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CHAPTER 1

ORGANICISM:
DEWEY’S ADAPTATION OF THE “PSYCHOLOGICAL STANDPOINT” AND HIS CRITIQUE OF DUALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL THEORIES

I. INTRODUCTION

John Dewey’s philosophical career spanned decades, ranging from his early Hegelian period to his seminal contributions to pragmatism and his critical work in social psychology. So varied were the topics Dewey engaged, so vast his published library, it would appear impossible to pinpoint some common thread binding all of these different manifestations into one, overarching project. Some commentators, like James Good, believe there to be a “permanent Hegelian deposit” running throughout Dewey’s mature philosophy. Others, like John Shook, believe if there is some common thread tying together Dewey’s otherwise spectacularly diverse contributions to philosophy, it is something more primary, perhaps, more general, a kind of methodological “organicism” and a systematic rejection of atomism. Many more believe there is neither point nor purpose to such an investigation but to those who hold this view I would implore them to reconsider. Finding a common thread throughout the long and diverse career of John Dewey is a project of the utmost philosophical significance. For some, there are two
distinct John Dewey; on the one hand, a theorist of human experience, on the other, a philosopher engaging the nature of existence. More specifically, it has proven to be a challenging task to reconcile what Deweyan scholars refer to as his “naturalist” and “instrumentalist” strains. In the following two chapters, I will make an attempt at just such a reconciliation, beginning with an articulation of the manner by which Dewey’s naturalism arose through an adaptation of the “organicism” permeating the so-called “Psychological Standpoint” which aided Dewey in articulating the conceptual dilemmas and fallacious moves that result in bifurcated, dualistic epistemological systems. In the second chapter, in highlighting the developmental aspect of Dewey’s naturalism, I will attempt to demonstrate how his naturalism remains susceptible to the type of extreme skeptical charges of ego-centric predicaments that Dewey, himself, rails against in traditional theories. To solve that particular dilemma in Deweyan scholarship we must turn away from his naturalism and towards his Peircian-inspired instrumentalism, specifically, his seminal essay “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism.” Whereas Dewey’s naturalism articulates the development of an organism within its environment along pragmatic lines of overcoming problematic situations, Dewey’s instrumentalism mirrors this triadic, cyclical methodology but with the specific goals of explicating objectivity, answering ontological questions about the nature of reality, and countering the ego-centric accusations of global skepticism. We will find that both naturalism and instrumentalism have negative and positive contributions useful in reconstructing “epistemology” as well as “ontology” and, when taken together, forward a robust,
dynamic theory of human experience no longer susceptible to extreme forms of global skepticism.

We will begin our project with an investigation into what Dewey perceived to be the fundamental flaws inherent in dualistic epistemological systems and how these flaws stem from a misunderstanding of the nature of human experience. John Shook highlights “Dewey’s insistence from the start of his career that reason not be abstracted from experience,” and that “any philosophy which would abstract from deliberative experience its intellectual factors, blow them up into metaphysically perfected entities, and then claim that our task is gradually to approximate and duplicate in ourselves these external entities”\(^1\) is a fallacious move that Dewey not only saw as ubiquitous in the epistemological theories of his age, but as something that must be wholly and completely done away with. Indeed, Dewey was sorely tempted to bury the very term “epistemology” in the darkest depths of the philosophical refuse pile where he felt it belonged. As Shook notes, “it may be objected by some at the outset that ‘epistemology’ is in this context a misnomer, since Dewey so often used it as a term of abuse.”\(^2\) In Dewey’s own words:

> Literally of course, ‘epistemology’ means only theory of knowledge; the term might therefore have been employed simply as a synonym for a descriptive logic; for a theory that takes knowledge as it finds it and attempts to give the same kind of an account of it that could be given of any other natural function or occurrence. But the mere mention of what might have been only accentuates what is. The things that pass for epistemology all assume that knowledge is not a natural function or event, but a mystery.\(^3\)

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2 Shook, p. 4
When experience, the organic relationship between individual human beings and their social and natural environments is forgotten, and these abstracted theories, these “external entities,” are set up as foundational or as independent, they more often than not create as a by-product a dualism of one form of another; for anything beyond experience is destined to conflict with what is in experience, be it in the form of a veil between them, impenetrable and mysterious where human sensations lay on one side and unknown “things-in-themselves” lurk on the other, or an ego-centric predicament in which, because of our inability to escape our own “subjective” experiences we will never truly know the “objective” world beyond. “Dewey’s entire philosophy,” Shook points out, “it is hardly too much to say, is a replacement of every dualism with the continuity provided by the absolute reality of the social experience.” When experience becomes primary and absolute, organic unity dissolves all possible dualisms and provides the type of continuity that Dewey felt was the only solution to the ego-centric roadblocks and stumbling points that so handicapped any real, genuine philosophical progress. And yet Dewey did not dismiss such predicaments out of hand but, rather, strove to unweave the dilemmas from within the frameworks of their own systems, on their own terms, in their own language,

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4 This is, of course, only one possible conception of the Kantian “thing-in-itself,” a more detailed analysis of a second way to interpret this concept will come later, one which will prove less problematic and give Kant more credit than he is usually due.
5 Shook, p. 146
6 “The elimination of the absolute self required the transformation of the other primary factors in Dewey’s philosophy: the ideals toward which we strive, the self in the process of realization, and the nature of growing experience…there can be only one philosophical absolute, Dewey decided, which is active human experience. All other realities must be understood as just functional phases of that absolutely ordinary experience,” Shook, p. 154
such that, as we shall see, a return to a standpoint of direct realism\textsuperscript{7}, free from these problematic dilemmas, will require the utmost care and hard work.

We will begin with Dewey’s own “Philosophical Method,” influenced heavily by James Ward’s “Psychological Standpoint,” a standpoint that Dewey would use as his guiding star not only as a means by which to reveal the fallacious movements in traditional epistemological systems but also to develop and articulate his own positive “theory of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{8}

Yet behind his adaptation of the Psychological Standpoint stood an even more fundamental motivation for Dewey, a motivation that, I contend, stemmed from Dewey’s adaptation of Frederich Trendelenburg’s reconfiguration of Hegel’s idealism along with the psychological contributions of Wilhelm Wundt. The common denominator between Trendelenburg and Wundt, two otherwise divergent thinkers, was a very complex, robust sense of “organism” and articulated a need, a demand in fact, for a philosophical system based on the concept of an “organic whole” of human experience, a system free from unnecessary dichotomies, divisions and dualisms. As I will attempt to demonstrate, it is this conception of “organism” that stands as a background against which Dewey applies the Psychological Standpoint as methodology to sustain the “organic whole” of experience and deviations from the Psychological Standpoint will be, likewise, deviations

\textsuperscript{7} It should be noted that Dewey’s “direct realism” is not to be confused with G.E. Moore’s conception of “naïve realism.” John Shook dedicates much of the chapter “The Reconstruction of Philosophy” in his Dewey’s Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality to explicating the difference between the type of direct, “naïve” realism of Moore’s waving hand and Dewey’s direct realism which is brought about by a long, often painful process of inquiry and problem-solving.

\textsuperscript{8} Dewey, more often than not, used “epistemology” as a term of abuse, in an attempt, I would imagine, to distance himself from the epistemological systems he was arguing against. Towards any positive claims of Dewey’s own construction I prefer to use the phrase “theory of knowledge” rather than “epistemology.”
that splinter this conception of this organic whole into parts subsequently taken up again
fallaciously as something primary, fundamental, isolated or independent. The results of
these deviations from both the Psychological Standpoint and, consequently, from
Dewey’s conception of “organism,” will be Dewey’s adaptation of what William James
called the “Psychologist’s Fallacy.”9 The exposition of these fallacious moves in other
schools of philosophy will manifest as some of Dewey’s better known criticisms of
epistemological theories.

II. ORGANICISM

It is neither a revolutionary nor original proposition that Dewey never shook
himself entirely free of his early Hegelian roots. James Good wrote a very illuminating,
thorough investigation of Dewey’s influences throughout the course of his philosophical
career entitled In Search of Unity in Diversity: The Permanent Hegelian Deposit in the
Philosophy of John Dewey. John Shook’s own investigation was heavily entrenched in a
detailed analysis of Dewey’s more prominent influences, noting that there were
“fundamental principles concerning knowledge and reality which Dewey accepted early
in his career and retained in adapted form for his mature thought.”10 Dewey himself
acknowledges this permanent “Hegelian deposit.”11 But Dewey was no blind adherent to
Hegelian absolute idealism. Indeed, what he took from his Hegelian roots in conjunction
with, just as importantly, what he left behind, formed what could easily be construed as

9 Or “Philosopher’s Fallacy”
10 Shook, p. 4
11 From “Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 1930
the primary motivation, the conceptual key, to his lifelong pursuit of the study of the organic whole of experience.

Dewey’s own idealism was from the outset unique, “never even a close duplicate of any other absolute idealism,”12 but there was, at the very least, one concept that Dewey held onto from his early Hegelian days and never let go of, that “experience is philosophically absolute.”13 A diverse array of influences, certainly, played into the development of his unique form of idealism, not the least of which was Frederich Trendelenburg.

Trendelenburg taught at Berlin University from 1833 through 1872 and articulated a theory of “organism” that would jibe well with the type of theory that Dewey would eventually articulate himself. This theory was passed on to Dewey, specifically, through the medium of yet another unique idealist, George S. Morris who taught at John Hopkins from 1878 to 1884. “Morris later found persuasive the idea that the individual mind is an organ with its own teleology, actively functioning within the absolute organism. This would obviate any need for a dualistic system of physical and mental reality.”14

It is here, in this synthesis of “physical and mental reality,” that Dewey found appealing ground for exploration. James Good, in his own account of Dewey’s development, points out that the Hegelian conception of the “Bildung model of

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12 Shook, p. 21
13 Shook, p. 20
14 Shook, p. 25
philosophy is the most significant Hegelian deposit in Dewey’s mature thought.”

How, precisely, does Good define Hegel’s conception of Bildung? “Bildung I will define simply as an organic model of education as growth.”

Shook highlights three key points that he believes Dewey inherited from Trendelenburg via Morris; points in close connection to what Good articulated as one of the most prominent and significant Hegelian deposits in Dewey’s mature thought, this dynamic conception of “Bildung.”

First, the highest level of understanding is teleological: to know completely a thing is to situate it in its context of growth…this ‘genetic’ mode of knowledge, provides Dewey with his primary epistemological thesis. Knowledge itself must be teleologically understood, in its own proper context, as a growth out of materials that it has actively and intentionally made its own. Second, the proper context for human knowledge is mind’s environment: the human mind develops in concert with nature, by interacting with nature in intelligent ways. Mind and nature, for Trendelenburg, Morris, and Dewey are harmoniously fitted together. Nature is never inscrutable and impenetrable to mind, and mind is not passively aloof and distance from nature. Organically one, the human mind and the natural world seem designed to grow together. Third, as organic growth demands developmental change, mind and nature must manifest such change.

As we recall, Good defined the Hegelian conception of Bildung as “an organic model of education as growth.” It is, I contend, precisely this notion that Shook is highlighting as the key aspect of Dewey’s inheritance from Trendelenburg and Morris, an original Hegelian conception which, by these rather unique idealists who rejected the timelessness of the absolute as ultimate reality and replaced it with an ultimate reality comprised instead of an “organic,” “teleological” development, this sense of “growth” and “education.” Good and Shook, I feel, are on this topic in complete accord and have

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16 Goode, p.xx
17 Shook, p. 25
highlighted what I believe to be the very spine of Dewey’s “epistemology” and 
metaphysics, the conception of organic growth, of education and progress.

In the latter two decades of the nineteenth century, Dewey came likewise under 
the influence of a rather unique psychologist, Wilhelm Wundt whose four major works, 
*Principles of Physiological Psychology* (1880), *Logik* (1883), *Ethik* (1886) and *System 
der Philosophie* (1889) further bolstered and reinforced Dewey’s growing organicism, 
adding dynamic new dimensions to his early work.

It is no surprise at all that Dewey would be drawn to a man who espoused a 
theory of “physiological psychology,” the science of observing the relations that hold 
between the one and the other. For a man, like Dewey, who saw first and foremost the 
organic totality and only as derivative, divisions from that totality, Wundt’s physiological 
psychology would have seemed like the window into the mind of a kindred spirit, a man 
who prized both psychology and felt that psychology, as a science, should be used to 
analyze organic totalities, specifically the relations of mind and body. As Shook 
describes of Wundt’s contributions: “While all of the sciences start from observations of 
experience, the natural sciences (such as physiology) begin from observing the external 
world and psychology starts from observing the internal mental processes in 
experience.”18 Wundt combined the two into an even greater organic unity, as ever 
starting from experience, but experience as the organic totality of the physical and the 
psychical. While Dewey’s own “epistemology” would not have characterized experience 
as such, dividing the “external world” from “internal processes” and then attempting to

18 Shook, p. 77
recombine what was already divided, the genuine desire to find a systematized methodology by which the psychical and the physical worked together in a coherent totality was certainly an idea that both Wundt and Dewey shared. Wundt, however, seemed less concerned than Dewey with the epistemological ramifications of dividing experience up into “externals” and “internals” and then trying to recombine them.  

Whereas Trendelenburg and Morris focused on a kind of unified organic theory of the physical-psychological nature, Wundt’s major contribution, both in terms of his own work and in terms of his influence on Dewey, was the unification of the individual aspects of mind and the rejection of a mechanistic sort of atomism in which the individual parts were considered as opposing and independent.

For Wundt the mind was an interrelated whole, performing many connected functions at once, each recognizable only in an advanced state of psychological development. However, although we can distinguish them, that does not imply that they have thereby achieved a new state of relative independence. By taking them too independently, other psychologies have fallen into grave errors. Erecting them into separate entities or function creates the need to postulate even more elaborate mental activities to explain how they can cooperate.

We can see in Shook’s analysis of Wundt not only the emphasis on the organic unity of mind, not only the greater organic unity of mind and body in a similar physiological-psychological sense that Trendelburg and Morris advanced, but also the need for a regulative study of psychology that demanded unity and rejected mechanistic atomism and artificial divisions.

The recognition of mental life as an organic unitary process developing according to the laws of all life, and not a theatre for the exhibition of independent

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19 Dewey’s contributions to the transaction between the psychical and the physical will be articulated clearly in the next chapter when we turn to Dewey’s contributions to the Reflex Circuit (Arc) concept in psychology.

20 Shook, p. 78 - 79
autonomous faculties, or a rendezvous in which isolated, atomic sensations and ideas may gather, hold external converse, and then forever part.\textsuperscript{21}

The failure of most epistemological systems, Dewey thought, was based on a disregard for the organistic approach to psychology; that of taking the mind not as an assembly of completely unrelated parts, not as a static substance, but as a dynamic, developing process, one not in opposition to the body, but in concert with it, the individual not in opposition to his environment, but in concert with that as well. Divisions, when they take place, are artificial, though sometimes necessary for scientific isolation and study, and problems arise when a part is divided from the whole and not put back where it was found, so to speak. The part attains a confused place of importance, as something independent, fundamental, “given,” or primary and the process by which it was abstracted in the first place is forgotten. Dewey needed to articulate, in no uncertain terms, a methodology based upon the view that the human being was a developing organism. Organic unity and not unbridgeable dichotomies should be the template against which to measure all realistic, successful psychological methodologies. Dewey needed to expose the epistemological fallacies of his day and thus created his own, unique version of what had become known as the Psychological Standpoint.\textsuperscript{22}

Organicism, briefly stated, is the philosophical doctrine that experience is best understood as an organic whole, rejecting the possibility that it can be better understood when broken down into its atomistic, constituent parts. That is, however, only the general conception of organicism, and as we shall see, Dewey’s use of the term and the

\textsuperscript{21} EW 1:56
\textsuperscript{22} “Psychology” was an important part of Hegel’s system that was, most likely, influential on Dewey’s early “psychology” as well.
concept of “organism” have two distinct yet interconnected uses and neither is exactly based on this general definition. The gist, however, is simple enough and one that Dewey certainly embraced: as a methodology, experience is best understood by looking at it as an organic whole rather than a concatenation of separate, atomized components or as only a collection of aggregate parts. Methodologically, experience is unified in the unanalyzed totality of subject/object in primary (or “non-reflective”) experience. Further, the phases of inquiry, as articulated by Dewey as adapted from the work of his pragmatic predecessors, must be seen as organically whole as well, an ongoing circuit. These concepts we will explore in full in chapters two and three of this investigation where we tackle Dewey’s developmental naturalism and his methodological “instrumentalism.” Further, there is, of course, nothing wrong with the breaking apart of individual, “atomized” parts of experience for special study. Indeed, Dewey would argue that this is, often, a necessary condition for fully developing a theory of an individual aspect of experience. Specific inquiries demand this kind of divisibility of the organic whole. The error lies not in dividing aspects from the organic whole of experience but, in a general sense, forgetting to put them back where they were divided from in the first place.

There are, as we’ve said, two general ways in which Dewey adapts and employs this concept of “organicism” in his philosophical investigations. On the one hand, it is to be contrasted methodologically with “atomism” by retaining the holistic integrity of experience and refrain from the unnecessary division and study of its individual

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23 The phases of inquiry, generally stated, are “settled-problem-hypothesis-test-objective-settled.” We will explore this type of “instrumentalism” in full in chapters two and three of this investigation.

24 Again, “holistic” in a methodological, not cosmological sense. Dewey was noting these otherwise cosmological conceptions of organismism from Morris and Trendelenburg but had his own agenda, namely, the construction of a functional methodology not a replacement cosmology.
components. On the other hand, in a narrower sense, that “organistic” approach to experience can be seen, metaphorically, as the transaction between organism and its surrounding environment. In a very general nutshell, this represents Dewey’s naturalism. Naturalism, for Dewey, is the reciprocal relation between an organism and its environment and must be explored as such, not atomistically in which “organism” or “environment” are artificially divided from one another and placed in opposition as so many of the “traditional” epistemological systems maintained. The critical influence that organicism had on Dewey’s naturalism was that “organism” and “environment” were not merely mechanistically “bumping up” against one another but, rather, were in a dynamic, reciprocal relation, engaging in give-and-take “transactions” in which each was augmented by the other, both developing due to the other. As such, Dewey’s organicism-cum-naturalism was not only a rejection of methodological atomism in favor of a methodological holism but, also, represented a rejection of any form of mechanistic approach to the study of human experience in favor of a dynamic, reciprocal relation between otherwise divergent aspects of experience. Perhaps Dewey’s greatest contribution to psychology and a vibrant example of this dual rejection of methodological atomism and mechanistic approaches to psychology lay in his reformulation of the “Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology.”

III. REFLEX CIRCUIT VS. REFLEX ARC

25 Though, these other systems usually employed terms like “mind” and “mind-independent reality” or “subject” and “object” rather than “organism” and “environment,” but the point remains the same.
“The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” was published in 1896, six years after William James’ “The Stream of Thought.” The essay was heavily influenced by James’ *Principles of Psychology*, as John McDermott points out in his introduction to the essay in his collected works, “In ‘The Development of American Pragmatism,’ Dewey wrote that the *Principles* enabled him to criticize Locke and Hume, as well as Kant and the neo-Kantians.”

McDermott goes on to stress the critical impact that Dewey’s contribution in this essay had to the development of psychological theory in quoting Gordon W. Allport in saying that “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology was ‘the most important psychological paper of the nineties.’”

The views that Dewey expressed in this pivotal essay were views that he would bring with him throughout his professional career. Indeed, some forty years later, Dewey echoed the sentiments of the “Reflex Arc” in his *Art as Experience*. Before we turn to the rather dense psychological methodology behind his contributions to the Reflex Arc, it may prove prudent to turn first to the later work so as to not only emphasize the enduring characteristics in Dewey’s philosophy but also to better express the place that his work with the Reflex Arc had in his overall theory of experience.

Before Dewey felt he could fully articulate his aesthetic theory of experience, he felt it necessary to clearly define what a “normal experience” actually was. To do so, though never made explicit, he draws heavily on the theories found in his much earlier work on the Reflex Arc in psychology.

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27 McDermott, p. 136. Indeed, on receiving the Nobel Prize for cognitive research in 1970, Sir John Eccles called it one of the most important milestones in the history of psychology.

28 *Art as Experience*, pp. 11 - 12
The senses are the organs through which the live creature participates directly in the on-goings of the world about him. In this participation the varied wonder and splendor of this world are made actual form him in the qualities he experiences. This material cannot be opposed to action, for motor apparatus and ‘will’ itself are the means by which this participation is carried on and directed. It is not opposed to ‘intellect,’ for mind is the means by which participation is rendered fruitful through sense; by which meanings and values are extracted, retained, and put to further service in the course of the live creature with his surroundings.29

The various functions of the live creature, the human being in its totality, act as a unified whole system reacting with its environment, adapting and readapting. “Senses” cannot be wholly exorcised from “will,” nor “intellect” from “action.” As he himself says, “since sense-organs with their connected motor apparatus are the means of this participation, any and every derogation of them, whether practical or theoretical, is at once effect and cause of a narrowed and dulled life-experience.”30 These derogations result in the kind of bifurcations found in the traditional epistemological theories that failed both to abide by the Psychological Standpoint and maintain the organic whole of experience. “Oppositions of mind and body, soul and matter, spirit and flesh all have their origin”31 in this unnatural derogation of one aspect of experience or another.

In the “Reflex Arc” essay, Dewey is bringing to bear his organistically infused naturalism against a significant flaw in the preexisting Reflex Theory. As he says:

The older dualism between sensation and idea is repeated in the current dualism of peripheral and central structures and functions; the older dualism of body and soul finds a distinct echo in the current dualism of stimulus and response. Instead of interpreting the character of sensation, idea and action from their place and function in the sensorimotor circuit, we still incline to interpret the latter from our preconceived and preformulated ideas of rigid distinctions between sensations, thoughts and acts. The sensory stimulus is one thing, the central activity, standing for the idea, is another thing, and the motor discharge, standing for the act proper, is a third. As a result, the reflex arc

29 Art as Experience, p. 22
30 Art as Experience, pp. 22 - 23
31 Art as Experience, p. 23
is not a comprehensive, or organic, unity, but a patchwork of disjoined parts, a mechanical conjunction of unallied processes.\textsuperscript{32}

The problem with the preexisting theory, as Dewey saw it, was that the different aspects of perception, specifically, the act of perception involved in an organism’s transaction with its environment were present but in an unnatural, divided, mechanistic sort of fashion. Instead of this, Dewey argued that each of these aspects of the sensorimotor system of the live creature be seen rather as phases in one whole, organic process, a “circuit” rather than an “arc” in which the phases of perception, stimulus, reaction, all inform one another and then loop back to inform future circuits now incorporating the new information gained from completed present and past circuits. In no way does Dewey try to disguise the obvious Peircian influence found in both the “Fixation of Belief” and the interactivity of what Peirce called “firstness,” “secondness” and “thirdness”\textsuperscript{33} which not only informed one another (there could never be simply one present without, in some fashion, the other two as well), but also articulated a system by which every thirdness would, necessarily, loop back into a new firstness, and so on. In \textit{Art as Experience}, Dewey clarifies this conception of the normal experience by invoking a very naturalistic argument:

\begin{quote}
Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it…and, in a growing life, the recovery is never a mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} McDermott, p. 137
\textsuperscript{33} In our next chapter, outlining the development aspect of Dewey’s naturalism and his methodological instrumentalism we will deal thoroughly with Peirce’s notion of “firstness,” “secondness” and “thirdness.”
\end{flushright}
The emphasis here is on the idea of “phases” within one total experience, not the kind of compartmentalized, mechanistic aspects found in the original concept of the Reflex Arc Theory. Dewey invokes a very Jamesian example in articulating this very point when he says that “growth signifies that a varied series of change enters upon intervals of pause and rest; of completions that become the initial points of new processes of development.” These phases of “rest” and movement are akin to the phases that James articulated as “perchings” and “flights” in *Principles of Psychology*, not mechanistic aspects of experience operating in a content-free vacuum, but phases of experience, phases of an organism’s adaptation and transaction within its environment. It is this very argument, this conception of “phases” within an organic whole that informed Dewey’s organistic reinterpretation of the Reflex Arc concept in psychology.

“What is wanted is that sensory stimulus, central connections and motor responses shall be viewed, not as separate and complete entities in themselves, but as divisions of labor, functioning factors, within the single concrete whole.” The type of naturalistic organismism found in Dewey’s argument against traditional epistemological theories that result in the psychologist’s fallacy is taken to an even more precise level here. Although “stimulus-response” and primitive “sense” data” are different problems, both commit the same fallacy of failing to keep what is whole, whole, and constructing artificial divisions where none previously existed. Not only should the different aspects within experience not be removed from experience and placed in a position somehow “external” or

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35 Art as Experience, p. 24
36 We will explore James’ cycle of “flights” and “perchings” in full in the second chapter of this investigation
37 McDermott, p. 137
independent of experience, but even within experience they should not be viewed as mechanically connected, operating disjointedly within an organic whole, but in unison, in harmony, the “divisions of labor” here are synonymous with the “phases of experience” most especially James articulated in his theory of “flights” and “perchings.” “Stated on the psychological side, this reality may most conveniently be termed co-ordination,” as Dewey says.

The reflex concept does not follow a pattern of “sensation-followed-by-idea-followed-by-movement” but, rather, a co-ordination of all three in one organic total experience. Just as no aspect of Peirce’s firstness, secondness and thirdness is ever entirely independent of the other two, so too here we see aspects in experience as phases within a total action, not as mechanically conjoined aspects of experience in themselves. In a sense, the term “followed by” can be replaced with simply “for,” that of a sensation for the idea for the movement and then, following the pattern of inquiry set by his pragmatic predecessors, a return to sensation and so on. “The act is seeing,” Dewey points out, “no less than before, but it is not seeing-for-reaching purposes.” Failing this, the result is, as Dewey points, what was the established and accepted reflex arc concept in psychology:

Failing to see the unity of activity, no matter how much it may prate of unity, it still leaves us with sensation or peripheral stimulus; idea, or central process…and motor response, or act, as three disconnected existences, having to be somehow adjusted to each

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38 Simply removing aspects of experience from experience for philosophical investigation is entirely acceptable. It is the phase of returning what was taken to its proper place that develops into a philosophical problem.
39 McDermott, p. 137
40 McDermott, p. 137
41 McDermott, p. 138
other, whether through the intervention of an extra-experimental soul, or by mechanical push and pull.\textsuperscript{42}

The attempt at unity is not enough if one fails to observe the different aspects found in the reflex system are, in fact, phases in one whole circular experience and not simply tossed together and mechanistically interacting, one after the other, each performing its own function regardless of the functions of the other two. The result is then a need for some kind of magical synthesizing system, something to bind them all together, either, as Dewey calls, some kind of “extra-experimental soul” or that disjointed mechanical movement, pushing and pulling but not truly interacting (or, rather, co-ordinating).

Ultimately, the very conception of reflex “arc” must be abandoned in favor of a more dynamic conception of a reflex circuit:

> What we have is a circuit; not an arc or broken segment of a circle. This circuit is more truly termed organic than reflex, because the motor response determines the stimulus, just as truly as sensory stimulus determines movement. Indeed, the movement is only for the sake of determining the stimulus, of fixing what kind of stimulus it is, of interpreting it.\textsuperscript{43}

The influence of Dewey’s organicism is made explicit in his theory reconstructing the reflex arc theory in psychology into a kind of “organic circuit.” The arc concept, aside from failing to account for the ways in which the different aspects of experience work together in more than a very superficially unified way (that they are, in fact, phases of experience all interrelated and interdependent, not merely following one after another in a forced, mechanistic, autonomous fashion), but also fails to account for the return of the arc into itself. It is, in fact, the return that accounts for the ability to learn at all. The eye muscles of a child, for example, adjust so that a focal stimulus can count as a

\textsuperscript{42} Mc Dermott, p. 139
\textsuperscript{43} Mc Dermott, p. 141
stimulus; and they adjust only because something is at odds with the child’s previous and anticipated course of experiences. This proves to be a potent argument against the traditional view that somehow a stimulus gets the entire process started and is really the heart of Dewey’s reformulation of the “arc” concept into the “circuit” concept. Note, as well, how seamlessly our previous examples of problematic situations, either minor attentions or serious problems, cause a necessary adjustment, an overcoming of the problem, in order to reestablish equilibrium.

It is worth while…to note especially the fact that it is simply the completion, or fulfillment, of the previous eye-arm-hand co-ordination and not an entirely new occurrence. Only because the heat-pain quale enters into the same circuit of experience with the optical-ocular quale and muscular quales, does the child learn from the experience and get the ability to avoid the experience in the future.44

Just as the Peircian firstness, secondness and thirdness operate in such a fashion that no one is ever devoid of the other two, likewise, every firstness proceeds from a previous thirdness of some other fulfillment of related experience. It is in this fashion that growth, that progress, that education occurs at all. A “reflex arc” cannot account for the reality of experience, according to Dewey, but rather we must turn instead to a more dynamic psychological standard of an “organic circuit.”

IV. A RECOVERY IN PHILOSOPHY

Another of Dewey’s more popular essays, which explores this notion of organism-qua-naturalism in terms of combating the prevalent problems in traditional epistemological systems, is his “Need for a Recovery in Philosophy” from 1917. Here he draws the distinction between the traditional epistemological view of experience and his

44 McDermott, p. 138
own naturalistic conception: “In the orthodox view, experience is regarded primarily as a
knowledge-affair. But to eyes not looking through ancient spectacles, it assuredly
appears as an affair of the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social
environment.” It follows, then, that if this “intercourse” between living beings and their
social worlds is forsaken or ignored, what remains is an atomistic account of the one and
other as separate entities cordoned off from the other. As he says, “the empirical
tradition is committed to particularism. Connections and continuities are supposed to be
foreign to experience, to be by-products of dubious validity.” There may be influences
here from James who maintained, especially in his Principles of Psychology, the
necessity to view both moments of certainty and rest (“perchings”) and moments of
uncertainty and movement (“flights”) as equally real and neither more nor less
significant to human growth and experience.

Suppose we take seriously the contribution made to our idea of experience by
biology…any account of experience must now fit into the consideration that experiencing
means living; and that living goes on in and because of an environing medium, not in a
vacuum. Where there is experience, there is a living being. Where there is life, there is a
double connection maintained with the environment.

In part, this type of naturalism is heavily influenced by Peirce’s notion of equilibrium as
articulated in his “Fixation of Belief” which we will engage in full in the next chapter.

For Dewey, an organism is constantly striving to maintain and re-establish its equilibrium
with its environment and this striving is an often-painful process of suffering, of
projection of hope, of joy in overcoming and sorrow in its eventual, and inevitable,

\[\text{References:}\]

45 McDermott, p. 61
46 Ibid
dissolution once again. To experience is to live, for Dewey, and living is a constant struggle of an organism to overcome the problems it faces from its environment so as to ensure its prosperity and survival.

Empirically, then, active bonds of continuities of all kinds, together with static discontinuities, characterize existence. To deny this qualitative heterogeneity is to reduce the struggles and difficulties of life, its comedies and tragedies, to illusion: to the nonbeing of the Greeks or to its modern counterpart, the “subjective.”

Again we see clearly some influence, or at the very least “like-mindedness” with James in his assertion that neither the moments of rest nor the moments of transition should be viewed as any less “real” or any more “illusion” than the other. Experience is living and living is a fusion of these moments of rest and moments of flight, their intercourse, their “transaction,” constituting the integrity of experience as an organism adapting and maintaining itself in its surrounding and often hostile environment.

In the sensationalism which sprang from Hume (and which was left unquestioned by Kant as far as any strictly empirical element was concerned) the implicit particularism was made explicit. But the doctrine that sensations and ideas are so many separate existences was not derived from observation nor from experience. It was a logical deduction from a prior unexamined concept of the nature of experience. From the same concept it followed that the appearance of stable objects and of general principles of connection was but an appearance.

Although Dewey’s articulations of the problems inherent in dualistic epistemological systems are frequent and varied, it may not be too far-fetched to say that this passage encapsulates the heart of his complaint. It is here, in the unfortunate “unexamined concept of the nature of experience,” that errors arise. Simply put, a sufficient examination of experience demonstrates that experience, as the transaction of organism

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48 As he says, “any achieved equilibrium of adjustment with the environment is precarious,” McDermott, p. 63
49 p. 66
50 McDermott, p. 67
and environment, between self and world, will not place one in opposition to another but form a unified totality at the outset rather than a bifurcated worldview. How, precisely, this is accomplished we will explore in our next chapter when we engage Dewey’s instrumentalism. Suffice it to say for now, Dewey is addressing the problems of epistemology not indirectly, but head on:

But if the assumption that experience is something set over and against the world is contrary to fact, then the problem of how self or mind or subjective experience or consciousness can reach knowledge of an external world is assuredly a meaningless problem.51

Problems arise for all dualistic epistemologies in the same fashion: some fundamental error in the initial examination of the nature of experience leads to the deductive conclusion that some aspect within experience must somehow be either prior to, or external to, experience. In order to maintain the organic integrity of experience, Dewey turned to the so-called “psychological standpoint” as a philosophical method by which to avoid the type of problematic initial interpretations of experience that divide it internally at the outset. Violations of this initial naturalistic-cum-organistic psychological standpoint result in what Dewey would call the “psychologist’s” or “philosopher’s fallacy.”

V. PSYCHOLOGICAL STANDPOINT AS PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD

Empiricism, generally stated, is an epistemological methodology emphasizing experience above all else, leaning heavily on scientific experimentation and observation in lieu of abstract theorizing. In “The Psychological Standpoint,” Dewey systematically

51 McDermott, p. 75
goes through the major players in British Empiricism and illuminates how they all started on the proper empirical principles but, despite their best original intentions, fell prey to the same sort of fallacious assumptions which violate the original psychological standpoint that Dewey believed empiricism, in its uncorrupted form, must adhere to. Empiricism, in this article, properly executed is not only compatible with “psychology” but is a necessary component of it.

In this present paper, I wish to point out that the defects and contradictions so powerfully urged against the characteristic tendency of British Philosophy are due – not to its psychological standpoint but – to its desertion of it. In short, the psychological basis of English philosophy has been its strength; its weakness has been that it has left this basis – that it has not been psychological enough.  

Epistemologies, from dualistic realisms through absolute idealisms, fall prey to confusions based precisely on the unjustified exorcism of one part of human experience or another and, once removed, holding this part as something primary, fundamental and independent, something apart from experience, something from which experience itself may even have sprung, without remembering that it was from experience that they removed the part to begin with. Dewey needed a way to articulate a positive methodology by which philosophers could study experience as an organic totality, vouchsafing philosophers a proper psychological analysis. It was, I argue, his organicism more than anything else, that lead Dewey to adapt James Ward’s, T.H. Green’s and James Seth’s work with the “Psychological Standpoint” that, in its most fundamental form, kept the whole of human experience and preserved the abstraction of individual parts of experience as something necessary for inquiry but never allowing for

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52 McDermott, p. 99
improper replacement of said parts as something independent of human experience or something from which human experience arose.

The psychological standpoint is this: nothing shall be admitted into philosophy which does not show itself in experience, and its nature, that is, its place in experience, shall be fixed by an account of the process of knowledge – by Psychology.53

The association between organicism as a “holistic” approach to epistemology and the psychological standpoint’s insistence that nothing “be admitted into philosophy which does not show itself in experience” is a subtle and somewhat elusive one. If epistemology is not approached holistically, that is “organically,” that epistemological theory runs the risk of breaking some aspect of experience off, atomistically separated and placed in its own individual “container,” effectively “misplacing” it outside of experience. Conversely, nothing runs the risk of violating the psychological standpoint as long as experience is engaged “organically,” for nothing could escape experience to be seen as beyond experience and then, accordingly, not allowed back in.

Psychology, in turn for Dewey, is the “scientific and systematic account of this experience.”54 The psychological method as applied to experience which, as we recall for Dewey, is absolute, effectively exorcises from philosophy all elements found in other epistemologies not founded in (or, indeed, even found in) experience. The ultimate result, as we shall see, is an intriguing combination of pulling into experience what other epistemologies found to be outside of experience or, from a different point of view, severing the “veil” once and for all, letting all behind it fall away into the oblivion of intellectual abstractions and unfounded postulations.

54 McDermott, p. 100
This entire investigation, thus far, explicating Dewey’s critique of traditional epistemological systems is reflective of this attitude towards philosophy. Maintaining the Psychological Standpoint, for example, presents a robust means by which to criticize traditional epistemological theories, clearing a path for philosophical productivity by exposing the types of fallacious movements within a theory that hinders progress by creating artificial problems. For if “psychology” is the “scientific and systematic account” of experience, and experience is the transaction between organism and environment, then a proper psychological standpoint, a viable philosophical method, maintains the integrity of experience as the starting point for psychological as well as philosophical inquiry. Organism and environment begin unified in a reciprocal relation as indicative of a proper examination of the nature of experience and the psychological standpoint is the litmus test to confirm that experience is being analyzed in its proper, unified, organic nature. Violations of this standpoint are examples of what Dewey (and James) called the “psychologist’s” or “philosopher’s fallacy.”

VI. VIOLATIONS OF THE “STANDPOINT” RESULT IN THE PSYCHOLOGIST’S FALLACY

Massive tomes could be written simply stock-listing the examples that Dewey (and, for that matter, James as well) found in epistemological theories of the so-called “Psychologist’s Fallacy.” The Fallacy itself is a direct result of violations of the Psychological Standpoint that, in turn, since it is so heavily based in Dewey’s organicism, leads to the Fallacy’s primary failure being one of forgetting to keep what is whole, whole. If experience is our organic whole, and for Dewey it most certainly is, then the
Psychological Standpoint aims at maintaining the organic whole of experience when involved in philosophical inquiry and violations of the Standpoint are examples of the Psychologist’s Fallacy that separate some aspect found in experience and place it firmly outside experience. It is, in essence, the genesis of all extra-experiential entities such as the Kantian thing-in-itself. Such violations result in dualistic theories of knowledge irrevocably and perpetually doomed to fall under the skeptic’s ego-centric dagger.

Our next chapter will deal with Dewey’s developmental naturalism and his instrumentalism, both based heavily upon Peirce’s earlier contributions, but a preliminary explication is needed here in terms of what is meant by “keeping what is whole, whole.” The implication, obviously, is that the natural state of affairs for experience is a state prior to cognitive divisions. This natural state is, in a sense, the state of rest, of equilibrium, existent in what Dewey would call primary or non-reflective experience, or James’ “perchings” or, perhaps, Peirce’s conception of “a state of belief.” Again, a more detailed explication will follow, but for now let us suffice to describe this initial state of “wholeness” as the state prior to cognitive reflection, when an experience is non-reflectively “had” rather than cognitively “known,” the “gestalt” or “fit” of experience in which the experience itself is ineffable, in an innocuous sense, simply prior to reflective experience.

55 Only if by “thing-in-itself” we mean some “mind-independent thing with a determinate nature of its own.” For example, Russell’s table independent of a group of observer’s individual and diverging accounts of his appearance, the “table-in-itself” that is “beyond” the sum-total of all of the observer’s phenomenological accounts of it (it’s color, shape, size, shading, etc.). However, if we align the noumenal with what should not be thought of or speculated about, this interpretation would enforce the fallacy, not commit it, by drawing our attention to the necessity of not confusing the ineffable nonreflective aspect of “having” an experience with the cognitive, reflective aspect of “knowing” something as an experience.
We see a sample of this fallacious move in Dewey’s attack on John Locke’s epistemology. The Locke example, found in Dewey’s essay “The Psychological Standpoint,” is one of the better examples that I’ve discovered as it begins with Locke’s articulation of a sort of proto-Psychological Standpoint and then its unfortunate (but instantaneous) violation that resulted in a prime example of the Psychologist’s Fallacy.

As Dewey quotes from Locke, “I thought that the first step towards satisfying several inquiries the mind of man was very apt to run into was to take a view of our own understandings, examine our own powers, and see to what things they were adapted.”\[^{56}\] This, for Dewey, in conjunction with Locke’s assertion that “whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks” is an Idea, created a solid precursor to the Psychological Standpoint. He notes, however, that Locke “having stated this method, immediately deserted it.”\[^{57}\] This is the same problem that Dewey finds in all British epistemologies, the genuine effort in the beginning of philosophical inquiry to develop and sustain a proper psychological perspective, but then the subsequent failure to fully adhere to it resulting in the types of fallacious arguments that we turn to now.\[^{58}\] Locke, articulated early on a desire to begin his inquiries into the nature of mind and then observe how objects unfolded from this perspective of, for all intents and purposes, human experience. However, instead of following this pattern of inquiry starting from man’s experience and engaging inquiries into the nature of mind and world from the

\[^{56}\text{McDermott, pp. 99 - 100}\]
\[^{57}\text{McDermott, p. 100}\]
\[^{58}\text{“In this present paper, I wish to point out that the defects and contradictions so powerfully urged against the characteristic tendency of British philosophy are due – not to its psychological standpoint but – to its desertion of it. In short, the psychological basis of English philosophy has been its strength: its weakness has been that it has left this basis – that is has not been psychological enough,” McDermott, p. 99}\]
perspective of man’s “own powers,” Locke “proceeded to explain our knowledge by reference to certain unknowable substances, called by the name of matter, making impressions on an unknowable substance, called mind.”

Instead of beginning with concrete experiences and asking what these concrete experiences tell us about reality as a whole, Locke reversed the process. It is in this way, and only in this way, that these things became “unknowable.” If the Psychological Standpoint, even in the form that Locke himself articulated, is followed thoroughly, “nothing shall be admitted into philosophy which does not show itself in experience, and its nature, that is, its place in experience, shall be fixed by an account of the process of knowledge – by Psychology.” Locke essentially reversed this process, as Dewey points out Hume did as well, starting “with a theory as to the nature of reality and determined experience from that.” Effectively, Locke opened his own door to the admission of things outside of experience, indeed, things completely unknowable, as opposed to sticking to his original standpoint of observing phenomena from the perspective of experience, human “powers,” as it were. “Locke,” Dewey argues, “assumes that something exists out of relation to knowledge or consciousness, and that this something is ultimately the only real, and that from it knowledge, consciousness, experience, come to be. If this is not giving up the psychological standpoint, it would be difficult to tell what is.”

59 McDermott, p. 100  
60 McDermott, p. 100  
61 McDermott, p. 100  
62 McDermott, p. 100
Shook goes out of his way to emphasize just how critical and “revolutionary” this application of Psychology to epistemological inquiry was for Dewey’s career:

It would not be too much to say that with this principle – that elements found within knowledge should not be taken to have an independent existence beyond or before knowledge – Dewey cleared the start of a revolutionary path for his career.\(^{63}\)

Shook’s characterization of the Psychological Standpoint in the above quotation is simultaneously a fairly concise articulation of the results of its violation, that is, a fairly concise definition of the Psychologist’s Fallacy which further shows how intimately related the two concepts are, both in positive articulation and negative consequence.

Dewey’s own definition is markedly similar:

What is denied is the correctness of the procedure which, discovering a certain element in knowledge to be necessary for knowledge, therefore concludes that this element has an existence prior to or apart from knowledge.\(^{64}\)

The Fallacy itself is well known and need not take up too much of our time in this investigation per se, all that needs be said here, however, is that it is the direct result of a failure to adhere to the Psychological Standpoint. The question we must answer now is, what, precisely, is the correlation between Dewey’s organicism and Dewey’s Psychological Standpoint?

The answer, I believe, was discovered as an intriguing bi-product of Shook’s research into Dewey’s early influences. John Caird, an organicist in his own right, articulated the following doctrine that proved to be, I would argue, a pivotal text and highly influential upon the early Dewey:

In a sense, analysis and abstraction constitute an important even a necessary step toward the truth. It is only when we sever the elements of knowledge from each other by

\(^{63}\) Shook, p. 48
\(^{64}\) McDermott, pp. 101 - 102
analysis, that we can distinctly see the link of connection that binds them together. It is only when we isolate and fix in abstraction the correlated parts of the organic whole of truth, that we become clearly conscious that they are correlated.65

Dewey did not argue that aspects of experience should not be isolated and abstracted for the sake of inquiry but, rather, that they often must be such that we can study them independently, on occasion, and this study may lead to a more robust understanding of the component of study. This conception is no stranger to the scientific methods of experimentation found in all branches of natural science. No, Dewey’s argument was that once abstracted and studied, these individual aspects of experience must be returned to their place within experience from which they were withdrawn in the first place.

Atomistic study has its place, to be certain, for sometimes it is true that the best way to understand a thing is not only to understand it in relation to other things but in isolation. Such scientific experimentation is necessary for social development. The problem is not in the abstraction, per se, it is in the abstraction and forgetting that the object of study was abstracted from experience and not fundamentally prior to, or outside of, experience. If this psychological methodology is not properly observed, the results can be catastrophic.

We begin in knowledge with a part, though this involves a false conception of the part as if it were a whole: but the effort to combine this part with other parts give rise to a contradiction, which cannot cease til the abstraction of our conception is corrected, or, in other words, til the parts are deprived of their false independence, and defined anew as elements of the greater whole.66

This is clearly Caird’s own interpretation of precisely the kind of fallacious result that Dewey observed in violations of his own Psychological Standpoint. Parts are confused with the whole and given a false sense of independence and primacy. This false sense of

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65 Shook, pp. 41 - 42
66 Shook, p. 42
independence and primacy constructs an epistemological gap between experience and that which is independent of experience, Locke’s “unknowables” or the Kantian thing-in-itself. As Dewey himself says, “the confusion is deeply rooted…any attempt to show the origin of knowledge or of conscious experience presupposes a division between things as they are for knowledge or experience and as they are in themselves, and is therefore non-psychological in character.” It is only when the parts are defined not in terms of their false independence (false because, as we recall, they were only made independent through philosophical abstraction and inquiry) but in terms of the organic unity that we can have a non-fallacious assessment of experience.

It is important to differentiate two distinct conceptions of “unity of experience.” On the one hand, we have, as we’ve foreshadowed and eluded to previously, the “gestalt” or “fit” of primary, non-reflective experience (for Dewey) or “perchings” (for James) as a unity of experience prior to a Peircian “secondness” disrupting the unproblematic equilibrium. On the other hand, by “unity of experience,” we mean to say, simply, the full range of experiential phases of experience, the “perchings” and the “flights,” the sensations, the dreams, the doubts, the beliefs, the totality of possible experience prior to the philosophical separation of one aspect from the rest for the purpose of inquiry. Again, these concepts will be explored in great detail in the next chapter. An organic unity of experience has its place here as well, in Dewey’s organicism-cum-naturalism. The transaction of organism and environment accounts for the “give and take” between traditionally disparate concepts in other epistemological systems. Equilibrium is

67 McDermott, p. 103
maintained between organism and environment until a problematic situation arises to disrupt that equilibrium and forces the organism to adapt to its environment, to overcome the problematic situation and, in so doing, changes the environment in turn. This helps deal with some epistemological problems raised in traditional theories.\footnote{Although we wish to note that naturalism appears to fail to account for more extreme skeptical questions of epistemology, namely, ego-centric-type predicaments}

Sensations, for example, are but one aspect of the total organic unity of experience and as such cannot be used to account for the totality of experience or just as one part cannot be considered in isolation as the genesis of the whole.

Such a sensation, a sensation which exists only within and for experience, is not one which can be used to account for experience. It is but one element in an organic whole, and can no more account for the whole, than a given digestive act can account for the existence of a living body, although this digestive act and others similar to it may not doubt be shown to be all-important in the formation of a given living body.\footnote{McDermott, p. 104}

And thus Dewey’s organicism, no doubt in part inspired by Caird’s contributions, becomes the motivating factor behind his adherence to the Psychological Standpoint. Experience must be not only taken as absolute but also kept whole, in an organic unity. But, as with Locke and as Caird pointed out in his own research, when aspects of experience are isolated and the process by which their isolation and abstraction for the purpose of philosophical inquiry is ignored or forgotten, these individual aspects can be given “a false independence,” as something fundamental, primary, that is not only outside of experience but, in some cases, actually gives rise to it.

What effect does this have on traditional epistemological theories? Cornelis De Waal, in his essay on “Dewey’s Engaged Instrumentalism,” points out how, if Dewey had a lifelong philosophical adversary, it would most likely be the ghost of Rene Descartes.
“Like Pierce,” De Waal points out, “Dewey rejects Descartes’ method of universal doubt. Moreover, the doubt elicited by indeterminate situations is not a purely subjective affair that can be resolved by manipulating our personal mental states, but is an objective, public relation of means and ends.”\(^7\) Shook echoes this sentiment by expressing, flat out, that “ultimately Dewey’s antagonist is the legacy of Descartes, who bequeathed to philosophy the notion that physical reality in some sense transcends human experience.”\(^7\)

VII. ORGANICISM AND THE NATURE OF REALITY

If, as Shook points, Descartes “bequeathed to philosophy” the notion that physical reality is distinct from human experience that places upon human experience limitations as to how well (if at all) human beings can come to know physical reality from the confines of their experience alone. The skeptical counterpoint to Descartes’ observations is that human beings can never transcend their experience to gain any sort of “True” knowledge of a physical reality beyond the reach of experience. This is, in short, the ego-centric predicament. How do we ever get outside our own minds to ever know with certainty what lies in the physical realm beyond?

Bertrand Russell reinvented Descartes in his *Problems of Philosophy*. As a stick enters the water, it appears to bend although we know through scientific experimentation that the stick does not really bend. Hence, the conclusion for the skeptic is that human beings have access only to the world of Appearance and never to the world of true

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\(^7\) Shook, p. 223
Reality, for we will never, to follow this current example, see the stick as it “truly is,” i.e., remaining straight as it enters the water. Our senses will deceive us, nature itself will alter our perceptions of the “Real” and relegate us to the secondary, derivative realm of mere Appearance. What Descartes and Russell were emphasizing, and what Dewey was rejecting, is that in placing limits on human experience and postulating that physical reality was somehow beyond the confines of human experience, a transcendent theory of meaning was constructed, forever placating the skeptical position of ego-centricity, that the mind and mind-independent reality resided on two sides of a massive ontological chasm. This transcendent\textsuperscript{72} theory of meaning, Shook points out, is the genesis of all dualistic epistemologies.

The transcendental theory of meaning asserts that meaning (1) resides in a mental state and (2) refers to some other thing, which (3) resides entirely beyond human experience...[Dewey’s] rejection of the transcendental theory starts with his denial of point 3 since it relies on the problematic dualistic notion of the thing-in-itself.\textsuperscript{73}

Although a case could be made that Kant himself used the term “thing-in-itself” in various ways and Dewey perhaps unfairly attacks only one possible permutation, the general point remains sound: the idea that there exists, ontologically, an object beyond human experience such that its true nature will forever be unknown to human beings is precisely the type of thing that Dewey most fervently rejected. This confusion was based on, in no small part, a categorical misunderstanding. Dewey rejected the “transcendentalist understanding of point 1, which takes mental states to be of an ontological category distinct from objects beyond experience.”\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Shook calls it the “transcendental” theory of meaning, but “transcendent” is, perhaps, more appropriate
\textsuperscript{73} Shook, p. 224
\textsuperscript{74} Shook, p. 224
When Russell made his observations about the stick appearing to bend in water, he was not mistaken, in fact, Dewey would most likely applaud his application of scientific experimentation and inquiry into the nature of water and refraction. However, instead of noting this phenomena from the perspective of human experience and proclaiming that “the reality of the situation is that the stick really does appear to bend in water though upon further scientific inquiry we discover that this appearance is due to certain wholly natural phenomena,” Russell, like Descartes, formulated two ontological realms, distinct, and ripe for the skeptic’s ego-centric picking. An epistemological question, that is, the different ways knowledge comes to us, from our senses, from deeper scientific experimentation, was confused with an ontological question. Had Russell stayed true to a Psychological Standpoint, coming at the situation from experience, such an ontological bifurcation would have never taken place, for he would have realized that experience as an organic whole held within it both the sensory appearance of the stick bending and the reflective, scientific inquiry that the reasons it appears to be bend are wholly natural, based on laws of refraction, light, etc. Nothing, in short, would be outside experience, Dewey’s absolute. The observing subject would not be yanked out of the organic whole of experience, labeled “mental state,” and given ontological independence along with the “physical reality,” given its own, unique ontological state, and placed forever beyond the reach of experience. This, as we said, does not attack the skeptical problem of ego-centricity directly but, rather, attacks epistemological dualisms globally, for the ego-centric predicament would have never have arisen if the dualistic epistemologies that support it had never been formed by these violations of a true
Psychological Standpoint that places experience as the absolute and based everything on experience viewed not atomistically but as an organic totality.

There may appear to be something rather ad hoc about the approach sketched so far. It would appear that what Dewey is recommending is a naturalism that reduces him to a mere practitioner of “philosophical anthropology.” Although a naturalism based firmly on organicism proves to be an adequate forum through which to work out many epistemological problems found in traditional systems, like the place of sensations, for example, it seems to fail to address more extreme skeptical issues of ego-centricity, for example, or the problem of certainty. It may seem, simply, that Dewey is adopting a different epistemological paradigm from representational realists though no less susceptible to the scathing razor of the philosophers’ problems by which he had dismissed in his rivals. Unless we simply “buy” into Dewey’s naturalism, he appears to simply be naturally recasting the subject/object, mind/world bifurcation with “organism/environment.” Representationalists like Descartes, Locke and Russell may well insist that they are entirely aware of the psychologist’s fallacy (though, obviously, prior to its articulation as such, at the least the principles motivating it), but insist that their talk of “things-in-themselves” is not evidence that they are taking something from experience and then abstracting it out of experience to a place beyond experience. Rather, they would insist that these things were simply never in experience to begin with and thus by no means falling prey to the fallacy in question. Such things, they may argue, are inherently outside of experience, though perhaps causally linked to it. To deny this, representationalists may argue, is to flirt with some sort of panpsychic idealism that
makes everything in the natural universe into some kind of “experience stuff.” And though they are mindful of the problems that representationalism yields in terms of these external things, the problem of the “veil of perception” and the fallibility of our sensory apparatus, for example, they work hard to forge solutions to these dilemmas. The long history of analytic epistemology attests to this in various permutations from process reliabilism to semantic externalism.

It would appear *ad hoc* because Dewey’s naturalism appears to, as we’ve said, simply dismiss epistemological problems of the kind that representational realists seem to so vigorously engage. It would appear that he is simply rejecting unpleasant skeptical consequences by formulating a less problematic epistemological paradigm. He would even appear to agree with G.E. Moore and direct, non-representational realists that everything is presented to experience exactly as it is outside of experience and, like Moore, Dewey is merely waving his hand and declaring the matter closed.

This could not be further from the truth on any count. Dewey does support a form of direct realism, as Moore did, but a kind so drastically different that it cannot truly be associated with Moore’s type of “naïve” direct realism but a far more dynamic, robust form in which objects are what they are experienced as only after an intense, complex instrumental method of inquiry.
CHAPTER 2

NATURALISM AND INSTRUMENTALISM: DEWEY’S DEVELOPMENTAL NATURALISM AND ITS INSTRUMENTAL COUNTERPART

I. INTRODUCTION

The heart of John Dewey’s attack on epistemology was an attack on, fundamentally, any theory of knowledge based upon a transcendent theory of truth. “The things that pass for epistemology,” he proclaimed, “all assume that knowledge is not a natural function or event, but a mystery.”75 The mystery of knowledge dissolves instantaneously when what is beyond experience, what is transcendent, is revealed to be within experience to begin with. How certain aspects of epistemological theories, things-in-themselves for example, got to be outside experience is a result of theories of knowledge not adhering to a strict Psychological Standpoint. Had they done so, instead of theories that invariably and inevitably fall prey to counterproductive dualisms based on the fundamental division between experience and what is beyond experience (or, rather, what is in “mind” and what is in a “mind-independent reality with a determinate nature of its own”), there would be a theory of unified experience. This type of “unified

75 MW 3:119
experience” comes in two forms, first, in terms of the unified experience found in unproblematic, non-reflective experience prior to the onset of a problematic situation as well as the total account of experience as a cycle, moving from equilibrium to disequilibrium and back, not as distinct ontological realms, but as phases within experience. Dewey’s organicism, one might argue, held experience together for him and acted as catalyst for his adoption of the Psychological Standpoint and his observations of the Psychologist’s Fallacy ubiquitously spread throughout dualistic epistemologies. In short, Dewey sought a paradigm of unity free from ego-centric predicaments, things-in-themselves, and skeptical conundrums.

We’ve explored how Dewey’s naturalism, forged of his strict adherence to the Psychological Standpoint and his conception of “organicism” lead him to a rejection of “epistemology” as it is classically understood. However, Dewey’s naturalism appears to remain susceptible to the same type of skeptical attack, namely, how does the organism know it is engaged in transaction with an external environment? Dewey’s naturalism, perfectly adequate to deal with many philosophical problems of organism-environment transaction, appears to fall short of giving a fruitful defense against skeptical charges on this extreme level. Dewey’s naturalism bolstered by his instrumentalism, however, is certainly up to the task for his “instrumentalism” was constructed to deal with precisely that problem. In a negative critique of epistemology, instrumentalism is Dewey’s greatest tool, not naturalism. The dynamic methodology of instrumentalism, as we will explore, based as it was on the contributions of his pragmatic predecessors, tackles the ego-centric predicaments on two fronts: first, prior to the divisions of subject and object
there is the unified totality of unanalyzed primary experience in which subject is not yet differentiated from object. This division is not primary, according to Dewey’s theory, but derived from a prior unified state. Further, as we will also show, concepts of “organism” and “environment,” which seem to suggest a return to the ego-centric predicament in the manner mentioned above, are, in fact, both achieved objectives of this instrumental inquiry. One investigation yields our understanding of “organism,” another of “environment,” both are objects, both achieved objectives, and the problem of reconciliation between them fades away in the manner in which we are about to explore.

Dewey’s instrumentalism, in relationship to, and separate from, his naturalism, is a dynamic methodology that will replace both traditional conceptions of “epistemology” as well as “ontology.” The traditional means by which human faculties attained knowledge (“epistemology”) and the nature of the objects and events that they attained knowledge of (“ontology”) had to, consequently, both be addressed and reformulated.

Whereas the type of organicism and naturalism that we explored in our first chapter seemingly had a primarily negative connotation, that of attacking traditional epistemological theories without really forwarding anything positive, that is a notion that we must rid ourselves of entirely. Dewey was not trying to dismiss the rigorous philosophical theories of representationalism with a “mere methodology” that proved less problematic and not susceptible to skeptical conundrums. Rather, Dewey was advancing a methodology that must replace epistemology entirely by arguing that it was, in fact, the accepted, traditional views of epistemologies that were inherently flawed, falling prey to artificially constructed dualisms in which objects outside of experience were forever
separated from experience. The fruits of his labors were born in his “Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” which not only articulated why there is nothing “mere” about Dewey’s methodology, but explained why “ontology” must, necessarily, likewise be replaced by this conception of “methodology.” The “things” that representationalists assume are outside of experience are, in fact, nothing of the kind, but products of experience, not in some magical, panpsychic way, but through a very dynamic, complex process of inquiry that has come to be known as Dewey’s instrumentalism. Between the naturalism that we have thus far explored and the instrumentalism we turn to now, we shall show that not only are the two necessarily continuous such that no “deep cracks” exist between the two, but, moreover, only together do they comprise the full picture of Dewey’s critical “methodology” as replacement for both traditional “epistemology” and “ontology.” In the end, Dewey’s “negative” naturalism in terms of his epistemological critique, when understood in light of the instrumental methodology that we’re about to explore, guarding it against extreme skeptical attacks, becomes a positive, dynamic, vibrant naturalism that can be used not only as critique but fertile ground for new philosophical investigations.

II. MAP 1: PEIRCE’S CYCLE OF DOUBT AND BELIEF

In 1877, long before Dewey began his own major contributions to philosophy, Charles Sanders Peirce wrote a pivotal essay entitled “The Fixation of Belief” in which several of the major themes in Dewey’s later work were manifest. For Peirce, both on a social and individual level, human beings strive to be in a state of belief, that is, the cessation of strife and doubt, not merely cognitive achievement. On occasion, inevitably,
problems arise that shatter the equilibrium, the peace of mind, the contentment of being in said state of belief.\textsuperscript{76} When these problems arise, “inquiry,” that is, investigation into the nature of the problem unsettling the equilibrium of belief, are instigated in order to ascertain ways in which to overcome the problem, incorporate the findings of this investigation in conjunction with knowledge of the nature of the problem, into a new, better, state of belief. In the interim, however, when belief is shattered due to a problem and while inquiry is instigated, human beings endure a state of doubt. This doubt, this disequilibrium, must be overcome through inquiry into the nature of the problem and the assessment of a viable solution. This, in short, is Peirce’s definition of social and individual progress.

Being in a state of belief is, for Peirce, being in a state of a coordinated matrix of regularized habits, habits formed, presumably, by earlier solutions bred of inquiry into earlier problems upon earlier states of belief. As he says, “the feeling of believing is a more or less sure indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions.”\textsuperscript{77} This state of belief is a “calm and satisfactory state”\textsuperscript{78} born of habits built into our world-views, our decision-making processes, and the entire gestalt of our human experience. But life is not perfect, as they say, and the natural world is a harsh, unforgiving and oftentimes peculiar place with anomalies lurking behind every tree, variances creeping round corners in the shadowy parts of existence. Indeed, sometimes inconsistencies in the way in which we expect the world to be manifest in the...

\textsuperscript{76} Comparable to a Peircian “firstness”  
\textsuperscript{78} Stuhr, p. 70
midst of a crowded city street in broad daylight. Variance, anomaly, peculiarity are all words for the unexpected; and the unexpected, as part of reality as much as is the expected, must be accounted for in terms of our human experience. Our state of belief is shaken by these anomalies in the way in which reality, as we have become habituated towards it, is meant to behave. The natural result of such anomalies, which must be analyzed, investigated and ultimately reabsorbed into our gestalt of experience (less we devolve into purposive ignorance), is doubt as to the reliability of our beliefs. “The irritation of doubt,” Peirce says, “causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle ‘inquiry.’”

The “inquiry” that Peirce denotes here is an inquiry into the problem that causes the equilibrium of the state of belief to be shaken, resulting in the abrupt onset of a state of doubt. Once in a state of doubt, human beings desire to re-attain a state of belief, that is, to reestablish their habitual equilibrium where every aspect of their gestalt of experience coheres to the experiential whole, allowing for, in a manner of speaking, peace of mind and cessation of doubt. “With the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends. Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion.” The cycle-map presents itself clearly: belief-problem-doubt-inquiry-belief.

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79 Stuhr, p. 70
80 It is important to note that Peirce has been interpreted in myriad ways. If Peirce is interpreted as adhering to purpose of inquiry culminating in the perfected science, the ideal of inquiry, as adhering to a monolithic design, this would distance him from Dewey further than I have compared them here and imply James was more of an influence on Dewey’s mature thought than Peirce. However, taking Peirce merely at face value as he presents himself in “The Fixation of Belief,” I maintain we do clearly see precursors to Dewey’s naturalism.
81 Stuhr, p. 70
For Peirce, the reestablishment of a state of belief through the resolution of inquiry is the very definition of human progress, for although we find ourselves once again in a state of belief, having gone through the process of inquiry into some new problem that had manifested to disrupt our original state of belief and plunge us into a state of doubt, we are now, necessarily, in a new state of belief. This new state of belief, we observe, is strengthened by the incorporation of both the latest problem and the solution to that problem. The new state of belief will have incorporated into its gestalt of experience and habitual matrix from which our opinions are forged the possibility of the event that had resulted in a problem and the solution to that problem.

We note, however, that the cycle-map is localized. An individual’s concatenation of specific habits, woven together to form the gestalt of his experience, are born of his specific community and the problems that arose within that specific community. There is a “fit,” if you will, resulting in a localized peace of mind. What problems arise, arise in part because of what is not a problem, that is, what has already been established in habit. That is to say, one man’s problem is another man’s normal routine. When a problem arises disrupting the equilibrium of a state of belief and is summarily solved, the solution is “true” not because it corresponds to a transcendental template. That is wholly unnecessary. For Peirce, a “true” opinion is distinguished from a “settled” opinion that, he claims, is generally sufficient. “True” opinions may well exist, for Peirce, if inquiry is pushed far enough, however, as we’ve said, the settled opinion leads to the restoration of a state of belief and is considered sufficient.

Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But
put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be false or true.\textsuperscript{82}

Is there ontological fallout from this epistemological theory? Indeed, for Peirce, there most certainly is.

“It is clear that nothing out of the sphere of our knowledge can be our object, for nothing which does not affect the mind can be a motive for a mental effort.”\textsuperscript{83} We can see the relationship between Peirce’s epistemological theory and its ontological ramifications clearly here. There can be no objects outside the reach of our knowledge, for Peirce, which goes hand-in-hand with his rejection of transcendent theories of knowledge in terms of his theory of inquiry in an epistemological sense. “That the settlement of opinion,” he says, “is the sole end of inquiry is a very important proposition. It sweeps away, at once, various vague and erroneous conceptions of proof.”\textsuperscript{84} Proofs do not require the type of epistemological contortions usually considered to be necessary for establishing correspondence between our subjective propositions and the absolute True existing somewhere “out there,” beyond our experience. There is “nothing out of the sphere of our knowledge that can be our object,” so just as transcendent things beyond our experience must be rejected, so too must a transcendent conception of the “True,” the universally true, the true beyond possible human experience and the concatenation of our opinions, be likewise rejected. The objects of our world are accessible through our own experience and appeal to something transcendent is confused. Likewise, what is and is not “true” need not appeal to the same

\begin{footnotesize}
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transcendent realm that those objects would otherwise inhabit but, rather, simply an appeal to the present and future “fit” of our habits.

This is not, of course, a blind, ignorant adherence to pure opinion or banal subjectivism. We must recall that our opinions, which inform our habits, are created, actively, through a process of inquiry into the problems that confound our equilibrium, our “state of belief.” Real problems, real inquiries, real solutions create our opinions. The problems can come from any number of sources, not the least of which being from our natural environment. Further, often what we think will solve problems turn out to be insufficient, the methods employed fail to bring about resolution. Because the world, in this sense, has ways of frustrating our plans and ideas, inquiry is not subjective. Human beings engage the world, solve their own problems, and these solutions create opinions and form new habits based not on ignorance but on practical, scientific experimentation. Peirce does not reject the rigor of inquiry, only its appeal to some transcendent template that, for him, is entirely superfluous.

III. MAP 2: JAMES’ CYCLE OF FLIGHTS AND PERCHINGS

In 1890, thirteen years after Peirce published “The Fixation of Belief,” William James articulated what became one of the most profound contributions to the field of psychology, his theory of “The Stream of Thought” in *Principles of Psychology*. For our purposes here it is imperative that we view James’ work through a Peircian lens, effectively mapping the cycle James articulates in “The Stream of Thought” on top of the cycle of Peirce’s “The Fixation of Belief,” as an architect would superimpose one set of blueprints upon another.
One of the major points that James wished to articulate in the essay is that of the protean nature of thought, not merely as change, but as progression. Above all, however, thought never occurs in exactly the same way twice. As James says, “no state once gone can recur and be identical with what it was before.”\textsuperscript{85} It is important to note, here, that by “state” James does not mean an explicitly cognitive thought but rather, whole, noncognitive, “pure experience.” We will investigate this notion of the “pure” or “whole” aspect of noncognitive or “non-reflective” experience more as we progress through our analysis here. However, suffice it to say for now, it is the primary quality, the Peircian “state of belief” or “firstness” that James is aiming at here. It is that type of “state,” “state of belief,” equilibrium, etc., that James says cannot be duplicated precisely as it occurred before. For every cycle achieved, from firstness through thirdness\textsuperscript{86} and back to a new firstness, that new firstness, that new “state,” will invariably be different and never identical to any other firstness experienced before.

Now, let us consider this critical observation of consciousness from a Peircian perspective, specifically, from the shore of his “Fixation of Belief.” As we recall, when problems arise to disrupt the equilibrium of a state of belief, they are solved and then reincorporated back into the habitual matrix, the gestalt of experience, to establish a new equilibrium with the problem now solved. This new equilibrium, this new state of belief, is different than the old state of belief because it has incorporated both the most recent event and its solution have been reincorporated into a new, enhanced, state of belief now

\textsuperscript{85} Stuhr, p. 164  
\textsuperscript{86} “Thirdness” as reflective consciousness occurring after the “firstness” of non-reflective experience and the onset of a problematic shock of “secondness"
including that previous event (or problematic situation\textsuperscript{87}) and its solution. The event, that is to say, is no longer problematic, and the experience is now part of the way things are, the “fit” of habits together in experience. James echoes that sentiment here, reiterating the \textit{necessary} progression of thought from one settled-event or noncognitive “perching” to the next. The next settled-event, or “perching,” incorporates the transitory “event” or problematic situation, a “flight,” if you will, which just transpired and has been overcome. Both problem and solution are both reincorporated into the new, noncognitive settled-event.

For James, this is not merely a psychological observation, but a physiological observation, for as he points out, even sensations, that is for example, the observation of the color “green,” cannot occur precisely the same way twice in any individual mind, “for an identical sensation to recur it would have to occur the second time \textit{in an unmodified brain}. But as this, strictly speaking, is a physiological impossibility, so is an unmodified feeling an impossibility.”\textsuperscript{88} However, it is likewise important to note that, although the “perceptual content” can never be the same twice, we can still have the same green \textit{object} twice. The object is, in a sense, the objective of an inquiry and is constructed out of this perceptual content and is over a more general nature that can be identified and shared. For example, although the “green” is never experienced precisely the same way twice, the green is used as a tool in an inquiry used to identify a lawn. The object (that is, the objective of inquiry) constructed \textit{from} this content, constructing \textit{using} this content, can

\textsuperscript{87} Dewey occasionally aligns “event” with “problematic situation” and consequently the resolution of a problematic situation would be the “settled event.”

\textsuperscript{88} Stuhr, p. 165
still be the green lawn; something that I can employ someone else to cut, sell to a neighbor, or simply light on fire for the entertainment of my block and the chagrin of local authorities. A full articulation of what it means to be an “objective” of an inquiry will be presented in the upcoming subsection on the “Postulate of Immediate Empiricism.”

Consider, as James considered in this essay, your own, personal, individual state of belief that you held ten years ago. The friends you once held so dear, the women who once seemed so fascinating, the miraculous wheelings of the stars overhead as portents of a universe larger and more mysterious than it may seem now, have these not been modified over that span of time?

Often we are ourselves struck at the strange differences in our successive views of the same thing. We wonder how we ever could have opined as we did last month about a certain matter. We have outgrown the possibility of that state of mind, we know not how. From one year to another we see things in new lights. What was unreal has grown real, and what was exciting is insipid.89

Our opinions, as we saw in Peirce as well, do not change on pure fancy and ignorance, mysteriously shifting from one year to the next but are conditioned by our transaction with our world, with those friends, with those lovers, with those stars. Our thoughts change and our impressions of the world progress. Our states of mind, as it were, are never twice the same, as James observes. He goes on to define the type of change that thought actually manifests. “When the rate is slow we are aware of the object of our thought in a comparatively restful and stable way. When rapid, we are aware of a passage, a relation, a transition from it, or between it and something else.”90

89 Stuhr, p. 166
90 Stuhr, p. 170
The object of our thought, that is, what our attention is directed toward, seems to establish itself as present in consciousness in two different ways. Let us once again view James’ observations through a Peircian lens. When our attention is directed towards some “subject matter” without the need for rapid change, for adaptation, for incorporation of something that does not “fit” with the rest of our conscious experience, our state of thought, for James, is “comparatively restful and stable.” Even directed attention reflects some slight disequilibrium, some slight variance from what is habitually expected. The difference between something merely “catching one’s attention” and something “genuinely problematic” is, in essence, whether or not “deliberate” or overt inquiry is required to reestablish equilibrium. Both slight attention and the genuinely problematic indicate some disequilibrium, true, but what arouses only slight attention, some directed attention to this event or that object, is less problematic because the necessary tools from previous inquiries needed to resolve this slight problem are already within the habitual matrix and can be drawn upon without need for further, more in-depth inquiry. It would be the difference between, on the one hand, something “flickering” at the edge of one’s perception and one’s “attention” being turned towards it. The individual considers “what is that?” and then, almost immediately, “oh, that’s what that is.” The stream of consciousness, in Jamesian terms, remained comparatively “restive and stable” and only a moment’s “attention” was needed (a moment of disequilibrium) for resolution. This is a different degree of problem than if something occurred within an individual’s field of vision and that solution set was not ready-at-hand. The individual considers “what is that?” and no answer within that individual’s previous experiences can be called upon for
a quick resolution to reestablish equilibrium. A new inquiry needs to be embarked upon before equilibrium can be reestablished.

This would seem to track well with Peirce’s state of belief that, above all else, establishes an equilibrium in which the opinions and habits in a localized subject cohere with one another in a unproblematic way, resulting in just such a state of stability and mental restfulness. However, “stability” or “restfulness,” for Peirce, is shattered as problems arise to disrupt the equilibrium of those states of belief, resulting in, instead, states of doubt which instigate us into inquiry into the nature of the problem, its subsequent solution, and the re-establishment of a new, altered, state of belief. If we find out mental states changing rapidly, that object of our attention in a noticeable flux, we are in a problematic situation in a way reminiscent of the type that jerks us out of our Peircian state of belief. We become “aware” of the flux, of the change, of a transition from a state of belief into a state of doubt, from a state of doubt into a state of belief, or “between” one or another. The key here is our awareness of the situation, an awareness of our mental state and the objects that spring forth from our gestalt of unproblematic, habituated experience. We’ve been “shocked” out of complacency resulting in a disruption of a Peircian equilibrium in which we would not be aware of the objects in such an overt way but, rather, experience a contentment, a restful stability, in a Jamesian sense.

It is important for us to here to pause for a moment and really examine what it means to be a “problem” in the context of this Peircian-Jamesian cyclical reading. “Awareness” by itself, initially, does not seem significant enough to constitute a problem
as we usually consider a “problem” to be. Lightning suddenly striking our house and igniting it in a massive infernal blaze while our pet canary and all our worldly possessions are still inside constitutes a problem by most human accounts. However, disruptions of equilibrium can be far subtler than that and thus we have to adjust our definition of problematic situations or, in another way of speaking, the jolt out of equilibrium.

Let us take two situations as examples and flesh out this more “subtle” conception of “problem” as we define it as something that shocks out of our equilibrium. We awake at two in the afternoon after a particularly rough night at the local pub and arrive at work. As we get out of our car we hear faintly in the distance the sound of a jackhammer and realize, with some irritation, as we move closer to our office building that the jackhammer is heartily at work just under our window. We get inside and begin to work despite the rumble of the jackhammer that slowly fades into the background of our perceptions. Let us now say that we turned down the provocative invitation from an attractive colleague to head down to the local watering hole the night before and we are capable of arising extremely early the next morning to get to the office and get work done. A pleasant near-silence greets us as we get out of our car and move towards our office building, a soft chittering of birdsong compliments the morning dew on the grass as we make our way up to our cubicle and open the window to let in a little fresh air. Suddenly, a jackhammer explodes out of the silence with such auditory violence that our coffee falls out of hands and onto our brand-new laptop, making our heart leap, metaphorically, out of chest with shock and surprise. Aside from a subtle implication
that it would have been better to have had that drink, twenty-twenty hindsight, and thus save our heart the stress and our wallets the cost of replacing a new laptop, the point here is that the same object of our attention, the jackhammer, can be experienced in two very different ways. The decibel level of the jackhammer is, in fact, the same in both situations (let us say it’s precisely the same jackhammer, as well). The way in which that sound is experienced, the context of the experience, is what differentiates one experience from the other and determines one as problematic and the other not. It is not the qualitative or quantitative content alone that determines the sound as problematic, but the fact that, in the latter case, the jackhammer erupted out of the stillness, causing us to jump in shock whereas, in the former case, we acclimated to the sound over a period of time. The sound remained the same in each case. The context of the experience is what determines the one as problematic and the other as unproblematic. James’ own example is quite similar:

A silence may be broken by a thunder-clap, and we may be so stunned and confused for a moment by the shock as to give it no instant account to ourselves of what has happened…into the awareness of the thunder itself the awareness of the previous silence creeps and continues; for what we hear when the thunder crashes it not thunder pure, but thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it. Our feeling of the same objective thunder, coming in this way, is quite different from what it would be were the thunder a continuation of previous thunder.91

One of the primary points that James wants to get across in this example is that it is impossible to have an experience of thunder without it carrying with it the experience of either the silence before the thunder or the experience of the continuing thunder prior to the thunder in question. In other words, there is never merely “thunder,” an experience

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91 Stuhr, p. 169
context-free. It is the context that determines the problematic nature of an experience. Thunder-upon-silence shatters the equilibrium of the previous silence-upon-silence (consider our own example of, say, “jackhammer-upon-silence”) and results in a problematic situation. Thunder-upon-continuing-thunder is not disrupting a previously established equilibrium of silence (consider, “jackhammer-upon-continuing-jackhammer”) and does not result in the same kind of experience, indeed, one either unproblematic or merely attention directed in the minimal type of problem content we discussed earlier. In a Peircian sense, this scans well with the conception that new states of belief (equilibrium) are necessarily conditioned by the disruptions of previous states of belief and the resultant inquiries into these problematic disruptions. As James says, “the feeling of the thunder is also a feeling of the silence as just gone; and it would be difficult to find in the actual concrete consciousness of a man a feeling so limited to the present as not to have an inkling of anything that went before.”

Let us imagine that we drive the same route to work everyday. The same route driven every day results in a kind of “wakeful-dreaming” in which miles, perhaps, can pass without our noticing. No problems arise in these instances that would jerk us out of our restfulness, of our habitual routine, or, more realistically, only a series “attentions” (as opposed to overt, serious problems) that require those slight, rapid adjustments that require no deeper inquiries. But if, for example, we pass suddenly underneath a streetlight that is green, as usual, but a far more faded green as if it were about to burn out completely, our attention is suddenly drawn towards it. Our equilibrium is disrupted and

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92 Stuhr, p. 169
our attention focused on that new “greenness” of the light. Both the greenness of the streetlight as different from the greenness of the light in previous experiences as well as the sudden eruption of our house in flames due to a lightning strike constitute “problems” that jerk us out of our restful states of belief or equilibrium though they are quite obviously of different magnitudes of “problem.” The underlying point is that of “awareness.” We are not aware of the light’s greenness any longer after having established within ourselves just a daily habitual routine of driving through it in the same way. It is only when the light’s greenness is no longer “as it should be,” that is, it no longer “fits” our habitual matrix, our gestalt of experience is disrupted. Indeed, the experience of the color itself, “green,” becomes a sign, a placeholder, for the problem articulated in a question like “is that green?” used to diagnose the nature of the problem. Our house exploding is fairly self-explanatory.

James equates the restful stages of our lives in terms of experience with the “perchings” of a bird, the transitional stages with the bird’s “flights.” The bird’s life, that is, is metaphorically coextensive with the stream of thought, the continuous thread that binds one experience to the next and allows for this conception of cyclical progress.

As we take it, in fact, a general view of the wonderful stream of our consciousness, what strikes us first is this different pace of its parts. Like a bird’s life, it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings…let us call the resting-places the ‘substantive parts,’ and the places of flight the ‘transitive parts,’ of the stream of thought.93

And so we can now place upon our Peircian cycle this blueprint overlay of James’ cycle of perchings and flights. Where for Peirce we read the cycle as “belief-problem-doubt-

93 Stuhr, p. 170
inquiry-belief” we can now overlay James’ cycle of “perching-shock-flight-perching.” We notice there is one less term in James’ cycle that requires a moment of clarification. It would seem, between the two cycles, Peirce’s is the more detailed of the two, as James appears to collapse both “shock” and “resulting inquiry” into the “flight” of the bird. It would, perhaps, be better to simply equate Peirce’s “belief” and “doubt” with James’ “perching” and “flight” and retain Peirce’s more robust articulation for our forthcoming analysis of Dewey’s appropriation of this cycle in terms of his development naturalism and instrumentalism.

The parallels between the two thinkers on this cyclical process are myriad. As James goes on to say: “It then appears that the main end of our thinking is at all times the attainment of some other substantive part than the one from which we have just been dislodged.” This echoes beautifully Peirce’s earlier observation, in his words, that “the irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle ‘inquiry’ in conjunction with his observation that “with the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends. Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion.” Indeed, James goes on to say in no uncertain terms that “we may say that the main use of the transitive parts is to lead us from one substantive conclusion to another.”

The epistemological conclusions from James’ psychological account of experience and its ontological ramifications are tellingly similar to those encountered in a
reading of Peirce’s “Fixation of Belief.” For example, James notes that “it is very difficult, introspectively, to see the transitive parts for what they really are.” The transitive parts, that is, the “flights” of experience are just as real and significant in our processes as the “perchings,” the substantive parts. They are both stages in the stream of thought, a unified, singular stream of thought. There is no need for a synthesizing self for the universal and the particular are one within the unity of experience, concepts like “self,” “universal” and “particular” are contributing *phases* of perchings and flights. Like Peirce, everything begins with a state of belief, a perching, and it is from this equilibrium for both philosophers that differentiations, problems, inquiries, states of doubt emerge from and ultimately return to. It is the necessary condition of human psychology, the necessary condition for human progress. This theory, like Peirce’s, undermines any possibility for a transcendent theory of knowledge from which what we are experiencing down here must somehow correspond to the “True” events as they unfold beyond experience. There is nothing beyond experience, for both thinkers, only the fluctuating but ever progressing cycle of equilibrium being disrupted and re-established.

IV: MAP 3: THE POSTULATE OF IMMEDIATE EMPIRICISM

The problem that Dewey’s naturalism uncovered at the root of traditional epistemological theories was that, failing to keep experience as an organic whole, certain aspects of it were free to be exorcised from the whole and then misplaced as something “independent” or “primary.” The result was, aside from committing the psychological (or philosophical) fallacy, the creation of a dualism between something in experience

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98 Stuhr, p. 170
contrasted with something outside of experience. These dualisms could take any form, their form dependent upon the type and focus of the epistemological theory that somehow committed this fallacy and misplaced some aspect in experience. It is the mind-body problem, the ego-centric predicament, the problem of the veil of perception. It is the external vs. the internal, the subject vs. the object, the soul vs. the body, the organism vs. the world. Once exposed as the root of the problem, Dewey’s positive theory of knowledge had to begin with a system that maintained the organic unity of experience, not merely in the mechanical sense seen in the original conception of the Reflex Arc, but in the more dynamic sense of reciprocal co-determination between organisms constantly adapting and readapting to their environments. However, as we’ve alluded to, Dewey’s naturalism appears exposed to the same types of skeptical attacks that the types of bifurcated worldviews that he so fervently railed against himself. How does an “organism” get to its “environment”? It would appear that Dewey simply recast the problem with naturalized terminology. Although it appears a fair assessment of naturalism to say that it does offer, through its insights into the organistic methodology of experience, resolution to many of the sticky epistemological problems that representationalists faced, it does seem to fail to answer the hard questions in epistemology, namely, ego-centric like predicaments. To that end, Dewey advanced a positive theory of knowledge, an instrumental cycle based upon his pragmatic predecessor’s insights into experience, development and growth. This “instrumentalism,” perhaps most poignantly embodied in his Postulate of Immediate Empiricism, became the heaviest weapon in Dewey’s epistemological argument, articulating precisely how it is
that the bifurcated, dualistic problems of traditional systems simply do not arise when experience is kept absolute.

“The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” was first published in 1905 and, as McDermott points out, “acts as a transition between Dewey’s early pragmatic epistemology and his mature philosophy of experience.”\(^9^9\) It describes how in a phenomenological methodology, forged with the Psychological Standpoint in mind, begins not with division but with unity, a “totality” \textit{from which} concepts like subject and object, organism and environment, emerge.

Naturalism was, as we’ve said, the reciprocal relation between an organism and its environment in which a give-and-take transaction took place between them rather than an inseparable ontological division. This reciprocal relation is not static or stagnant but ever-developing: organisms and environments change one another through this reciprocal relation. Mapped upon his pragmatic predecessors, indeed, vibrantly upon Peirce’s “Fixation of Belief,” organisms experience an unproblematic, nonreflective gestalt of experience prior to the onset of a problematic situation. Once resolved, the solution and the problem are reincorporated back into the organisms’ habituated, nonreflective, unproblematic experience. This is education, progress, and development in naturalism. Instrumentalism is mapped upon the same cyclical progression, but instead of a naturalism in which we observe how “organism” and “environment” relate reciprocally to one another, instrumentalism offers us the ontological means by which to account for objectivity and the nature of reality in which “organism” and “environment” emerge as

\(^{99}\) McDermott, p. 240
the *objectives* of individual inquiries. Objects, in short, become objectives of inquiry and what *is* becomes what it is experienced *as*.

As we recall from Dewey’s naturalistic attack on epistemology, those traditional theories, each in their own way, failed to adhere to type of Psychological Standpoint that held experience as an organic whole thus failing to recognize when some aspect of experience was fallaciously removed and placed in a position of independence or primacy, as something “beyond” experience in contrast to what is in human experience. This type of abstraction lay at the heart of, for example, Russell’s differentiation between “appearance” and “reality.” Rather that recognizing that the stick “really” remains straight when placed in water though, equally real, is the “appearance” of it bending due to physical laws of refraction and reflection, the “reality” of the unbent stick was abstracted from experience and placed beyond experience into its own ontological realm beyond the realm of human capability to directly encounter. With this type of bifurcation, and this is but one of dozens of similar manifestations of this same problem of the “veil of perception” or the “ego-centric predicament,” comes the point in which the global skeptic can claim that we can never know anything of the “world of reality” which lay somehow magically beyond the scope of human experience. Dewey’s solution was not to attack global skepticism per se, but, rather, to develop a positive theory of knowledge that accounts for both Russell’s realm of appearance and his realm of reality and show that, for good and all, these are not two separate ontological realms but, rather, two equally real ways of experiencing the world neither of which is behind some magical veil of perception or beyond the reach of human experience.
“Immediate empiricism postulates that things – anything, everything, in the ordinary or non-technical use of the term ‘thing’ – are what they are experienced as. Hence, if one wishes to describe anything truly, his task is to tell what it is experienced as being.”

Thus, Dewey’s positive theory of knowledge is one of immediate experience, what is happening, what is experienced, is real, and the job of the philosopher is not to approximate what is experienced against what is “metaphysically” Real, but to understand, empirically, the events unfolding as different reals of experience. Consider Dewey’s own example of the tapping window shade:

Let us say that I am sitting in my den completely absorbed in Swann’s Way, envisioning the narrow roads of Combray and the quiet mid-summer’s evening along with our protagonist. Suddenly, there is a rap at my window and I’m shocked out of my reverie and drop my book upon the floor. I stand, then, and move to where the noise emanated and note that it was merely the tapping of my window shade after a strong gust of wind. The “absorption-in-book” represents a Peircian firstness, or a James’ perching. There is a stability in my experience, an equilibrium of a perfectly unproblematic nature. Suddenly, there is the onset of shock as I hear the noise. This is a kind of Peircian secondness or James’ flight. Finally, upon successful investigation into the nature of the shock, the problem that disrupted my equilibrium, comes the cognitive realization of what all actually happened. This is akin to Peirce’s thirdness. Note, now, I can return to my book and after a few moments find myself once again lost in those narrow roads of Combray in mid-summer, a reestablished firstness, a new state of belief, a new perching.

100 McDermott, p. 241
It is likewise important to note that if the window shade should tap again, it would be an entirely different experience for many reasons not the least of which being that I have already undergone an investigation that resulted to the cognitive awareness of what the problem “had been.” Should the window shade tap again it might draw my attention for a moment, a slight disequilibrium, but now the solution to that problem has now been experienced from that previous inquiry and I can reestablish my equilibrium and return to my book almost instantly. Each of these three phases was experienced as it was experienced, none more “real” than any other. Though in thirdness, the cognitive, reflective phase of experience, we can “correct” our previously conceived “shock” experience and construct, retroactively, merely a tapping window shade, nevertheless that secondness was experienced as that secondness, that shock was real just a the cognitive thirdness reconstruction of the secondness is real.

We recall here James’ example of the experience of thunder and how the same thunder could be experienced in different ways depending upon the context (thunder-upon-silence or thunder-upon-continued-thunder, for example). If one wishes to describe the thunder, as we said earlier, it is insufficient for a full understanding of thunder to describe it without some reference to its context of experience. It becomes important when we realize how the same thunder in different contexts can prove to be either problematic or unproblematic. I am tempted to say there is a fusion here of what would traditionally be conceived as “epistemology” and “ontology” into one dynamic “methodology” of inquiry. Our method of knowing our world, that is to say, is the same method by which we can determine what things are within that world. It is only because
of these empirical investigations that humanity can come to understand what is, actually, happening when the stick enters the water and, in so doing, becomes capable of differentiating between what “really happens” both in terms of illusion and not-illusion (the stick bending, the stick not bending, but both as part of reality).

In each case, the nub of the question is, what sort of experience is denoted or indicated: a concrete and determinate experience, varying when it varies, in specific real elements, and agreeing, when it agrees, in specific real elements, so that we have a contrast, not between a Reality, and various approximations to, or phenomenal representations of Reality, but between different reals of experience.\(^{101}\)

This is ultimately the crux of the matter, this concept of “different reals of experience.” James, perhaps best, articulated how neither “perching” nor “flights” as phases of one’s total experience is more “real” than the other, no closer to some transcendent notion of the really “Real.”

Taking, again, Russell’s example of the stick bending in water, what we have in such an experience is not a contrast between a hidden Reality and the appearance denoting a skewed approximation to that Reality, but, rather, different reals of experience. On the one hand, we have the real of experience of our pure, immediate experience of the stick appearing to bend in water. The real of experience is that the stick really does appear to bend in water! Consider the possibility that we are in need of food while stranded on a desert island. Our only tool is a sharpened stick. Our only source of nutrition are the fish in the shallows. The knowledge of how it is that the stick appears to bend in the water will be taken up into our calculations of where, precisely, to hurl the spear. There is nothing magical or occult in such an experience, it is a real of experience, commonplace in our everyday lives. On the other hand, if we were to investigate the

\(^{101}\) McDermott, p. 242
scientific principles of refraction and reflection, we’d have a different experience, a
different real of experience, by viewing the stick phenomenon through this lens. The
type of dualistic, epistemological conundrum that Russell felt was such a critical
philosophical dilemma is truly nothing more than a misunderstanding of the nature of
experience; with different inquiries come different objectives constructing different
objects leading to different experienced reals none more “Real” than any other.

Now let us apply this principle instead to the pragmatic circuits that we’ve
established. For an empirical nominalist inspired by Russell, there would be a sense of
primacy to the stage of “belief” (for James) whereas the “flights” would be more distant
from reality, transitory states that don’t exist as real in the same way the more stable
stages. This principle would not stand with any of the pragmatists but its rejection is
perhaps most concise and directly articulated in Dewey’s Postulate of Immediate
Empiricism.

Peirce’s stage of Doubt, the “flights” of James, would be no less “real” than the
stages of Belief and the moments of stable “perchings.” “Equilibrium” and
“disequilibrium,” as can be associated with these concepts from both philosophers, are
merely stages of experience, indeed, they are necessary components of experience, as
human beings continue to pass through one to get to the next and so on. They are, in fact,
necessary components of objectivity, of the very ability to both have and know a real
world. No one aspect of the cycle is any more “real” than any other, as Dewey says, they
are simply “different reals of experience.”

McDermott, p. 242
flights,’” Dewey said later in *Experience and Nature*, “characteristic of alternate emphasis upon immediate and mediate, the consummatory and instrumental, phases of all conscious experience.” 103 As the window was initially tapped by the branch, the experience of “fright” was no more or less “real” than what “really” happened, namely, that it was discovered it was merely a winding shade tapping. Just as the initial experience of the stick bending in water was no more or less “real” than what was “really” happening, namely, that the stick was remaining straight and laws of reflection and refraction were altering our perceptions. These represent different outcomes of different inquiries, different “reals” of experience, not some ultimate Reality or approximations to some ultimate Reality. Such a concept, for Dewey as well as his pragmatic predecessors, has no place in epistemological inquiry.

V: RECONCILING DEWEY’S NATURALISM AND INSTRUMENTALISM

If we summarize Dewey’s naturalism as the study of experience in terms of the relationship between an organism and its environment, it points to two immediate questions: first, what is the nature of this relationship between organism and environment, and second, how does an organism come to know its environment with any kind of certainty? Critics in the epistemological tradition of skepticism attack Dewey via this second question, pointing out that by constructing this naturalism, Dewey in effect constructs the same kind of bifurcated world-view he felt so compelled to combat in traditional epistemological theories. In short, Dewey fell prey to the same kind of

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fallacious moves he criticized so many others for making. Here, again, the skeptic claims, is the ego-centric predicament, the problem of the external world, the dilemma of the veil of perception; for how does an organism ever get outside of itself in order to know its environment at all (let alone with any kind of certainty)? It would appear that the skeptic has a valid point. However, what the skeptic fails to do in pointing out this seemingly obvious problem in Dewey’s naturalism is account for an answer to the first question: what is the nature of the relationship between organism and environment? I contend that the answer to this first question dissolves the second question and, in so doing, dissolves the skeptic’s attempt at undermining Dewey’s methodological replacement of epistemological systems and their ontological ramifications. I contend, specifically, that if Dewey’s naturalism comes up short in terms of the global skeptic’s ego-centric attack, instrumentalism is a viable methodological solution. Further, it is not merely “leaping” from one framework and terminology to another (when naturalism fails, that is, we simply leap to instrumentalism), but that the two are necessarily related reciprocally. Naturalism, based as it is in concepts of organism/environment transaction, arises only after instrumentalism has viably accounted for the terms “organism” and “environment” “ontologically.”

As we’ve said, Dewey’s naturalism and his instrumentalism have distinct uses in different types of inquiry yet remain in a dependent, reciprocal relation. On the one hand, naturalism is forged from instrumentalism precisely because the terms “organism” and “environment” employed in naturalistic accounts of experience, growth and development are forged of instrumental inquiry which result in the achieved objectives, objects, of
“organism” and “environment” through different investigations. Once these terms have been viably achieved through instrumental inquiry they can then be applied aptly to natural processes of growth and development without the sting of the ego-centric predicament. On the other hand, reciprocally, instrumentalism is forged of naturalism, because the transaction of organism and environment is accounted for by the instrumental cycle resulting in objects as achieved objectives of inquiry. Instrumentalism ontologically establishes the terms used in naturalism by accounting for what “organisms” and “environments” in terms of their objectivity, what place they have in reality.

Instrumentalism is thus negative in the sense that it is Dewey’s ultimate critique of ego-centricity and dualistic epistemological systems which separate reality into ontologically disparate realms. Instrumentalism, conversely, is positive in the sense that it viably accounts for what things are, ontologically, by accounting for how they are experienced. In this way, naturalism, like instrumentalism, has positive and negative aspects. Negatively, naturalism provides a viable critique of most epistemological confusions found in traditional theories, all save the more extreme forms of ego-centricity, as we’ve said, when we focus on the reciprocal relation between “organism” and “environment” not as primarily divergent but unified in transaction. Positively, once this illusory theoretical “hole” in naturalism has been plugged by reading naturalism as a product of instrumentalism, naturalism can be used as a viable methodology itself in exploring variations of organism-environment transaction in naturalism’s developmental aspect without suffering the sting of the ego-centric attack.
Both are mapped upon the same cyclical progression that Dewey adapted from his pragmatic predecessors. Naturalism speaks of the equilibrium between organism and environment. Instrumentalism speaks of the unproblematic “gestalt” of non-reflective experience. Both are stages prior to the onset of problematic situations. Naturalism speaks of having overcome a problematic situation and re-establishing equilibrium as an example of progress and development and adaptation, the new “equilibrium” not quite the same as the old “equilibrium” but more advanced, having now incorporated the problem and solution set that occurred in the interim. Instrumentalism has its parallel, namely, the return to a new unproblematic “gestalt” of non-reflective experience after a successful inquiry into a problematic situation resulted in an achieved objective. Naturalism studies the ongoing transactions between organisms and environments and studies them in terms of progress, development and education. Instrumentalism deals exclusively with solving problems of reality and objectivity, engaging ego-centric like predicaments by accounting for what things are, ontologically, and why there is no ontological chasm between “subjects” and “objects” but, rather, demonstrating why everything is entirely “open and above board” and can be used on the same ontological plane.

Since skepticism is instrumentally undercut by the original unity of subject and object distinct only as phases of problem-solving activity, and since the objects are uniformly attained objectives of inquiry, instrumentalism passes along to naturalism a realm of “open and above board” objects immune to the skeptic’s narrow philosophical
challenge but by which new forms of integrated, organic activities crucial to the problems of humans can be explored.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{104} A full account of the reciprocal relation between Dewey’s naturalism and his instrumentalism would be a massive undertaking in and of itself and will be saved for another project at a later time.
CHAPTER 3

NON-REFLECTIVE INFLUENCES ON CONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE:

MAPPING DEWEY’S THEORIES OF HABIT FORMATION ONTO HIS PEIRCIAN-INSPired INSTRUMENTALISM

I. INTRODUCTION

Dewey’s non-naïve direct realism proved to be a dynamic and formidable methodology to replace the problematic traditional epistemologies that so often fell prey to ego-centric predicaments and other unsolvable skeptical conundrums. Mapped upon Peirce’s cyclical progression as expressed in his “Fixation of Belief,” it offered a viable alternative to the representational realisms in the tradition of Descartes, Locke and Russell. Neither was it the type of “direct realism” forwarded by G.E. Moore’s infamous waving hand. The external world was not known to the individual mind in a direct and “magical” sense, for Dewey, but rather came to be known through a complex, dynamic and often painful process of inquiry and investigation. As Dewey articulated in his “Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” “things are what they are experienced as,” in other words, objects are objectives of inquiry. In essence, Dewey’s rejection of traditional epistemology bore an equally revolutionary consequence for traditional ontology and both concepts, kept separate (though interrelated) in many traditional philosophical schools, seemed almost merged into one dynamic “methodology” that replaced them both.
The heart of Dewey’s instrumentalism was his explication of “non-reflective” or “primary” experience, a concept discussed at length by two of his more notable pragmatic predecessors. For James, this non-reflective experience was a phase of experience, one he referred to as “perchings,” like that of birds at rest. This was markedly similar to the Peircian notion of a “state of belief,” both demonstrating a kind of stable equilibrium between organism and environment or a non-problematic state of being. This notion of “being” is likewise important as this conception of “non-reflective experience” also seemed to be associated with the Peircian notion of “firstness,” or “being.” In any permutation, the idea is clear: non-reflective experience, “perching,” “state of belief,” and “firstness” represent a phase of experience prior to the onset of inquiry into a newly problematic situation. In an epistemological sense, this offers an alternate paradigm from the “containment” paradigm of traditional epistemological theories as concepts like “subject” and “object,” “mind” and “reality,” are, first and foremost, unified prior to any separation, effectively dissolving the ego-centric conundrum. In an ontological sense, this is the stage setting for a more robust, dynamic ontology than any mere static substance ontology. “Non-reflective experience” is shattered and transformed by the onset of a problematic situation, an ensuing investigation, and an achieved objective to that specific investigation which, in itself, is a constructed object of experience. Dewey often referred to this “non-reflective experience” as “having” an experience as opposed to cognitive, reflective “knowing” that one is experiencing something. It is a “gestalt” of

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105 “Containment” and “Inferential” paradigms are coined by Frank Ryan in his research into John Dewey’s philosophical career
experience, a nonproblematic backdrop, a seamless “fit” in which all facets of this backdrop of non-reflective experience “fit” so well, in fact, no attention is drawn to it. It is simply the “having” behind the “knowing,” the ambiance behind any reflective experience.

And it is that point precisely that we wish to explore here: how this non-problematic gestalt of experience, this backdrop, effects and influences the cognitive or “reflective” component of experience. When one has a reflective experience, when some problem arises or our attention is drawn to some object or event, that object or event leaps out from our gestalt of experience and separates itself as problematic from the non-problematic. Some firstness remains in our experience when secondness divides a part of the firstness from firstness and our investigation into this new secondness leads us to a cognitive thirdness. How does the background affect the foreground? How does the non-problematic affect the problematic? How does our “gestalt” of non-reflective experience affect how we reflectively experience our world? It would appear to follow that what leaps out from the gestalt is defined by what does not and what maintains itself as problematic, likewise, is defined in relation to what is unproblematic. In order to deal with these questions I will focus our investigation on John Dewey’s Human Nature and Conduct and begin to weave his instrumentalism together with his social psychology, effectively mapping terms more apt to be used in psychological investigations onto the somewhat more philosophical template found in his adaptation of the Peircian cycle.

II. HABITUAL MATRIX
Central to Dewey’s revision of epistemology as well as ontology is his conception of “non-reflective” or “primary” experience. In terms of its epistemological ramifications, non-reflective experience, associated with a Peircian “firstness,” is a gestalt of experience prior to any divisions of subject and object from which ego-centric-like conundrums emerge in bifurcated, dualistic systems. Ontologically, non-reflective experience is the base from which we launch our ontological investigations into the furniture of our world. We begin with non-reflective experience until some problem arises at which point we combine our intellectual hypotheses and physical instruments into an investigation of the problem and a proposed solution. The result of this investigation or “experiment” is an achieved objective, an object for our experience, which is then reincorporated into the gestalt of our experience. As technical as that may sound, it’s really quite intuitive. Anything novel and problematic, once solved, loses its novelty and problematic nature and becomes commonplace, that is, reabsorbed back into our non-reflective experience. In order to explicate what place this “non-reflective” experience has in our daily lives, it may prove useful to alter our terminology and move away from some of the more philosophically technical jargon and towards more commonplace terminology, for “non-reflective” experience, our gestalt of experience, is little more than the total accumulated matrix of our learned habits. We shall hereby refer to our “non-reflective experience” as our “habitual matrix.”

Psychical habits are not unlike physiological functions, for Dewey, both operating on a “non-reflective” level of experience.

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.  

What differentiates physiological functions and habits in this sense is not their cognitive level of operation but the manner by which they were acquired by the individual. Simply put, physiological functions are not learned but pre-established as part of our inherent physiological make-up whereas habits are, in fact, learned. There is nothing overtly revelatory in this remark, however it must be observed that there are many similarities between habits and pre-psychological functions, in particular, the level of cognitive operation of both. This similarity is forged, once again, upon Dewey’s constant use of the term “organism,” specifically, his instrumentalistic “transactivity” between “organism” and, as he says here, “environment.”

“We must begin with recognizing that functions and habits are ways of using and incorporating the environment in which the latter has its say as surely as the former.”  

This “transactivity” is as simple as stating that “breathing is an affair of the air as truly as of the lungs; digesting an affair of food as truly as of tissues of the stomach.”

Physiological functions are transactions between organisms and environment, unlearned, innate and involuntary. There is no cognitive aspect to digestion, for example, only a transaction between food and the tissues of the stomach. Like breathing, digestion is a function we are born with, quite simply, to perpetuate our own lives. It would be misleading to say that we were in the “habit” of breathing, for we did not “learn” to breath, the ability to breath was not “acquired,” we simply breathe, involuntarily. Habits,
although they can signify just as swift and non-reflective a transaction between organism and environment as physiological functions can, the one important difference, Dewey points out, is that habits are acquired. How are they acquired? Habits, Dewey says, are like arts:

They involve skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning or craft, and objective materials. They assimilate objective energies, and eventuate in command of environment. They required order, discipline, and manifest technique. They have a beginning, middle and end. Each stage marks progress in dealing with materials and tools, advance in converting material to active use.¹⁰⁹

There is no mistaking the allusion to the Peircian cycle of inference in this description of how habits are acquired. Habits are forged through a coordination of intellectual “cunning” and physical “materials” resulting in a “command of environment.” They have, as Dewey points out, a beginning, middle and end, making them part of the very fabric of experience, of a connected series of perchings and flights, “beginning, middle, and end” paralleling a Peircian progression of “firstness, secondness, and thirdness.” “Command of the environment,” specifically, is the same kind of achieved equilibrium between an organism and its environment as Peirce articulated in his “Fixation of Belief.”

Habits, once formed, exist non-reflectively. Then, once a problem arises, they are put to work, “converting material to active use” until command of the environment is re-established and equilibrium between organism and environment is likewise re-established. This marks “progress,” just as the Peircian cycle marked the constant reincorporation of problems and solutions back in the equilibrium between organism and environment exemplified by the “state of belief.” Indeed, what is formed in the Peircian cycle found in his essay “The Fixation of Belief” could be quite easily qualified as habits.

¹⁰⁹ HNC, p. 18
In our unproblematic state of belief we enjoy an equilibrium between ourselves and our environment and the bedrock of that equilibrium are a set of habits all “fitting” together to form the gestalt of our unproblematic experience and our peace with our environment. It is only when a problem arises that that matrix of habits is disturbed, the equilibrium broken, until a new habit is forged of an empirical inquiry that solves whatever problem originally agitated our relationship with our environment. Peirce’s designation of “firstness,” we must recall, is the possibility of a concretely realized sensation and that possibility rests upon the clash between what is habituated (unproblematic) and what is unexpected (problematic). A new habit is then reincorporated into the habitual matrix such that, when the same problem should arise a second time, it is now less problematic and may indeed be “solved” so quickly the second time round that it is hardly cognitively noticed at all, merely a flicker of attention and nothing more, because we have already sublimated the same problem and that problem’s solution from a previous inquiry. As Dewey says,

The word habit may seem twisted somewhat from its customary use when employed as we have been using it. But we need a word to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity.\(^{110}\)

The emphasis here is on the acquisition of habits, the process by which they are acquired, and it certainly has a very instrumentalistic, or inferential tone in a Peircian sense. As we saw in the various permutations of the Peircian cycle, be it in the cycle found in the “Fixation of Belief” or his cycle of inference in terms of his “firstness,” etc.,

\(^{110}\) HNC, p. 39
there is “human activity” influenced by “prior activity,” that is, a firstness and secondness informing every thirdness, which, in turn, is incorporated into a new firstness. Every state of belief that is disrupted by a problem, a disequilibrium, is then incorporated along with the problem and its resolution into a new state of belief, better, evolved, more dynamic.

Physiological functions and habits both rely on a transaction between organism and environment. However, the physiological functions are involuntary, not acquired as habits are, and thus the functions are present regardless of the specifics of the environment or the organism. As long as there is air in the environment, as long as there are functional lungs within an organism, the transaction between the two, the act of breathing, will take place. All human beings breathe air if they are to remain alive. “Which human beings breathe?” and “what country do they breathe in?” are equally absurd questions.

Habits, however, rely on very specific transactions. So specific, in fact, that no two organisms have precisely the same habit set. Human consciousness is never exactly the same from one moment to the next, as James argued, invoking a very Heraclitean metaphor of being unable to step into the same river twice. Nor is the environment stagnant, but constantly changing and reshaping. As Dewey says, “the environment in which the act takes place is never twice alike. Even when the overt organic discharge is substantially the same, the acts impinge upon a different environment and thus have different consequences.”\textsuperscript{111} The physiological function of breathing takes place within

\textsuperscript{111} HNC, p. 142
every human being in any environment. Any specific habit, however, is based firmly in
the means by which it was, as Dewey said, “acquired.” The Peircian cycle of inference
will change depending on the specific individual and the specific problem that that
individual faces such that the habit that is eventually formed will be, consequently,
equally specific to that individual.

Of course, individuals within a given community will all demonstrate similar
habits for those habits were the result of problems arising from an environment that,
though not stable and stagnant, is, at least, changing in a unified way as experienced by a
group of individuals. We must note, however, that Dewey is not lapsing into the kind of
“atomism” that stood in stark contrast to his own “epistemological” contributions. The
notion of cultural norms and habits is not the mere aggregate of individual habits, it is
only to note certain commonalities in environment and approach to that environment. A
certain countryside town, for example, will constantly change as the climate and seasons
move life around, but these changes are experienced by everyone within that town.
Likewise, habits will show some uniformity within a given community as they are passed
from one generation to the next, and from one member of the community to another. As
Dewey says, “our individual habits are links in forming the endless chain of humanity.
Their significance depends upon the environment inherited from our forerunners, and it is
enhanced as we foresee the fruits of our labors in the world in which our successors
live.”

As our parents acquired their habits through the solution of problems, when

112 HNC, p.23
those problems arise for us, we bring to bear the education we have so far acquired; in no small part influenced by our parents and the habits they forged themselves.

In terms of a description of social phenomena, the result of this emphasis on the nature of an individual organism interacting with specific environment, engaging a specific problem and forging a specific habit, is that it begins to separate individuals from one another. Again, individuals within a specific community, though all unique and exhibiting differences in judgment, temperament and activity, will have similar habits (though exceptions are always possible) due to the unified environment of all and the communal transaction between members, all “infecting” the habits of others with their own, and vice versa, until the “gestalt” of any individual’s habitual matrix will prove compatible and markedly similar to anyone else’s within that community. The “gestalt” of the group is likewise influential on the formation of the individual, for, as we must always keep in mind with Dewey, there is a reciprocal relation, a transaction between organism and environment, individual and community, in which the power of influence is a two-way street. If we transport ourselves farther through either time or space, we begin to encounter vastly different individuals with vastly different environments facing vastly differently problems that forge vastly different habits (notice, however, that physiological functions remain the same). One man’s problem, we could say, is another man’s everyday occurrence. Dewey maintains that the specific confluence of habits acquired in any given individual is exactly the thing that we normally refer to as a man’s “character.”
“Character” is a product of this dynamic, reciprocal relation, this “transaction,” between an individual and his community.\textsuperscript{113}

Were it not for the continued operation of all habits in every act, no such thing as character could exist. There would be simply a bundle, an untied bundle at that, of isolated acts. Character is the interpretation of habits. If each habit existed in an insulated compartment and operated without affecting or being affected by others, character would not exist. That is, conduct would lack unity being only a juxtaposition of disconnected reactions to separated situations. But since environments overlap, since situations are continuous and those remote from one another contain like elements, a continuous modification of habits by one another is constantly going on. A man may give himself away in a look or a gesture. Character can be read through the medium of individual acts.\textsuperscript{114}

All of our habits are at work all the time, in every act, and obviously we are not aware of all of them at every moment. Most operate on a level of sub-reflection, and only those at play at the moment, involved in the resolving of some problematic situation, are noticed as habits at work. As Dewey says, “in actuality, each habit operates all the time of waking life,”\textsuperscript{115} and the focus only comes upon one or two specific habits when they are directly, and overtly, involved in the resolution of a problematic situation.

Because the non-reflective habits are constantly at work, though most not overtly, they form a continuity which Dewey defines as character, character unique to the habitual matrix of any given individual for the Peircian inferential (or Deweyian instrumental) processes by which they were acquired to begin with is equally unique.

\textsuperscript{113} Although it is beyond the scope of our current investigation, we must recall Dewey’s rejection of the atomistic individual of classical liberalism in his \textit{Individualism Old and New}, specifically, in which he advances a more dynamic conception of the individual as “social individual.”

\textsuperscript{114} HNC, p. 37

\textsuperscript{115} HNC, p. 36
This argument is a good microcosmic example of his rejection of any sort of “containment”\textsuperscript{116} paradigm in which any aspect of experience is isolated from any other in an atomistic fashion in favor of what Dewey seems to constantly prefer, an “organistic” paradigm in which experience is kept whole and viewed, instead, as inferential stretches, as an instrumental methodology of progress. Habits, events, environments, are not isolated but overlap and form a continuity through time and space, a concept made plain in his reconstruction of the Reflex Arc concept in psychology. The eye’s attention to the flame, the hand’s reaching, the burning sensation, the withdrawal of the hand, are all phases of one unified experience. If this continuity and overlapping is not accounted for, in favor of less developed, atomistic, compartmentalized conception of experience, the very act of learning and progress cannot be sufficiently accounted for. Here, as individuals experience problems and resolve these problems, the habits they form through the necessary resolution of problems and reestablishment of their equilibrium with their environment constructs their unique, individual characters. These “characters” are the unified continuity; the common-thread running through all of the Peircian processes that give rise to the individual habits, not isolated from their environing community, but engaged in a dynamic, ongoing transaction \textit{with} their communities. No individual habit is recognized as isolated from any other, but all work together, some overtly, some non-reflectively, at all times, constructing an individual’s “character” and representing both the ideas and tools at that individual’s disposal to solve

\textsuperscript{116} Frank Ryan articulated in his own research the different characteristics of “containment” and “inferential” paradigms. Dewey rejected “containment” as “first philosophy” or a “root metaphor.” Obviously, however, there are countless situations where describing “containments” is essential for experimentation and philosophical inquiry in ways we explored in chapter one’s investigation into the Psychologist’s Fallacy.
new problems, giving rise to new habits, and so on. “Character,” Dewey says, “is the name given to the working interaction of habits.”

III. HABITUAL FILTRATION SYSTEM

“Ideas,” Dewey defines as “thoughts of ends.” “Ends,” in a Peircian sense, could be seen as the achievement of an objective of inquiry and the “ideas” are the plans brought to bear upon achieving that objective. Ideas are the cognitive, psychical aspect of problem solving, and when in conjunction with the physical “tools” that are at an individual’s disposal, result, ideally, in the solution to a problematic situation. This solution is the original objective achieved, and that objective, in turn, becomes the object of experience. “Ideas” are the thoughts of these attained objectives. We project forward to the possibility of achieved ends and then go about physically trying to achieve them. These machinations, however, are never formed in a vacuum free from our habits. “Ideas…are not spontaneously generated. There is no immaculate conception of meanings or purposes. Reason pure of all influence from prior habit is a fiction.” Our habitual matrix which is, in turn, acquired through our previous experiences, conditions our ideas. “How” we experience something is just as individualized as “what” we plan to do about it. By “something” I mean to say either a “problematic” or an “unproblematic” situation. If our previous experiences have engaged a specific problem in the past, we experience the “how” of the situation as unproblematic. If unproblematic, “what” we will do about it, the ideas that inform our plans and construct an inquiry into resolution.

117 HNC, p. 39
118 HNC, p. 31
119 HNC, p. 31
will be fairly minimal, a slight readjustment, often barely noticed at all. If the “how” of this experience proves to be problematic, “what” we will do about it, the plans we will forge, will be more overt and detailed, ideas constructing a means by which to solve the problem and bringing physical tools to bear upon it. Our habits inform our ideas in two ways: in one sense, the habits that we’ve acquired are acquired specifically from the previous resolution of problematic situations. As such, when a new problematic situation arises, our habits will inform the methods by which we go about solving the problem. In another sense, what arises as a problem in the first place that would otherwise cause ideas to emerge in order to solve the problem, are conditioned by our habits. Our habits, that is, determine whether or not something even is a problem in the first place. As Dewey says, “some habit impeded by circumstances is the source of the projection of the end. It is also the primary means of its realization.”\textsuperscript{120} Our habits are informative both in terms of (a) the objects and events we encounter in experience and (b) whether or not these objects and events we encounter in experience prove problematic.

“Immediate, seemingly instinctive, feeling of the direction and end of various lines of behavior is in reality the feeling of habits working below direct consciousness.”\textsuperscript{121} After our habits have been acquired (through a process differentiating them from physical functions), they operate on a cognitive level similar to that of physical functions, that is to say, they function without our being aware of them functioning (unless, of course, we draw our attention to them actively, as I can become

\textsuperscript{120} HNC, p. 36
\textsuperscript{121} HNC, p. 32
aware of my “breathing” though I don’t need to be aware that I am breathing to be breathing). As Dewey says:

In actuality each habit operates all the time of waking life; though like a member of a crew taking his turn at the wheel, its operation becomes the dominantly characteristic trait of an act only occasionally or rarely.\textsuperscript{122}

If our habits are operating non-reflectively, and if, in turn, those habits inform our experience of objects and events and determine whether or not they constitute for us, individually, a problem, our habits form, consequently, a kind of “filter” operating between us and the objects and events of our experience.

The medium of habit filters all the material that reaches our perception and thought. The filter is not, however, chemically pure. It is a reagent which adds new qualities and rearranges what is received. Our ideas truly depend upon experience, but so do our sensations.\textsuperscript{123}

A common filter would separate, say, larger particles from smaller particles such that the organic whole of the material prior to filtration would be subsequently “different” inasmuch as, at least, the larger particles would have been filtered out. In addition to this function of filtration, Dewey says that the filter alters the qualities of the particles that \textit{do} make it through the filter.

It is critical here not to confuse Dewey’s “filter” with the more common “veil” of perception found in the ego-centric predicament. Although they appear to be markedly similar, there is no ontologically superior realm, for Dewey, lurking beyond our experience. What is really “real” \textit{is} our experience and our experience is phenomenologically accounted for here in terms of events and objects coming through a filter of pre-existing, non-reflective habits. Both our sensations and our ideas, Dewey

\textsuperscript{122} HNC, p. 36
\textsuperscript{123} HNC, p. 32
says, depend upon our experience, and our experience is determined in no small part due
to what our habits filter in and out.

Habits, as Dewey said, inform our ideas as well as our sensations. Consider the
following example:

It is all of a kind with the doings of a man, who remembering a prior satisfaction
of thirst and the conditions under which it occurred, digs a well. For the time being water
in reference to his activity exists in imagination not in fact. But this imagination is not a
self-generated, self-enclosed, psychical existence. It is the persistent operation of a prior
object that has been incorporated in effective habit. There is no miracle in the fact that an
object in a new context operates in a new way.\textsuperscript{124}

This proves an interesting parallel to the child being burned by the flame and
remembering the connection between flame and pain response. Here we have a thirsty
man remembering the conditions under which the thirst was quenched on a prior occasion
through the acquisition of water. Finding himself now in similar situation, the man
begins to dig a well in hopes of finding water to quench this new thirst. I say “new” thirst
for it certainly is not the same as his “old” thirst, as no two experiences can be exactly
alike for no consciousness is precisely the same from one moment to the next. We have,
in no small part, James’ “stream of consciousness” to thank for that insight. However, in
this new occasion, the water is not yet made “fact” but exists solely in the man’s
imagination as a goal to which he applies the tools at his disposal. “It is,” as Dewey say,
“the persistent operation of a prior object which has been incorporated in effective habit,”
that is, the prior object, “water,” not in isolation but in a continued unity with the
cessation of thirst, persists within the man’s consciousness, forging the new water in his
imagination as a goal to achieve. Whereas before water was “fact” inasmuch as it was

\textsuperscript{124} HNC, p. 52
there and present before him to quench his thirst, now it only exists in his “imagination” because of its successful use in a previous experience in contrast to the absence of its physical presence. Neither the “fact” water from before nor the “imagined” water of the current experience is any less “real” than the other, only different phases within the man’s experience, as he uses a previously acquired habit to forge a plan for how to resolve a current problematic situation. Our previous habits involving the acquisition of water to quench thirst inform our ideas on how best to quench a new thirst, a new problematic situation. Sometimes our habits are good habits, inasmuch as they allow us to successfully form new ideas to solve new problems. Sometimes, however, our habits color our ideas such that we form ideas that are too much in opposition to our environment, bad habits, in a sense, that fail to achieve our objective goals. If an earlier habit fails to solve a new problem, that original habit must be altered in order to achieve the desired resolution and reestablished equilibrium with our environment. As a “good” or “successful” habit, it broadens the meaning of “water” to now include connections to other things and events, past and present, physical and imaginary. The term “water” has become more dynamic by this process.

“Old habits,” Dewey says, “must perforce need modification,” but “obviously any such change can be only experimental.”¹²⁵ In keeping with Peirce’s inferential cycle and Dewey’s instrumentalism, the re-establishing of habits is forged on a process of experimentation. If an old habit proves not to be useful in reconciling a current problematic situation, it’s a “bad habit,” and must be modified. One can only change

¹²⁵ HNC, p. 53
habits through experimentation, testing out old habits to see if they solve current
situations and, if not, they must be modified. This modification can be either non-
reflective or overt, depending upon the situation. It is not beyond the pale to imagine
someone reflecting upon a failed current experience and thinking “there is something I
am doing wrong here, what can it be and what can I change to achieve my desired goal?”
Likewise, it is entirely possible that someone keeps experimenting, plugging at it, as it
were, until the problem is solved in a such a way that the person is not entirely aware of
what habits changed to achieve the new goal. But achieved it was regardless and as such
the new habits (or, rather, the old habits now modified) are reincorporated into the
person’s habitual matrix, or, we could say, his “character.”

The correlation between the modification of “bad” or unproductive habits and this
conception of “filtration” can be readily observed.

There was a time when men believed that each object in the external world
carried its nature stamped upon it as a form, and that intelligence consisted in simply
inspecting and reading off an intrinsic self-enclosed complete nature. The scientific
revolution which began in the seventeenth century came through a surrender of this point
of view. It began with recognition that every natural object is in truth an event
continuous in space and time with other events; and is to be known only by experimental
inquiries which will exhibit a multitude of complicated, obscure and minute
relationships.126

What Dewey is hinting at here is a bad “philosophical” habit, one instrumentalism has
begun to overcome. If we reject, as Dewey does, the concept that an object was nothing
more than a static, stable, isolated form existing in the external world in favor of a more
dynamic concept of an object as an event, in a sense, a public “object” experienced
uniquely through individual gestalts of experience, we come to realize that we have a

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126 HNC, pp. 53 - 54
very pluralistic universe, as James’ argued as well. If any given object is an event “continuous in space and time with other events,” and can be known only by the type of Peircian experimentalism, engaging problems as they arise and objects in space and time become objectives of these inquiries, than the very notion that there is one, true, ultimately real object with a determinate nature of its own existing in the external world dissolves as mere fiction. The habits one person has accrued over a lifetime of experimentation will produce a different new and unique experience of an object than another person who has accrued a very different set of habits over his own lifetime of facing very different problems and finding very different solutions. It certainly would make little sense to say that one person’s experience is closer to the really “real” of an object than any other. The only thing that differentiates one man’s experience of an object as “inferior” or “superior” to any other is not in terms of its distance from the really “real,” a fiction for Dewey, but in terms of its usefulness. “Bad” habits that fail to resolve a situation are not engaging objects as events in a useful productive way.

As Dewey says, “any observed form or object is but a challenge.”127 The ideas brought to bear on the solving of such challenges are, as we’ve seen, unique to the individual, for these ideas are informed by the habits accrued after a set of problems and solutions unique to that individual. If any object is an event seen as a successful overcoming of a challenge, overcoming a unique problematic situation, a very pluralistic ontology follows. An object becomes an objective of inquiry and each inquiry is based upon ideas brought to bear upon the resolution of that inquiry. Habitual matrices that are

127 HNC, p. 54
unique to every single, individual human being, in turn, inform these ideas. This ontological theory hearkens back to Dewey’s thesis in his “Postulate of Immediate Experience,” that what *is* is what it is experienced *as*. The ontological ramifications of his theory, a kind of “transactional ontological pluralism,” map perfectly onto a Peircian cycle of inference.

What we’ve added here, through Dewey’s investigation into the nature of “habits” and his social psychology, is a greater explication of precisely how this pluralism comes about and how our habits, standing in for a Peircian non-reflective experience, inform every inquiry that we embark upon. That is to say, our habits *are* what provide the ontological pluralism by creating a filter¹²⁸ through which we experience the world, a filter unique to every individual based upon a previous, and equally unique, experimental set. To say “what *is*, is what it is experienced *as*” is to note that what it is experienced as, *is* experienced that way in no small part due to the habitual filter through which all experience must pass.

IV. INDIVIDUALIZED HABITS CULTURALLY CONDITIONED

“Habits,” Dewey reminds us, “as organized activities are secondary and acquired, not native and original. They are outgrowths of unlearned activities which are part of

¹²⁸ It may be remarked that “filter,” though we have distinguished its use here from the standard empiricist view leading to a “veil of perception” problem, is still a bit problematic. “Filters,” in general, are designed to keep things out, true, but they also allow certain things to be filtered “in” as well. Unlike the standard empiricist “veil of perception,” the filter is seen here as simply a postulation to better explore the nature of unconscious habit on conscious experience. There is nothing static or stagnant about the filter itself, it merely conditions, in part, what leaps out from the gestalt of unproblematic primary experience as problematic from what does not and, as we’ve explored, what is considered to be “problematic” evolves over time through an individual’s (or a society’s) education and development.
man’s endowment at birth.”

The only other aspect of Dewey’s social psychology that he labeled as “unlearned” were the physical functions that he juxtaposed to the learned, or “acquired,” nature of habits. We begin with something more primitive at birth, something “instinctive,” and those “instincts” are only thereafter put to the test, many tests, in fact, and as a result of their being tested, coalesce into the habits that we then bring to bear upon new problems as they arise.

In the life of the individual, instinctive activity comes first. But an individual begins life as a baby, and babies are dependent beings. Their activities could continue at most for only a few hours were it not for the presence and aid of adults with their formed habits. Our parents, family members and community members are each individual “strings” of habit-experiment continuity constituting their “characters.” From breath one, we, as babies, are at the mercy of these habit continuities, characters, we call “family” and “community.” More often than not, pre-linguistic infants are benefited by their families and their communities, nurtured, supported, and rightly so. Not always, of course, in unfortunate circumstances and even in those circumstances where there is overt support and nurturing, the infant remains “at the mercy” of the influential habitual continuities of family and community (racism towards outsiders, for example, could be cultivated within a community though the individual babies within that community are supported and nurtured and loved ceaselessly). From breath one, we are influenced by the acquired habits of others as they begin to teach us how to make our way in the world.

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129 HNC, p. 85
130 Dewey says that “the words ‘instinct’ and ‘impulse’” are “practical equivalents” on page 99, HNC, to help, in part, differentiate them from the genetic programs we regard as “animal instincts.”
131 HNC, p. 85
In the case of the young it is patent that impulses are highly flexible starting points for activities which are diversified according to the ways in which they are used. Any impulse may become organized into almost any disposition according to the way it interacts with surroundings. Fear may become abject cowardice, prudent caution, reference for superiors or respect for equals.\textsuperscript{132}

We enter into this world as unqualified potential, a mass of instincts and impulses unlearned and ingrained in us from birth. These constitute not only the wide array of physical functions, digestion, breathing, but moreover, the natural drives we feel to find sustenance, procreate, interact with others like us, and deal with the varying emotions that constantly bombard us. These impulses could be directed in any number of ways. Our community, specifically, our parents and family members most present and influential in our early stages of development, conditions the ways in which they are, ultimately, directed. How we react to the fear impulse, for example, can lead to any number of acquired habits. We must be careful to note, however, that Dewey is not always careful in differentiating an impulse before and after its conceptual association. There really isn’t a “fear impulse,” per se, at least, not until some impulse is later conceptually associated with “fear.”\textsuperscript{133} These habits, as we’ve seen, are acquired through engaging a problematic situation, testing previously acquired habits, and seeing if they succeed in reestablishing our equilibrium with our environments. But how we are taught to experiment, the manner by which we inquire into the nature of our world, is conditioned by how our parents taught us to. This, in turn, is conditioned by how they themselves inquired into our world, and so on. We all begin with impulses, in short, but how those impulses are conditioned into habits which inform our dealings with our world is a highly

\textsuperscript{132} HNC, p. 91

\textsuperscript{133} Consider the associations here with the cognitive Peircian “thirdness” reflecting back on a previous “firstness”
subjective, individualized engagement with very specific problems and very specific methods by which to solve these problems, methods passed down to us by our parents and conditioned by our communities.

A man may be chiefly afraid of the spirits of his ancestors, of officials, of arousing the disapproval of his associates, of being deceived, of fresh air, or of Bolshevism. The actual outcome depends upon how the impulse of fear is interwoven with other impulses. This depends in turn upon the outlets and inhibitions supplied by the social environment.¹³⁴

As we recall from almost any facet of Dewey’s work in philosophy, aspects of experience should be accounted for organistically rather than atomistically, that is to say, taken as a whole rather that divided into unnatural, artificial contained parts. As such, any impulse when seen in the proper organic light is never alone in isolation but naturally interwoven with other impulses. It is this web of impulses that stimulate the processes by which habits are acquired, a web or matrix of habits no less expansive than the impulses they are born from. Any individual impulse existing within any specific individual is conditioned into a habit by not only the influence of his parents and community but by the available outlets and inhibitions supplied by his “social environment,” both in terms of his natural environment and in terms of his fellow community members. There is no greater individualized procedure than this. Every step is conditioned by the influence of others and the influence of environment and yet every step is one’s own private investigation leading to one’s own experiment and resolution resulting in one’s own, unique habitual matrix.

V. EDUCATION AND THE ROAD TO PEACE

¹³⁴ HNC, p. 91
It is precisely because of a social environment’s outlets and inhibitions that one can trace a line of analyzed continuity back and forth between individual and community that condition the outgrowth of impulses into regularized and regularizing habits. The way impulses are released and the ways habits are formed are reflective of a social environment’s outlets and inhibitions. Conversely, a study of the outlets and inhibitions demonstrated by a social environment can shed light upon the impulses and formed habits of the citizens living within that social environment.

All human beings have myriad impulses that could find themselves conditioned into any number of different habits. The conditioning is a product of their own investigations into the world, their own experiments, and those experiments in turn are conditioned by both their communities’ influence on their development as well as the social environment that they find themselves in. Perhaps the most vivid example that Dewey gives us is an analysis of James’ study of the reasons why mankind goes to war. As Dewey says, the issue:

Calls attention to the medley of impulses which are casually bunched together under the caption of belligerent impulse; and it calls attention to the fact that the elements of this medley may be woven together into many different types of activity.

Dewey wants to argue that, contrary to many moral theorists, human nature is susceptible to change over time. If the more general impulses, say, for example here, “belligerence,” are viewed as a medley of other impulses, a different portrait of human nature is painted. Whereas a more general impulse like “belligerence” could be seen as timeless and unchanging, a part of the very “essence” of humanity, a coordination of a

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135 See James’ “The Moral Equivalents of War”
136 HNC, p. 106
dozen or more interwoven impulses forming what is casually referred to as “belligerence”

offers us a more dynamic view of the human condition.

Pugnacity, rivalry, vainglory, love of booty, fear, suspicion, anger, desire for
freedom from the conventions and restrictions of peace, love of power and hatred of
oppression, opportunity for novel displays, love of home and soil, attachment to one’s
people and to the alter and the hearth, courage, loyalty, opportunity to make a name,
money or a career, affection, piety to ancestors and ancestral gods – all of these things
and many more make up the war-like force.137

The statement “humans are, by nature, timelessly belligerent creatures and it is because
of this belligerence that they go to war” we see is clearly an under simplification of an
immensely complex and dynamic concept. All of the aforementioned are impulses, for
Dewey, all interwoven to form this war-like impulse, this belligerent impulse. We can
clearly see that not all of them are applicable at all times for all people, but only a
coordination of some can account for the motivating factors involved in any conflict. It
would be absurd to say that the United States launched its offensive against Iraq because
of piety towards its ancestral gods or for the love and affection that launched a thousand
ships as in the epic tale of the Iliad. Consequently, just as social environments, as Dewey
has said, inform impulses and the habits acquired from those impulses, it is clear here that
the converse is likewise true: impulses inform social environments. The impulses at play
when the decision is made to go to war are clearly different today than they were two
thousand years ago. It can only follow that the impulses that create the habits that forge
human character imply that human nature itself is alterable over time. For what was once
important is no longer, and what was once unforeseeable has now come to pass.

137 HNC, pp. 106 - 107
Consider here, James’s assessment of the changing character of any given individual in his “Stream of Consciousness.”

Often we are ourselves struck at the strange differences in our successive views of the same thing. We wonder how we ever could have opined as we did last month about a certain matter. We have outgrown the possibility of that state of mind, we know not how. From one year to another we see things in new lights. What was unreal has grown real, and what was exciting is insipid. The friends we used to care the world for are shrunken to shadows; the women, once so divine, the stars, the woods, the waters, how now so dull and common!\(^\text{138}\)

As we saw in Dewey as well, both the environment and the organism within any transaction are in constant states of change, a perpetual battle to re-establish and maintain equilibrium. “Our brain changes, and that, like the aurora borealis, its whole internal equilibrium shifts with every pulse of change.”\(^\text{139}\) We are not the people we once were, our priorities, wants, desire and fears change from month to month. As individuals comprise societies, it follows logically that those societies, and the impulses that drive the individuals therein to make decisions reflective of those societies, change as well. From the changing political landscape to Proust’s twilight admissions on the past, that “it is labour in vain to attempt to recapture it,”\(^\text{140}\) it becomes clear “a permanently existing ‘idea’ or ‘Vorstellung; which makes its appearance before the footlights of consciousness at periodical intervals, is as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades.”\(^\text{141}\) How similar this sounds to Dewey’s observation that “ideas…are not spontaneously generated. There is no immaculate conception of meanings or purposes. Reason pure of all

\(^{138}\text{Stuhr, p. 166}\)
\(^{139}\text{Stuhr, p. 166}\)
\(^{140}\text{Proust, p. 54}\)
\(^{141}\text{Stuhr, p. 167}\)
influence from prior habit is a fiction."\textsuperscript{142} Although, “no doubt it is often convenient to formulate the mental facts in an atomistic sort of way, and to treat the higher states of consciousness as if they were all built out of unchanging simple ideas,” ultimately “no two ‘ideas’ are ever exactly the same.”\textsuperscript{143}

Habits once formed perpetuate themselves by acting unremittingly upon the native stock of activities. They stimulate, inhibit, intensify, weaken, select, concentrate and organize the latter into their own likeness. They create out of the formless void of impulses a world made in their image. Man is a creature of habit, not of reason not yet of instinct.\textsuperscript{144}

Once more we see the filtration system of the habitual matrix in play, creating out of the formless void of impulses “a world made in their own image,” that what is encountered is encountered through this habitual filter, that what is is what it is experienced as.

“Acquired habits can be modified only by redirection of impulses”\textsuperscript{145} and thus the ultimate question becomes: “how can we actively redirect impulses which seem so primitive, so latent, within our very make-up as human beings?”

The key lies in the rejection of accepting any individual impulse in a social or individual vacuum, as viewed too atomistically. Once again, we turn to a more dynamic organismic that informs a more accurate assessment of the human condition. No impulse acts alone but, rather, in a complex, dynamic coordination with myriad other impulses, pulling this way and that, which, after numerous occasions of experiments and inquiries into how best to maintain an equilibrium with our world, coalesce into what we call habits. We seek not to change our “impulses” per se, for mankind will always be

\textsuperscript{142} HNC, p. 31
\textsuperscript{144} HNC, p. 118
\textsuperscript{145} HNC, p. 119
susceptible to any and all of the limitless void of impulses, but the way in which they are coordinated and which ones, in specific, are coordinated, into habits. Consider Proust’s recollections again of his youth at Combray and the manner by which he learned, only as an adult, the means by which his impulses of “Love,” initially random and chaotic, would eventually coalesce into something more stable:

As for the agony through which I had just passed, I imagined that Swann would have laughed heartily at it if he had read my letter and had guessed its purpose; whereas, on the contrary, as I was to learn in due course, a similar anguish had been the bane of his life for many years, and no one perhaps could have understood my feelings at that moment so well as himself; to him, that anguish which lies in knowing that the creature one adores is in some place of enjoyment where oneself is not and cannot follow – to him that anguish came through Love, to which it is in a sense predestined, by which it must be equipped and adapted; but when, as had befallen me, such an anguish possess one’s soul before Love has yet entered into one’s life, then it must drift, awaiting Love’s coming, vague and free, without precise attachment.¹⁴⁶

Love, for a child, remains “vague and free” yet remains nevertheless, “predestined,” in a sense, for the impulses are there, but not yet coordinated into anything specific, a habit of Loving directed at someone or something specific. These wild, free, vague impulses of desiring what is other, wanting comfort, companionship, must be “equipped and adapted,” that is, coordinated through the ideas that habits inform towards specific ends; resolved coordinations of impulses. “Filial piety,” “affection for a comrade”¹⁴⁷ or the love of one’s spouse, will all form from the same “vague and free” penumbra of impulses.

Now let us consider the impact that social institutions have on this early coordination of “vague and free” impulses into regularized and regularizing habits. “Existing institutions impose their stamp, their superscription, upon impulse and

¹⁴⁶ Proust, p. 36 ¹⁴⁷ Proust, p. 36
instinct…how then can we get leverage for changing institutions?”¹⁴⁸ Our social environments influence our habits; of that there is little doubt. The culture in which we grow into adults will be the source of all the forces that influence how we coordinate which impulses into what, specific, habits. And yet institutions, governments, structured religions, impose upon their populace their own “stamp” and “superscription” aimed at curbing one impulse and emphasizing another. It is not any one, specific institution, but the coordination of all institutions within a society that forge the social conditions, the social environment, from which impulses are formed into habits. “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.”¹⁴⁹ “To suppose there is some one unchanging native force which generates war is as naïve as the usual assumption that our enemy is actuated solely by the meaner of the tendencies name and we only by the nobler.”¹⁵⁰

Dewey cites James’ examples of the Iliadic period in which the “motives” and “glories”¹⁵¹ of the Trojan War were vastly different from those of modern warfare. As he says, “no longer personal love, love of glory, or of the soldier’s love of his own privately amassed booty, but are of the collective, prosaic political and economic nature.”¹⁵² As he says, “the motives once appealed to are out of date; they do not now induce war.”¹⁵³ The parallels between this and James’ account of the changing desires and passions of the

¹⁴⁸ HNC, p. 119
¹⁴⁹ HNC, p. 107
¹⁵⁰ HNC, p. 107
¹⁵¹ HNC, p. 107
¹⁵² HNC, p. 108
¹⁵³ HNC, p. 108
individual from month to month, let alone down through the years, let alone abstracted out to encompass an entire society, are vividly clear in this passage. What was once important is, simply, no longer, but new passions and motivations, previously unforeseen, have become the impetus for war. “The forces that once caused wars have found other outsets for themselves; while new provocations, based on new economic and political conditions have come into being. War is thus seen to be a function of social institutions, not of what is natively fixed in human constitution.”\(^{154}\)

The implications of this theory are profound. If there is no purely “war-like” instinct residing in some static, stagnant “nature” of man, war is not, necessarily, an activity that man must always find himself enmeshed in. As we’ve seen, the forces and motivations that previously caused wars, those specific coordination of impulses, have since found “other outlets.” Yet new provocations have arisen to which social institutions, be it religious, political, or both, have provided the outlet in the form of a war with new motivations. War is, as Dewey concludes, a “function of social institutions, not…a fixed human constitution.” In order to alter the coordination of impulses that form the habits that provoke war, the social institutions must be changed and new outlets for the same impulses in different coordinations must be discovered and utilized, an alternate piping system, redirecting these otherwise destructive forces to non-violent ends. If war is solely a function of social institutions and not a product of some innate, static human nature, and if the motivations of wars past no longer hold the power to motivate war now, it would follow that, at least in theory, there is some coordination of

\(^{154}\) HNC, p. 108
impulses and a social environment that could curb human conduct away from war altogether. It all comes back to Dewey’s question: “how then can we get leverage for changing institutions?”

The solution lies in the education of our children. As Dewey says,

The cold fact of the situation is that the chief means of continuous, graded, economical improvement and social rectification lies in utilizing the opportunities of educating the young to modify prevailing types of thought and desire.\(^\text{155}\)

The modification of prevailing types of thought and desire is analogous to the modification of the social institutions and, consequently, the social environment in which individuals are acculturated into coordinating their habits in one way or another. Children, specifically, are targeted by Dewey’s theory:

The young are not as yet as subject to the full impact of established customs. Their life of impulsive activity is vivid, flexible, experimenting, curious. Adults have their habits formed, fixed, at least comparatively. They are the subjects, not to say victims, of an environment which they can directly change only by a maximum effort and disturbance.\(^\text{156}\)

It takes time to transform coordinations of impulses into regularized (and regularizing) habits. Time, specifically, dedicated to putting to the test different coordinations of impulses to see whether or not they result in a desired outcome, a successful objective achieved, such that the organism (the individual) establishes a proper equilibrium with his environment. These impulses in adults are firmly in place, coordinated into their associations and established in tried and tested habits. These habits, however, are conditioned by the individual’s social environment, not the least of which a response to the social institutions (government, religion) in place and imposing their own, pre-

\(^{155}\) HNC, p. 120
\(^{156}\) HNC, p. 120
established means by which to direct and inhibit some impulses (and habits) at the expense of others. Children have not yet put their impulses to the test (impulses no different than adults have in the sense of their “limitless void”, not yet bundled into specific coordinations and not yet formed into regularized habits). The impulses of children remain in their state of limitless potential, not yet associated with one another in any regularized fashion.

“Education” of the young is, in this sense, akin to the Peircian inferential cycle, Dewey’s instrumentalism, which bases progress on ideas (and materials) being put to practical tests and experimentation. Of course, this education, as we’ve seen, cannot take place in a void of human contact for, as we’ve already mentioned, from breath one children are at the mercy of the adults in their community to keep them alive. In so doing, the habits that the previous generation acquired through their own experimentation “infect” the children’s own experimentation and developing habits. Prior to this influence, this “infection” of others’ habits, impulses have no necessary or direct association with empirical goals in reality. Those empirical ends have not yet been observed for experiments have not yet been engaged. “Desire for comfort,” for example, very quickly gains association with one’s mother, for example, but that association does not exist in any innate way prior to the child’s birth. Perhaps a more vivid example, in terms of war, would pertain to the conflict in the Middle East. To say there is an “anti-Semitic” impulse is absurd, what impulses are associated with anti-Semitism are coordinated into habits through practice, experience and real-world experimentation. The association, specifically, must be made by another and transferred to a child. Another
must influence the child. The idea that there is a perpetually existing type of impulse with innate, inherent empirical associations (like the very concept of “anti-Semitism”) is a “fiction” for Dewey and the type of permanently idea ‘idea,’ for James, “as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades.” “Names did not appear…inalterable, but changed their shape to suit the context in which they lay.”\textsuperscript{157} Unquestionably there are impulses that become coordinated into the habit of anti-Semitism, but these impulses need not necessarily be directed to that end (for, logically, there are all manner of different kinds of discrimination and, indeed, human beings free from such overt discrimination who, nevertheless, maintain the same impulses as everyone else but must, simply, find a different direction for their exploration). 

There is, like all things with Dewey, an interconnectiveness, a transaction between a multitude of different institutions that form our social life, our social environment.

It is not easy to exaggerate the extent to which we now pass from one kind of nurture to another as we go from business to church, from science to the newspaper, from business to art, from companionship to politics, from home to school. An individual is no subjected to many conflicting schemes of education. Hence habits are divided against one another, personality is disrupted, the scheme of conduct is confused and disintegrated. But the remedy lies in the development of a new morale which can be attained only as released impulses are intelligently employed to form harmonious habits adapted to one another in a new situation.\textsuperscript{158}

The impulses are present in all individuals, it is the ways in which they are expressed and the coordinations in which they find themselves placed that will influence the habits that form and types of characters that are, consequently, produced. War cannot be attributed

\textsuperscript{157} HNC, p. 167
\textsuperscript{158} HNC, pp. 122 - 123
to any one impulse, as we’ve seen, nor any one specific institution for the myriad institutions constantly influencing and interacting with any given individual.

It is now naïve to attribute war to specific isolable human impulses for which separate channels of expression may be found, while the rest of life is left to go on about the same. A general social reorganization is needed which will redistribute forces, immunize, divert and nullify. Hinton was doubtless right when he wrote that the only way to abolish war was to make peace heroic.\textsuperscript{159}

There is no specific “war-like” impulse, but rather a coordination of impulses that have resulted in the declaration of war. Indeed, these coordinations of impulses on a societal level have changed drastically over the generations, as James’ articulated in his account of the motivations behind the Trojan War and more modern warfare. There is no “essence” nor substance, nor static, specific, isolable impulse associated with war.

It now appears that the heroic emotions are not anything which may be specialized in a side-line, so that the war-impulses may find a sublimation in special practices and occupations. They have to get an outlet in all the tasks of peace.\textsuperscript{160}

The solution to the question as to how to alter the influences that social institutions have on habit formation is two-fold. On the one hand, impulses exist in all human beings, at first, in a nearly limitless void without direction or coordination. If the impulses normally associated\textsuperscript{161} with the more general (and mythological) “war-impulse” can be granted an outlet aimed not at war, but rather at peace, many of the “heroic” impulses can be given a more protagonistic and beneficial association. As Hinton said, the act of abolishing war is to make peace heroic. It is the association of the impulses we all have (the “heroic” impulses) with the act of bringing about peace rather than declaring war.

On the other hand, this association best takes place through the education of the young

\textsuperscript{159} HNC, pp. 108 - 109
\textsuperscript{160} HNC, p. 109
\textsuperscript{161} Though, the impulses in question, as we’ve seen, have changed drastically over the millennia
when the coordinations of impulses are weakest and the untapped potential of impulse associations and coordinations into habits is highest.

Specific examples of redirected impulses offer interesting possibilities, true, but what is called for is a more dynamic conception of disposition to intelligent activity and the ways in which, in general, impulses factor into the construction of such a disposition. The key to everything lies in Dewey’s assessment that “the remedy lies in the development of a new morale which can be attained only as released impulses are intelligently employed to form harmonious habits adapted to one another in a new situation.”

This instrumental process of character development via the coordinated redirection of impulses into a dynamic matrix of habits can be, in a sense, itself directed towards the conversion of impulses into a disposition to intelligent activity that is constructive, creative, innovative in which to better engage in the world. In general, impulses can be directed to forge habits that are directed, in turn, to forge even better habits that aid in the overcoming of problematic situations. A disposition, a “character”, directed to intelligent activity can be constructed via the redirection and coordination of the release of impulses into certain quite remarkable habits, habits that, when taken together, form this disposition to intelligent activity, this “new morale.”

In conclusion, we can see clearly that Dewey’s instrumentalism, inspired by his pragmatic predecessors, bears heavily upon his social-psychological investigations into the nature of habit formation and character development. Critical to both his philosophical instrumentalism and his sociological observations on habit formation is the

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162 HNC, p. 123
notion of primary, or “non-reflective” experience, the unproblematic “gestalt” of experience. If progress, both socially and individually, is defined in terms of problems overcome, these problems, both in terms of their defining characteristics and their status as problems at all, are defined by the unproblematic, by what is already “settled.” As such, it follows that the problematic is in part conditioned by the unproblematic, the reflective experience in part conditioned by the non-reflective, and, in a very significant way, all human progress is defined by the habitual framework each individual has already established as stable and settled. Our habits determine what presents itself as problematic and those problems contribute to the development of our characters through education, through progress, and prove to be, quite possibly, the most critical aspect in any investigation into the phenomenological make-up of human experience and composition of human character.
CHAPTER 4

SCRIPTURE AS EXPERIENCE:

READING DEWEY’S THEORIES OF ART AND EXPERIENCE INTO W.C. SMITH’S ACCOUNT OF SCRIPTURE

I. INTRODUCTION

If our purpose here has been to give some account of a functional methodology in which the problems that arose for traditional epistemological systems along with their unfortunate ontological ramifications are dissolved and replaced with a system that places human experience first, whole and organic and evolving, then our account of human experience would be woefully inadequate without some articulation of the role religion has played in human life. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, philosopher and theologian, said: “the role of scripture in human life has been prodigious – in social organization and in individual piety, in the preservation of community patterns and in revolutionary change…given the power and the persistence, it is not easy to develop a conception of scripture that will not under-estimate its wide-ranging importance in world history, to the present day.”163

We will not be engaging the place of “religion,” in general, in human affairs so much as the place of “scripture” in human affairs for, as we shall see, not only does

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scripture symbolize the importance of religion in human experience but represents a fascinating microcosm of the philosophical problems that John Dewey tried to dissolve with his pragmatic methodology.

Although Smith’s project, perhaps articulated best in his seminal work *What is Scripture?* is predominantly a negative theory of what scripture is not, he does leave us a series of fascinating clues and suggests possible solutions to what he sees as a universal error in the study of scripture. Above all else, Smith argues, we must not treat “scripture” as merely a “text.” Rather, he suggests a methodology for studying scripture that does not reduce it to the mere ontological status of “text,” or “book,” but one that incorporates the human element that he believes is a necessary component to any functional and dynamic understanding of scripture. Instead, Smith suggests, the true methodology for the study of scripture must not take scripture as merely a “text” but must somehow present scripture not as something static but as something taking part in a reciprocal relation with a community. It must emphasize the human involvement in scripture and the reciprocal relation of the role scripture plays in human ontology, and it must present scripture not as a stagnant, static “object” but as part of an historical, ever-changing, ever-adapting process that presents scripture as something new and fresh to every individual, every day. I maintain that John Dewey’s contributions to naturalism, instrumentalism, his theories of art and human experience, represent the missing component to Smith’s positive theory of scripture.

We will show how Dewey’s naturalism and instrumentalism, specifically his Postulate of Immediate Empiricism, provides the type of reading of scripture’s place in
human experience that I maintain Smith would have endorsed. Lastly, as we have done in our third chapter, we will end with a normative twist and articulate how a Deweyan reading of Smith’s theory of scripture provides several fascinating suggestions on how to better not only our understanding our scripture’s place in human affairs but how to better understand ourselves as well. For, as Smith maintained, “the basic question is not about scripture, but is about us.”

II. SCRIPTURE AND THE PHILOSOPHER’S FALLACY

Smith maintained that modern scriptural studies have had a fascinating but unfortunate “de-transcendentalizing” and, consequently, “dehumanizing” effect that distances modern interpretation from what Smith believes is the only adequate articulation of scripture’s true significance. In part, Smith maintained, this was due to a relatively modern trend, especially in philosophy, of an unhealthy and artificial shift to “atomism” as methodology and theories that succumb to dualistic epistemological systems that separate “subject” from “object” and consequently shift their focus of study to the understanding of scripture in its “objective” form.

The problems with treating scripture as merely a “text” or a “book” are myriad. First and foremost, to equate “scripture” with an object or “book” fails to explain why that one, specific text is elevated to a place of supreme importance in a community as differentiated from other texts. Further, it fails to explain how it is that a scriptural text can retain its significance over vast stretches of space, binding different communities together, and vast stretches of time, binding communities together in an historic

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164 Smith, p. 242
processional. Frequently, scriptural analyses pose questions like “why does a certain community find the need to elevate this written text to the level of scripture?” This is asked in conjunction with other questions like “when this text was originally formed, what problems did that community face that needed something like this scripturalized text to aid in their alleviation?” These questions invite an historical, hermeneutical turn in which the origin of a scripturalized text is analyzed and the study shifts to focus on what the conditions were for that community at the time and how a given scripturalized text reflects those conditions or reactions to those conditions. Immediately we see problems begin to manifest: it does not answer the overriding question, namely, how a text forged in a specific time in a specific place can have such wide-reaching, world-altering significance across vast reaches of time and space. It does not answer the question how a scripturalized text can be fresh every morning for every person with a given community.

In short, this modern trend of scriptural analysis effectively “freezes” a text in a given time and place and attempts to formulate explanations for why it is that that text was elevated to the level of scripture. This commits two major fallacious moves: first, it assumes that the proper method of scriptural interpretation is “atomistic,” namely, it seeks to study a specific text as something that’s meaning is either completely ahistorical or associated exclusively with some earlier interpretation, the period in which the text was originally constructed, for example, and fails to account for the very real process and development that binds communities in far-reaching times and places together through a common text. Second, it assumes that scripture is actually experienced from an internal
perspective of a community as being somehow “elevated” from a mere text to a text of critical significance with scriptural quality in the same way it is often studied from an external perspective of a third-party observer. As we shall see, the assumption that scripture is best studied atomistically, namely, via the circumstances within a community during its formulation or as something wholly ahistoric, rather than seeing it as an historical, developing process is problematic at best. The assumption that scripture is actually experienced as being elevated from text to scripture is even more problematic, for it fails completely to account for the actual experience of those involved within the community and, in so doing, fails completely to formulate an accurate account of what scripture is for that community and likewise fails to even come close to approximating its true significance.

If we take our cue from Dewey’s theory of experience, we can see more clearly where Smith is coming from in his rejection of an “atomistic” approach to scriptural interpretation and why a forced, artificial bifurcated world-view, that is, a philosophical dualism, creates an equally artificial forum where scriptural study goes terribly awry.

Dewey maintained throughout his career a very “organistic” theory of experience. This “organicism” is sharply contrasted with “atomism,” that is, rather than studying experience in terms of its component parts it is more fruitful and more accurate to study experience in terms of its total organic “interaction,” or perhaps better still, “transaction,” between an organism and its environment. This organic, in a sense, “holistic,” approach to the total experience was likewise the foundation of his naturalism as well as his instrumentalism, in which “subject” and “object,” “organism” and environment,”
“individual experience” and the “external world” are not at odds separated by a veil of representation or an ego-centric chasm but are, rather, fundamentally and primarily “whole” and only divided after the fact when problems arise. This was based soundly upon Peirce’s earlier contributions to pragmatism, including his cycle of doubt and belief as well as his semiotic “virtuous cycle”\(^{165}\) of firstness, secondness, and thirdness.

The reason why both Dewey and Smith focus so much of their energy on expressing this organic approach to philosophy is that it exposes a fundamental logical fallacy that they both believed to be inherent in the predominant philosophical theories at the time, for Dewey, the traditional epistemological theories, for Smith, the modern theories of scriptural interpretation.

For Dewey, if epistemology begins with a division of subjective experience and objective reality, it gives birth to the type of ego-centric predicament that has plagued Western philosophy since the pre-Socratics and has relinquished not one inch of theoretical ground despite the best attempts of semantic externalists, process reliabilists, and hordes of equally thought-provoking but ultimately futile epistemological attempts to bridge that chasm. However, it is no mere admission to failure, but rather the exposure of the fallacious movement that resulted in, consequently, an insoluble philosophical conundrum. The original proposition, that subjective experience and objective reality are divided on a primary, fundamental level is an unfounded assumption that forgets one very critical component: it was, originally, only in and through human experience that the divisions of subject and object were born in the first place. The philosopher’s or

\(^{165}\) As opposed to a “vicious circle”
“psychologist’s” fallacy is the result of aspects originally in experience (subjects, objects, mind, reality, etc.) were removed and placed outside of experience and this process of abstracting something out of experience was forgotten. What should have been primarily a theoretical move for purely inquisitorial purposes (the abstraction of something from within experience and placing it outside of experience, as if to ask the question, “what might this be like, if anything at all, beyond human experience”?) became conflated with some kind of primary state of reality in which two disparate ontological realms were artificially constructed; the inner world and the outer world. Dewey takes his cue here from Peirce who, in his “firstness,” stipulates an organically whole view of experience in which objects and subjects are only divided later when some reason for their division (i.e., our attracted attention or some problematic situation) makes such divisions useful for philosophical inquiry. However, after these divisions in secondness, once the problem is overcome, a re-unification takes place in thirdness which cycles back into firstness, a new firstness, heightened and made more dynamic by the previous inquiry. In other words, divisions of subjects and objects do happen, but only as the result of a problematic situation and at the culmination of that problem’s solution, subjects and objects are reincorporated back into a new unified primary state. Organic unity is the fundamental state of primary or non-reflective experience, not atomistic division.

For Dewey, the philosophical consequences are profound, effectively dissolving not only the ego-centric predicament and the two-thousand year old tradition of global skepticism, but revolutionizes traditional views of epistemology and ontology into dynamic, progressive methodologies forged of problem-solving, unified, organic human
transaction with their world, that is to say, forged of human experience. Smith, likewise, is articulating a parallel problem in theology in which the study of scripture has been infected by this same type of fallacious reasoning that results in a dehumanizing effort to study scripture purely as text. Smith, consequently, like Dewey, advocates a reestablishment of human experience as the foundation and missing element for his own philosophical investigations.

The sense of continuity through time, of participating in a community in a long-range motion, did not exclude the here-and-now. Awareness of past and future as ‘ours’ did not crowd out the present but enriched it. (Many moderns, in contrast, absorbing a different spirit from current culture, have so distanced themselves from their heritage, from previous times, that these are felt as radically ‘other.’ They perceive history not as an on-going process in which they are currently participating but as a fixed and alien era of ‘the past’ to which their ‘identity’ consists in their not belonging.)

Part of the fundamental problem in modern scriptural interpretation is that, underlying this study is the problem of a-historicity, that is, the disregard for the historical process in which we are all participants. In psychologically fallacious movements within epistemology, some aspect in experience is removed from experience and placed as someone prior to experience or wholly outside of experience. Experience, which is by all pragmatic accounts, a process itself, is forgotten in this movement and these alien “things-in-themselves” are formulated asynchronously with the process itself. Something within the process of experience is frozen, abstracted, placed outside the process which, in itself, is fine for philosophical inquiry, until the point in which one forgets to place that “something” back into the process from whence it was wrenched. Similar to this Deweyan critique of traditional epistemological systems is Smith’s critique of modern scriptural theorists. When modern scriptural theorists fail to view

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166 Smith, p. 27
history as an on-going process, in the same way traditional epistemologists failed to view the place of on-going experience in their epistemological (and, consequently, ontological) investigations, a similar error results: the abstraction of, in this case, the “past” as something fixed, immutable and wholly alien.

When “past” is separated from “present” in such a fashion, immediately we have the type of dualistic system akin to the bifurcated ontological/epistemological world-views riddled with ego-centric predicaments and veils of perception shielding the subjective realm of mind from the objective realm of mind-independent things-in-themselves. Smith himself notes a similarity between this historical problem of interpretation in scriptural analysis and the so-called “analytic” movement in philosophy in which “analysis” becomes the overriding goal at the price of forgetting the importance of any sort of “synthesis.”

An intellectual outlook strong in Western academic thought at that time (and for some, still dominant) may be called ‘analytic.’ The modern Western university as such has often been excellent at analysis, but seemingly less good at synthesis, and indeed less concerned with it. This matter was even formalized in philosophy when some for a time explicitly held that truth is analytic, or is arrived at analytically.167

Let us not forget that progress, throughout much of pragmatism, was a critical component of the very definition of “experience.” For James, it was the cyclical progression of “flights” and “perchings” as phases of experience. For Peirce, it was the inferential movement from belief through problem through doubt to re-established, evolved belief. In a sense, what Smith seems to be suggesting (and what Dewey would certainly have advocated as well), is that, though “analysis” certainly has its place in terms of analyzing some specific component within the historical progression or experiential field, it should

167 Smith, pp. 78 - 79
not supplant what is the far more important aspect of philosophical inquiry, namely, the kind of synthesis representative of an organistic approach in which aspects of inquiry are framed within their developmental process, not opposed it. For again, once this division of “past” from “present” is made, the compulsion emerges to analyze the past “in-itself” as opposed to the present, and regardless of the historical process linking both together. This isolation of past from historical development leads to a skewed and artificial form of scriptural interpretation.

Taking this and the analytic predilection together, an attitude prevailed whereby the task of an historian was often understood as that of considering anything extant at any given point in the historical process and discerning the parts out of which it was composed, ferreting out where each had come from, tracing the various elements of any complex back to their respective sources. Thus anything was thought to have been understood when it had been broken up intellectually into its components, and deemed to have been understood historically when the lines here converging had been traced back to their various origins. 168

The task for philosophers and scriptural interpreters alike is to “analyze” the origins and roots of that frozen, isolated, alien component of the past. The act of “synthesis,” specifically, synthesizing past experience with present experience within the organistic framework of one, whole, experiential progressive development, is forgotten and “meaning,” “truth,” become the objects of the atomistic analysis of some static “thing’s” origins at a time and place wholly alien to our own. This is the very heart of Smith’s objection to modern scriptural interpretation in which “scripture” is equated with a specific, static “text,” frozen in time (specifically, the time it was originally constructed), and isolated from the historical process which is, in any way you want to read it, motivated by ongoing human experience. This type of scriptural “analysis,” blind to any

168 Smith, p. 79
form of theoretical synthesis, fails to account for why scripture remains meaningful thousands of years and thousands of miles away from its time and place of origin. It fails to do so because, Smith argues, it fails to account for the place of human experience in scripture and, conversely, the place of scripture in human experience.

III. SCRIPTURE AND NATURALISM AS A RECIPROCAL RELATION

One of the ways in which Dewey sought to correct the interrelated problems of atomism and the philosopher’s (or psychologist’s) fallacy that lead to artificial dualistic systems, was to account for the transactions that take place between an organism and its environment, a reciprocal relationship which would supplant the problematic notion of “subject” and “object” dichotomies. This “naturalism” was heavily influenced not only by an organistic study of human experience (as opposed to the traditional atomistic approaches), but also by Peirce’s seminal essay, “The Fixation of Belief”, in which Peirce accounted for human progress in terms of an inferential cycle that, above all, sought to establish and re-establish equilibrium between an organism (a human individual in this case) and its environment (the otherwise detached, alien “objective world”).

Dewey’s instrumentalism, as we shall discuss momentarily, articulated precisely why the subject-object bifurcation was only one part of the cycle of human experience and why, primarily, there is only non-problematic unity before the onset of divisions. We’ll get to this shortly. Dewey’s naturalism, however, argued that “organism” and “environment” were not in opposition to one another, but placed in a reciprocal relationship of

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169 As we noted in previous chapters, and as we shall explore briefly again further on, this was also a pivotal text in terms of influencing Dewey’s “instrumentalism” as well
transaction in which, as changes take place on one side of the equation, changes take place on the other side as well, allowing for the re-establishment of equilibrium between them.

This is very similar to Smith’s project as well. Once we establish the error in thinking of scripture as some stagnant, static text, some mere “object,” lifeless and isolated from human experience, we must account for a positive theory of what, precisely, scripture is. Smith did not attempt this project per se, but, rather, articulated, as we said, a primarily negative theory of what scripture is not and pointed the way for some new theory of scriptural interpretation that must, above all else, take into account the place of scripture in the ever-developing process of human experience. If we read Dewey’s naturalism into Smith’s scriptural project, we find a fascinating parallel: Smith, similar to Dewey’s epistemological contributions, advocated viewing scripture not as an isolated object, but as part of a reciprocal relationship between itself and the community that endorsed it. It would be fruitful, I believe, to equate Dewey’s conceptions of “organism” and “environment” in his naturalism with Smith’s conceptions of “text” and “community” in Smith’s theory of scripture. The key to both is this concept of “reciprocal relationship” or, in more Deweyan language, “transaction” and the concept of scripture, traditionally equated with merely the “text” component of the relationship, becomes, rather, the relation itself.

As Smith says, “on close inquiry, it emerges that being scripture is not a quality inherent in a given text, or a type of text, so much as an reciprocal relation between that text and a community of persons (though such relations have been by no means
constant). “170 This calls our attention to a very common-sense problem that we face when considering the nature of scripture, namely, what makes one “book” scripture and rather than another? What differentiates the New Testament in the West from Dante’s Inferno or Proust’s Swann’s Way? What, in short, elevates one, specific text to the level of scripture? Scripture is not a thing, nor text, nor even a quality of a text but, rather, denotes the relationship between a specific text and the community that elevates it to a special place in the context of their lives. Since scripture is not a quality inherent in the text itself, when one asks the question, what elevates one text to the level of scripture rather than another, one would be looking in the wrong place entirely if one were to turn to a specific book for answers. No, what elevates a given text to the level of scripture is a quality inherent in the specific relationship between a community and a given text.

“‘Scripture’ is a bilateral term. By that we mean that it inherently implies, in fact names, a relationship. It denotes something in a particular relation to something else.”171

As we recall from our study of Dewey’s naturalism, the relationship there is a transaction between an organism and its environment and the goal of such a relationship, the goal of this transaction, is the establishment of equilibrium between them and, moreover, the re-establishment of such a non-problematic equilibrium after some problem arises to shatter the preexisting equilibrium. Thus, here, in our parallel example, we have a text, a community, and the relationship between them, which is, for Smith, what scripture “is,” if it is anything at all. And if we follow our parallel example from our Deweyan thread, the goal for Smith’s scriptural analysis would likewise be the establishment of

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170 Smith, p. ix
171 Smith, p. 17
equilibrium between the community and the text they adhere to scripturally. What, then, would be the nature of this scripturalized type of equilibrium?

It would be difficult to construct an historically sound understanding of scripture without recognizing that people in their diversity have poured into whatever text played that role for them – people have imposed on that text, if one will – much of their deepest concerns, aspirations, fears, hopes, outlooks, feelings. Yet it would be a blunder to note this without recognizing further – and this is what cries out for understanding – that even in these cases, having poured these in they have then received them back profoundly fortified and strikingly enhanced: their hopes activated, their fears assuaged, their choices strengthened with courage, their feelings enriched and deepened. 172

This pluralism of scripturalized texts is indicative of the sheer, overwhelming number of scripturalized texts, over different eras, different regions, and vastly different interpretations. The most vibrant example of this pluralism, just in interpretation alone, that Smith conjures is that of the Song of Songs, a passage in the Torah as well as the Christian Bible that has vastly different meanings and interpretations from one culture to the other. The genesis of this pluralism is the living variable that is the human condition; from one epoch to the next, from one nation to another, human beings have poured the chaotic miasma of their hopes, dreams, fears and desires into a given text. But Smith is quick to point out that this relationship is not one-sided, but reciprocal, a synthesis, or better still, a symbiosis in which what a community pours into a given text is then returned to them from the text many times over. This is a complicated and, what appears to be at times, a somewhat mystical phenomenon that could use a concrete illustration to help explicate Smith’s point.

There have been many different interpretations of the Song of Songs, as we’ve mentioned already. One such interpretation is that of the mainstream Jewish

172 Smith, p. 16
interpretation, namely, that it is the story of God’s love for the people of Israel.

Arguably, there is nothing more defining, more powerful, to the Jewish faith than their binding sense of community, stretching throughout both time and space. As such, as Smith points out, “the Jewish sense of community and history clearly underlay this reading, and contributed to it, but in turn was preserved, heightened, vivified by it.”

Prior to engaging this specific text, the Jewish people had, as an integral part of their culture, a dynamic and powerful sense of community. This sense of community was brought to bear upon the text and informed their specific interpretation and differentiated their interpretation of the text from, say, the Christian interpretation or the secular academic interpretation. But that, as Smith pointed out, is only half the story. Once this reading had been given to this text, the text was then read, in return, to reflect God’s love for the Jewish community. The same sense of community that informed the Jewish interpretation of the text, the same hopes and desires and joys that were poured into the reading of the text that gave it that specific Jewish interpretation, were then seen in the text, reflected in the text, as a result of this reading, which, in turn, served to preserve and vivify that same sense of community. Members of a Jewish community read the Song of Songs with God’s love for their community in their hearts and minds and saw, in the words of the text, a confirmation of God’s love for the Jewish community. What went into the text was reflected back, reaffirming what went in to begin with, creating a symbiotic relationship in which what empowered the text and informed its specific

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173 Smith, p. 26
interpretation was then reflected back to the readers of the text and re-empowered them in return.

By reading, cherishing, reverencing it, by recognizing it as scripture, not only were Jews assured of solidarity of their fellows with them, and that their life had depth and meaning and richness, both in personal and in cosmic terms. More substantially, it was – became – a matter not simply of assurance but of fact. By their recognizing it as a scripture, an historian observes, the solidarity was actually there; and their life did in fact have depth and meaning and richness.\(^\text{174}\)

The solidarity was not merely read into the scripture as part of the Jewish interpretation of the Song of Songs. By the very act of interpreting solidarity into the text, solidarity was then actually achieved on the other end of the reciprocal relation; the reading of the text, in essence, brought about the reality of the reading. There was (and still is) a sense of solidarity, both read into, and received from, the Jewish interpretation of the text. The fundamental point when both movements of the reciprocal relationship between text and community are observed is that the solidarity is, in fact, present and real for the Jewish people in part as a result of this scriptural text. Smith goes so far as to say that this reciprocal relationship may well be one of the ever-elusive (for let us not forget, Smith is providing a primarily negative theory of scripture) defining characteristics of what scripture may well actually be:

May we not say, then, that for a work to be scripture means that it participates in the movement of the spiritual life of those for whom it is so. At times they poured into it, but also then they got out of it, the highest, best, fullest to which their mind or imagination or heart could rise. It is not only that their life shaped the meaning that scripture has for them. The further, and more noteworthy, point is that for each, that scripture and the meaning that it had for him or her, the fact of its being scripture, shaped them. Too, it shaped the course of history.\(^\text{175}\)

\(^{174}\) Smith, p. 28

\(^{175}\) Smith, p. 36
As a defining characteristic of what differentiates scripture from other texts, what elevates it from “mere text” or something more, is its participation with its community in terms of shaping their entire paradigm, or world-view. In Deweyan language, what defines scripture as scripture is its role as part of a relationship in which community and text engage in transaction and this transaction becomes a defining characteristic of both.

Like an organism in transaction with its environment, ever-striving to re-establish and maintain equilibrium, a community is engaged in transaction with its scripture, on the one hand pouring into its hopes and fears and dreams and, on the other hand, receiving confirmation of hope, dissolution of fears, elevation of dreams back from their scripture, reifying all that they poured in to begin with. This transaction, for both Smith and Dewey, only endures so long as equilibrium can be achieved, else the relationship would have to change, either on the part of the organism or the environment. For Smith, religions endure only so long as they remain pertinent, applicable to the lives of the community. Otherwise, they are relegated to the proverbial dustbin of history, antiquated and vestigial, no longer supplying a forum through which new hopes, new fears and new dreams can be adequately engaged. Equilibrium fails to be reestablished. The organism, that is, the scriptural text, can no longer survive in its environment, the community, and consequently perishes.

Further, Smith is quick to point out the critical significance of this relationship: that, specifically, it was this reciprocal relationship that shaped the history of mankind. This scans with a Deweyan reading of naturalism in two ways. On the one hand, when scripture fails to be pertinent, it dies out, like an organism no longer capable of
reconciling itself with its environment (i.e., its community). On the other hand, and more significantly, it is the very cycle of equilibrium, problem, disequilibrium, resolution, new equilibrium, culled from Peirce’s “Fixation of Belief” that accounts for the very fact of historical progress. History unfolds precisely because of the problems and resolutions that mankind must face, the organism constantly reconciling itself with its environment, changing itself as it must, changing its environment as it can. Scripture has always been at the very heart of that process for scripture has always been a decisive factor in human inquiry and development, for good or ill. The questions mankind has asked and the problems mankind has faced have been poured into these seminal texts and answers as well as direction have been reflected back. In this sense of adaptation by overcoming problems, scripture has, truly, been instrumental in shaping the history of the human race.

IV. SCRIPTURE AND DEVELOPMENTAL NATURALISM

Dewey’s naturalism is, as we’ve said, intimately bound up with his so-called “instrumentalism,” inspired in no small part by James’ phases of experience and, more overtly, Peirce’s inferential cycle reflected both in terms of his “Fixation of Belief” as well as his semiotics. Although Dewey’s naturalism, as we’ve explored, can be viewed as a reciprocal relationship between an organism and an environment, that relationship results in an ongoing process of development and adaptation, cycling forward one resolved problematic situation after another. Paralleling this cyclical progression is Dewey’s instrumentalism, articulating answers to questions of objectivity and reality, establishing what, ontologically, things are through active inquiry in which achieved objectives of inquiries result in objects of experience.
Instrumentalism, perhaps best embodied in his Postulate of Immediate Empiricism, was Dewey’s reaction to traditional epistemological systems that fell prey to ego-centric like conundrums when they found themselves enmeshed in artificially (fallaciously) constructed dualistic ontological realms. Dewey, in essence, synthesized these antiquated and problematic notions of both “epistemology” and “ontology” into a single, dynamic method of experience that accounts both for the nature of the encountered world as well as the ways by which human beings live and develop within it (without there being any problematic disjunction between human being and encountered world, subject and object, mind and mind-independent reality). For all things begin with unproblematic, non-reflective experience, the stable equilibrium, prior to such artificially constructed (though often useful) divisions. Divisions only arise, that is, when our attention is drawn to them or when problems arise, not before.

Smith’s negative account of scripture, as we’ve seen, explores the pitfalls of those old, “traditional” epistemological and ontological theories which engage scripture atomistically rather than organistically, resulting in the same type of dualism that Dewey sought to diagnose and correct in his own work. This, as we’ve said, is indicative of a kind of psychological or “philosophical” fallacy; taking what is within history (or experience) and placing it outside of history (or experience) in some artificially static, stagnant ontological realm without remembering to put it back where it was originally abstracted from.

Smith, as we’ve said, does not set out to construct a positive account of what scripture actually is but does, on occasion, give clues to what would constitute a positive
theory of scripture should he ever come across one. The first component that we have already explored was that scripture is not merely a static text (his rejection of the traditional view), but a transaction between a text and a community. The other component that Smith feels is necessary for a dynamic, robust theory of scripture is that it must account for scripture’s historical quality and development, specifically, how scripture can remain fresh and new for every person, ever day. In part, we’ve already addressed this in our account of scripture and Dewey’s naturalism, as organisms reestablish equilibrium with their environment, should scripture prove too antiquated, too vestigial, no longer reflective of the lives and hopes and dreams and fears of its community, it will die off. However, we did not account for the positive view of this negative theory, which we must turn to now; how do certain scriptural texts manage to survive the reestablishment of equilibrium between text and community for thousands and thousands of years? How can these organisms remain alive after their environment has changed drastically through space and time? What is about certain texts that allows them to remain new and fresh and alive for their communities thousands of years after their original inception? To answer these questions, I believe Smith would entertain a closer look at Dewey’s instrumentalism, specifically, the ontological and epistemological ramifications of his Postulate of Immediate Empiricism.

Smith notes that “for no engaged community is their scripture old as distinct from contemporary. It is new every morning.” He calls it “a living force in their lives.” In essence, for Smith, scripture is new and pertinent for every person, every day. As a

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176 Smith, pp. 92 - 93
177 Smith, p. 93
“living force,” scripture, like the living force of humanity itself, grows and develops. No static ontological account of scripture as “text” could account for this defining characteristic. Scripture is not static, that is, but process. An account of scripture as existing historically, through time, developing and changing, must replace the antiquated notion of a static, stagnant text. Dewey’s theory of developmental naturalism handles this concisely.

Again, with both Smith and Dewey, their negative theories about scripture and epistemology respectively are intimately bound with their positive theories (in Smith’s case, at least, his projected positive theory). For Smith, just as scripture is not static text as object differentiated from subjective experience in a dualistic, bifurcated system, likewise, the past (i.e., when a given text was formulated or how a given text was interpreted in some previous era) is not distinct from the present and the future (that, it is not distinct from the historical process). Just as you can’t snap “text” off from human experience and give a robust account of its significance in a vacuum of human involvement, so too can you not isolate “the past” as something separate from history and hope to understand how it is that something remains pertinent through time. For both thinkers, this reflects their rejection of atomism as a viable method of philosophical inquiry.

History is not the past; history is process. The study of history is the study of process. To understand history is to understand movement— forwards. In analyzing an historical datum into parts, the older view tended to overlook or anyway not to interpret the process that went into the synthesizing (a process obviously crucial, historically). An historical account of anything that separates out its elements and traces each back to its source is not so accurate a description of what actually happened as is one that looks at
exactly the same facts but by which those disparate items from here and there were at a given moment creatively put together, to constitute something new.  

This account of history as process is macrocosmic of Smith’s account of scripture as historically developing and appears to clearly express a keen awareness of both the problems inherent in atomistic interpretation in philosophy as well as the perils that atomism holds for psychologically fallacious movements. Like Dewey, this critique of atomism and keen eye towards the psychological fallacy, has its clear ontological ramifications. To avoid conceptualizing any aspect of experience as some static, fixed object is to avoid encountering the problem of that how that object, being static and fixed, is engaged with the subjective experience of it.

We cannot, then, set aside this development and freeze the object of our interest to one moment of its large course, that initial moment, with not a moving picture of its dynamic and variegated life but a single frame, magnified, and held fixed and motionless, so that all its details could be minutely studied.

Smith’s account of static objects, fixed and frozen in the past, separates both the objects themselves from their own development as well as the past from history in general; artificially constructed static objects existing a-temporally. He notes that, in terms of scripture and history as a whole, “in both realms it leads to the genetic fallacy. To understand the role in human life of oaks, one must study more than acorns.”

The existence of the acorns is not in question, certainly, only their place as ultimately significant in the attempt to understand the nature of the oak. Like Dewey, Smith notes that the investigation into the “acorns,” that is, the investigation into “how the text came into being, and what empirical data lie behind its development as a text, is

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178 Smith, pp. 79 - 80
179 Smith, p. 82
180 Smith, p. 84
one type of inquiry,” useful as part of the learning process, but must not be conflated with something original, primal, fundamental or somehow “outside” of the historical process of experience. Smith, like Dewey, advocates a shift of focus from the more atomistic investigation of the origin, the acorn, “the past,” to the more organistic investigation of the process as a whole, the development, the growth, “history” as interconnected phases through time. This can be seen clearly in Smith’s views on the various ways one specific passage from one specific scriptural text can be interpreted, as we saw in his elucidation of the Song of Songs.

“Every passage has meant this or that to so-and-so in such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time.” Taking the Qur’an as one specific example, Smith says:

The historian can in principle document that it has in fact meant to some degree similar and to some degree different things to different people at different times and places; and can document what those similar things and different things have been and are…we may therefore add together all of these to form a dynamic complex. We spread them out before our minds over the array of the historical process to arrive at the total meaning thus far, as a coherent concept. (This scripture will have future meanings too, we may be sure; these have not yet been determined).

We see clearly here, in Smith’s description of Scripture has “historical process” rather than “static substance” (i.e., text) as something very reminiscent of Dewey’s own rejection of atomistic theories of meaning. For Smith, the entire process, including all its individual, otherwise atomistic permutations, is where the meaning of scripture lies just as, for Dewey, no individual component of the instrumental cycle can hold the meaning of the entire historical process. This is a clear indication of a more organicistic theory of scripture as process rather than substance. It is organicistic in the sense that no one time

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181 Smith, p. 97
182 Smith, P. 89
183 Smith, pp. 88 - 89
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or event or interpretation within the total historical process can be isolated as the meaning of scripture in its totality. It is instrumentalistic, also, if we remember Dewey’s famous postulate of immediate empiricism; that what is, is what it is experienced as.

Consider Smith’s point that “the historian can in principle document that it [the Qur’an] has in fact meant to some degree similar and to some degree different things to different people at different times and place.” This clearly reflects a keen eye towards placing the meaning and significance of scripture on the ever-changing process through history, on its development, rather than the text itself. Yet, each individual interpretation must be accounted for, or, at least, some theory which not only views scripture as a unified historical process, but can also account for why it is that in different times, in different places, for different people, scripture has constantly been revitalized and reinterpreted. The answer, I suggest, lies in Dewey’s Postulate of Immediate Empiricism.

V: SCRIPTURE AND INSTRUMENTALISM

Let us now flip the coin of developmental naturalism over and engage Smith’s theory of scripture in terms of Dewey’s instrumentalism. What something is, is what it is experienced as, that is to say, the object experienced is the objective of the type of empirical inquiry that Dewey mapped upon Peirce’s inferential cycle. Different people, in different places, at different times represent different organisms transacting with different environments (Dewey’s naturalism). These vastly different transactions will, consequently, encounter vastly different problems, different lines of inquiry, different tools and hypotheses brought to bear, until, ultimately, different objects are attained as different objectives of different inquiries. As Smith articulated in his concept of scripture
as a reciprocal relation between a text and community, what the community pours into it, including its “fears,” its problems, dictates what the community receives back in return. This reciprocity, reminiscent, as we’ve said, of Dewey’s naturalistic engagement between organism and environment, will consequently be a different relationship, a different transaction, from one people, at one time, in one place, from another.

Scripture binds them together, historically, when scripture is viewed as process binding them together in succession. Individually, these interpretations, the very fact that scripture is new and fresh to every one, every day, is a reflection of the reciprocity of different people, at different times, in different places encountering different problems which they must stabilize and overcome, resulting in different inquiries when different fears and problems are poured into the text. Further, Smith goes on to say that:

This sequence of various meanings, whatever these have been, is real, is empirical, is a complex of intelligible historical facts. The links among them, the interconnections, the influences, the processes of change, the divergences, the persistences, the communal life, the communal pressures, the force of traditions, can all in principle be traced. Thus we leave out nothing that Muslims have seen in it. Why should we? Only prejudice, not historical fidelity, can omit the nuances and the reverberations that Muslim reading of it has evinced.\footnote{Smith, pp. 88 - 89}

Both the individual instances of interpretations, the moments in time dotting the historical continuum, as well as the process in its holistic totality, are real. An interesting parallel can be drawn here between Smith and another pragmatic philosopher who was also a great inspiration for John Dewey, namely, William James. James’ Principles of Psychology articulated “phases” of experience that he called “flights” as well as “perchings,” corresponding roughly to the Peirce’s “phases” of “doubt” and “belief.” There are moments of stability, of equilibrium, of non-problematic peace in which
organism and environment are in accord and at rest, like birds “perching.” Then, when a problem arises, the bird takes “flight” and makes its way over to a new perch, a new stability, and on the cycle goes. For James, no one phase was more “real” than another, both the perchings as well as the flights had equal, though different, philosophical and psychological import and neither should be considered closer to any really “Real” reality than the other. Here, too, Smith argues that both the moments of historical import, the moments in which a certain people, in a certain place, at a certain time provided a certain interpretation based on certain problems that needed to be resolved for them in that place and time, as well as the process of change itself, the development itself, the invisible thread of history binding these moments together, are all equally real, and all meaningful. The chain as well as the links must all be accounted for in order to do justice to what Muslims considered to be their central scriptural text.

We remember that, for Dewey’s postulate, to say “what something is, is what it is experienced as,” is to admit that the main ingredient in this ontological methodology is, in fact, human experience. Humans do the experiencing and, in so doing, construct the object of that ontological-epistemological investigation through this dynamic instrumental methodology as the objective of some specific inquiry. What is often missing in traditional epistemological attempts to find truth and meaning has been the human element. Smith echoes this sentiment in his theory of scripture:

The real meaning of the Qur’an is not any one meaning but is a dynamic process of meanings, in variegated and unending flow. The true meaning of scripture is the solid historical reality of the continuum of actual meanings over the centuries to actual people.
It is as mundane, or as transcending, or both, as have been those actual meanings in the lives and hearts of persons.\(^{185}\)

To say, as Smith does, that religion is new every day, for every person, in every community is, I argue, to say that religion is *experienced* new in the same fashion. As new problems manifest within individuals within a given community engaged in a reciprocal relation with a text from which they derive answers to their problems, that text, itself, becomes an objective of a current inquiry into the nature of these new problems. The reason why Smith’s motto is viable, according to a Deweyan interpretation, is that a scripturalized text *is*, ultimately, what it is experienced *as*, and what it is experienced *as* is conditioned by daily, renewed inquiries from a daily renewed organism, then consequently the organism, that is, the individual, experiences a scripturalized text and the religion associated with it as something new every day.

For Smith, “any scripture – Gita, Bible, a Buddhist Sutra, or whatever – and any verse or term within it, means what it in fact means, and has meant, to those for whom it has been meaningful.”\(^{186}\) If meaning is to be placed anywhere, for Smith, the meaning of any given verse of any given scripture is placed within the experience of those for whom that scripture has been meaningful. Just as with Dewey’s postulate, what something *is*, is what it is experienced *as*, here, too, what is meaningful about any specific scriptural verse is what it is experienced as for a given people, at a given time, in a given place. Scripture *is*, in this sense, what it is experienced *as*. “The meaning of the Qur’an as scripture lies not in the text, but in the minds and hearts of Muslims.”\(^{187}\)

\(^{185}\) Smith, p. 89
\(^{186}\) Smith, p. 89
\(^{187}\) Smith, p. 91
VI: SCRIPTURE AND ART

Dewey’s instrumentalism (in association with his naturalism in the ways we have already explored), proves to be such a dynamic methodology that its insights into human experience can be extended in innumerable directions. Far from a “mere” methodology, simply “side-stepping” the epistemological conundrums of traditional epistemological theories, a criticism so often leveled against Dewey and his pragmatic predecessors, Dewey’s instrumentalism offers a positive account of human development and all aspects of human interaction with the world forged with a dynamic theory of what “experience” really is. One of the more profound examinations of human experience that Dewey forwarded in his epically long career is found in his seminal text, *Art as Experience*. Oliver Wendell Holmes, no literary slouch himself, commented that Dewey’s “insights into the movement of the universe as it shows itself to men goes to as high a point as has ever been reached by articulate speech”\(^{188}\) in reference to Dewey’s contributions in this text. It would seem to follow that if Dewey’s methodological contributions helped move Smith’s argument towards a positive, and not merely negative, theory of scripture, taking a look at Dewey’s methodological account of art as experience will further elucidate Smith’s theory by drawing a direct parallel between Smith’s theory of scripture and Dewey’s theory of art, bound by the common, fundamental exploration of both in terms of human experience.

By one of the ironic perversities that often attend the course of affairs, the existence of works of art upon which formation of an esthetic theory depends has become an obstruction to theory about them. For one reason, these works are products that exist

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\(^{188}\) Dewey, back cover
externally and physically. In common conception, the work of art is often identified with the building, the book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience.\(^\text{189}\)

Clearly, Dewey is once again emphasizing his rejection of atomistic interpretations, specifically, the equation of art with some singular, static object somehow isolated and apart from human experience. What’s fascinating about this passage in light of our discussion of Smith is that Dewey’s criticism of esthetic theory parallels Smith’s theory of scripture, namely, in the problematic reduction of “art” or “scripture” to a mere static object isolated from human experience.

There are, however, two distinct types of esthetic theory that Dewey rails against, not merely the reduction of art to object but, on the other end of the ontological spectrum, the elevation of art to something beyond human experience, something ideal or divine. Both types of theory isolate art from experience, the former, by reducing it to object independent of human experience, the latter, elevating it to representative of some ideal form, independent of common, everyday human experience. As he says, “to my mind, the trouble with existing theories is that they start from ready-made compartmentalization, or from a conception of art that “spiritualizes” it out of connection with the objects of concrete experience.”\(^\text{190}\)

Thus, we see Dewey’s theory of art navigating through the Scylla and Charybdis of, on the one hand, the reduction of art as mere object and, on the other, the elevation of art as purely spiritual, both static and immutable and isolated from common, everyday experience.

\(^{189}\) A&E, p.1
\(^{190}\) A&E, p.10
Theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing, are not inherent in the subject-matter but arise because of specifiable extraneous conditions. Embedded as they are in institutions and in habits of life, these conditions operate effectively because they work so unconsciously. Then the theorist assumes they are embedded in the nature of things.\textsuperscript{191}

As is common with any example of the psychologist’s fallacy, theories that isolate some aspect of experience from experience in general and place that aspect as somehow external or independent from experience do not do so out of blind ignorance but from a natural result from the prevailing paradigm. This paradigm, the “institutions” and “habits of life,” create the fundamental platform from which inquiries are launched which subsequently forms theories. If the platforms from which these inquiries are launched are based upon a paradigm which has, as a major component, the notion that art is separate from common, everyday experience, theories will consequently emerge that support this fundamental platform, but because this paradigm is, among other things, the culmination of habits, it can only go unnoticed, as part of the non-problematic “gestalt” of communal experience. Dewey would expose this type of fallacious thinking, forgivable as it may be given the circumstances, and construct a theory which, instead of beginning with a “containment”\textsuperscript{192} paradigm in which art and experience are bifurcated at the onset of inquiry, supplants that with a “inferential” paradigm in which theories of art arise out of human experience and, fundamentally, are not set in opposition to one another but unified until the onset of some problematic circumstances separate them for the sake of inquiry and the re-establishment of equilibrium. What Dewey recommends, after expressing this negative theory of esthetic interpretation, is a positive theory,

\textsuperscript{191} A&E, p. 9
\textsuperscript{192} The terms “containment” and “inferential” paradigms are taken from conversations with Frank Ryan based on his long-standing study of the career and work of John Dewey
namely, “that of recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living.”

Even a crude experience…is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of esthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience. Following this clue we can discover how the work of art develops and accentuates what is characteristically valuable in things of everyday enjoyment. The art product will then be seen to issue from the latter, when the full meaning of ordinary experience is expressed, as dyes come out of coal tar products when they receive special treatment.

If we abandon the containment paradigm in which an artistic object is “already set apart from any other mode of experience,” we can see how art arises, as we’ve said, out of everyday experience and, consequently, arising out of everyday experience, we can shift our study of art away from the abstracted, isolated realm of mere “object” or heightened “spirituality,” and toward a reflection of what human beings find valuable in everyday experience and tie this directly into our esthetic theory. What is valuable in art, that is to say, is the same as what human beings find valuable in everyday experience.

A conception of fine art that sets out from its connection with discovered qualities of ordinary experience will be able to indicate the factors and forces that favor the normal development of common human activities into matters of artistic value. It will also be able to point out those conditions that arrest its normal growth.

If we recall from our section engaging Dewey’s instrumentalism, specifically, its ontological implications, that what something is, is what it is experienced as, we come to an interesting twist on that concept in his tracing of the genesis of esthetic significance. The product of the instrumental cycle is the encountered object, and that encountered object is synonymous with the achieved objective of some specific inquiry that, in turn, was brought about by the onset of a specific problem that had disrupted a previous

193 A&E, p. 9
194 A&E, pp. 9 - 10
195 A&E, p. 10
equilibrium. Many theorists spend a lot of time in tracing the process from its non-problematic equilibrium through to an achieved objective of inquiry (that is, an encountered object), but it would seem that here, in Dewey’s explication of art’s true meaning, it would prove useful to consider the entire process backwards, that is, backward instrumentalism.

By beginning with the encountered object we can work backwards through the inferential process that lead to the encountered object being encountered in the way it was to discover what the factors were that allowed it to be what it is for the human beings engaging with it. We can trace back, from art, the genesis found in everyday human experience that gave rise to the piece as art, its significance in its inception as well as its enduring significance. Notice how this type of backward inquiry would not get very far is we maintained the containment paradigm in which art was wholly isolated from human experience (there would be no backwards path to trace, all there would be would be the art in a vacuum of possible explication). Likewise, art rendered as representative of some idealistic sensibility, spiritualized art, isolated in an immutable realm all its own as separate from the mutable realm of experience, could not be accounted for in this fashion either, for whatever heightened qualities it possesses, it possesses them regardless of human experience.

How is it that the everyday making of things grows into that form of making which is genuinely artistic...these are the questions theory must answer. The answers cannot be found, unless we are willing to find the germs and roots in matters of experience that we do not currently regard as esthetic. Having discovered these active seeds, we may follow the course of their growth into the highest forms of finished and refined art.\(^{196}\)

\(^{196}\) A&E, p. 11
After digging backwards through the instrumental cycle to find what aspects of everyday human experience, the types of things that are normally not considered to be artistic, we can then trace forward from this discovered seeds how the original encountered object, the piece of art, became art at all by discovering what about it reflects the enduring aspects of everyday human experience. In this sense, even working backwards along the inferential path was, in a sense, working forward through inferentialism to discover the seeds that grow into the object we began our investigation with. Even the seeds of a previous inquiry can be the encountered object as the objective in a current inquiry.

In order to understand art’s place in human experience, we must, on the one hand, abandon the notion that art is a static object isolated from human experience either as something elevated beyond human experience or as static and frozen and isolated from any sort of developmental process and, like Smith, move the significance of art (scripture, for Smith) from the object itself to the transaction between the object and the community that engages with it. In order to do so, however, we must come to a better understanding of what, precisely, Dewey means by “everyday experience” when he says that the significance of art is not in the object but in the way in which an artistic object transacts with its surrounding community’s everyday experiences.

The nature of experience is determined by the essential conditions of life. While man is other than bird and beast, he shares basic vital functions with them and has to make the same basic adjustments if he is to continue the process of living…these biological commonplaces are something more than that; they reach to the roots of the esthetic in experience. 197

197 A&E, pp. 12 - 13
In keeping with Dewey’s rejection of both an atomistic association of art with some static object as well as his rejection of the elevating of art into some abstract, equally immutable realm, he associates art with everyday experience. If everyday experience is associated with the naturalistic conception of organism/environment transaction in conjunction with Dewey’s instrumentalistic notion of development through overcoming problematic situations, we can associate, then, the genesis of the esthetic experience and the very meaning of art with the same types of naturalism and instrumentalism that inform human transformation and development. Art, as Dewey says, is experience or, more precisely, art is a reflection of this transaction, this adaptation, this overcoming of problematic situations that is so central to human experience. As he says, “experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment.”

Let us recall from Dewey’s instrumental system that after the onset of a problematic situation, an individual’s ideas are combined with what physical tools he has at his disposal to arrive at a resolution to the problem. This resolution is the achieved objective of inquiry which is, in turn, the object of that experience. This fusion of “thoughts” and “things” construct an object in experience and never is this more evident or instructive than through art. “Art itself,” Dewey says, “is the best proof of the existence of a realized and therefore realizable union of material and ideal.”

Art is a distillation of what’s valuable in experience and a microcosm of the cycle of naturalistic development common to all human beings. The ideas and the materials, the thoughts and things, are all right there in unmolded clay to be formed and shaped by

198 A&E, p. 22
199 A&E, p. 28
the artist in whatever way he or she sees fit. And therein lies the heart of its significance; to view a work of art is to view the coordinated efforts of ideas and tools of another human being that have, in turn, brought about effect in the world (the construction of the work in question). For both Smith and Dewey, the scripture itself, the artistic piece itself, have value, true, but to understand their true significance to people and their enduring qualities, we must shift our focus to the transaction between the object in question, be it art or scripture, and the community that surrounds it. The scriptural text exists just as the painting exists, but in order to understand its full meaning, we must not look there, but, rather, look to what effect the text and artistic piece has for its surrounding community. Specifically, in works of art, we can see in the piece a reflection of the completed naturalistic cycle that is so intimately bound to the human condition.

VII: CONCLUSION

Smith, implicit in his negative theory of scripture, seems to suggest the type of complaints maintained by Dewey in his assault on traditional epistemologies. First, scripture is not merely a static object, or a text, best studied in isolation from human experience. This parallels Dewey’s rejection of traditional epistemological theories found, among many other places, in his “Need for a Reconstruction in Philosophy.” Second, scripture should be viewed, not as a text, certainly, but as a dynamic reciprocal relation between text and the community that surrounds it. This “transaction” compliments Dewey’s intercourse between organism and environment, articulated in his naturalism. Finally, scripture is neither static nor stagnant but changes through time, allowing for the phenomenon that Smith notes in which scripture is new for every person,
every day. This is akin to Dewey’s instrumentalism, specifically, his Postulate of Immediate Empiricism, which notes that what something is, is what it is experienced as, allowing for an interpretation of experience as ever-changing, ever-developing.

“No one on earth today,” Smith argues, “quite knows what scripture ‘is.’” No one can know what scripture ultimately “is,” because, if we read Smith’s theory of scripture through Dewey’s Postulate of Immediate Empiricism, scripture “is” not anything static and stagnant, but becomes whatever it is as it is experienced. Scripture is not some “thing” existing independent of human experience. Fundamentally, for Smith, this is the wrong question to ask. Rather, one should ask “what is scripture for an individual on an individual day for an individual occasion?” Only then can the type of instrumentalistic inquiry be accomplished by which the individual can give answer: scripture is what that individual experiences it as at that moment.

Traditional theories of scripture, maintaining that scripture is a static, stagnant objective best understood independent of human experience, result in, consequently, a de-humanization of scripture in specific, religion in general.

One of the West’s initial responses to becoming in modern times seriously aware of the panaroma of other cultures’ sacred books was a new de-transcendentalized meaning of the plural term ‘scriptures’…it amounted also to a de-personalizing step: it involved a virtual losing sight of the human involvement.201

With the proliferation of scriptures, in the plural, the modern trend was, as Smith points out, to study them in isolation from the possibility of a transcendental presence. To engage them purely “scientifically,” as it were, “anthropologically.” This investigation may have its place, certainly, but as an unfortunate side-effect it ignores the actual

200 Smith, p. 212
201 Smith, pp. 220 - 221
experience of those members of a given community who share a given scriptural text. For these individuals do experience a relationship with the divine as assuredly as they experience a relationship with the text itself. Indeed, as Smith himself points out, it may well be better to explore this notion of a reciprocal relation in terms of a “triadic” relationship, in which a scriptural text mediates the relation between community and the divine figure they believe in. This move interferes with the actual experience as it is experienced by those who are doing the experiencing, namely, it ignores the experience of the community who do, in fact, have a relationship with the cosmos as mediated by their scripturalized texts. This is why a “de-transcendentalizing” theory maintains a de-humanizing by-product. “Scripture,” Smith says, “can be understood only in relation to a community of persons.”

Smith, himself, notes not only the relation of this problematic interpretation of scripture with the dominant philosophical fallacy, but also the relation of scripture and art in terms of the misapprehensions at the foundation of the fallacy.

The matter has been related to a recently dominant fallacy, that of subject-object polarity. This heresy has gone far to divide up our world into lonely individualisms on the one hand and impersonal objects on the other…much of what is fundamental to human life is omitted from this desperately narrow theory, this mistaken categorizing.

Smith notes two, specific, aspects of human life that are omitted if one adapts a bifurcated worldview stemming from this fallacious interpretation of the nature of scripture. “Community is one example of what gets lost: our participation, as persons, in

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202 "...the relation between human beings and the cosmos, as mediated by their scriptures," Smith, p. 217
203 Smith, p. 221
204 Smith, p. 221
groups that transcend us as individuals.”205 The interrelation between persons within an environment, certainly part and parcel with Dewey’s organic theory of naturalism, is omitted in a bifurcated world in which subjects are divided from objects and, consequently, other subjects. Organisms can’t interact with their environment under such a theory any more than they can interact with aspects of their environment, namely, a community of other organisms. “The on-going process of history is another example: our participation in the movement over the centuries from our predecessors in the past…to our successors in a future still to come.”206 Akin to Dewey’s naturalistic cycle of development, both on an individual and social stage, a bifurcated world-view results in the negligent assessment of the objective world, in which we directly participate, as something stagnant and static.

Art, too, is an example – by which what might look like objects to philistines are transformed for those more authentically human into something immensely grander. Sunsets are a further example, and flowers and the natural world generally – much of whose truth is omitted if we perceive them in merely objective ways.207 Art, like sunsets and flowers and the natural world in general, cannot be fully understand in merely their “objective” manifestations, devoid of human involvement. The objectification of scripture as merely “text” is no different. Simply put, “to fall into the objective-subjective dualism is to accept a less close approximation to the truth, not only of ourselves and our fellow human beings but also of the world around us, which we are trying to understand, than could be ours.”208

205 Smith, p. 221
206 Smith, p. 221
207 Smith, pp. 221 - 222
208 Smith, p. 222
Reading Dewey’s naturalism-qua-instrumentalism into Smith’s theory of scripture can account for the creeping sensation that, when working in a containment paradigm of atomistic investigation and bifurcated world-views, “for a multitude of matters that make each of us more than subject, and our environment more than object.” For Smith and Dewey alike, “it is impossible adequately to understand persons objectively, as if they were objects; and it is misleading to understand persons ‘subjectively,’ as if they were merely subjects and we were isolated from them.”

Indeed, just like Dewey, Smith maintains that prior to the division of subjects and objects there is a unified state that more closely approximates the human condition, specifically, the nature of experience. These divisions are only derivations from a unified whole. For Dewey, this was gestalt of non-problematic, primary experience (akin to a Peircian “firstness” or State of Belief). Smith’s own words echo of a deep, dynamic, profound pragmatic world-view: “both objectivity and subjectivity are derivative, almost arbitrarily, from a prior and far richer reality. The relation between each of us and the rest of us, and the rest of the environment, is not secondary but constitutive.” This is precisely the problem Smith noted in traditional scriptural theories just as it was the problem which Dewey saw as ubiquitous in traditional epistemological systems. Further, it can account for, as Dewey himself noted, the special status of art in human experience as, if nothing else, certainly other than mere object.

Art is another element in human life, like scripture, by which we transcend (are enabled to transcend) the immediate dimensions of our environment and that also cannot

209 Smith, p. 222
210 Smith, p. 222
211 Smith, p. 222
212 “The understanding of scripture provides a telling example of the object-subject split,” Smith, p. 222
be understood objectively, by being considered apart from the persons and groups involved, on the one hand, and apart from the higher levels of the universe and of the self, on the other, between which it has served to mediate.\textsuperscript{213}

Both a scriptural text and a piece of art cannot be understood by merely their objective manifestations, namely, the binding of the book or the splattering of color patches on canvas. Both, in similar fashions, act as symbols pointing beyond themselves to an experience that cannot be experienced by mere appeal to the objective qualities of the objects themselves. Indeed, the only way to adequately account for either scripture or art is by demanding a study that places both or either in relation to a community of involved individuals.

Art and scripture that endure, that stand the test of time, prove, like good habits, to be useful in the further development of human character. If our analysis of a scriptural text or a piece of art is that it is something to be noted, to be enjoyed, to be singled out as significant and poignant, it differentiates these pieces of art, these individual text, from the mere status of their objective forms (i.e., their bindings, pages, etc.) as well as from other similar texts. We pass these assessments on to our children and “only if they find that we were right and that they too are indeed rewarded by such heeding, do they in turn pass it on to the next generation and in due course Shakespeare becomes great, the Confucian Classics become sacred, the book of Amos becomes Canonical.”\textsuperscript{214} In short, they work successfully to develop our characters further and allow our understanding of human nature to grow.

For people have found their scriptures good; have found these proved themselves good. We might say, supremely good. For indeed those involved,\textit{ engages}, have

\textsuperscript{213} Smith, p. 227
\textsuperscript{214} Smith, p. 208
consistently reported that their scriptures...open up a window, or constitute a window, to a world of ultimate reality and truth and goodness. Over against the mundane world of sorrow, of self-interest and its loneliness, of injustice and failure, scriptures have played a role of enabling human beings to be aware of and indeed to live in relation to the other dimension of reality that characterizes our humanity by being somehow near and within our life yet also somehow far from it.\textsuperscript{215}

What ingrains these scriptures as the “habits” of our respective cultures is that, like habits on an individual level, they have proven successful in overcoming the problems that we face in trying to engage with our world. For let us not forget, for Dewey nor for Smith, the organism-environment struggle is never merely for basic survival, for human beings are complex organisms, with hopes and dreams and fears that can inspire us to great heights or shake the very core of our beings. Scripture and art, both, inspire us to greater achievements, to look beyond the mere materials we are engaging with, and towards ever more poignant possibilities. Both can be understood only in relation to those individuals involved, not merely by appeal to their purely objective status in isolation from human experience. Both can only be understood, further, as aspects of human experience that, like all human experience, is part of the naturalistic struggle to adapt to an ever-changing world and an instrumental process of development, changing us, bettering us, and preparing us for tomorrow’s new challenges.

\textsuperscript{215} Smith, p. 232
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