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Richard E. Sommerfeld

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_sommerfeldr@csl.edu

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THE NATURE OF MAN
IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOHN DEWEY

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

Richard E. Sommerfeld

June 1954

Approved by:

Arthur C. Repp
Advisor

A. G. Merkins
Reader

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CHAPTER I

PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHOD

The purpose of this study has been to find, through an examination of John Dewey's writings, his thoughts and ideas on the question of the nature of man. Dewey has never spoken out on this subject directly. There is only a paragraph here and a sentence there. By employing these sentences and paragraphs as they came from Dewey's pen, a systematic and valid presentation of Dewey's position has been prepared.

The scope of this study has been the writings of John Dewey. Of course, Dewey did not in every book, much less in every article, address himself directly or indirectly to the question of the nature of man. The greater bulk of Dewey's literary output has been searched, however, for references to the problem. In general only Dewey's own words have been used. In some instances a quotation has been drawn in from a critic or a supporter of Dewey. This was done to illuminate a point that Dewey himself had already made. Secondary sources have not been used for the primary presentation. Unless otherwise noted in the text itself, all quotations are from the pen of John Dewey. Where anyone else is quoted, that author is named in an introductory sentence.

Dewey himself has been allowed to speak. This study is not an interpretation. In fact, interpretation of any kind has been studiously avoided. From the mass of Dewey's works an abundance of quotations have been drawn that refer to the problem at hand. These were arranged in such a fashion that Dewey has addressed himself, with some degree of continuity, to the problem that has been set up. It will be necessary to tie the quotations from Dewey together with words of context and time, but nothing has been either added or subtracted from what Dewey himself had said.

There are "jumps" in the progression of Dewey's thought as this study has presented it. However, the reader must remember that

Unfortunately his [Dewey's] psychological discussions are scattered throughout his various writings, and nowhere systematically developed. To a large extent they are programmatic, lacking the details which are so necessary to convert an insight into a directing hypothesis.¹

The content and the arrangement of the chapters in this study reflect the endeavor to place the study within the framework of Dewey's philosophical thought. The reader will note that all chapters have been related to social interaction. Chapter V, The Soul, is an exception. However, this chapter of antithetical nature is necessary for an understanding of subsequent chapters, which are socially related.

¹Sidney Hook, John Dewey an Intellectual Portrait (New York: John Day Co., 1939), p. 116.

CHAPTER II

DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHIC POSITION IN RELATION TO THE PROBLEM

This chapter is not an attempt to give the reader a biography of John Dewey. That can easily be read, in rather complete form, in Schilpp's The Philosophy of John Dewey. Instead, the concern is with those experiences out of Dewey's life that together produced the background or the foundation upon which Dewey later built his personal philosophic position.

During his student days Dewey read voraciously. He was particularly interested in the philosophy of Hegel, and, as he himself later said, Hegel "left a permanent deposit" on his thinking.¹ While a student, and even more so while an instructor at the University of Michigan, Dewey came to be influenced by George S. Morris. Morris, an established philosopher at that time, was an Hegelian, but one who emphasized "a logic of the processes by which knowledge is acquired" -- a logic completely "emancipated from Hegelian garb."² The intimate relationship between Dewey and Morris

¹Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," The Philosophy of John Dewey, edited by Paul Schilpp (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1939), p. 17.

²Ibid., p. 18.

was not only on the academic plane; it was a personal friendship of mutual respect that included both families. There was one other man who had a hand in shaping Dewey's early thinking. That was George Herbert Mead. Mead, also a professor at the University of Michigan, had formulated a theory of the origin of the self through social interaction, and Dewey took this formulation over into his own philosophy.³ As a result of this relationship with Mead, Dewey was concerned throughout his life with the possibilities and the problems of social interaction.

Judging from the interest that Dewey had in Hegel and the effect that Hegel had on Dewey, it would seem anything but natural to say that Dewey harbored some thoughts of idealism. However, Morton White feels, and appears to show, that there is a movement of Dewey's thought from idealism to instrumentalism through various stages.⁴ This "transformation" as White calls it, took place in the early 1890's. This observation by White has been intentionally noted in order to point out something that the reader will find in this study of Dewey. In order to avoid the possibility of meaningless and conflicting statements in Dewey -- something that could perhaps occur if attention were centered on the transformation

³Ibid., p. 26.

⁴Morton White, The Origin of Dewey's Instrumentalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), passim.

period -- material has been drawn only from the later and more consistent years of Dewey's philosophic life. However, this means by-passing only the first ten years of Dewey's whole professional life.

One of the most important factors to remember is that Dewey is a naturalist, and

As a naturalist, he accepts the findings of science that the physical has temporal priority. But as far as man is concerned, the social is the widest and most complex mode of association into which man as a psycho-physical creature can enter. It is in social life that almost all of the qualities that we regard as distinctively human appear. And, as we shall see, in indicating wherein "the unity of the human being" lies, main emphasis falls upon the quality of inter-personal relationships which are found in the realm of the social.⁵

The social becomes the all in all for Dewey. Of course, the social situation lies within a natural setting. The point is that Dewey's social-naturalism does not recognize any other area of activity, of causal relationship, or of consequence.

Merle Boyer notes that

Naturalism as a system of metaphysics rejects any idea of causal factors existing in the universe above and apart from nature. The naturalist can see no reason for accepting the idealistic position which interprets nature as a product of an Absolute Mind.⁶

Among some philosophers there is a thought that above

⁵Sidney Hook, John Dewey an Intellectual Portrait (New York: John Day Co., 1939), pp. 118-119.

⁶Merle Boyer, Highways of Philosophy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 224.

and beyond the empirical there is the ideal, and that in some fashion the ideal transmits itself to the mind of man. Dewey would deny every syllable of the preceding. Ideals, and even mind, exist only in the social situation, and their existence is the end product of previous social action.

Dewey says that

Moreover, the ends that result from our projection of experienced goods into objects of thought, desire and effort exist, only they exist as ends. Ends, purposes, exercise determining power in human conduct. . . . Aims, ideals, do not exist simply in "mind"; they exist in character, in personality and action.⁷

The socially empirical is then the real. The human being within the social situation becomes concerned with the relationship of his action to the consequences, to a later action, and so on. Dewey indicates this assumption when he says that

Henceforth the quest for certainty becomes the search for methods of control; that is, regulations of conditions of change with respect to their consequences.⁸

Sidney Hook, one time student and long time protagonist of Dewey, has characterized Dewey as a "natural pietist." In a later portion of this study Dewey's natural piety and

⁷John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 48.

⁸John Dewey, Quest for Certainty (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1929), p. 128.

its significance for our problem will be considered. However, at this point the relationship of Dewey's natural piety to other credos can be shown. According to Sidney Hook

Supernaturalism as a creed is hard to accept for a person of intelligence and courage; atheism as a doctrine isolates man from those relations of the physical world which support human achievement. Natural piety recognizes the continuity between man and nature. It acknowledges man's kinship of origin, but not of interest or aim, with other living things. It accepts the natural limitations imposed on man's effort by the fact that he has a body, that he is a creature of time, history, and society, as a point of departure for improving the human estate. In this way natural piety avoids the servility of those who fear the gods and would placate them, as well as the arrogance of those who would be gods.⁹

Dewey's intellectual position was constantly influenced by his acceptance of the theory of evolution. As James O'Hara observed,

That which distinguishes Dewey is the undisguised assurance with which he accepts the theory of evolution.¹⁰

Sometimes this "assurance" is explicit and at other times it is implicit. But regardless of its use, if the reader is to understand Dewey's thought, the influence that evolution had in Dewey's thinking must be kept constantly in the reader's mind.

⁹Hook, op. cit., p. 214.

¹⁰James O'Hara, The Limitations of the Educational Theory of John Dewey (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1929), p. 27.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF MAN IN TERMS OF INTELLIGENCE

It ought to be noted from the very outset that this chapter is not concerned with Dewey's epistemology. The concern is with the active position of intelligence in human nature, according to the philosophy of John Dewey.

Dewey has nowhere laid down, in dictionary style, his definition of intelligence. But if the role of intelligence in human nature is to be examined, some sort of working concept of Dewey's understanding of the term intelligence will have to be available. In Dewey's words

Common sense regards intelligence as having a purpose, and knowledge as amounting to something. . . . To be reasonable is to recognize things in their office as obstacles and as resources. Intelligence, in its ordinary use, is a practical term; ability to size up matters with respect to the needs and possibilities of the various situations in which one is called to do something; capacity to envisage things in terms of the adjustments and adaptations they make possible or hinder. One objective test of the presence or absence of intelligence is influence upon behavior. No capacity to make adjustments means no intelligence; conduct evincing management of complex and novel conditions means a high degree of reason. Such conditions at least suggest that a reality-to-be-known, a reality which is the appropriate subject-matter of knowledge is reality-of-use-and-in-use, direct or indirect, and that a reality which is not in any way of use, or bearing upon use, may go hang, so far as knowledge is concerned.¹

¹John Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1931), p. 41.

For Dewey it appears that intelligence is a product of and an instrument for the situation. If this is the case, it would be expected that Dewey would disown the concept of intelligence as an absolute to be possessed in a moment.

Thus he writes that

Intelligence is not something possessed once for all. It is in constant process of forming, and its retention requires constant alertness in observing consequences, an open-minded will to learn and courage in readjustment.²

Intelligence is a "capacity" that is "in constant process of forming," and within the frame of this capacity there is a dynamic.

Reason is experimental intelligence, conceived after the pattern of science, and used in the creation of social arts; it has something to do. It liberates man from the bondage of the past, due to ignorance and accident hardened into custom. It projects a better future and assists man in its realization. And its operation is always subject to test in experience. The plans which are formed, the principles which man projects as guides of reconstructive action are not dogmas. They are hypotheses to be worked out in practice, and to be rejected, corrected and expanded as they fail or succeed in giving our present experience the guidance it requires. We may call them programmes of action, but since they are to be used in making our future acts less blind, more directed, they are flexible.³

Accordingly we may conclude, in terms of Dewey's philosophy, that intelligence activated by reason is a constant

²John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920), pp. 89-90.

³Ibid., p. 89.

formulator of dynamic hypotheses for living -- hypotheses to be tested and re-formulated in the crucible of experience.

If we are to understand Dewey's concept of intelligence, it will be necessary to follow Dewey's formulation still further into the area of life. It is no concession to Dewey to recognize that within the scope of daily living the individual is rarely faced by such a clear-cut situation that he is able through experimental intelligence to posit one plan, and that that plan will, at most, have to be modified only in detail and not in structure. Not even experimental intelligence is able to avoid alternatives, choices, or, as Dewey himself says, "preferential action."

Preferential action in the sense of selective behavior is a universal trait of all things, atoms and molecules as well as plants, animals and man. . . . Such preferential action is not exactly what makes choice in the case of human beings. But unless there is involved in choice at least something continuous with action of other things in nature, we could impute genuine reality to it only by isolating man from nature and thus treating him as in some sense a supernatural being in the literal sense.⁴

Within the life situation the individual is faced by prominent choices, and the resulting selections have as a consequent the activation of other choices, which then come to the fore. So in choosing the individual is participating in a process.

⁴Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization, pp. 274-275.

Choice, in the distinctively human sense, then presents itself as one preference among and out of preferences; not in the sense of one preference already made and stronger than others, but as the formation of a new preference out of a conflict of preferences. If we can say upon what the formulation of this new and determinate preference depends, we are close to finding that of which we are in search. Nor does the answer seem far to seek nor hard to find. As observation and foresight develop, there is ability to form signs and symbols that stand for the interaction and movement of things, without involving us in their actual flux. Hence the new preference may reflect this operation of mind, especially the forecast of the consequences. If we sum up, pending such qualifications or such confirmation as further inquiry may supply, we may say that a stone has its preferential selections set by a relatively fixed, a rigidly set, structure and that no anticipation of the results of acting one way or another enters into the matter. The reverse is true of human action. In so far as a variable life-history and intelligent insight and foresight enter into it, choice signifies a capacity for deliberately changing preferences.⁵

Dewey nowhere makes man the absolute master of his fate. However, he does have the capacity for determining in a measure the direction of his life. The difference between these two statements may appear, at this juncture, to be slight, if not picayunish, but the distinction will become increasingly important as we proceed.

Thus far attention has been directed only to the concrete situations of life which face the individual squarely. But there is also that area of life where the individual creates a situation for himself. These created situations, aims or ideals are also a part of the nature of man in

⁵Ibid., p. 276.

terms of intelligence. Dewey's position is that

The aims and ideals that move us are generated through imagination. But they are not made out of imaginary stuff. They are made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience. . . . Imagination seized hold upon the idea of a rearrangement of existing things that would evolve new objects. The same thing is true of a painter, a musician, a poet, a philanthropist, a moral prophet. The new vision does not arise out of nothing, but emerges through seeing, in terms of possibilities, that is, of imagination, old things in new relations serving a new end which the new end aids in creating.⁶

Hence, what is serves as the raw material for creative activity.

Man has a single capacity for intelligence and intelligent activity, but this capacity is multi-faceted. At first glance, it appears that Dewey employs intelligence in two ways or according to two modes. But Dewey himself says that such is not the case.

Reflection and rational elaboration spring from and make explicit a prior intuition. But there is nothing mystical about this fact, and it does not signify that there are two modes of knowledge, one of which is appropriate to one kind of subject-matter, and the other mode to the other kind. Thinking and theorizing about physical matters set out from an intuition, and reflection about affairs of life and mind consists in an ideational and conceptual transformation of what begins as an intuition. Intuition, in short, signifies the realization of a pervasive quality such that it regulates the determination of relevant distinctions or of whatever, whether in the way of terms or relations, becomes the accepted object of thought.⁷

It now becomes clear that for Dewey all activity of the

⁶Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 49.

⁷Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization, p. 101.

intellect is oriented to the object by evaluating the object in terms of experience and making preferential selections under the influence of and awareness of consequences.

There is one phase of man's mental life that we have not considered, and that is the role and relation of emotions to the calculating will of intelligence.

The volitional phase of mental life is notoriously connected with the emotional. The only difference is that the latter is the immediate, the cross-sectional, aspect of response to the uncertain and precarious, while the volitional phase is the tendency of the reaction to modify indeterminate, ambiguous conditions in the direction of a preferred and favored outcome; to actualize one of its possibilities rather than another. Emotion is a hindrance or an aid to resolute will according as it is overwhelming in its immediacy or as it marks a gathering together of energy to deal with the situation whose issue is in doubt. Desire, purpose, planning, choice, have no meaning save in conditions where something is at stake, and where action in one direction rather than another may eventuate in bringing into existence a new situation which fulfills a need.⁸

Emotional activity is then a concomitant, either positively or negatively, of intelligence. Depending upon its use, it can be either constructive or destructive in the dynamic of experimental intelligence. But regardless of its role, its reality lies in intelligence, not outside it or beside it.

Upon contemplating this proposition by Dewey, the thought occurs that emotion is a potentially dangerous factor in the

⁸John Dewey, Quest for Certainty (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1929), p. 226.

on-going development of intelligence in the situation.

Dewey readily grants that

Intense emotion may utter itself in action that destroys institutions. But the only assurance of the birth of better ones is the marriage of emotion with intelligence.⁹

Dewey is able to take this position because he feels that in spite of certain negative influences emanating from the emotions, still "affection and passionate desire for justice and security are realities in human nature."¹⁰

Intelligence always functions within the frame of social situations, and of prime importance for the understanding of the activity of intelligence is the reminder that consequences are a prominent determinant. Dewey, in a broad manner, has summarized his position in a few sentences. Bear in mind that when Dewey speaks of ideas and idealism, he is anything but Platonic. It is simply a convenience of expression. Thus he says that

The constructive office of thought is empirical -- that is, experimental. "Thought" is not a property of something termed intellect or reason apart from nature. It is a mode of directed overt action. Ideas are anticipatory plans and designs which take effect in concrete reconstruction of antecedent conditions of existence. They are not innate properties of mind corresponding to ultimate prior traits of Being, nor are they a priori categories imposed on sense in a wholesale, once-for-all way, prior to

⁹Dewey, A Common Faith, p. 80.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 79

experience so as to make it possible. The active power of ideas is a reality, but ideas and idealisms have an operative force in concrete experienced situations; their worth has to be tested by the specified consequences of their operation.¹¹

Contrary to many other philosophers, Dewey attributes no a priori value to ideas. Immediacy is both the origin and the measure of any idea.

Ideas and idealisms are in themselves hypotheses not finalities. Being connected with operations to be performed they are tested by the consequences of these operations, not by what exists prior to them. Prior experience supplies the conditions which evoke ideas and of which thought has to take account, with which it must reckon. It furnishes both obstacles to attainment of what is desired and the resources that must be used to attain it. Conception and systems of conceptions, ends in view and plans, are constantly making and remaking as fast as those already in use reveal their weaknesses, defects and positive values. There is no predestined course they must follow. Human experience consciously guided by ideas evolves its own standards and measures and each new experience constructed by their means is an opportunity for new ideas and ideals.¹²

The unusual part of this whole construction is brought to light by a statement made by Dewey that appears to qualify sharply what has been so systematically constructed.

Intelligence becomes ours in the degree in which we use it and accept responsibility for consequences. It is not ours originally or by production. "It thinks" is a truer psychological statement than "I think." Thoughts sprout and vegetate; ideas proliferate. They come from deep

¹¹Dewey, Quest for Certainty, pp. 166-167.

¹²Ibid., p. 167.

unconscious sources.¹³

It is Dewey's last sentence that is difficult to integrate with the many paragraphs that he has offered previously. The sentence occurs at the very end of a lengthy construction, and it is without further explanation. The difficulty increases when another paradoxical statement by Dewey is recalled.

All that is distinctive of man, marking him off from the clay he walks upon or the potatoes he eats, occurs in his thought and emotions, in what we have agreed to call consciousness.¹⁴

And no definition of "consciousness" follows, though it may be inferred from the totality of Dewey's philosophy.

We have seen that consequences play a strong and determining role in the individual's reasoning. Societal sanction-value is added to the consequences by inserting the concept of individual liability.

If the man's nature, original and acquired, make him do what he does, how does his action differ from that of a stone or tree? Have we not parted with any ground for responsibility? When the question is looked at in the face of facts rather than in a dialectic of concepts it turns out not to have any terrors. Holding men to responsibility may make a decided difference in their future behavior; holding a stone or a tree to responsibility is a meaningless performance; it has no consequence; it makes no difference. If we locate the ground of liability in future consequences rather than in antecedent causal conditions, we moreover find ourselves in

¹³John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1922), p. 314.

¹⁴Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization, p. 5.

accord with actual practice. Infants, idiots, the insane, those completely upset, are not held to liability; the reason is that it is absurd -- meaningless -- to do so, for it has no effect on their further actions.¹⁵

Dewey is here saying that not only is the individual to make all decisions in terms of the consequences, but he is also to take into the reasoning process the factor that he personally is liable for the consequences of his preferential action. Social sanctions are to be considered. However, this simple external pressure, enforced with the presence of reciprocal treatment, is not sufficient in itself.

Some animals, dogs and horses, have their future conduct modified by the way they are treated. We can imagine a man whose conduct is changed by the way in which he is treated, so that it becomes different from what it would have been, and yet like the dog or horse, the change may be due to purely external manipulation, as external as the strings that move a puppet. The whole story has not then been told. There must be some practical participation from within to make the change that is effected significant in relation to choice and freedom. From within -- that fact rules out the appeal, so facilely made, to will as a cause.¹⁶

Right at this point there is a large hiatus in the philosophy of John Dewey. It is not sufficient to say simply that "some practical participation from within" is necessary, and then drop the thought without developing the source and nature of this internal participation.

However, this study is concerned primarily with what

¹⁵Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 274.

Dewey has said, and absences and inconsistencies of thought are noted only in a secondary manner. If Dewey is granted leave, his development of the concept of liability continues without a hitch.

No amount of pains taken in forming a purpose in a definite case is final; the consequences of its adoption must be carefully noted, and a purpose held only as a working hypothesis until results confirm its rightness. Mistakes are no longer either mere unavoidable accidents to be mourned or moral sins to be expiated and forgiven. They are lessons in wrong methods of using intelligence and instructions as to a better course in the future.¹⁷

Granting this one concession opens the door for a complete social philosophy of naturalism and with it goes a certain degree of self-satisfaction, provided the individual is applying himself diligently. Obviously Dewey has thought of this last implication, too, for he offers this comment.

Natural piety is not of necessity either a fatalistic acquiescence in natural happenings or a romantic idealization of the world. It may rest upon a just sense of nature as the whole of which we are parts, while it also recognizes that we are parts that are marked by intelligence and purpose, having the capacity to strive by their aid to bring conditions into greater consonance with what is humanly desirable.¹⁸

At another time Dewey stated that

Individuality in a social and moral sense is something to be wrought out. It means initiative, inventiveness, varied resourcefulness, assumption of responsibility in choice of belief and conduct. These are not gifts, but achievements.

¹⁷Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, p. 140.

¹⁸Dewey, A Common Faith, p. 25.

As achievements, they are not absolute but relative to the use that is to be made of them. And this varies with the environment.¹⁹

Individuality, selfhood, has achieved a certain status, but even this is relative to its use within the environment. Hence, the quality of the self can be manipulated through the concentrated instruments of our social environment, our social institutions. And Dewey concurs with this conclusion when he writes that

When the self is regarded as something complete within itself, then it is readily argued that only internal moralistic changes are of importance in general reform. Institutional changes are said to be merely external. They may add conveniences and comforts to life, but they cannot effect moral improvements. . . . Individuals are led to concentrate in moral introspection upon their own vices and virtues, and to neglect the character of the environment. . . . But when self-hood is perceived to be an active process it is also seen that social modifications are the only means of the creation of changed personalities. Institutions are viewed in their educative effect: with reference to the types of individuals they foster.²⁰

Still any person who is the least bit observant will notice that human behavior does not always follow according to Dewey's pattern, nor are corrective measures so easily and effectively established. Furthermore, the institution is only as effective as the total support of the persons who have established it. Ordinarily some difficulty would arise right here in the structure of Dewey's system of thought,

¹⁹Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, pp. 152-153.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 153-154.

but he is able to overcome the difficulty -- provided he is allowed another hiatus.

The position of natural intelligence is that there exists a mixture of good and evil, and that reconstruction in the direction of the good which is indicated by ideal ends, must take place, if at all, through continued cooperative effort. There is at least enough impulse toward justice, kindness, and order so that if it were mobilized for action, not expecting abrupt and complete transformation to occur, the disorder, cruelty, and oppression that exist would be reduced.²¹

It is a considerable concession to allow Dewey to posit his "impulse toward justice, kindness, and order." However, this is what Dewey has blandly posited, and since the exploration of his philosophy of the nature of man is the purpose of this study, the point can only be noted in passing.

Dewey then employs the educative means of social institutions toward one end, in terms of the role of intelligence in the nature of man, who in turn is in society.

The mind of man is being habituated to a new method and ideal: There is but one sure road of access to truth -- the road of patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record and controlled reflection.²²

And so the greater development of intelligence through social interaction becomes both the means and the end of Dewey's society.

²¹Dewey, A Common Faith, p. 47.

²²Ibid., p. 32.

It (faith in the possibilities of continued and rigorous inquiry) trusts that the natural interactions between man and his environment will breed more intelligence and generate more knowledge provided the scientific methods that define intelligence in operation are pushed further into the mysteries of the world, being themselves promoted and improved in the operation.²³

Dewey has stated, as noted several paragraphs back, that in natural intelligence there is a mixture of good and evil. He has also said that experience serves to shape thought and idea. The simple conclusion then is that there will be a mixture of good and evil thoughts and ideas circulating among men; that human intelligence will propagate this mixture through the employment of reason or experimental intelligence. To this Dewey replies that

Our ideas truly depend upon experience, but so do our sensations. And the experience upon which they both depend is the operation of habits -- originally of instincts. Thus our purposes and commands regarding action (whether physical or moral) come to us through the refracting medium of bodily and moral habits. Inability to think aright is sufficiently striking to have caught the attention of moralists. But a false psychology has led them to interpret it as due to a necessary conflict of flesh and spirit, not as an indication that our ideas are as dependent, to say the least, upon our habits as are our acts upon our conscious thoughts and purposes.²⁴

The Dewey formula would then read: Since we are under the deterministic influence of our habits, originally, of our instincts, we ought to develop better habits for a better life.

²³Ibid., p. 26.

²⁴Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, p. 52.

It would be interesting to study the relationship and development of instincts and habits in Dewey's philosophy.

One final question comes up. Does not history show, as some men have said, that the common greed of men reduces life to the struggle of all against all, clique against clique, or class against class?

To conceive of human history as a scene of struggle of classes for domination, a struggle caused by love of power or greed for gain, is the very mythology of the emotions. What we call history is largely non-human, but so far as it is human, it is dominated by intelligence; history is the history of increasing consciousness.²⁵

What Dewey, in his own words, said about intelligence has been presented. But what role does intelligence play in the daily life of the individual, according to Dewey's understanding of intelligence? Le Boutillier has prepared a brief paragraph that very neatly ties together all that Dewey said, and she applies it to the question that has been posed. She writes.

Intelligence and effort are the active forces of what Dewey calls 'adjustment', which 'lend deep and enduring support to the processes of living', which take man out of himself to manipulate his environment and to actualize his ideals. These forces are at work in all of man's activity, through which he trues up the pattern of his life to conform to his values even while he derives his values from the pattern of his life. Science and art and religion all have a part in this. Science and art and religion, which are, perhaps, our highest values, are methods by

²⁵ John Dewey, "Is Nature Good? A Conversation," Hibbert Journal, VII (July, 1909), 837.

which we may bring out of nature and make explicit and related and meaningful what is in nature, and by which we actualize in nature the ideals we thus derive.²⁶

The social situation and the inter-personal relations of persons within the social situation are vitally important to the child's personality. This has been shown in the discussion of intelligence during the nature of man. Intelligence was shown to be a social activity in a full measure when the social situation is understood completely the working of that intelligence and its manifestations, direct attention must be given to the kind of social interaction.

It has been said that every child is born with a capacity for intelligence, but a sharp degree of variation exists in the parts in which the child interacts with other individuals in society. It has been pointed out, as well as by Binet, that intelligence changes experience, but it is the social experience that has a reciprocal effect. For example, habits and social accretions that are derived from social experiences.

Other organized activities are secondary and derived, not primary and original. They are products of organized activities which are part of man's endowment at birth.

In the course of living the child finds the place of social activity, and in turn the child develops a set of

²⁶Cornelia Le Boutillier, Religious Values in the Philosophy of Emergent Evolution (New York: n.p., 1936), p. 77.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE OF MAN IN TERMS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

The social situation and the inter-personal relations of persons within the social situation are vitally important for Dewey's philosophy. This has been shown in the discussion of intelligence within the nature of man. Intelligence was discussed without entering in a full measure into the social frame. But to understand completely the working of this intelligence and its manifestations, direct attention must be given to the area of social interaction.

Dewey does not deny that every child at birth has a capacity or intelligence, but a sharp degree of variance arises in the years in which the child interacts with other individuals in society. It has been pointed out, as Le Boutillier did, that intelligence shapes experience, but at the same time social experiences have a reciprocal effect. For example, habits are mental constructs that are derived from social experiences.

Habits as organized activities are secondary and acquired, not native and original. They are outgrowths of unlearned activities which are part of man's endowment at birth.¹

In the course of living the child feels the pinge of social stimuli, and in turn the child develops a set of

¹John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1922), p. 89.

rather standardized responses. It is these standardized responses that Dewey calls habits.

The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response, not to particular acts except as, under special conditions, these express a way of behaving. Habit means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrence of specific acts. It means will.²

Obviously this is not a rote development. The intelligence of the child plays a strong role in the growth of a body of habits. However, the factor to be noted at this point is that social interaction also plays an important part in the development of habits. On the basis of the material presented thus far, it can be said that social relations are the ground and intelligence the focus of habit formations. Dewey himself illustrates this tight inter-relationship between intelligence and social interaction.

Habits may be profitably compared to physiological functions, like breathing, digesting. The latter are, to be sure, involuntary, while habits are acquired. But important as is this difference for many purposes it should not conceal the fact that habits are like functions in many respects, and especially in requiring the cooperation of organism and environment.³

Since habits are "modes of response" to social stimuli, it is necessary that the particular response be oriented to the intelligence of the receptive individual -- as Dewey says,

²Ibid., p. 42.

³Ibid., p. 14.

In short, the meaning of native activities is not native; it is acquired. It depends upon interaction with a matured social medium.⁴

The development of habit within the individual has been seen. Now attention is turned to the growth of a body of habits within the individual who both influences and is influenced by social interaction. Social interaction would be a minimum factor if habits were passive, but according to Dewey the very opposite is true.

Each person is born an infant, and every infant is subject from the first breath he draws and the first cry he utters to the attentions and demands of others. These others are not just persons in general with minds in general. They are beings with habits, and beings who upon the whole esteem the habits they have, if for no other reason than that having them, their imagination is thereby limited. The nature of habit is to be assertive, insistent, self-perpetuating.⁵

This being the case, it can safely be said that in the early months of the life of a child he is, in terms of habits, more the moved than the mover. However, as time proceeds the body of habits that have developed begin to assert themselves in response to social stimuli, and a balance of social influence results. Of course, there are individual exceptions to this formulation, depending upon the strength of their character.

For Dewey, character appears to be the sum total of habits functioning in the social situation.

⁴Ibid., p. 90.

⁵Ibid., p. 58.

Character is the interpenetration of habits. If each habit existed in an insulated compartment and operated without affecting or being effected by others, character would not exist.⁶

Character, then, becomes the end product of the social inter-play of habits.

The adult who has the advantage of greater experience, and so of greater habits, does not ordinarily look upon the child as one who is in an ideal position to receive a discriminate habit education. Rather, it appears from Dewey, that the adult views the child as a living area to be exploited by means of the habits of the adult.

We come back to the fact that individuals begin their career as infants. For the plasticity of the young presents a temptation to those having greater experience and hence greater power which they rarely resist. It seems putty to be molded according to current designs. That plasticity also means power to change prevailing custom is ignored. Docility is looked upon not as ability to learn whatever the world has to teach, but as subjection to those instructions of others which reflect their current habits.⁷

It is quite understandable that Dewey would speak in this manner, for he is deeply concerned with reforming and improving the social life of men through the peculiar powers and abilities that men innately possess. For that reason Dewey unhesitatingly chastises the individual for social shortcomings that are experienced in the world.

⁶Ibid., p. 38.

⁷Ibid., p. 64.

Our self-love, our refusal to face facts, combined perhaps with a sense of a possible better although unrealized self, leads us to eject the habit from the thought of ourselves and conceive it as an evil power which has somehow overcome us. We feed our conceit by recalling that the habit was not deliberately formed; we never intended to become idlers or gamblers or rouses. And how can anything be deeply ourselves which developed accidentally, without set intention? These traits of a bad habit are precisely the things which are most instructive about all habits and about ourselves. They teach us that all habits are affections, that all have projectile power, and that predisposition formed by a number of specific acts is an immensely more intimate and fundamental part of ourselves than vague, general, conscious choices. All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word will, they are will. They form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity.⁸

During the course of his life the individual builds up a body of habits. These habits remain encased in the self; for that matter, they are the self, and even as the nerves are always poised ready to respond to any stimuli, so also the self, this body of habits, stands constantly ready to respond and constantly responding to any social stimuli. Dewey indicates that there are factors tending to restrain habits. Whether or not the habit or the restraint wins out depends upon the strength of the stimulus and the strength of the habit-disposition-attitude.

Attitude and, as ordinarily used, disposition suggest something latent, potential, something which requires

⁸Ibid., pp. 24-25.

a positive stimulus outside themselves to become active. If we perceive that they denote positive forms of action which are released merely through removal of some-counteracting 'inhibitory' tendency, and then become overt, we may employ them instead of the word habit to denote subdued, non-patent forms of the latter.

In this case, we must bear in mind that the word disposition means predisposition, readiness to act overtly in a specific fashion whenever opportunity is presented, this opportunity consisting in removal of the pressure due to the dominance of some other habit; and that attitude means some special case of a predisposition, the disposition waiting as it were to spring through an opened door.⁹

Even the inhibitory tendencies are habits and have been formed in the way all habits are formed.

The result of this construction of Dewey is to make man a complete social animal. Given a certain amount of innate ability, he can build, or multiply, the original ability and capacity to almost unlimited heights depending upon the quantity and quality of social interaction. Quite simply man is the measure of all things.

A glance at the history of mankind would clearly indicate that man has been anything but successful in his growth, and even that man has exploited his potential in a way that threatens his own destruction rather than promoting growth. Of this, Dewey, too, is aware.

Aforetime man employed the results of his prior experience only to form customs that henceforth had to be blindly followed or blindly broken. Now, old experience is used to suggest aims and

⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

methods for developing a new and improved experience. Consequently experience becomes in so far constructively self-regulative.¹⁰

More specifically Dewey says that

Man who lives in a world of hazards is compelled to seek for security. He has sought to attain it in two ways. One of them began with an attempt to propitiate the powers which environ him and determine his destiny. . . . The other course is to invent arts and by their means to turn the powers of nature to account; man constructs a fortress out of the very conditions and forces which threaten him. He builds, shelters, weaves garments, makes flame his friend instead of his enemy, and grows into the complicated arts of associated living.¹¹

Hence Dewey's answer is simply that man has not as yet fully accomplished because he has not as yet completely tried. To the extent that he has tried to exploit his potential, he has succeeded admirably. It now remains for the intelligent individual to recognize the obvious conclusion, and a new and better way of life is his for the attempt.

¹⁰ John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920), p. 88.

¹¹ Dewey, Quest for Certainty, p. 3, as quoted by H. S. Thayer, The Logic of Pragmatism (New York: The Humanities Press, 1952), p. 212.

CHAPTER V

THE NATURE OF MAN IN TERMS OF THE SOUL AND BODY-MIND RELATIONS

In a consideration of the nature of man we must deal with the role, if any, of the soul in man's nature. In the examination of John Dewey's philosophy on this point it will be shown that there is a strange contradiction.

Dewey's thinking cannot be accounted for, but perhaps some light can be thrown on the matter by considering the books and journals in which Dewey spoke out on this matter.

The one opinion, that can conceivably be labeled the minority opinion, appears in Bibliotheca Sacra. That particular journal is a respected journal of Christian philosophy and ethics, and it would hardly tolerate an evolutionistic article, particularly one that dealt with the sacred matter of the soul of man. This is the only place in which Dewey expressed himself in the "minority" manner. All other expressions are consistent, though in contradiction to the first.

Consideration will first be given to the reference from Bibliotheca Sacra, and then attention will be directed to the more extensive expression of Dewey's view of the soul and body-mind relations. Dewey operates with the concept of the soul as if it were a foregone conclusion that it existed. His attention is on the place of the soul in the body and

its function.

If we include within our survey the psycho-physiological facts as well as the purely physiological phenomena of nerve action, we come to the conclusion that the soul not only directs and focuses the activities of the organism, but that it transforms them into something which they are not. It realizes itself upon the hints, as it were, given by the body. The soul is not only immanent in the body, as constituting its unity and end; it is transcendent to it, as transforming its activities for its own psychical ends.¹

The soul then is a psychical entity permeating the physical body, guiding and directing that body and giving it ends and purposes. Notice that here and in the following expression Dewey does not even hint that there is any question concerning the ontology of the soul. The article from which this material was drawn was entitled "Soul and Body," but the treatment within the article is directed more specifically to the soul and the act.

The psychical is immanent in the physical; immanent as directing it toward an end and for the sake of this end selecting some activities, inhibiting others, responding to some, controlling others and adjusting and co-ordinating the complex whole so as, in the simplest and least wasteful way, to reach the chosen end. We find, therefore, that in the simplest form of nervous action there are principles to which matter, as such, is an entire stranger. Matter per se knows no higher category than that of physical causality. Its highest law is that of the necessities of antecedent and consequent. In nervous action we find the category of teleology. The act is not determined by its immediate antecedents, but by the necessary end. We have gone from the sphere of physical to that

¹ John Dewey, "Soul and Body," Bibliotheca Sacra, XLIII (April, 1886), 254-255.

of final causation, and thereby we recognize that we have gone from the purely physical to the immanence of the psychical in the physical, directing the latter for its own end and purpose.²

It is worth noting that even at this point Dewey has inserted the idea of the soul serving as the director, the selector, the inhibitor of physical action. In view of the fact that he has laid much stress upon habit-action and habit-formation, some connection can be seen. This connection could very easily serve as a stepping stone, or a loop-hole, for the position that Dewey held during a greater part of his literary life.

Very clearly Dewey has remarked that the soul transcends the body, but this transcendence is not a supernatural one. Dewey's concept of the soul, as it appears in Bibliotheca Sacra, is spirit only in the sense in which Hegel speaks of the spirit and the spiritual. There is no connection whatsoever with the Christian concept of spirit and spiritual. So the soul becomes a driving force, a guiding "spirit" of the physical powers of the body.

The soul accordingly, is not a powerless, impotent something, so transcendent that it cannot be brought into relation with matter. It is a living and acting force which has formed, and is constantly forming the body, as its own mechanism. This assures on the one hand that no act or deed of the mind is ever lost, that it find its registration and record; and that not alone in some supralunary sphere, but down here in the world of matter; and, on the other hand, it forms a mechanism by which the soul can immediately

²Ibid., p. 247.

know, can grasp the fragments of its knowledge into one symbolic whole without laboriously gathering them and piecing them together, and by which it can immediately act. It is, as it were, the mind's automaton, ceaselessly and tirelessly executing the demands responding to the needs of the soul?³

A statement of this nature says in a lucid fashion that the soul is the controlling and directing force within the body. There is an interaction of needs and fulfillments between the body and soul, but the soul is still the dominant force.

This must be compared with statements made in Human Nature and Conduct, Dewey's volume on social psychology.

As explicit as he was in the previous reference toward the existence of the soul, Dewey is now taking a contrary position.

The doctrine of a single, simple and indissoluble soul was the cause and the effect of failure to recognize that concrete habits are the means of knowledge and thought. . . . Now it is dogmatically stated that no such conceptions of the seat, agent or vehicle will go psychologically at the present time.⁴

Here Dewey denies what he had previously stated concerning "soul." He even avoids using the word itself by using descriptive terms instead.

The traditional psychology of the original separate soul, mind or consciousness is in truth a reflex of conditions which cut human nature off from its natural objective relations. It implies first the severance of man from nature and then of each man from his fellows. The isolation of man from nature is duly manifested in the split between mind and

³Ibid., pp. 261-262.

⁴John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1922), p. 138.

body -- since body is clearly a connected part of nature. Thus the instrument of action and the means of the continuous modification of action, of the cumulative carrying forward of old activity into new, is regarded as a mysterious intruder or as a mysterious parallel accompaniment.⁵

James O'Hara, a critic of Dewey's position in relation to the soul, offers this explanation of Dewey's statements.

Dewey rejects the doctrine of a spiritual soul because, in harmony with his theories, it cannot be demonstrated experimentally. . . . Dewey's dismissal of the soul arises from the behavioristic viewpoint of psychology which was considered under the foregoing heading.⁶

But even if Dewey does deny the existence of the spiritual soul, he will still have to deal with the question of the ontology of mind and its relationship to the physical body. If the previous critic of Dewey is correct, and if Dewey remains consistent, he will have to deny the existence of mind on the same empirical ground on which he denied soul.

Great pains have been taken to permit Dewey to speak for himself, and not to put the name of Dewey over the words of another. However, in this instance the principle is laid aside to permit Sidney Hook to summarize Dewey's thinking.

The physical, or Matter, Life, and Mind are abstractions, according to Dewey, not existences. Existences have physical, living, or mental character depending upon the set of properties they reveal as they develop in time. The fact that some properties whose conjunction indicates the presence of mind emerge later in time

⁵Ibid., p. 85.

⁶James O'Hara, The Limitations of the Educational Theory of John Dewey (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1929), p. 28.

than others does not make them 'less real' or less efficacious than others, as traditional materialism assumed. The fact that under certain circumstances physical situations are changed as a result of operations and actions that indicate the presence of the mental, does not justify belief in a mind as a separate power, force or vital energy which mysteriously acts upon things, as traditional spiritualism assumed. The problems about mind-body which have mystified philosophers can only be settled by seeing the elements which have been originally separated as functional distinctions within a continuity of history.⁷

Though these are not Dewey's own words, they were used because of the preciseness of the formulation and also because of their validity in terms of Dewey's philosophic position.

In a similar vein Dewey himself wrote that

Body-mind simply designates what actually takes place when a living body is implicated in situations of discourse, communication and participation. In the hyphenated phrase body-mind, 'body' designates the continued and conserved, the registered and cumulative operation of factors continuous with the rest of nature, inanimate as well as animate; while 'mind' designates the characters and consequences which are differential, indicative of features which emerge when 'body' is engaged in a wider, more complex and interdependent situation.⁸

Dewey is here developing his concept of mind from the results of intelligence operating in social interaction. This is indicated by Dewey himself when he call his presentation, quoted above, an "emergent theory of mind."⁹

⁷Sidney Hook, John Dewey an Intellectual Portrait (New York: John Day Co., 1939), pp. 112-113.

⁸John Dewey, Experience and Nature (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1925), p. 285.

⁹Ibid., p. 271.

Granting an emergent theory of mind, Dewey will still have to account for minds that break down, that are not able to maintain their position within the body. Or, perhaps more logically, he will have to account for the unity and consistency of the mind operating within the body. It is not sufficient that he simply posits a relationship without showing its function. Sidney Hook describes, in the following quotation, Dewey's attempt to do just this.

All of us are vaguely aware that a normal human being functions as a unity. . . . One of the reasons that belief in the 'soul' has persisted is that many people have sought to find a definite locus for the bond of unity that marks the presence of personality.

For Dewey, the unity of the organism, considered biologically, consists in the way in which all parts of the body function together to produce the balance or moving equilibrium that we call the quality of good health. But since man is not only a biological organism but a social creature, his unity as a human being consists in the co-operative functioning of his relationships to other human beings in a social environment.¹⁰

Assuming that Hook has accurately represented Dewey, and that Dewey has not chosen to misrepresent himself on this particular point, our original statement of mind being the result of intelligence operating in social interaction is valid for Dewey's philosophy.

But what are the results of Dewey's uniting body, mind, nature and society into a single functioning whole? Dewey himself has not answered this question, but if Dewey

¹⁰Hook, op. cit., pp. 124-125.

is to be examined in the spirit of Dewey, the consequences will have to be considered. Again, Sidney Hook has prepared an answer.

By his emphasis upon the continuity of nature, body, society, and mind, Dewey does two things. He breaks down the dualism between the physical and the psychical without reading the properties of mind into nature, as do the mentalists and panpsychists, and without denying the existence of consciousness, as do extreme materialists and behaviorists. Secondly, he is able to make clear that 'the unity of the human being' consists not in the sum of separate ultimate elements, whether these be sensations or reflexes, ideas or glandular secretions, but in an observable series of co-operative functions, a working together of interacting processes, that constitute a personality.¹¹

One final remark before concluding this chapter. The problem chosen in this paper is not entirely new, as some Dewey protagonists well recognize. The immediate concern is not to sit in judgment of Dewey and his philosophy, but to examine it and see exactly where the man does stand. However, labels do serve some slight purpose, some convenience. Hence, the following final quotation is offered concerning Dewey and his position on the soul and body-mind relations. Again it's from Sidney Hook.

In challenging the dualistic theory [the mind-body theory], Dewey has challenged one of the most pervasive determinants of Western European culture, an attitude fortified by religion, by popular morality, by the teachings of the Academy as well as of the Learned Doctors. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is Dewey's theory of human

¹¹Ibid., p. 111.

nature and human mind which has provoked the charge of materialism against him, particularly in theological quarters. If refusal to dissociate mind from body and body from nature is materialism, Dewey is one of the greatest materialists of all time.¹²

¹²Ibid., p. 109.

CHAPTER VI

THE NATURE OF MAN IN TERMS OF GOOD AND EVIL

The heading for this chapter is more descriptive than definitive, for Dewey's philosophy of naturalism does not of itself recognize any area of "good" or "evil." However, Dewey was quite well attuned to other beliefs and philosophies prevalent in the world, and he did on occasion speak out in relation to these opposing views. The reader will note that Dewey is not interested in entering into a polemic, but that whatever he has said, he has said for the sake of differentiating his position from that of other positions.

Philosophy is concerned only with propositions which are true in any possible world, existentially actual or not. Propositions about good and evil are too dependent upon a special form of existence, namely human beings with their peculiar traits, to find a place in the scheme of science. The only propositions which answer to the specification of pure universality are logical and mathematical. These by their nature transcend existence and apply to every conceivable realm.¹

Still even Dewey is able to say that some activities among men are regarded with greater esteem than others. Even an instrumentalist will say that the nature of the consequences varies. Emotions have been given a strong role in the nature of man, but on occasion an individual will be

¹John Dewey, Quest for Certainty (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1929), p. 66.

guided primarily, perhaps to his later regret, by his emotions.

Dewey recognizes the foregoing conditions and possibilities, and he offers this explanation of the situation.

Man as a natural creature acts as masses and molecules act; he lives as animals live, eating, fighting, fearing, reproducing. As he lives, some of his actions yield understanding and things take on meaning, for they become signs of one another; means of expectation and of recall, preparations for what is to come and celebrations of what has gone. Activities take on ideal quality. Attraction and repulsion become love of the admirable and hate of the harsh and ugly, and they seek to find and make a world in which they may be securely at home. Hopes and fears, desires and aversions, are as truly responses to things as are knowing and thinking. Our affections, when they are enlightened by understanding, are organs by which we enter into the meaning of the natural world as genuinely as by knowing, and with greater fullness and intimacy.²

Dewey here indicates that natural man is first of all a creature of emotional responses -- in terms of Dewey's definition of emotional response. Though this proposition seems incongruous with the general tenor of Dewey's philosophic position, he offers some substantiation for it.

We need to recognize that the ordinary consciousness of the ordinary man left to himself is a creature of desires rather than of intellectual study, inquiry or speculation. Man ceases to be primarily actuated by hopes and fears, loves and hates, only when he is subjected to a discipline which is foreign to human nature, which is, from the standpoint of natural man, artificial.³

²Ibid., pp. 296-297.

³John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920), p. 32.

Dewey will not subject emotion responses to value-categories. He looks past emotion responses because he places the emphasis on the response, in terms of a stimulating situation, and not on the bare emotion.

Emotions are conditioned by the indeterminateness of present situations with respect to their issue. Fear and hope, joy and sorrow, aversion and desire, as perturbations, are qualities of a divided response. They involve concern, solicitude, for what the present situation may become. 'Care' signifies two quite different things: fret, worry and anxiety, and cherishing attention that in whose potentialities we are interested. These two meanings represent different poles of reactive behavior to a present having a future which is ambiguous. Elation and depression, moreover, manifest themselves only under conditions wherein not everything from start to finish is completely determined and certain. They may occur at a final moment of triumph or defeat, but this moment is one of victory or frustration in connection with a previous course of affairs whose issue was in suspense. Love for a Being so perfect and complete that our regard for it can make no difference to it is not so much affection as (a fact which the scholastics saw) it is concern for the destiny of our own souls. Hate that is sheer antagonism without any element of uncertainty is not an emotion, but is an energy devoted to ruthless destruction. Aversion is a state of affectivity only in connection with an obstruction offered by the disliked object or person to an end made uncertain by it.⁴

Regardless of the view that anyone takes of emotion responses, no one can avoid seeing that in many instances emotions literally pour over until they have become not a guiding and directing agent, but a dictating and dominating tyrant. Nor does Dewey deny this.

⁴Dewey, Quest for Certainty, pp. 225-226.

The natural man dislikes the dis-ease which accompanies the doubtful and is ready to take almost any means to end it. Uncertainty is got rid of by fair means or foul. Long exposure to danger breeds an overpowering love of security. Love for security, translated into a desire not to be disturbed and unsettled, leads to dogmatism, to acceptance of beliefs upon authority, to intolerance and fanaticism on one side and to irresponsible dependence and sloth on the other.⁵

Without a question Dewey feels that emotion responses are value-neutral, and being value-neutral there simply is no question of good or evil that can possibly be connected to them. Since Dewey regards the emotions and emotion responses as having developed originally from instincts, a point he made earlier in this study, this move is a broad step toward wiping the nature of man clean of taint of evil or glitter of good. He is neutral.

Even in the case of choice, the consequences of which are undesirable, the intellect and emotions are not to be held responsible or liable. In fact, the nature of man has no liability either. It is the will, a strange but potent force that resides "outside the person," that must bear all responsibility and liability.

It is worth while to pause in our survey while we examine more closely the nature of choice in relation to this alleged connection with free will, free here meaning unmotivated choice. Analysis does not have to probe to the depths to discover two faults in the theory. It is a man, a human being in the concrete, who is held responsible. If the act does not proceed from the man, from the human being in

⁵Ibid., pp. 227-228.

his concrete make-up of habits, desires and purposes, why should he be held liable and be punished? Will appears as a force outside of the individual person as he actually is, a force which is the real ultimate cause of the act. Its freedom to make a choice arbitrarily thus appears no ground for holding the human being as a concrete person responsible for a choice.⁶

For that matter not even the will can be held liable, for the will does not make alternative selections. What it does do is to clarify the situation by narrowing it down and defining it in terms recognizable and receivable by the intelligence of the situation. The task of resolving some situations is so broad and profound that the ultimate resolution cannot be value judged.

We are free in the degree in which we act knowing what we are about. The identification of freedom with 'freedom of will' locates contingency in the wrong place. Contingency of will would mean that uncertainty was uncertainty dealt with; it would be a resort to chance for a decision. The business of 'will' is to be resolute; that is, to resolve, under the guidance of thought, the indeterminateness of uncertain situations. Choice wavers and is brought to a head arbitrarily only when circumstances compel action and yet we have no intelligent clue as to how to act.

The doctrine of 'free will' is a desperate attempt to escape from the consequences of the doctrine of fixed and immutable object Being. With the dissipation of that dogma, the need for such a measure of desperation vanishes. Preferential activities characterize every individual as individual or unique.⁷

⁶ John Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1931), p. 273.

⁷ Dewey, Quest for Certainty, pp. 249-250.

In a very systematic and precise manner Dewey has dealt with all the peripheral arguments, and he has succeeded in maintaining his position -- provided some concessions, mentioned in the preceding chapter, are made. But eventually the reader and the student of Dewey comes to the point where he asks quite bluntly: But what about the basic drives or motivations of acts? Are they not value-oriented according to the degree of self-ishness or unself-ishness in the individual?

Dewey's reply is actually a return to the opening paragraphs of his argument as it is here recorded. He says that when discussing emotion responses to concrete situations, or to situations recently made concrete by the will's resolution, the discussion concerns an area in which there is neither self-ishness or unself-ishness, neither good nor evil.

A correct theory of motivation shows that both self-love and altruism are acquired dispositions, not original ingredients in our psychological make-up, and that each of them may be either morally good or morally reprehensible. Psychologically speaking, our native impulses and acts are neither egoistic nor altruistic; that is, they are not actuated by conscious regard for either one's own good or that of others. They are rather direct responses to situations.⁸

Let us digress for a moment and see how this would work in a social example. The usual way for an individual to earn

⁸ John Dewey and James Tufts, Ethics (Revised edition; New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1936), p. 324.

a living is to apply himself in some form of work which brings returns either in the form of food or some value-object that can be traded for food. This labor institution is quite common to our society. But suppose, and this too is rather common, that some individual decided not to follow the pattern of the institution and instead goes out and robs and kills others for his livelihood. The thieving individual is captured, imprisoned and forced to work to provide a living for himself within the prison. Isn't the individual's aversion to the pattern of the labor institution and the induced conformance to the pattern ample evidence of the quality-rating of the nature of that individual?

It is 'natural' for activity to be agreeable. It tends to find fulfillment, and finding an outlet is itself satisfactory, for it marks partial accomplishment. If productive activity has become so inherently unsatisfactory that men have to be artificially induced to engage in it, this fact is ample proof that the conditions under which the work is carried on balk the complex activities instead of promoting them, irritate and frustrate natural tendencies instead of carrying them forward to fruition. Work then becomes labor, the consequence of some aboriginal curse which forces man to do what he would not do if he could help it, the outcome of some original sin which excluded man from a paradise in which desire was satisfied without industry, compelling him to pay for the means of livelihood with the sweat of his brow. From which it follows naturally that Paradise Regained means the accumulation of investments such that a man can live upon their return without labor. There is, we repeat, too much truth in this picture. But it is not a truth concerning original human nature and activity. It concerns the form human impulses have taken under the influence of a specific social environment. If there are difficulties in the way of social alteration -- as there certainly are -- they do not lie in an original aversion of human

nature to serviceable action, but in the historic conditions which have differentiated the work of the laborer for wage from that of the artist, adventurer, sportsman, soldier, administrator and speculator.⁹

The crowning statement, which leaves no room for reply, though it carries little conviction, is Dewey's high regard for the "neutral" nature of man.

No matter how much evidence may be piled up against social institutions as they exist, affection and passionate desire for justice and security are realities in human nature.¹⁰

In one passage Dewey very conveniently places his philosophy in relation to the thought that has existed since the beginning of the world. He is not so placing his entire philosophy, but only his position on the question of the nature of man in terms of good and evil.

History seems to exhibit three stages of growth. In the first stage, human relationships were thought to be so infected with the evils of corrupt human nature as to require redemption from external and supernatural sources. In the next stage, what is significant in these relations is found to be akin to values esteemed distinctively religious. This is the point now reached by liberal theologians. The third stage would realize that in fact the values prized in those religions that have elements are idealizations of things characteristic of natural associations which have then been projected into a supernatural realm for safe-keeping and sanction.¹¹

⁹John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1922), pp. 123-124.

¹⁰John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 79.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 72-73.

The whole point of the previous reference is that if accepted, it becomes the groundwork for the proposition that

The problem of evil ceases to be a theological and metaphysical one, and is perceived to be the practical problem of reducing, alleviating, as far as may be removing, the evils of life.¹²

Notice that Dewey has come around to the point where he says unabashed that there are definite evils in the life of man; conversely there is also good. But he has maneuvered about the question so that he is able to approach it from a side that makes the question of good and evil not a stumbling stone for him but a stepping stone for the further expansion of his philosophy. He is now able to say that

Social conditions rather than an old and unchangeable Adam have generated wars; the ineradicable impulses that are utilized in them are capable of being drafted into many other channels.¹³

In the quotations that have been offered from his writings, Dewey's personal position on the question of good and evil in the nature of man has been presented. Dewey's position can be pointed up more sharply if a few of his antithetical statements are extracted for the sake of contrast.

Dewey himself poses a question that has long troubled many philosophers. If the universe is in itself idea, rather than concrete situation that requires an emotion

¹²Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, pp. 141-142.

¹³Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, p. 113.

response, why is it that we experience so much in the universe that is completely unideal?

Attempts to answer this question have always been compelled to introduce a lapse from perfect Being: -- some kind of fall to which is due the distinction between noumena and phenomena, things as they are really are and as they seem to be. There are many versions of this doctrine. The simplest, though not the one which has most commended itself to most philosophers, is the idea of the 'fall of man', a fall which, in the words of Cardinal Newman, has implicated all creation in an aboriginal catastrophe. I am not concerned to discuss them and their respective weaknesses and strengths. It is enough to note that the philosophies which go by the name of Idealism are attempts to prove by one method or another, cosmological, ontological or epistemological, that the Real and the Ideal are one, while at the same time they introduce qualifying additions to explain why after all they are not one.¹⁴

If the fall of man is a fictional construct rather than a factual reality, then, of course, any doctrine of salvation for fallen mankind is also mythical. Dewey does, however, give some slight indication as to how this peculiar and unempirical doctrine came to be. This doctrine, even as all human behavior has a psychological explanation of its origin.

All the theories which put conversion 'of the eye of the soul' in the place of a conversion of natural and social objects that modifies goods actually experienced, is a retreat and escape from existence -- and this retraction into self is, once more, the heart of subjective egoisms. The typical example is perhaps the otherworldliness found in religions whose chief concern is with the salvation of the personal soul. But otherworldliness is found as

¹⁴Dewey, Quest for Certainty, p. 301.

well in estheticism and in all seclusion within ivory towers.¹⁵

In fact, Dewey is not even convinced that the doctrine of man's natural sinfulness is original. He feels that it is a carry-over from the very earliest days of scientific inquiry. This is not scientific inquiry as we know it, nor, for that matter, does it even closely resemble our concept of science. Rather it was a carry-over from the first stumbling days of an attempt to develop a scientific method. For science, too, at one time, resorted to the supra-natural for causal explanations.

The sinfulness of man, the corruption of his heart, his self-love and love of power, when referred to as causes are precisely of the same nature as was the appeal to abstract powers (which in fact only re-duplicated under a general name a multitude of particular effects) that once prevailed in physical 'science', and that operated as a chief obstacle to the generations and growth of the latter. Demons were once appealed to in order to explain bodily disease and no such things as a strictly natural death was supposed to happen. The importation of general moral causes to explain present social phenomena is on the same intellectual level.¹⁶

Even if evidence is presented to show man's sinful condition, or what may be labeled sinful, Dewey will not accept the conclusion that man must have a supernatural redeemer if he is to be saved.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁶Dewey, A Common Faith, pp. 77-78.

The conclusion (need for supernatural redemption because of corruption and sin) does not follow, however, from the data. It ignores, in the first place, that all the positive values which are prized, and in aid of which supernatural power is appealed to, have, after all, emerged from the very scene of human associations of which it is possible to paint so black a picture.¹⁷

Still where did men ever get the idea of evil in human nature? If Dewey is right, there must have been some social situation that prompted this faulty will-resolution. Dewey says there was. Man's idea of establishing morality -- most likely in the sense of a social mos and sanction -- gave rise to the whole misunderstanding.

Morality is largely concerned with controlling human nature. When we are attempting to control anything we are acutely aware of what resists us. So moralists were led, perhaps, to think of human nature as evil because of its reluctance to yield to control, its rebelliousness under the yoke.¹⁸

With regard to Dewey's statement, morality and the moralists must here be thought of as contributing elements in the earliest formation of human social organization.

Experience has taught us many things, and some of them are not exactly desirable. But the repetition and assimilation of an experience, to the degree that it becomes a habit, is not to be regarded as a manifestation of some innate and natural condition of our nature.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁸Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, pp. 1-2.

Our self-love, our refusal to face facts, combined perhaps with a sense of a possible better although unrealized self, leads us to eject the habit from the thought of ourselves and conceive it as an evil power which has somehow overcome us. . . . These traits of a bad habit are precisely the things which are most instructive about all habits and about ourselves. . . . All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self.¹⁹

If self is the sum total of habits good and bad, and they are "grouped" within us according to kind, a rational explanation of human behavior and conduct is quite simple.

We arrive at true conceptions of motivation and interest only by the recognition that selfhood (except as it has encased itself in a shell of routine) is in process of making, and that any self is capable of including within itself a number of inconsistent selves, of unharmonized dispositions. Even a Nero may be capable upon occasion of acts of kindness.²⁰

But Dewey's reply is actually begging a question. For his reply is appropriate only to a dogmatic statement that man is entirely evil and that there is no one single bit of good in man; more generally, that the nature of man is fixed, either good or evil. Dewey continues in this vein by replying to the proponents of a fixed and immutable nature, not to the proponents of supernatural redemption.

The assertion that a proposed change is impossible because of the fixed constitution of human nature diverts attention from the question of whether

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 24-25.

²⁰Ibid., p. 137.

or not a change is desirable and from the other question of how it shall be brought about. It throws the question into the arena of blind emotion and brute force.²¹

The preceding is the only reference found that addresses itself to the mutation of man's nature, and it simply argues in favor of the mutable as opposed to the immutable. Apparently Dewey does not consider it necessary to give further attention to the question of supernatural redemption and mutation of the nature of man. Dewey indicates this situation by declaring that

The time may be far off when men will cease to fulfill their need for combat by destroying each other and when they will manifest it in common and combined efforts against the forces that are enemies of all men equally. But the difficulties in the way are found in the persistence of certain acquired social customs and not in the unchangeability of the demand for combat.

Pugnacity and fear are native elements of human nature. But so are pity and sympathy. We send nurses and physicians to the battlefields and provide hospital facilities as 'naturally' as we change bayonets and discharge machine guns.²²

As noted in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the philosophy of John Dewey does not have room for a threshing out of the question of good and evil. The question is, at best, irrelevant, if not non-existent. Dewey has laid all

²¹John Dewey, Problems of Men (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), p. 192.

²²Ibid., p. 187.

his stress upon habit formation and the function of these habits.

Again the question is asked what are the consequences of Dewey's formulations. Opinion is rather sharply divided. Sidney Hook feels that

By pointing to the pervasiveness of habits and their historical character, Dewey is able to cut the ground from under the hoary but still very much alive belief in the unalterability of human nature. The facts of heredity by what they are, changes in social conditions will produce those changes in men which are social and morally significant. It is in social and moral terms that human nature is always construed, especially by those most convinced of its fixity. ...the natural endowment of man shows at most a capacity for violent action. Whether the capacity expresses itself in shedding blood according to certain rules or in any of William James' moral equivalents of war depends upon the set of habits which obtains in a culture, and upon the historical context of those habits. War is thus seen to be a function of social institutions, not of what is natively fixed in human constitutions.²³

But then why does an institution such as war persist; why do men permit it? Reinhold Niebuhr is of the opinion that

Dewey is in fact less conscious of the social perils of self-love than either Locke or Hume. In his thought the hope of achieving a vantage point which transcends the corruptions of self-interest takes the form of trusting the 'scientific method' and attributing anti-social conduct to the 'cultural lag', that is, to the failure of social science to keep abreast with technology. 'That coercion and oppression on a large scale exist no honest person can deny,' he declares. 'But these things are not the product of science and technology but of the perpetuation of old institutions and patterns

²³ Sidney Hook, John Dewey an Intellectual Portrait (New York: John Day Co., 1939), pp. 120-121.

untouched by the scientific method. The inference to be drawn is clear.' The failure of the past and present are due to the fact that the scientific method 'has not been tried at any time with use of all the resources which scientific material and the experimental method now put at our disposal.'²⁴

Sidney Hook is obviously of the opinion that the scientific method can accomplish a reformation and redirection of human nature. But Reinhold Niebuhr does not agree, and he offers this comment on Dewey's attitude toward the scientific method.

Professor Dewey has a touching faith in the possibility of achieving the same results in the field of social relations which intelligence achieved in the mastery of nature. The fact that man constitutionally corrupts his purest visions of disinterested justice in his actual actions seems never to occur to him. Consequently he never wearies in looking for specific causes of interested rather than disinterested action. As an educator, one of his favourite theories is that man's betrayal of his own ideals in action is due to faulty educational techniques which separate 'theory and practice, thought and action.' He thinks this faulty pedagogy is derived from the 'traditional separation of mind and body' in idealistic philosophy. In common with his eighteenth-century precursors, he would use the disinterested force of his 'freed intelligence' to attack institutional injustices and thus further free intelligence. Despotism represents 'relationships fixed in a pre-scientific age' and are the bulwark of anachronistic social attitudes. On the other hand 'lag in mental and moral patterns provide the bulwark of the older institutions'.²⁵

²⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1953), I, 110. The inner quotations are from Dewey, Liberalism and Social Action, p. 82.

²⁵ Ibid., I, 110-111.

CHAPTER VII

THE NATURE OF MAN IN TERMS OF MORALS AND MORALITY

At first glance it appears that there is only a fine line, if any, between the subject area of this chapter and that of the preceding. But this distinction has been made intentionally for the sake of comprehension and also of integrated organization. This is a slightly shorter chapter than the preceding and it will attempt to localize Dewey's principles as they were exhibited in an extended fashion earlier.

One other note ought to be made. In this chapter the focus is on morals and morality as Dewey defines them. Unfortunately Dewey never printed his own personal definition of morals and morality, but from the material examined thus far it appears that for Dewey morals are not traditional formulations of social sanction, nor are they supernatural laws of behavior that men have received by revelation, nor are they the end product of a philosophical system. Marjorie Grene comments on Dewey's position in this fashion.

After a fine, 'scientific,' 'tough-minded' account of democratic man's liberation from false traditional moralities there always comes, in Dewey and his followers, a point at which one suddenly finds that with the elimination of religious superstition and metaphysical ignorance, new values or even old ones have been spontaneously generated out of the bedrock of fact and more fact. ...and at that point pragmatism itself succumbs to a delusion at least as grievous as those by which Hegel's pure speculants

deceived themselves; for mere facts will never to all eternity generate values; nor can science -- psychology as well as nuclear physics -- by itself generate good or evil.¹

The difficulty indicated in the above quotation will become more and more apparent as we proceed. In the face of this paradox the term "morals" will still be used for the sake of the common understanding of the general reader.

Previously Dewey rejected the idea of an immutable nature of man, and, being consistent, he indicated that the consequences of this doctrine of the immutable nature are fruitless.

The theory of fixed ends inevitably leads thought into the bog of disputes that cannot be settled. If there is one summum bonum, one supreme end, what is it? To consider this problem is to place ourselves in the midst of controversies that are as acute now as they were two thousand years ago.²

Dewey's formulation of morals and morality is not based on fixed ends, a supreme good or eternal verities.

The whole of Dewey's philosophy, especially his epistemology, is concerned with the problem of means and ends as consequences of the means. In the area of morals, too, he is concerned with this relationship. As Dewey puts it,

¹Marjorie Grene, Dreadful Freedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 9-10.

²John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920), p. 134.

Desire belongs to the intrinsic nature of man; we cannot conceive a human being who does not have wants, needs, nor one to whom fulfillment of desire does not afford satisfaction. As soon as the power of thought develops, needs cease to be blind; thought looks ahead and foresees results. In forms purposes, plans, aims, end-in-view. Out of these universal and inevitable facts of human nature there necessarily grow the moral conceptions of the Good, and of the value of the intellectual phase of character, which amid all the conflict of desires and aims strives for insight into the inclusive and enduring satisfaction: wisdom, prudence.³

Notice that Dewey accepts and deals with man as he finds him, without in any way idealizing him. But at the same time Dewey inserts the intellect or intelligence of the individual as a determining factor. This strong reliance upon "the intellectual phase of character" is found throughout Dewey's philosophy.

As indicated earlier in this paper, social interaction is all-important in a consideration of any segment of Dewey's philosophy. Here too it plays an important part. At the same time in which the individual is developing a set of "morals" for himself, he is acting with and upon other individuals in the social situation. There results a literal give and take of thought, action and accepted pattern of behavior. It is from this interaction with the consequent of accepted and approvable patterns of action that Dewey develops his idea of morals and morality.

³John Dewey and James Tufts, Ethics (Revised edition; New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1936), p. 343.

Human beings approve and disapprove, sympathize and resent, as naturally and inevitably as they seek for the objects they want, and as they impose claims and respond to them. Thus the moral Good presents itself neither merely as that which satisfies desire, nor as that which fulfills obligation, but as that which is approvable. From out of the mass of phenomena of this sort there emerge the generalized ideas of Virtue or Moral Excellence and of a Standard which regulates the manifestation of approval and disapproval, praise and blame.⁴

Dewey's position is illustrated by the manner in which a body of morals, or morality, develops. Morality did not develop overnight or with the issuing of a single set of edicts. Morality came about through a long and still continuing process of posit, test, adjust and approve.

Inquiry, discovery take the same place in morals that they have come to occupy in sciences of nature. Validation, demonstration become experimental, a matter of consequences. Reason, always an honorific term in ethics, becomes actualized in the methods by which the needs and conditions, the obstacles and resources of situations are scrutinized in detail, and intelligent plans of improvement are worked out.⁵

This program of action has not always been carried out in social life, and because it has not been put into operation,

The need in morals is for specific methods of inquiry and of contrivance: Methods of inquiry to locate difficulties and evils; methods of contrivance to form plans to be used as working hypotheses in dealing with them. And the pragmatic import of the logic of individualized situations, each having its own irreplaceable good and principles, is to transfer

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, pp. 139-140.

the attention of theory from preoccupation with general conceptions to the problem of developing effective methods of inquiry.⁶

When Dewey refers to "individualized situations, each having its own irreplaceable good and principles," he is simply noting that all morals and morality are relative to the immediate situation with its consequences. It is insufficient to say that Dewey's ethics and morality fall into the broad category of relativism, for he adds the slightly qualifying clause of the consequences. Since these consequences are realized in progressive social situations, and all social situations are to a greater or lesser degree inter-related, a body of morals is built up. However, this body of morals is still dependent upon the individualized situation with its consequences. Dewey indicates his desire to place the emphasis here rather than on the development of a body of generalized morals in the last half of the last sentence of the quotation.

Still not every social situation is a moral situation.

A moral situation is one in which judgment and choice are required antecedently to overt action. The practical meaning of the situation -- that is to say the action needed to satisfy it -- is not self-evident. It has to be searched for. There are conflicting desires and alternative apparent goods. What is needed is to find the right course of action, the right good.⁷

⁶Ibid., pp. 136-137.

⁷Ibid., p. 133.

Over a period of time some social situations and their responses become so firmly established that there is no judgment or choice required. An example, perhaps, would be the introduction of two strange men to each other. It is quite well established that the two will speak some brief greeting and shake hands. No amount of judgment or deliberative choice are required before the two respond to each other and to the social situation. However, if the situation required that the individuals involved think over and evaluate the situation, and then decide upon a course of action -- with due consideration to the consequences --, that would be a moral situation.

The implications of the previous paragraph are that morals exist only when a moral situation exists. This is true even though an individual in the history of his experience can recall other similar moral situations and his responses. There is no such thing as applying your moral experience to the immediate moral situation and mechanically selecting a response. At best moral experience can be used to aid the intellect in its deliberation toward making an existential choice.

Moral goods and ends exist only when something has to be done. The fact that something has to be done proves that there are deficiencies, evils in the existent situation. This ill is just the specific ill that it is. It never is an exact duplicate of anything else. Consequently the good of the situation has to be discovered, projected and attained on the basis of the exact defect and

trouble to be rectified. It cannot intelligently be injected into the situation from without.⁸

If this is the case, the only thing that we can say about morals that is generally applicable is that

Wide sympathy, keen sensitiveness, persistence in the face of the disagreeable, balance of interests enabling us to undertake the work of analysis and decision intelligently are the distinctively moral traits -- the virtues or moral excellencies.⁹

We mentioned earlier that Dewey discards the doctrine of eternal verities, and in so doing he is of the opinion that the loss is insignificant in the light of the gains made through the use of the scientific method.

In the end, loss of eternal truths was more than compensated for in the accession of quotidian facts. The loss of the system of superior and fixed definitions and kinds was more than made up for by the growing system of hypotheses and laws used in classifying facts. After all, then, we are only pleading for the adoption in moral reflection of the logic that has been proved to make for security, stringency and fertility in passing judgment upon physical phenomena. And the reason is the same. The old method in spite of its nominal and esthetic worship of reason discouraged reason, because it hindered the operation of scrupulous and unremitting inquiry.¹⁰

This does not mean, however, that there no longer is anything that can be labeled true. It is rather a

⁸Ibid., p. 136.

⁹Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 133-134.

distinction in the method of determining what things are true. It has taken some time but

In physical matters men have slowly grown accustomed in all specific beliefs to identifying the true with the verified.¹¹

The attitude that the true is the verified can easily be carried over into the area of morals and morality. However, it will mean, according to Dewey, that some things that have attained status by virtue of age or that have been taken for granted will have to pass the acid test of verification through the scientific method. Otherwise they will be discarded.

To generalize the recognition that the true means the verified and means nothing else places upon men the responsibility for surrendering political and moral dogmas, and subjecting to the test of consequences their most cherished prejudices.¹²

On the basis of impersonal logic, even though it is applied to personal situations, Dewey's position appears quite sound. However, one telling objection can be raised, which nullifies most of what Dewey has so carefully constructed. As Boyer points out,

The modern scientific philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and John Dewey may emphasize a morality based on the idea of progress, since they view the laws of nature as impersonal but nevertheless

¹¹ Ibid., p. 130.

¹² Ibid., p. 131.

amenable to man's desires.¹³

This lapsa dialectica cannot be passed by. The idea of progress and the amiable character of the laws of nature are something that is frequently found in Western philosophic thought -- it might almost be said that it is peculiar to Western thought. But even as the physiocratic theory was the crux of the entire classical tradition in economics, so in this instance Dewey's entire structure stands or falls on the granting or denying of one assumption.

¹³Merle Boyer, Highways of Philosophy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 120.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NATURE OF MAN IN TERMS OF CONSEQUENT LIVING

In this final chapter under the general heading of The Nature of Man the principles that have been examined thus far will be projected into the realm of societal living. Dewey himself was strongly concerned with the consequences of any act, and to extend the formulation to include the consequences is to follow Dewey's own pattern.

Before the consequences are studied, however, a glance ought to be given once again to the causative factor behind consequences, and then view the consequences in the light of the causation.

The doctrine that the chief good of man is good will easily wins acceptance from honest men. For common-sense employs a juster psychology than either of the theories just mentioned. By will, common-sense understands something practical and moving. It understands the body of habits, of active dispositions which makes a man do what he does. Will is thus not something opposed to consequences or severed from them. It is a cause of consequences; it is causation in its personal aspect, the aspect immediately preceding action. . . . For a disposition means a tendency to act, a potential energy needing only opportunity to become kinetic and overt. Apart from such tendency a 'virtuous' disposition is either hypocrisy or self-deceit.¹

Consequences and consequent living is, then, the end product of the action of an individual who is acting according

¹John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1922), p. 44.

to the body of habits or dispositions that he has built up through successive experience. But at the same time there must be some field within which these dispositions and habits function overtly. The total environment surrounding the acting individual serves as the field or ground for the action.

Consequences depend upon an interaction of what he starts to perform with his environment, so he must take the latter into account. No one can foresee all consequences because no one can be aware of all the conditions that enter into their production. Every person builds better or worse than he knows. Good fortune or the favorable co-operation of environment is still necessary. Even with his best thought, a man's proposed course of action may be defeated. But in as far as his act is truly a manifestation of intelligent choice, he learns something: as in a scientific experiment an inquirer may learn through his experimentation, his intelligently directed action, quite as much or even more from a failure than from a success. He finds out at least a little as to what was the matter with his prior choice. He can choose better and do better next time; 'beter choice' meaning one better co-ordinated with the conditions that are involved in realizing purpose. Such control or power is never complete; luck or fortune, the propitious support of circumstances not foreseeable is always involved. But at least such a person forms the habit of choosing and acting with conscious regard to the grain of circumstances, the run of affairs. And what is more to the point, such a man becomes able to turn frustration and failure to account in his further choices and purposes.²

Dewey's presentation of the place of consequences in life is completely consistent with his principles of choice and

²John Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1931), pp. 286-287.

selection that were quoted earlier. But notice that right in the midst of his extended argument he introduces the factor of "good fortune." The obvious inference is that Dewey himself felt the difficulty, perhaps even the impossibility, of determining broadly the consequences on the basis of the habit-choices made.

Though he recognizes certain forces that are beyond the control of man, Dewey is careful to state that these forces can, in part, be brought into control, or at least that man be able to predict the action and reaction of these forces. This is something that primitive man with lesser intellectual attainment was not able to do.

There can be no doubt of our dependence upon forces beyond our control. Primitive man was so impotent in the face of these forces that, especially in an unfavorable natural environment, fear became a dominant attitude, and, as the old saying goes, fear created the gods.

With increase of mechanisms of control, the element of fear has, relatively speaking, subsided. Some optimistic souls have even concluded the forces about us are on the whole essentially benign. But every crisis, whether of the individual or of the community, reminds man of the precarious and partial nature of the control he exercises. When man, individually and collectively, has done his uttermost, conditions that at different times and places have given rise to the ideas of Fate and Fortune, of Chance and Providence, remain. It is the part of manliness to insist upon the capacity of mankind to strive to direct natural and social forces to humane ends. But unqualified absolutistic statements about the omnipotence of such endeavors reflect egoism rather than intelligent courage.³

³John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), pp. 24-25.

In spite of man's continued difficulty and even failure in controlling these outside forces, Dewey still insists that it is a part of manliness that man has the capacity to strive with these forces and bring them into subjection for the sake of "humane ends."

In another instance Dewey did not speak nearly so optimistically about man's consequential relationship to these outside forces beyond man's control.

Fortune rather than our own intent and act determines eventual success and failure. The pathos of unfulfilled expectation, the tragedy of defeated purpose and ideals, the catastrophes of accident, are the commonplaces of all comment on the human scene. We survey conditions, make the wisest choice we can; we act, and we must trust the rest to fate, fortune or providence.⁴

Dewey is here taking a far more realistic view of consequences, as they appear in his structure of thought, than he did in the earlier quotation from him. However, Dewey is not ready to admit that because fate and fortune frequently govern our activity, by determining consequences, we must pattern our activity according to an established plan, which itself has been drawn up from a vast amount of experience with fate and fortune.

The fact that human destiny is so interwoven with forces beyond human control renders it unnecessary to suppose that dependence and the humility that accompanies it have to find the particular channel

⁴John Dewey, Quest for Certainty (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1929), p. 7.

that is prescribed by traditional doctrines. . . . For our dependence is manifested in those relations to the environment that support our undertakings and aspirations as much as it is in the defeats inflicted upon us.⁵

To Dewey much of the dependence upon these outside forces is an historical fact, something that existed powerfully in the days of primitive man, but since that time it is slowly being overcome. This being the situation, according to Dewey, men ought to strive with greater energy to establish the scientific method of acting.

It would be possible to argue (and, I think, with much justice) that failure to make action central in the search for such security as is humanly possible is a survival of the impotency of men in those stages of civilization when he had few means of regulating and utilizing the conditions upon which the occurrence of consequences depend. As long as man was unable by means of the arts of practice to direct the course of events, it was natural for him to seek an emotional substitute; in the absence of actual certainty in the midst of a precarious and hazardous world, men cultivated all sorts of things that would give them the feeling of certainty. And it is possible that, when not carried to an illusory point, the cultivation of the feeling gave man courage and confidence and enabled him to carry the burdens of life more successfully.⁶

It is at this point that Dewey can very successfully enter his previous formulation concerning good and evil, fixed and flexible ends. This is not to say that it is logically permissible, for it has previously been shown that

⁵Ibid., p. 25.

⁶Dewey, Quest for Certainty, p. 33.

there are severe shortcomings in Dewey's formulation. But if the practice of letting Dewey speak for himself is maintained, he would at this point, by using a principle established earlier, be able to solve the problem of consequences and fate.

In any case, however, arguments about pessimism and optimism based upon considerations regarding fixed attainment of good and evil are mainly literary in quality. Man continues to live because he is a living creature not because reason convinces him of the certainty or probability of future satisfactions that carry him on. He is instinct with activities that carry him on. Individuals here and there cave in, and most individuals sag, withdraw and seek refuge at this and that point. But man as man still has the dumb pluck of the animal. He has endurance, hope, curiosity, eagerness, love of action. These traits belong to him by structure, not by taking thought. Memory of past and foresight of future convert dumbness to some degree of articulateness. They illumine curiosity and steady courage. Then when the future arrives with its inevitable disappointments as well as fulfillments, and with new sources of trouble, failure loses something of its fatality, and suffering yield fruit of instruction not of bitterness. Humility is more demanded at our moments of triumph than at those of failure. For humility is not a caddish self-depreciation. It is the sense of our slight inability even with our best intelligence and effort to command events; a sense of our dependence upon forces that go their way without our wish and plan.⁷

Dewey points out that much thinking about man and his possibilities has been fogged by pre-conceptions regarding the nature of man. In a series of three quotations Dewey's position on the question of consequent living will be shown.

⁷Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, p. 289.

Once again he places man in the realm of the relative.

Man's nature has been regarded with suspicion, with fear, with sour looks, sometimes with enthusiasm for its possibilities but only when these were placed in contrast with its actualities. It has appeared to be so evilly disposed that the business of morality was to prune and curb it; it would be thought better of if it could be replaced by something else. It has been supposed that morality would be quite superfluous were it not for the inherent weakness, bordering on depravity, of human nature. Some writers with a more genial conception have attributed the current blackening to theologians who have thought to honor the divine by disparaging the human.⁸

According to Dewey these theologians and the religions they represent actually have no battle with science -- provided they are willing to view man through the glasses of the scientific method.

Religious faiths have come under the influence of philosophies that have tried to demonstrate the fixed union of the actual and ideal in ultimate Being. Their interest in persuading to a life of loyalty to what is esteemed good, has been bound up with a certain creed regarding historical origins. Religion has also been involved in the metaphysics of substance, and has thrown in its lot with acceptance of certain cosmogonies. It has found itself fighting a battle and a losing one with science, as if religion were a rival theory about the structure of the natural world.

The religious attitude as a sense of the possibilities of existence and as devotion to the cause of these possibilities, as distinct from acceptance of what is given at the time, gradually extricates itself from these unnecessary intellectual commitments. But religious devotees rarely stop to notice that what lies at the basis of recurrent conflicts with scientific findings is not this or that special dogma so much as it is alliance with philosophical schemes which hold that the reality and power of

⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

whatever is excellent and worth of supreme devotion, depends upon proof of its antecedent existence, so that the ideal of perfection loses its claim over us unless it can be demonstrated to exist in the sense in which the sun and stars exist.⁹

Finally, granting all that Dewey has just said, the measure of consequent living becomes relative to the social situation within which the individual finds himself and encounters the results of his selective form of behavior.

No individual or group will be judged by whether they come up to or fall short of some fixed result, but by the direction in which they are moving. The bad man is the man who no matter how good he has been is beginning to deteriorate, to grow less good. The good man is the man who no matter how morally unworthy he has been is moving to become better.¹⁰

Dewey is careful not to say that a utopia could well come into being if all men were to practice a policy of consequent living. But he is willing to say that without a doubt social conditions would be vastly improved by such action.

Men have never fully used the powers they possess to advance the good in life, because they have waited upon some power external to themselves and to nature to do the work they are responsible for doing. Dependence upon an external power is the counterpart of surrender of human endeavor. Nor is emphasis on exercising our own powers for good an egoistical or sentimentally optimistic recourse. It is not the first, for it does not isolate man, either individually

⁹ Dewey, Quest for Certainty, pp. 303-304.

¹⁰ John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920), p. 141.

or collectively, from nature. It is not the second, because it makes no assumption beyond that of the need and responsibility for human endeavor, and beyond the conviction that, if human desire and endeavor were enlisted in behalf of natural ends, conditions would be bettered. It involves no expectation of a millenium of good.¹¹

The fundamental shortcoming that pervades Dewey's entire philosophy is the problem of providing an adequate motivation to impel men to use all the powers that are at their disposal, whether these powers be internal or external. If man is inherently evil by nature, there is no natural motivation for action that is to be for the good of all. If man is neutral, there simply is no inherent motivation one way or the other. The only way that anyone can discover some sort of motivation within natural man is to say that man is by nature inclined to consequent and considerate societal living.

Indulge for a moment in an imaginative flight. . . . Suppose also men had been systematically educated to believe that the important thing is not to get themselves personally 'right' in relation to the antecedent author and guarantor of these values, but to form their judgments and carry on their activity on the basis of public, objective and shared consequences. Imagine these things and then imagine what the present situation might be.¹²

But still the question remains as to what will be the motivation and who will be the first "educator."

¹¹Dewey, A Common Faith, p. 46.

¹²Dewey, Quest for Certainty, p. 47.

Dewey imagines that

Barring the fears which war leaves in its train, it is perhaps a safe speculation that if contemporary western man were completely deprived of all the old beliefs about knowledge and actions he would assume, with a fair degree of confidence, that it lies within his power to achieve a reasonable degree of security in life.¹³

What has been the cause of these wars, and so of the fears that wars engender in men? Dewey feels that the environment with its social institutions and social structures is the key. If an environment that is both receptive to men and that positively contributes to men is provided, the problem is solved.

We may desire abolition of war, industrial justice, greater equality of opportunity for all. But no amount of preaching good will or the golden rule or cultivation of sentiments of love and equity will accomplish the results. There must be change in objective arrangements and institutions. We must work on the environment not merely on the hearts of men. To think otherwise is to suppose that flowers can be raised in a desert or motor cars run in a jungle. Both things can happen and without a miracle. But only by first changing the jungle and desert.¹⁴

Notice that the "hearts of men" will apparently, by themselves, become positively attuned to the new order and will in the future function according to the spirit of this new arrangement.

How is it that Dewey takes the attitude that man is

¹³Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, pp. 21-22.

potentially in the process of positive development? O'Hara proposes this answer.

That which distinguishes Dewey is the undisguised assurance with which he accepts the theory of evolution. Man is for him the culminating expression of a long series of evolutionary processes. Evolution is invoked to explain everything that exists. Dewey's entire conception excludes the acceptance of creation. Consequently, the question of man's origin is settled by him as being naturalistic. He makes man the highest animal organism.¹⁵

It might also be added that Dewey is able to settle in like manner the question of the nature of man. The nature of man is naturalistic, the highest development of any animal organism. This can be said, according to W. T. Feldman, because

Dewey posits a serial order of natural events, which falls into definite, well-marked stages. At one stage in the history of our universe, no living or conscious beings existed. Upon the occurrence of certain groupings of inanimate objects, life appeared. Mind developed only later, after living creatures had acquired a certain degree of organization. Each of these stages is a genuine addition to the cosmic scene, i.e., its existence is not logically implicit in the state of affairs from which it developed. This all sounds like a familiar form of the theory of emergent evolution, but since Dewey apparently wishes to deny some of the characteristic implications of that theory, his reasonings on this point must be scrutinized carefully. Life, we are told, marks the appearance of 'need-demand-satisfaction' in a world to which that factor had hitherto been foreign.¹⁶

¹⁵James O'Hara, The Limitations of the Educational Theory of John Dewey (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1929), pp. 27-28.

¹⁶W. T. Feldman, The Philosophy of John Dewey (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), p. 74.

The Dewey philosophy then deals with man unlimited. Being consistent, Dewey would say that there is no limit to the levels to which man may develop, provided he employs the proper means. Dewey's methodology of human development is an open-ended methodology. Man can, if only he will. As Le Boutillier phrases Dewey's thought,

The universe is realizing its potentialities, and so is the life of man that represents its most complex activity. Above man there are the idealized meanings of things, or their highest values: the further potentialities of human and natural existence. Dewey insists that this realm is accessible to experience and to human action, a constant challenge to our intelligence, our aspiration and effort, and is in fact a part of the realm of nature, though not yet embodied in fact.¹⁷

However, as far as man has presently developed, Dewey's philosophy has a strange religious piety, according to Le Boutillier.

...a devout piety which says that there is nothing beyond nature but the ideal values man projects there to be actualized; and that faith in the possibility of such actualization is a worthy and an inspiring and a sufficient faith. Man, a part of nature, imbued with intelligent ideals, can intelligently bow the knee to nothing less and nothing more than the active relation he must contrive between himself and these highest hopes.¹⁸

Some pages earlier in this chapter it was stated that the measure of consequent living becomes relative to the

¹⁷ Cornelia Le Boutillier, Religious Values in the Philosophy of Emergent Evolution (New York: n.p., 1936), pp. 74-75.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

social situation within which the individual finds himself and the consequences accruing from his action within that situation. James O'Hara, a student of Dewey who has published a study of Dewey's philosophy, offers this evaluation of what has been called "consequent living."

The destiny of man is earthly according to Dewey's naturalistic and experimental conception of life. As he denies the existence of the soul, a fortiori he sets aside any hope of immortality. The question arises: what is the highest good in life, as he conceives it? This may be answered simply by saying that the individual is to make a return to society that will at least equal what he has received. The individual is to cooperate for his own upbuilding; and not merely cooperate, but also react to life as he meets it in order to make his contribution.¹⁹

This, then, becomes the sum, the substance and the end of life as Dewey views it consequentially.

¹⁹O'Hara, op. cit., p. 30.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY

This final chapter will be a summary of Dewey's thought concerning the nature of man. What follows is quite concentrated. That is because all the constructive arguments have been dropped off here, though they were an important part of the preceding chapters. This chapter contains only Dewey's conclusions concerning the nature of man.

Intelligence is not a gift that each person has from birth. It is something that develops within the individual in the course of that individual's interacting with other people and with his environment. Intelligence is a capacity that is in constant process of forming. It is a capacity for interpreting a received social stimulus and responding to it. Reason is experimental, applied intelligence, and it must always consider the consequences of the response that it selects. Hence, for Dewey all activity of the intellect is oriented to the object by evaluating the object in terms of experience and making preferential selections under the influence of and awareness of consequences.

Intelligence is a product of social action of the individual

Through interacting with others, each person influences other persons and is in turn influenced by them. The infant,

because of his degree of development, is more influenced than influencing. As the infant grows it makes these social influences and the accepted modes of response, or habits, a part of itself. According to Dewey's line of reasoning, the character of the individual is the sum total of habits functioning in the social situation. This being the situation, if better men are desired, form better habits in the young, who are easily influenced, and they will grow to be better men.

Dewey does not accept the concept of "soul," because it cannot be demonstrated empirically that soul exists. However, in spite of this criterion of empirical demonstration, Dewey holds that mind emerges from the operation of intelligence in the social situation. Social interaction of course involves the activity of the body in a social situation, and because both body and intelligence, and concomitantly mind, are all functionally involved together, Dewey concludes that there is a unity of body, mind, nature and society. By this means Dewey denies any dichotomy of body and soul, body and mind, or body and personality.

Good and evil, in the metaphysical or theological sense, do not exist for Dewey. He is concerned only with an individual's emotion responses and the consequences of those responses. In this connection Dewey does admit that the nature of the consequences varies, and so each individual is held liable for the consequences of each of his emotion

responses. At the same time Dewey notes that the individual's emotion responses are neither positively nor negatively oriented. Man is neutral. Unfavorable social conditions promote unsatisfactory emotion responses. Hence, improve social conditions and social "evils" will be eliminated. Unfavorable social conditions are not the result of the nature of man. Rather they are historical accidents that grew out of early man's failure to employ experimental intelligence -- commonly called the scientific method. If men would wholeheartedly employ the scientific method even now, the whole social situation would be rectified in the course of time. Unfortunately men have not thus far been willing to use the scientific method to this extent, and so we are what we are.

The nature of man is not fixed; it is pliable. Accordingly, morals and morality are not fixed entities for Dewey. There is no fixed code of ethics. Morality is a way of life that comes about through a long and still continuing process of men collectively positing some action, testing it, adjusting it, and finally approving it as an acceptable response to a given stimulus. The determining factor that does the testing, adjusting and approving is the intellectual phase of character. However, there are many situations which are not common enough to have approved responses, and so Dewey speaks also of individualized situations, each having its own irreplaceable good and

principles. Ultimately this makes all morals and morality relative to the immediate situation with its consequences. Dewey avoids sheer relativism by inserting the factors of consequence and liability. Dewey does dismiss eternal truths, but he would deny that he dismisses truth. For Dewey truth is only that which has been verified by the scientific method. Mere assent to authority or to tradition for determining truth is not acceptable.

The purpose of this study was to determine Dewey's position on the nature of man. No critique of Dewey's philosophy was intended. But one note ought to be made concerning Dewey's whole philosophic position in relation to the nature of man. The fundamental shortcoming that pervades Dewey's entire philosophy is the problem of providing an adequate motivation to impel men to use all the powers that are at their disposal, whether these powers be internal or external. Dewey has denied that man is evil by nature. He denies the need for any supernatural redemption. He does say that man is neutral, but neutrality offers no motivation -- one way or the other. The result is that Dewey is almost forced by his own logic to say that man is inclined to some sort of living that considers the consequences of every act. He does not say this explicitly, but he implies, partly on the basis of his acceptance of evolution, that it is entirely possible to develop men of this nature through education. But still the question remains as to what will be the

motivation and who will be the first educator.

The philosophy of John Dewey is a wonderful, logical complex. It has gaps. In number they are few, but they occur in such vital spots that the whole logical scheme hangs on whether or not a certain assumption is granted. This is the fatal shortcoming in Dewey's whole philosophy.

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