based on perspective does not mean that values are subjective. He writes, "the doctrine of the relativity of values Protagoras inherited from Heraclitus...showed that values depend upon the relation of the object to the specific will, whether that of ass, or ox, or fish, or hog, or surgeon." He goes on to say that "relativity of values to the will does not mean subjectivity of values. We can predict values for definite wills."[63]

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[60] Oehler, 208.

[61] Oehler, 211.

[62] Plato, 186, 167b.

[63] Booden, John E. "From Protagoras to William James." *The Monist*, 21,1 (January, 1911), 74.

All this being said, Plato in his presentation of Socrates misses the fact that "value" plays an essential role in any "formal claim" to truth. As Oehler writes, "every statement asserts that something *is* or *is not*, and with this assertion it implicitly makes a claim to truth – independently of its actual truth value, which might become clear only retrospectively, through empirical observation."[64] For Protagoras, and for pragmatism "all truths are values," and thus "examination in and through praxis constitutes the bridge that closes the gap between truth claim and validity."[65] For Plato and Socrates however, though praxis was important, their idealist notions of knowledge and truth paint a different picture. Dewey wrote that Plato's "standpoint and method furnish…the elements of a typical and enduring definition of truth: the idealistic notion of truth as the complete, comprehensive, self-consistent meaning of existences."[66] Those within this strain of idealism which includes Plato and his teacher Socrates, do not claim that truth is a correspondence between subject and object, but instead that ideas correspond to supranatural, eternal concepts which are often interpreted as Plato's 'forms.' As Plato says numerous times throughout the *Theaetetus* he is seeking to examine ideas in reference to themselves to check for their consistency, not in reference to any external empirical test. So it is that Plato's notion of truth consistently favored formal claims to truth over value claims, or practical trial.

Dewey's humanist instrumentalism overcomes the problems of the consistency and correspondence notions of truth

In John M. Cooper's article, "Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge*"* he carefully explains the ways in which we might and have traditionally interpreted the philosophical implications of Plato's mind and body dualism and the role in which this dualism played in his theory of knowledge. Cooper breaks interpretations into two "broad classes." The one class would hold that Plato rejected the idea

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64 Oehler, 210.

65 Oehler, 210.

66 Dewey, John. *The Essential Dewey, Vol.2*. Ed by Hickman, Larry A. and Alexander, Thomas M. (Indiana University Press, 1998), 111.

sense played a role in knowledge because "the objects which we perceive are not the sort of objects which one could have knowledge, only the unchanging Forms can be known." Cooper goes on to say that the other class would hold that knowledge cannot be equated with perception because knowledge is a process or inquiry *about* sense-experience. As he writes, "the thinking we do *about* the deliverances of the sense, and not the mere *use* of the senses is the source of knowledge."[67] Cooper aligns himself with this interpretation, but I would take it one step further and say that sense is also enhanced and deepened when knowledge is on the scene.

As in all philosophical discussions, the term *knowledge* must be dealt with carefully as we are often thinking about it in a technical sense; we are looking for a definition of *knowledge itself*. When Plato asks of the nature of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* he is looking for a definition of knowledge in this technical and philosophic sense. In Dewey's 1911 monograph *The Problem of Truth* he shows us that any technical philosophical definition of truth must also be understood as it relates to common experience, by the practical difference it makes in the human organism's life. Dewey opens the article by writing that "to the lay mind it is a perplexing thing that the nature of truth should be a vexed problem. That such is the case seems another illustration of Berkeley's remark about the proneness of philosophers to throw dust in their own eyes and then complain they cannot see."[68] Instead, of taking a top-down idealist approach to the problem of knowledge imagining that knowledge and thinking is set apart from common experience, bodily function, and intuition, a pragmatic, instrumentalist, humanist approach to the problem of knowledge allows us to see thinking as an emergent function of human and higher organisms interacting with their environment.

For Dewey and the modern humanist or pragmatist we must understand that though there are

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[67] Cooper, John M. "Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (Theaetetus 184-186)." *Phronesis*, 15, 2 (1970), 123. Cited Hereon as Cooper, p. #.

[68] Dewey, 101.

numerous technical and philosophical discussions of truth and knowledge which we may have, mostly related to "formal" claims of truth for the idealist or analytic, we cannot forget to refigure these speculations about pure thinking against our common experience. Traditionally philosophical theories of knowledge have divided into two very rough schools, the idealist and empiricist schools, or as Dewey calls them in *The Problem of Truth*, the "consistency" and "correspondence" schools respectively. For the consistency or idealist schools as I have already alluded to, knowledge claims are found to be true when an idea is self-consistent and non-contradictory in relation to the "thoughts themselves." The traditional empiricist or correspondence schools held that a knowledge claim is true when the idea "represents" the object in the physical world in a corresponding way, if the representation as idea is in some way equal to the actual object, or truly discriminates its character. Though the formal idealist and the correspondence notions of truth are factors in the truth of a statement or knowledge claim, Dewey reminds us that they fail to grasp the whole realm of which knowledge entails.

The traditional idealist view fails because mind is not separate from body nor thinking separated from sensuous experience. The empiricist, or correspondence views fail in the end because they fail to grasp the purposiveness of knowledge as a human behavior. In short, knowledge is a type of behavior which allows us as organisms to greater understand the world around us, and to deepen and diversify our experience and our possibilities. Dewey explains the shortcomings of the empiricist, correspondence tradition deftly when he remarks, "the report, the communication, is not the thing over again; it is an account, a taking stock of the thing. This story, or elucidation, must necessarily be in terms of something beyond itself; this something beyond is the place the thing occupies in the current scheme of social customs."[69] Further, one of the problems Plato struggles with most in the *Theaetetus* and in his work at large is his inability to describe the nature of error. The pragmatist, or humanist has

[69] Dewey, 105.

no problem explaining what error is and how it arises. Dewey writes, "to give an incoherent account of anything is to prompt a number of incompatible and mutually destructive reactions. When a man's statements contradict one another he contradicts *himself* and thereby destroys his social utility; he is divided against himself and therefore unreliable."[70] Thus, we know truth and error from their real world impact.

For Dewey, knowledge in a technical philosophical sense is always an instrumental function of an organism interacting with its environment. Knowledge or true meaning does not reside as the idealist holds only in the mind, nor as the empiricist holds in the physical object itself. Instead, knowledge is a relation, an instrumentality between organism and its object. As Dewey puts this, "meaning is not indeed a psychic existence; it is primarily a property of behavior, and secondarily a property of objects," going on to say that "possession of the capacity to engage in such activity [meaning-making] is intelligence. Intelligence and meaning are natural consequences of the peculiar form which interaction sometimes assumes in the case of human beings."[71]

Concluding Remarks

To bring the paper full circle we now must discuss Dewey's pragmatic instrumentalism as it relates to Protagoras' *homo mensura* philosophy and as the solution to the riddles of the nature of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. The most common objection raised against so-called 'humanist' philosophies is that if values are relative to the perceiver then values are subjective. Earlier in the paper I described that one of Dewey's fundamental principles of pragmatism is that things "are what they are experienced as being." He lays this idea out in the *The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism* and he shares this fundamental belief with the character of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* and with most humanist philosophers who hold that truth is in some sense perspectival. Thus we arrive at our

[70] Dewey, 105.

[71] Dewey, 55.

problem, or critique. How are we to assess perceptions, to judge which are better or worse or actually True in reference to knowledge claims, or statements? As Socrates puts the conundrum further, why is it not that "'Pig is the measure of all things' or 'Baboon' or some yet more out-of-the-way creature with the power of perception."[72] Why is it that man is the measure of all things?

Well, this is only true in a sense; we are the measure because we are the dominant species capable of widespread discourse and communication. While other species certainly influence and use our world, in no way does another species of Earth dominate it's resources nor utilize its resources as we do. As well, as human beings we have the ability to judge the perceptions of a pig or baboon while they may not be able to fully understand all we experience. A pig may know it is being slaughtered, but it knows not for whom it is being slaughtered. As humans, we are able to know and perceive the entire community of events which lead the pig to its end and out of which it was born. Since knowledge *is itself* the understanding of this 'community of events,' since knowledge is a "peculiar form" of human behavior and interaction in a technical philosophic sense as Dewey teaches us, human's may measure their world and impact it and grow with it, or destroy and suffer with it out of ignorance and pride. But, all this is beside the point, Protagoras' character reveals to us the solution to our present problem and the problem of the *Theaetetus*, which is what is knowledge in itself?

We are mistaken at the heart of the matter for we have misused the name of Truth. We have made it a static reference to abstract states of mind, or ideas, or a correspondence between idea and reality, but the truth of the matter is that Truth entails vitality, connection, diversity and deepening of experience and possibilities, as Protagoras might say a “betterment” of our condition. Further, traditionally as philosophers when we have asked the nature of truth we have really meant what is a *true idea*, and this distinction is paramount. Even more, the philosophical problem of defining an *idea* is to often formulated in incorrect terms as we portray an idea as a kind of mental entity which is

[72] Plato, p, 179, 161c.

complete in itself and does not change. For example, we might consider an Idea something like the proposition 'everything is made of particles.' I think we can all agree that this kind of statement, or proposition is traditionally what we have held to be an idea singular. Or better yet, the statement or proposition is a formulation or linguistic representation of the mental entity, or idea in question. On the idealist or "consistency" side of things, the idea is true if the idea in question fits into the working network of other ideas within the mind. On the realist, empiricist, or "correspondence" side of things the idea is held true if it "matches" a given physical experience of the object or objects to which the statement pertains. However, I hold, Dewey held, and the humanist pragmatist philosopher must believe that there is no singular entity called an idea. Instead, as I have continuously argued thinking is a kind of behavior and we will know knowledge when we see the positive fruits brought into being by its occurrence. As well, a statement or proposition *does not* copy the idea, and is not equal to the physical objects that generated the proposition and to which the proposition refers.

Remember Dewey's argument in *The Problem of Truth* here, he understood that a proposition "the report, the communication is not the thing over again; it is an account, a taking stock of the thing. This story, or elucidation must necessarily be in terms of something beyond the thing itself."[73] So, propositions, or the thinking on which propositions are based do not copy physical objects but instead are intended to direct future behavior and experiences. Thus, truth is neither a 'correspondence,' nor a property of ideas when they are self-consistent with themselves. I'm so strongly urging this point because I want us to realize the nature of ideas and thoughts themselves in order to show that they are neither mental "entities," nor discrete atomic "ideas" which are "copies" of sensuous experience. When we ponder the statement 'everything is made of particles' we realize that the supposed singular idea or proposition expands infinitely; the statement of one tentative answer opens up numerous questions.

We cannot isolate any statement or proposition as a singular idea, nor a thought as singular

[73] Dewey, 105.

thought, because the process of thought is itself the result of a behaving organism in transaction with its environment. As William James argued in his ground breaking psychological work which deeply influenced the young Dewey, thought is not made of discrete ideas which stand alone from the whole complex of thought. Instead, we must realize the dynamism involved in thinking and realize it as a *stream of consciousness*. Let me emphasize again there is no distinct difference between mind and body. As Dewey puts it, the term mental or psychical "denotes a *function* of things, not a special structure. Even if there are psychic ghosts, or reduplicates of things, they are not cognitive in their existence, but in their use, so that the entire problem of knowledge is the same as if there were none."[74] When we treat the *function* which is thought as a thing in itself, as if it stands alone in its own 'mental' realm, we commit "what goes in philosophy by the evil name of hypostasizing."[75]

To close the paper I need to connect two divergent lines of argumentation. First, I have tried to present the case of pragmatism as a theory of knowledge overcoming the pitfalls which the realist, correspondence, or empiricist tradition, and the idealist, self-consistency tradition contain. The pragmatist theory of truth differs from these two theories in numerous ways. The pragmatist does not hold that ideas are entities or things in themselves, instead consciousness is always in flux and thought is itself the kind of behavior by which an organism tries to control and impact future experience. What we may call truth or knowledge is identified at the culmination of a sustained inquiry that *works*. I find one of my own reservations when I first began work understanding Dewey's theory of instrumentalism was my want to equate the idea that we have knowledge when it works with a kind of utilitarian efficiency. However, for Dewey an idea *works* and is true not just because it creates products for consumption or material efficiency, but instead when it opens up human possibilities and deepens our lived experience. Pragmatism as a theory of knowledge also subverts the problem of how an idea must

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[74] Dewey, 129, note 8.

[75] Dewey, 119.

‘correspond’ or match a physical object, or how ideas fit consistently together by realizing that thought is a function not a thing in itself.

The second string of argumentation is exactly how we may take 'man to be the measure,' and what humanist philosophies, especially Dewey's pragmatic instrumentalism have to say for what knowledge is. Knowledge is not a private matter though perceptions may be relative to the experiencer. Instead, knowledge, better said Truth must be seen as a social matter. Throughout his essay *The Problem of Truth* Dewey consistently remarks that truth to the common man is never an abstract property of 'ideas' but instead is a social fact communicated through women and men of good character. The truth pushes us as a society forward and into deeper and more honest communication with one another. As to how we may see 'man as the measure' when it comes to the pursuit of knowledge I will leave us with a fine quote from Dewey and his conclusion to the aforementioned essay. He writes, “to know is the characteristically human enterprise – a thing for men, not for gods or beasts. And since the good of humanity has ever to be secured anew in an untried and precarious future, knowing is not the condescension of reduplicating a nature that already is, but is the turning of that nature to account in behalf of consequences. And objective truth is the free outworking of nature so interpreted into an intercourse more secure, more varied and more free.”[76]

[76] Dewey, 129.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

We should see by now the brilliance and importance of Dewey's instrumentalism as a radically distinct theory of knowledge opposed to both the traditional idealistic and empiricist views of knowledge. Dewey shows us how consciousness and thinking are not distinct from our bodily or cultural context. Instead, reflective knowledge allows us as human beings to further enrich our experience. In my thesis, I have used the works of Hegel, Quine, and Plato to show how Dewey fits into the historical philosophical tradition. As a thinker profoundly effected by Hegel, Dewey believed that consciousness is itself a development and function of a complex organism. We need not and must not take the 'critical point of view' when discussing consciousness and thinking. Instead, to truly understand the nature of thinking and consciousness we need to show how these functions emerge from our experience. Perhaps I can best end my project with a quote from one of Dewey's most important early works. He writes, “while reflective knowing is instrumental to gaining control in a troubled situation (and thus has a practical or utilitarian force), it is also instrumental to the enrichment of the immediate significance of subsequent experiences.” And further, “it may well be that this by-product, this gift of the gods, is incomparably more valuable for living a life than is the primary and intended result of control, essential as is that control to having a life to live.”[77]

[77] Dewey, John. *Essays in Experimental Logic*. Ed. Hester, Micah and Talisse, Robert (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 2007), 10.

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