Dewey's Theory of Language and Meaning: Its Philosophical and Educational Implications

Dissertation

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Approved by

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To

My Parents
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Human behavior as we know it," says Aldous Huxley, "became possible only with the establishment of relatively stable systems of relationships between things and events on the one hand and words on the other. In societies, where no such relationship has been established, that is to say, where there is no language, behaviour is nonhuman." Language is the mother of all human significance. It is by virtue of language that man becomes man, living in a world distinct from that of sheer animality. As Ernst Cassirer says, man has developed a unique system of adapting himself to his environment, that is, the "symbolic system." By means of this achievement his behavior-patterns have undergone an immense transformation. In consequence, says Cassirer, "he lives, so to speak, in a new dimension of reality."

Language liberates man from the purposeless world of brute existence and enables him to live in a world of things that have meanings. Unlike the lower animals, man lives not in a world of merely physical things but in a symbolically mediated world. What is distinctive of man's being is, in Edward Sapir's phrase, "the tendency

to see reality symbolically." Karl Jaspers also has said that the "comparison of man and animal only points to communication as the universal condition of man's being. It is so much his comprehensive essence that both what man is and what is for him are in some sense bound up with communication."\textsuperscript{3} Language, serving to distinguish man from the brute as it does, thus provides, as Susanne K. Langer observes, the "recognized key" to the understanding of "that mental life which is characteristically human."\textsuperscript{4}

The problem of language is now recognized as fundamental in all scientific and philosophical studies of human behavior and culture. In anthropology, the works of Benjamin Lee Whorf on meta-linguistics, Edward Sapir's well-known studies of language, and Malinowski's classic works on the problem of meaning in primitive languages, have moved us toward a better understanding of the cultural patterns of human behavior. In the field of general semantics, the writings of Korzibski and Hayakawa have made a revolutionary contribution to the study of the role of language in thought and action. We find in psychology, and in psychoanalytic studies also, an increasing awareness of the need for understanding the nature of man's symbolic activities. Again, recent philosophical studies of the theoretical


foundation of modern science have shown that a concern for the lights and shadows of language is fundamental in scientific theorizing. Today, in philosophy, as well as in logic, mainly through the influence of Wittgenstein's works, the analytic study of scientific language is a central undertaking. Though all of these studies differ in their methods and conclusions, they share a basic assumption—namely, that the key to understanding man's nature, his activity of inquiring and valuing, lies in his use of language. It is not an exaggeration to say that the twentieth century's dominant and characteristic problem in philosophy and science is that of language.

It is with this significant movement in mind that the present writer has chosen to study Dewey's philosophy. For, as his study will show, the problem of language and meaning is equally critical in all aspects of Dewey's philosophical efforts. In fact, his naturalistic treatment of communication points up in a most significant way the characteristics of his philosophical and logical inquiry. Wilbur M. Urban contends that communication is an ultimate category in Dewey's philosophy. In his Experience and Nature, for instance, Dewey reveals the depth of his interest in the problem of human communication when he says, "Of all affairs communication is the most wonderful."5 Language, according to Dewey, is the vehicle of thought as well as of communication; it is the ultimate tool by which meanings and concepts, constituents of human thought and judgment, are brought into existence.

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He even treats linguistic or naming activity as itself directly the activity of knowing. "Our hypothesis is," say Dewey and his co-author, Arthur F. Bentley, "that by treating naming as itself directly knowing, we can make better progress than in the older manners." 6

Not only Dewey's theory of knowledge, but his social and political philosophy as well, is fundamentally concerned with the problem of language. Human community, Dewey emphasized in The Public and Its Problems, demands language and communication as a prerequisite. No theory of the community, in his view, could be adequate without studying first the nature of communication. Finally, the significance of Dewey's theory of language is recognized in his educational philosophy. "As one studies the influence of John Dewey's thought upon educational theory," Alfred S. Clayton points out, "it becomes increasingly clear that his theory of language is of central importance." 7 A crucial point in Dewey's thought, according to Clayton, is "his revolutionary acceptance of language as the key to adequate understanding of human endeavors and human knowledge." 8 The present study will endeavor to show that an analysis of Dewey's treatment


8 Ibid., p. 37.
of language and meaning throws illumination upon all major problems of his philosophy.

Unfortunately, there have been many stumbling blocks to the realization of this approach to Dewey's philosophical works. The naming of his system "naturalistic" seems to have been a principal one. Historically, the problem of language has been monopolized in philosophy by the schools of rationalism and transcendentalism. Because of this tradition there still prevails a suspicion of the adequacy of a naturalistic interpretation of language. Urban, for instance, writing in the idealistic tradition, maintains that all the naturalistic philosophies are insufficient to account for human intelligible communication. He disagrees with Dewey, contending that Dewey's substitute for what he calls the "supra-empirical unity of mind" which, according to him, is implied in intelligible communication, makes the miracle of communication "finally and wholly unintelligible." What does Urban mean by the supra-empirical unity of mind? The unity, he says, "is supra-empirical and, therefore, by definition, not verifiable as an empirical fact by a direct application of the 'empirical criterion.' All that is directly observable are merely the facts of similarity of organism and of environment and these facts, as we have shown, constitute merely apparent, not real, communication, and are wholly inadequate to account for intelligible communication in both its nature and range."9

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The empirical criterion of verification Urban has in mind is certainly inadequate to account for human communication. But is this criterion an appropriate one by which to judge Dewey's approach to empirical verification? Dewey never defined the empirical method as mere observation. No scientific theory is possible without going beyond the directly observable. To transcend what is immediately given, Dewey repeatedly noted, is the sine qua non of human knowledge. Man is capable of experiencing and knowing precisely because, unlike the lower animals, he can go beyond the immediately observed and conceive of things that are not present. Urban conceives naturalism narrowly and, by identifying Dewey's position with his conception, succeeds in showing Dewey's theory of communication, as well as the meaning of contemporary empirical science, to be "finally and wholly unintelligible."

It is instructive, in connection with Urban's anti-naturalistic philosophy of language, to consider Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolism. Cassirer's symbolism is known, also, as "anti-naturalistic." Many philosophers, including Urban, believe Cassirer's philosophy to be diametrically opposed to Dewey's naturalism. But what Cassirer has in mind when he attacks naturalistic theories are the older schools of sensationalism. He says:

Proponents of the naturalistic theories could appeal for proof to the principles of psychology established by the older schools of sensationalism. Taine developed the psychological basis for his general theory of human culture in a work on the intelligence of man. According to Taine, what we call "intelligent behavior" is not a
special principle or privilege of human nature; it is only a more refined and complicated play of the same association mechanism and automatism which we find in all animal reactions. If we accept this explanation the difference between intelligence and instinct becomes negligible; it is a mere difference of degree, not of quality. Intelligence itself becomes a useless and scientifically meaningless term.\textsuperscript{10}

Cassirer was very sensitive, of course, to the fact that language makes human mentality superior to that of animals. To emphasize the fact, he defines man as an \textit{animal symbolicum}\textsuperscript{11} and his student, S. K. Langer, goes so far as to postulate the need of symbolization as distinctive of human nature. Now it is often thought that "naturalism" fails to describe this distinctive nature of human mental life. Particularly, as Langer's polemic suggests, the Watsonian behaviorists and animal psychologists finally reveal the inadequacy of "naturalism," reducing human behavior to physiological mechanisms. It is unfair, however, to accuse Dewey of belonging to this school of naturalism. In fact, the naturalism to which Cassirer and Langer are opposed is precisely the one Dewey opposes.\textsuperscript{12} Dewey says: "That Nature is purely

\textsuperscript{10} Ernst Cassirer, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 65-66.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{12} Felix Kaufmann says: "... some striking differences between their doctrines (Dewey and Cassirer) are less fundamental than one might suppose them to be. Dewey's philosophy, it might be suggested, is through and through naturalistic; Cassirer's philosophy, on the other hand, is idealistic. We are thus confronted with two diametrically opposed philosophical approaches. "But such an interpretation is all too facile, and cannot bear closer examination..." (\textit{The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer}, ed. by Paul A. Schillp, p. 209)."
mechanistic is a particular metaphysical doctrine; it is not an idea implied of necessity in the meaning of the word. And in my Experience and Nature I tried to make it clear that while I believe Nature has a mechanism—for otherwise knowledge could not be an instrument for its control—I do not accept its reduction to a mechanism." For Dewey, as well as for Cassirer and Langer, the key to understanding human mentality is "the fact of language, that cannot occur without physical conditions nor without physiological processes, but that cannot be reduced to them without making nonsense of all its characteristic traits."^13

Dewey believes, as Cassirer does, that professed empiricists have been inferior to professed transcendentalists in their emphasis on the difference language makes between man and brute. "Upon the whole," he said, "professed transcendentalists have been more aware than have professed empiricists of the fact that language makes the difference between man and brute." But, he continues: "The trouble is that they have lacked a naturalistic conception of its origin and status."^15 What Dewey attempts to do, then, is to supply a "naturalistic ground" for the idealistic emphasis on language.

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The significance of this attempt is suggested even in Cassirer's definition of *man—animal symbolicum*. It is this aspect of Dewey's philosophical undertaking which will be explored in the present study.

Another reason why Dewey's philosophy may not have attracted the attention of those interested in the philosophical study of language is that he views language in such a wide perspective it is hardly distinguished from the other functions of human behavior. It is, however, precisely in his widened meaning of language that we find the characteristics of his work. Language, for Dewey, is the "natural function of human association"; its original function was to co-ordinate the behaviors of human organisms. This view differs radically from the prevailing notion that language is "something ready-made man invented to communicate thoughts and ideas he already had." It holds, instead, that thoughts and ideas emerge with language. As George R. Geiger has said in his volume on Dewey, "mind arises and varies with communication and not the other way around." Language, in other words, is not the invention of the mind. It is the process in and by which "mind" is liberated and created. Dewey's theory of mind, in fact, is grounded in his understanding of the nature and function of language.

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For Dewey, then, language is more than an instrument for the conveying of ideas. It is essentially a means of establishing a communal life which is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained. It underlies and permeates the whole pattern of human cultural behavior. The nature and function of language cannot be understood in isolation, therefore, from its existential and cultural matrix. Dewey rejects any theory that treats language as an entity or thing separate from the living behavioral processes in which the organism engages in transactions with its physical and social environment. In *Knowing and the Known* Dewey and Bentley say, "Except as behavior—as living behavioral action—we recognize no name or naming whatever. Commonly, however, in current discussions, name is treated as third type of 'thing' separate both from organism and environment, and intermediate between them... Such an intervening status for 'name,' we, by hypothesis, reject." Language itself is a behavioral fact; thus, it is inescapably in process of generation and becoming.

In relating language to behavior Dewey emphasizes, of course, the role of meaning in language and behavior. The separation of language from its existential or behavioral matrix means the splitting of "word" from "meaning," of a sign from a sign-vehicle. Dewey says that, though this split is stressed as one of theoretical importance in the recent movement of analytic philosophy, it turns

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*Knowing and the Known*, p. 116.
out to be nothing more than the old rejected dualism (say, between form and matter or between the rational and the empirical) in a new guise. Language and meaning, according to him, are inseparable. Meaning is, so to speak, the life of language. Things operate as symbols only "in virtue of their representative capacity or meaning." It should be mentioned here, also, that Dewey views meaning as a behavioral property or quality, not as mental or psychical stuff. In his view, language, meaning, and behavior, are inseparable terms. The realization of this fact is an important step toward an adequate understanding of Dewey's philosophy in general and his theory of language and meaning in particular.

The purpose of this study is twofold. In addition to examining Dewey's theory of language and meaning it will endeavor to show that his philosophic distinctions relate directly or indirectly to the basic assumptions of the theory. Take, for instance, his conception of experience. This cannot be understood apart from his analysis of language and meaning. Experience is conceived by Dewey neither as a mere collection of sense-data nor as what James called "pure experience." Dewey rejected the empiricist's reduction of experience to sense-data. He held, rather, that experience begins to arise only when the given sensory qualities are discriminated and identified in such a way that they may serve as signs of something beyond themselves. In other words, we experience things only as we take

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them in communication as shared means to social consequences. Perceived qualities, when taken in themselves, say or mean nothing. They acquire meanings, that is, they are experienced and known, only when they are "employed as indications of acts performed and to be performed and as signs of their consequences." It is through language that things are shared and gain objective qualities. When they are so shared and objectified they are said to have become experienced and known.

Dewey also opposed the postulation of "pure experience" or "pure becoming" by James and Bergson. He did this in emphasizing that language and experience are inseparable. To postulate something called "pure experience or becoming," entirely free from the influence of language, is meaningless. No experience exists prior to language. These objections, made against the influential theories of experience of his day, were based on his assumption that language is an essential factor in experience.

The problem of language and communication is central, also, in Dewey's social and educational philosophy. His analysis of the nature of communication characterizes his inquiry into the problems of education and society. His view concerning the relation of individual and society, for example, is uniquely grounded in his theory of communication. It is only through communication, according to Dewey, that man develops his distinctive self and mind. To participate in the "give-and-take" of social communication is prerequisite to

19 Experience and Nature, p. 258.
becoming distinctively human. "To learn to be human," he says, "is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community..."

Thus viewed, to posit a dualism of individual and society is gratuitous. To separate individuals from society is to misunderstand the nature of human life, which is always communal, even in its most apparent individualistic aspects. We find, in short, that Dewey's major social concepts, such as "democracy," "freedom," "community," "education," and so on, are to be fully understood only when his theory of communication is adequately treated.

Finally, to state in summary form the task of the present study, its aim is to analyze Dewey's theory of language and meaning with the intent to clarify certain important aspects of his treatment of inquiry and valuation and, in addition, to apply this analysis to the interpretation of his social and educational views. More than a description of Dewey's meanings of language and meaning is involved. Such a description has been adequately provided by Paul Wienpahl. His study is significant at one level but, in the final analysis, it is but a list of Dewey's meanings of meaning. No specific treatment of this theory in relation to other aspects of Dewey's philosophical work is presented. It is true, of course, that because of certain

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characteristics of Dewey's philosophy, it often becomes meaningless to treat his theory of language and meaning in isolation from other concepts basic to his considerations. To give warrant to the adequacy and significance of this approach to Dewey's philosophy and to bring, if successful, a new focus on his works is also a fundamental goal of this study.

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22 Wienpahl himself says in a footnote: "The writer is aware of the responsibility he assumes, particularly in taking results of Dewey's work out of their contexts. For Dewey's theory of language is spread throughout his writings because of that characteristic of his approach to philosophy which regards every problem and its solution as occurring in a context."
"If one denies the supernatural, then one has the intellectual responsibility of indicating how the logical may be connected with the biological in a process of continuous development."¹ This is the thesis of Dewey's naturalism. In rejecting the traditional separation of the natural and the mental, Dewey's philosophy seeks for a "continuity" between these aspects of experience. The postulate of continuity underlies all the aspects of his philosophical undertakings. Whenever a dualist presents a dichotomy, Dewey replaces it by the idea of continuity. Though we are unable to refer to all the dualisms Dewey has rejected, we shall endeavor, in this chapter, to show that his treatment of language provides a "naturalistic" ground for the continuum hypothesis.

Time and again Dewey emphasizes his contention that there is no breach of continuity between logical operations and biological operations. He holds that rational operations grow out of and are continuous with organic activities. To say that the logical is continuous with the biological is, however, far from maintaining that the former can be reduced to the latter. There is no attempt in the postulate of continuity to reduce human purposive and
intellectual operations to a system of self-sufficient biological entities or to a series of simple mechanisms. The postulate rejects reductionism and mechanism, as well as the view that some supra-empirical norms or standards, forms or categories, may be imposed on experience ab extra. Neither physical laws nor metaphysical principles define humanity, according to Dewey. Against both physical and metaphysical determinisms, Dewey's naturalism is in essential agreement with the functional assumption underlying Cassirer's philosophy of symbolism, as the following indicates:

The philosophy of symbolic forms starts from the presupposition that, if there is any definition of the nature or "essence" of man, this definition can only be understood as a functional one, not a substantial one. We cannot define man by any inherent principle which constitutes his metaphysical essence... Man's outstanding characteristic, his distinguishing mark, is not his metaphysical or physical nature—but his work. It is this work, it is the system of human activities, which defines and determines the circle of "humanity."2

This functional assumption is fundamental to Dewey's philosophy, as well as to Cassirer's "philosophical anthropology." It leads to a definition of man in terms of what he actually does, not in terms of physical or metaphysical entities, which are often thought to be inherent in his nature. What is distinctive of man's activity, according to Dewey, is his use of language. The emergence of language marks the conscious and intellectual life of man. No conception of man would be adequate, therefore, without understanding

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2 An Essay on Man, pp. 67-68.
how he develops and uses language and what language, in turn, does to him.

The "special function of language," Dewey says, is to effect "the transformation of the biological into the intellectual and the potentially logical." The biological structures and operations of man are therefore involved in his use of language. They are also an indispensable part of his logical activity. "It is obvious without argument that when men inquire they employ their eyes and ears, their hands and brains. These organs, sensory, motor or central, are biological. Hence, although biological operations and structures are not sufficient conditions of inquiry, they are necessary conditions." In what follows, we shall consider how, according to Dewey, natural organic needs and activities prepare the way for a communicated life, how language provides a bridge between the natural and the mental and, finally, how language performs its instrumental role in man's emotional and intellectual life.

1. Language and the Communal Life of Man. The life of the human organism is, in a primary sense, at the mercy of its environing conditions. The organism, Dewey says, must maintain "exchanges" or "transactions" with its necessary environment. To live is basically a "communal" affair. The interruption of the exchange or the

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3 Dewey, op. cit., p. 45.
4 Ibid., p. 23.
communal relationship, therefore, is tantamount to the death of the organism. As Alfred Adler also remarks, communal living is a fundamental human necessity. He says: "The communal need regulates all relationships between men. The communal life of man antedates the individual life of man. In the history of human civilization no form of life whose foundations were not laid communally can be found. No human beings ever appeared except in a community of human beings." 5 There is nothing of major significance in human nature which is not communal or does not have social implications. Even our so-called fundamental biological desires and needs, like hunger and sex, have social implications, since, as George H. Mead said, "they involve or require social situations and relations for their satisfaction by any given individual organism; and they thus constitute the foundation of all types or forms of social behavior, however simple or complex, crude or highly organized, rudimentary or well developed." 6

Now it is in this communal need and mode of human organic activities that Dewey finds the natural origin and status of language. Language is not something man invented to express thoughts and ideas he already possessed. The common notion that language is the expression of thought is likely to result in positive error. The primary motive for language, according to Dewey, is to influence


the activity of others and to enter into more intimate communal relations with them. Human beings naturally join in behavior and seek a shared life. Language originally functioned to co-ordinate their behavior in mutually dependent life. As Dewey states: "The heart of language is not the 'expression' of something antecedent, much less expression of antecedent thought. It is communication; the establishment of co-operation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership." 7

This human partnership is such that the partners consciously put themselves in a situation in which they share with others and, with them, anticipate common goals. Dewey notes, for instance, that when a person, A, requests another person, B, to bring him something, say, a book, and points to it, A "conceives of the thing (book) not only in its direct relationship to himself, but as a thing capable of being grasped and handled by B." Similarly, B's response to A's request is such that he interprets the pointing gesture of A "in a way which is a function of A's relationships, actual and potential, to the thing." 8 This ability to put oneself "in the standpoint of the situation in which two parties share" is the sine qua non of language and of significant social activity.

To state Dewey's analysis of communication somewhat differently, we shall refer to Mead's concept of the "triadic relation." Take, for

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7 Experience and Nature, p. 179.
8 Ibid., p. 178.
instance, the case of a commercial transaction. In commercial affairs, the transaction between two parties, buyer and seller, is called "trade." Trade is the act of exchanging commodities. The commercial act of exchange is based on a triadic relation. It involves at least two persons, buyer and seller, and the commodities they exchange. An object can be a "commodity" only when it is involved in a transaction, as, for example, a woman can be a wife only when she is married. In the process of the commercial transaction, according to Mead, "there is a participation in the attitude on need, each putting himself in the attitude of the other in the recognition of the mutual value which the exchange has for both." And the value of a commodity "exists as an object only for individuals within whose acts in exchange are present these attitudes which belong to the acts of the others who are essential to the exchange."  

Linguistic behavior is similarly based on the triadic relation. It assumes at least two persons, communicator and communicatee, and the sharing of meanings by virtue of which communication is possible. Just as things become commodities when they are involved in the commercial situation in which two parties, buyer and seller, engage in a transaction, natural existences such as bodily movements, sounds, and marks on paper, acquire "new ways of operation" and "new properties," which is to say that they are invested with "meanings," when they are 

10 Ibid.
employed as means of co-ordinating the behaviors of participants in communication. A piece of paper, for instance, represents (or means) a dollar or a yen in virtue of the agreed-upon use which is made of it in controlling economic activities. The meaning or significance of a thing is determined by the use it is put to in shared activity. As Dewey says:

Gestures and cries are not primarily expressive and communicative. They are modes of organic behavior as much as are locomotion, seizing and crunching. Language, signs and significance, come into existence not by intent and mind but by overflow, by-products, in gestures and sound. The story of language is the story of the use made of these occurrences; a use that is eventual, as well as eventful.11

2. The Social Nature of Meaning. For Dewey, then, meanings come into being with communication. Since communication implies at least two selves involved in a shared activity, the occurrence of meaning is distinctively social. Or, as Dewey puts it, meanings are social "because they are modes of natural interaction; such an interaction, although primarily between organic beings, as includes things and energies external to living creatures."12 We learn the meanings of things when we note how they operate in a social situation, what social consequences follow from acting upon them, what uses they can be put to in promoting our communal relations with others. Consider, for example, how the immature child learns meanings and

11 Experience and Nature, p. 175.
12 Ibid., p. 190.
symbols through his participative acts with his guiding elders:

The baby begins of course with mere sounds, noises, and tones having no meaning, expressing, that is, no idea. Sounds are just one kind of stimulus to direct response, some having a smoothing effect, other tending to make one jump, and so on. The sound h-a-t would remain as meaningless as a sound in Choctaw, a seemingly inarticulate grunt, if it were not uttered in connection with an action which is participated in by a number of people. When the mother is taking the infant out of doors, she says 'hat' as she puts something on the baby's head. Being taken out becomes an interest to the child; mother and child not only go with each other physically, but both are concerned in the going out; they enjoy it in common. By conjunction with the other factors in activity the sound 'hat' soon gets the same meaning for the child that it has for the parent; it becomes a sign of the activity into which it enters. The bare fact that language consists of sounds which are mutually intelligible is enough of itself to show that its meaning depends upon connection with a shared experience.  

Dewey's theory of meaning will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. But one thing must be noticed here—namely, his theory of communication rules out the exclusively private and inner realm of meaning. Meaning, according to Dewey, is not a subjective psychic existence; "it is primarily a property of behavior, and secondarily a property of objects." Meaning as a property of behavior is called "intent"; meaning as a property of objects is called "significance." Both intent and significance are to be understood only in the triadic context of communication. A requests B to bring him a book. A's intent is to possess the book through the medium of B's action. B interprets the gestures and sounds of A, that is, the meaning of A's behavior, which for B is the intent of A. B either

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14 *Experience and Nature*, p. 179.
co-operates or acts adversely in the fulfillment of A's request. From the standpoint of A, the intent of B is then the meaning of B's response to his proposal. "Intent," Dewey says, "is not personal in a private and exclusive sense"; it is a quality of behavior that comes into being in and because of communication. "When the introspectionist thinks he has withdrawn into a wholly private realm of events disparate in kind from other events, made out of mental stuff, he is only turning his attention to his own soliloquy. And soliloquy is the product and reflex of converse with others; social communication not an effect of soliloquy. If we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves."15 Jean Piaget also remarks that the solitary talker "would talk to himself in order to make himself work, simply because he has formed the habit of talking to others in order to work on them."16

On the other hand, significance is the quality added to things "in making possible and fulfilling shared co-operation." Things become significant or acquire meanings only in virtue of their operational force; that is, as they function to promote shared activities. "Significant things" (or things with meanings) are divided into things-signifying and things-signified. In the first place, because of communication, the movements and sounds of both A and B become signs

15 Ibid., p. 170.

or things-signifying having mutually shared indications. Secondly, the thing (book) with which A and B are concerned gains meaning. "Significance resides... in the consequences that flow from the distinctive patterns of human association."  

3. The Communal Self. It follows, from Dewey's theory of language, that it is meaningless to speak of characteristics of an individual in isolation from specific situations of social communication. As he notes: "... the human being whom we fasten upon as individuals par excellence is moved and regulated by his associations with others; what he does and what the consequences of his behavior are, what his experience consists of, cannot even be described, much less accounted for in isolation."  

A community defines an individual; the individual does not define the community. The part is not explained apart from the whole. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. The self is not a self-sufficient, ready-made inner entity with which an individual is born and by which he communicates with other selves. It is rather the name for a whole system of individual attitudes and habits which emerge and grow through communication. 

"The self," in Mead's words, "is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole.

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18 The Public and Its Problems. Denver, Alan Swallow, 19 p. 188.
and to other individuals within that process."\textsuperscript{19} That a person has a self simply means that he has "the ability to take the attitude of the group to which he belongs, then to come upon himself, stimulate himself as he stimulates others, talk to himself in terms of his community and lay upon himself the responsibilities that go with the community."\textsuperscript{20} Max Otto also represents Dewey's of the self as follows:

\begin{quote}
It (the self) is a center of energy, a going-concern, acting and being acted upon, which gradually came into existence as the native impulsive life of the individual was organized into meaningful habits under stress of a social and physical environment. It is a fluctuating collection of desires, memories, aptitudes, hopes, and the like, which, as a result of the give-and-take relationship of an active organism and an active environment, have come to keep house together in the same body and are there felt to be members of one family.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

Each individual begins life without an "awareness of himself as an entity separate from the rest of the world." It is only as the individual shares the "consensually validated" meanings of language, which he acquires in "interpersonal activities" in his community, that he develops the capacity to discriminate what he later calls his "self."\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} Mead, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 135.

\textsuperscript{20} Pfutze, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 78.


He then comes to judge himself in terms of the social approval and condemnation common to his community. It is thus that the ability to reach moral judgments develops. The self is, so to speak, an internalized drama; it plays many roles with reference to many imaginary others. Indeed it may be more accurate to speak, as Boyd H. Bode has done, not of the self but, rather, of the many selves, represented by the interests and ideals an individual pursues. Participation in communal life is prerequisite for the development of the self. So-called human nature, therefore, is, in Otto's phrase, "socially induced nature."

4. Language in Motive and Habit. C. Wright Mills' sociopsychological analysis of motives is worthy of mention in connection with Dewey's emphasis on the social significance of individual behavior. Mills, along with Dewey and Mead, rejects the notion that language is the expression of antecedent psychic states or of elements within the individual. "The postulate underlying modern theory of language," he says, "is the simple one that we must approach linguistic behavior, not by referring to private states in individuals, but by observing its social function of co-ordinating diverse actions." He thus rejects the view that motives are inner psychic states or subjective springs of action. He maintains instead that motives are attempts to justify behavior in specific social situations. He says

that one's motives are characterized by an attempted justification of the socially acceptable reasons given for his actions in "delimited social situations." If the individual can find no reasons for his actions that others will accept, he will often abandon them. "The motives actually used in justifying or criticizing an act definitely link it to situations, integrate one man's action with another's, line up with norms." A vocabulary of motives, or what Kenneth Burke calls a "grammar of motives," in these terms, has as its function the justification of actions in specific social situations. When a person vocalizes his motives, he is influencing not only himself, but others as well. "Motives are common grounds for mediated behavior." Motives cannot be explained in isolation from specific situations of social transaction.

Dewey's thesis is thus given warrant by Mills' study. A motive, in Dewey's words, "is an outcome of the attempt of men to influence human action, first that of others, then of a man to influence his own behavior." Man is naturally an active being. His acts do not await a motive to induce them. He simply acts. But, because of the social give-and-take of communication, he learns to judge his own acts in terms of social approval and condemnation. He then teaches himself to think of the consequences of acting in this

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24 Ibid., p. 908.
25 Ibid.
way or that before he acts. This forward-looking reference to consequences constitutes a motive. As Dewey says, a motive "is an act plus a judgment upon some element of it, the judgment being made in the light of the consequences of the act." Motives are not mere impulses; they are the projective forces socially oriented and directed.

Man is born with many and varied impulses and tendencies. These natural energies and tendencies are raw materials which require external treatment to produce motives and habits. They are possibilities which may be developed in various ways. Man, having these inborn potentialities, initiates or engages in transactions with his surrounding forces and what he will be is determined by the character of the transactions in which he engages. Since he is not born with ready-made ways of doing the things which he is required to do in his social life, his behavior in his early days is mostly of the trial and error type. But he has a capacity—which the lower animals do not have—to realize, and to become articulate about, the connection between what he has done and what has happened in consequence and to preserve his past successes. He thus comes gradually to learn more effective ways of participating in communication with others and of adjusting his surrounding forces to aid the achievement of his purposes. Through communication, in other words, he develops capacities to control his surroundings and to turn them

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27 Ibid., p. 120.
to account for his own growth. Thus, his initial unorganized trial and error ways of experiencing are gradually refined and organized into a certain order. This orderly organized way of doing things is "habit," according to Dewey. And the habits thus formed define the self. Motive, habit, and self are inseparable categories, therefore, in defining human nature.

5. Language as the Natural Bridge Between Nature and Experience. We have seen throughout that for Dewey language is an essential force in the socialization and intellectualization of human behavior. The development of language permits man to go beyond the stage of sheer organic association to the stage of mutually conscious coordination of perspectives which, in turn, enables the members of a community to influence each other and grow together emotionally and intellectually. Dewey says that human organisms combine in behavior according to their natural structures, and their organic and physical association is a natural condition for the creation of genuine human community. It is with the emergence of language, however, that the purely organic association is transformed into a shared and co-operative community. Things, insofar as they are employed in this community, undergo a change of character. Organic energies and tendencies, which are otherwise blind and disorganized, are modified into purposive uses; brute existences are qualified by meanings; sheer impulses are given direction and controlled for desirable social consequences—all with the development of communica-
tion. Those natural things and events which come through this process of transformation vary in their meanings and functions according to social contexts. Social results are indefinitely translated into them.

Though language thus lifts man from his merely organic world and enables him to live in a world of meaningful events, it is, according to Dewey, not a "veil" or a "screen" which separates man from nature. Man transcends his biological world and creates the world of experience by means of language; he is able to do so, however, in virtue of nature. Only as natural existences are present to be signified and qualified, and only as nature provides organic needs and tendencies to interact with these existences, can there be meanings and, in consequence, mind and knowledge. "It is not experience which is experienced, but nature—stones, plants, animals, disease, health, temperature, electricity, and so on." Again, it is organic energies which are transformed into social efficiencies—such as purpose, deliberate inquiry, co-operative activity, etc. To disjoin the world of experience from nature is gratuitous. According to Dewey, there is a "natural bridge" which joins the two. This bridge is communication, language. He says, "there is a natural bridge that joins the gap between existence and essence; namely, communication, language, discourse. Failure to acknowledge the presence and operation of natural interaction in the form of communication

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creates the gulf between existence and essence, and that gulf is factitious and gratuitous."

The human organism is part and parcel of the course of natural events. It becomes capable of mending by virtue of its distinctive way of being and partaking in the course of these events. There are of course different ways of being in the world of events. Thus viewed, "The significant distinction is no longer between the knower and the world; it is between different ways of being in and of the movement of things; between a brute physical way and a purposive, intelligent way." \(^{30}\)

Man, unlike the lower animals, control events, adding meanings to them and thus turning them to his purposes. Meaning involves understanding of the conditions under which events take place, as well as the consequences to which projected responses lead. Mind (or mending) appears in the behavior of the organism as it turns events into "things-with-meanings," thus becoming capable of predicting future consequences and of responding to them as stimuli to present behavior. For Dewey a mind is a natural event which symbolizes the future in such a way as to influence present behavior. Or, as he puts it, "Mind is the whole system of meanings as they are embodied in the workings of organic life." \(^{31}\) Such a "mind" cannot function

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 167.


\(^{31}\) Experience and Nature, p. 303.
apart from nature. It is not an entity existing on its own account possessing the power either to "experience" nature or to direct it.

The meanings which constitute mind, in this sense, are derived from and continuous with the material of the natural world as it is concretely experienced. Philosophers, however, have often converted meanings thus acquired into a\textit{\textipa{pri\textordmasculine{ori}}} forms and essences, thus separating existence and essence. As Dewey says, "meanings, under the name of forms and essences, have often been hailed as modes of Being beyond and above spatial and temporal existence, invulnerable to vicissitude" and, further, "thought as their possession has been treated as a non-natural spiritual energy, disjoined from all that is empirical."

Dewey regards this conversion of meanings into antecedent reality as the philosophic fallacy. It arises because of a "failure to acknowledge the presence and operation of natural interaction in the form of communication."

6. \textbf{Language as the Tool of Tools}. Dewey's naturalistic theory of language involves two essentially \textit{inseparable} aspects—the behavioral and the instrumental. So far we have been particularly concerned with his behavioral analysis of language. In this analysis, language is defined as a mode of \textit{communication} or of \textit{transaction} of organism and environment. It has as its function the co-\textit{ordination} of social behaviors. In his instrumental analysis, however, language is specifically defined as "the tool of tools."

\footnote{Ibid., p. 167.}
Man has often been defined as the tool-making animal. For Dewey, this definition gives the key to understanding the basic traits in which the distinction between the mentality of animals and man finds expression. A tool, he says, "is a thing used as means to consequences, instead of being taken directly and physically. It is intrinsically relational, anticipatory, predictive. Without reference to the absent, or 'transcendence,' nothing is a tool." In this sense, the use of tools by Kohler's apes is very restricted. Though they were able to relate one thing (a stick) to another (a banana), this relation was immediate. It was possible only in a situation in which the two things were seen simultaneously. That is, his apes reached for the stick in order to get the banana only when the stick and the banana were seen together by them. They could not look at the one and think of the other. This means that the apes were unable to respond to the absent. Kohler observes, for instance, that the "disappearance of a sick (or dying) animal (chimpanzee) has little effect on the rest, so long as he is taken out of sight..." Because of their inability to refer to the absent, tool-experience in the apes is a series of disconnected episodes. In consequence, their world is spatially confined to the range of their immediate senses, and temporally limited to the moment.

33 Ibid., p. 185.
Tools have an intrinsically different function for man. They enable him to go beyond or transcend the immediate present to the absent or the future. He can, for example, carry a hammer around and look for nails and boards which are not present. His hammer is thus potentially connected with other things for certain consequences. A tool is a particular thing which operates as means to consequences and in which "a connection, a sequential bond of nature, is embodied." That is, "It possesses an objective relation as its own defining property. Its perception as well as its actual use takes the mind to other things." Taken in this sense, according to Dewey, a tool becomes a kind of language. "For it says something, to those who understand it, about operations of use and their consequences." Modern technology, thus viewed, is a foreign language to those who are not familiar with it.

Owing to the relational and potential nature of tools, the tool-making animal, that is, man, has indefinitely extended his power of inference and control. Indeed, how much man owes his progress in art and science to the invention and use of instruments is beyond description. Alfred Whitehead says:

The reason why we are on a higher imaginative level (in science) is not because we have finer imagination but because we have better instruments. In science, the most important things that has happened in the last forty years,
is the advance in instrumental design... These instruments have put thought on a new level.\textsuperscript{39}

Malinowski also tells us that the origin of culture and civilization is marked by "the ability to recognize instrumental objects, the appreciation of their technical efficiency, and their value, that is, their place in the purposive sequence, the formation of social bond, and the appearance of symbolism."\textsuperscript{40}

Among all the instruments and techniques man has developed, however, language is the most important and fundamental. Language is a tool, but it is a particular tool which institutionalizes, objectifies, and transmits all other instrumental devices and agencies. Our previous exposition has shown, according to Dewey, first, that language establishes a "community" and, second, that things become "meaningful" only insofar as they are employed as means to consequences in the community. Furthermore, "the things usually thought of as appliances, agencies and furnishings, can originate and develop only in social groups made possible by language. Things become tools ceremonially and institutionally."\textsuperscript{41}

Language is thus "the tool of tools" and the "cherishing mother of all significance."\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{40} A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1944, p. 136.

\textsuperscript{41} John Dewey, Experience and Nature, p. 186.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
7. **Language in Science and Art.** Language, in addition, is also "the source of every art, philosophic, scientific, technological and esthetic." Linguistic media are fundamental in distinguishing the characteristics of the arts. The ultimate material of all arts are the transactions of the living organism with its environment. The arts differ, however, because of the differing media used in dealing with the material. "Each art transforms some phase of the raw material of experience into new objects according to the purpose, each purpose demands a particular medium for its execution." Language discriminates, qualifies, and adds meaning to natural things and events. This function of language varies with the context and purpose of human action. If the purpose is prediction and control, the language becomes "scientific," its function being to transform some phase of transactional existences into "scientific objects" or to objectify operations of inquiry. On the other hand, if the purpose is to enhance direct experience, feeling, and emotion, then the language is "esthetic" and existences are discriminated and characterized to serve this purpose. Though the sciences and esthetics start initially with the same material, their media are different and unique. Their unique interests and purposes react upon the material and, in consequence, they add unique meanings to it. "The funda-

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44 Ibid., p. 320.
mental principle of Dewey's theory of language is," according to Paul Wienpahl, "that language is a tool used in transforming some phase of the raw material of experience into new objects according to some purpose." 15

Dewey thus distinguishes between scientific and esthetic uses of language. The scientific language takes a form of statement. Its function is to state meanings for the sake of making possible prediction and control, and as such "can be understood only in terms of the context of inquiry." The esthetic language, on the other hand, is concerned with the expression and enhancement of direct experience, of feelings and emotions. Its function is to be understood, therefore, "only in terms of expression and experiencing for its own sake." The function of language varies according to the purposes and concerns for which it is employed.

In current discussions, the esthetic expression is often described as a purely emotive and ejaculatory phenomenon having no objective significance. Dewey's view differs radically from this prevailing notion. He maintains that the esthetic expression is a kind of communicated behavior and, therefore, has objective significance. Esthetic language objectifies emotions so as to make them communicable. Human emotions are not merely organic overflows. They are not exclusively subjective and private. They are instead a mode of social

behavior and operate in the form of communication. Emotions are always colored by social results. It should be noted, further, that emotions are not completely devoid of intellectual elements but rather continuous with them. The emotional and intellectual aspects of experience flow into one another. Ernst Cassirer also teaches us that scientific or logical language is continuous with emotional language. He defines man as an animal symbolicum and not as an animal rationale, for he rejects the view that language has to do exclusively with the rational. "Primarily," he says, "language does not express thoughts or ideas, but feelings and affections."\(^\text{16}\)

Dewey conceives of the development of language as a process of objectifying and organizing experience. Through this process, organic and physical qualities are gradually distinguished and refined in terms of their communicated consequences. Objects emerge, which are cognized and shared rather than merely felt. This continuous transformation takes on a systematic form. And, finally, the objective order of reality appears and the world of natural events becomes truly "meaningful." Science, art, religion, are various but continuous phases in this process.

8. The Final and Instrumental Functions of Language.

Language, as we have seen, is "uniquely instrumental." It is a tool used in "liberating us from the otherwise overwhelming pressure of events and enabling us to live in a world of things that have

\(^{16}\) An Essay on Man, p. 25.
meaning."[47] Experience, through language, are continuously pre­served, transmitted, reconstructed, and enriched. A life of rich and varied meanings is thus made possible. Arts have been advanced; histories have been created; cultures have been developed—all by means of language. Language is the instrument of all instru­mentalities. But, according to Dewey, language is final, as well as instrumental. "It is final as a sharing in the objects and arts precious to a community, a sharing whereby meanings are enhanced, deepened, and solidified in the sense of communion."[48] Communication is both an end and an instrument, both a reward and a method.

There is immediate satisfaction and reward in discourse, as there is in eating, in quenching thirst, and in other natural behavings. Even scientific discourse becomes an enjoyed object to those con­cerned in it. "Few would philosophize," Dewey says, "if philosophic discourse did not have its own fascination."[49] Symbolic activities are originally esthetic and final in function. Even at the higher rational level, they are capable of being enjoyed for their own sake. Human discourse has for one of its most striking features preoccupa­tion with consummatory satisfaction and esthetic enjoyment. Man's use of language is not only his instrumental power but his immediate and dominant concern.

[48] Ibid., pp. 204-5.
[49] Ibid., p. 203.
We often hear some critics of Dewey saying that his philosophy, because it is too pragmatic or instrumentalistic, fails to do justice to the final and esthetic aspect of human experience and language. They say, for instance, that the arts of primitive people are to be understood only in terms of their final and symbolic qualities, not in terms of their instrumental efficiencies. It is true that, at times, we find Dewey speaking of primitive unintelligent arts as if they are consciously practiced methods and find him naively comparing them with the arts of cultivated science. In some of his books, he is so preoccupied with his emphasis on "scientific method" or "intelligence" that he writes as if he finds in primitive arts not symbolic qualities but "stupidity." But this naive experimentalistic treatment of primitive arts results rather from the context in which he writes. For, in his other major writings, particularly in Experience and Nature and Art as Experience, he does more than direct our attention to the primary significance of esthetic qualities in experience.

In Experience and Nature, Dewey emphasizes his contention that language is primarily of esthetic and final concern. The origin of language, he says, is found in the esthetic side of life rather than in science and logic. The language of superstition and myth existed prior to that of scientific sophistication. Primitive art and literature have provided the resources of our present language. Esthetic language is more vital and urgent in meaning than that of intellectual
information. For, as Dewey says, "man is naturally more interested in consummations than he is in preparations." Dewey has been especially sensitive to the esthetic function of human language and experience. He believed that: "In comparison with intellectual and moral endeavor, this trait of experience has hardly received the attention from philosophers that it demands." 50

We must realize, however, that Dewey does not separate the final and intrinsic function of language from its instrumental aspect. He says that "the great evil lies in separating instrumental and final functions." 51 When Dewey says that language is instrumental, he does not mean that it is always consciously so employed. While we are eating foods, we are not always conscious of their nutritive qualities. They are, however, instrumental in keeping our physical health regardless of our awareness of their effects. Though a philosopher of art, like Susanne K. Langer, may be justified in her emphasis on the finality inherent in the languages of such "impractical" and "unapplied" arts as ritual, magic, myth, fiction, etc., it often ignores instrumental qualities involved in these unintelligent arts. To say that primitive languages are instrumental is not to deny that they may be unconsciously practiced. As she says, the symbolic activities of primitive people may spring from their entirely

50 Ibid., p. 78.

51 Ibid., p. 205.
unconscious motives. Their activities of symbolization may be spontaneous, undesigned, and purely natural. But the activities are instrumental in effect, for they fix the norms and standards of the communal life of the people, stimulate their efforts, and determine the nature of such education (informal or formal) as they provide.

Dewey says:

> The saying of Matthew Arnold that poetry is a criticism of life sounds harsh to the ears of some persons of strong esthetic bent; it seems to give poetry a moral and instrumental function. But while poetry is not a criticism in intent, it is in effect, and so is all art. For art fixes those standards of enjoyment and appreciation with which other things are compared; it selects the objects of future desires; it stimulates effort.\(^52\)

The final and instrumental functions of language are inseparable.

It is appropriate, of course, to say that scientific discourse is to be accounted for more in terms of its instrumental qualities in the context of inquiry. As Dewey himself says, "it is not the satisfactoriness of the activity which defines science or philosophy; the definition comes from the structure and function of subject-matter."\(^53\) Similarly, it may be said that esthetic language should be concerned with for its function which makes possible the enhancement of direct experience. Yet scientific discourse has its own esthetic fascination and, on the other hand, esthetic language contributes to the direction and stimulation of ideas and endeavors in a shared life.

\(^52\) Ibid., p. 204.

\(^53\) Ibid., p. 203.
Thus we discover that for Dewey language is central to the growth of human mind and culture. His theory of language provides the ground upon which his principles of continuity and transaction may be viewed. Dewey's treatment of language makes it a critical and focal point for the development of his philosophical insights, especially as these bear upon such concepts as mind, self, and society, as well as for the interpretation of scientific and esthetic experiences, which are basic to his considerations.
CHAPTER III

MEANING AND LANGUAGE

There can be no communication, no discourse, unless there are meanings to exchange. Meanings, according to Dewey, constitute the essence of language and communication. Any treatment of Dewey's theory of language would be inadequate, therefore, if conducted apart from a consideration of his theory of meaning. In fact, Dewey's analysis of meaning not only characterizes his conception of language, it is also essential to his theory of inquiry, a point that will be dealt with in the next chapter.

1. A Meaningful Response. Man is an active being. His experience is an affair primarily of trying and doing. He does not wait passively for something to turn up. Being active by nature, man ceaselessly acts upon his surroundings. Always, of course, his acts entail sufferings or undergoings. Dewey says that man learns when he institutes causal connections between what he has done to things and what has happened to him in consequence. He learns, for instance, that fire means "burn" when he connects the movement of sticking his finger into fire with the pain he undergoes. To learn from experience is to establish connections between doings and undergoings. When the doing-consequence connection is instituted in conception, the thing which is once acted upon ceases to be
neutral, a mere thing. It becomes, instead, a "meaningful object," one that has distinctive functions in directing actions.

H. Gordon Hullfish represents Dewey's view when he states that a meaningful object is "an object of many possibilities" — the possibilities being limited only by our past reactions to the objects.¹ In other words, the meaningful object suggests many possible ways of enjoying, suffering, and using it; these suggested ways vary according to prior operations we have performed in dealing with the object. Our response to the object is therefore such that it interprets these suggested ways and selects some of them so that our acting upon the object may undergo desirable consequences. There is a doubt, a selection process, an interpretation, and a decision in the very act of meaningful response.

Thus, Hullfish contrasts Dewey's view with Thorndike's mechanistic explanation of human behavior, emphasizing that the mechanistic simplification of the complexity of human response fails to account for the complex structures and modes of human thought. In mechanistic behavior, no thinking takes place. We think only because a situation presents indeterminate and doubtful possibilities to be considered. And, as should be obvious, our thought becomes highly complex because of the ambiguity and complexity inherent in the

¹ Aspects of Thorndike's Psychology in Their Relations to Educational Theory and Practice. Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 1927, p. 71.
world of meaningful objects. The occurrence of thought, says
William A. White, is
due to increasing complexity of the problems of adapta-
tion and the introduction of more than one possible
reaction to any given situation. As a result the several
possibilities are weighed, there is doubt, examination of
the advantages of the several possibilities, and decisions,
all of which corresponds, in physiologic terms, to the
choice of the final common path.2

Human learning, according to Dewey, has to do with meaning.
We learn to respond to the meanings of things; we do not respond
to things physically and directly. Through learning, in other
words, we establish significant relations between things, the
relations in which one thing becomes a sign of other things which
are not present, thus suggesting future happenings and making
possible deliberate choice of the courses of action. Learning the
meanings of things is distinct from building up the mechanical
habits of immediate response. There is thus a radical difference
between the human use of signs and the signaling behavior of
animals. The following passage from Susanne K. Langer is suggestive:

Man, unlike all other animals, uses "signs" not only
to indicate things, but also to represent them. To a clever
dog, the name of a person is a signal that the person is
present; you say the name, he picks up his ears and looks
for its object. If you say "dinner," he becomes restless,
expecting food. You cannot make any communication to him
that is not taken as a signal of something immediately
forthcoming. His mind is a simple and direct transmitter
of messages from the world to his motor centers. With
man it is different. We use certain "signs," among cur-

2 "Thought and Its Instrument—Language," in The Language
of Wisdom and Folly, ed. by Irving J. Lee. New York, Harper &
selves that do not point to anything in our actual surroundings. Most of our words are not signs in the sense of signals. They are used to talk about things, not to direct our eyes and ears and noses toward them. Instead of announcers of things, they are reminders. They have been called "substitute signs," for in our present experience they take the place of things that we have perceived in the past, or even things that we can merely imagine by combining memories, things that might be in past or future experience... They (signs) serve, rather, to let us develop a characteristic attitude toward objects in absentia, which is called "thinking of" or "referring to" what is not here. "Signs" used in this capacity are not symptoms of things, but symbols.3

2. Meaning and Inference. The interest of human action, Dewey says, is always an interest in what will or may come. It is not an interest in what is immediately given, or its own account. The interest concerns itself with transforming the immediately given into a sign of something possible or potential, of what is to come. In this active interest, meaning plays an essential role—the role being, to borrow C. I. Lewis' words, "that of an instrument enabling transition from the one to the other; from the actual present to a future which is desired and which the present is believed to signalize as possible."4 Meaning is the awareness of the "future qualified by values which action may realize."5 A thing becomes "meaningful" insofar as it serves to enforce the essential connection of it with action indicating certain possible consequences the action


5 Ibid.
will undergo. As Dewey says, things "acquire meaning only as they become signs of possible, but not yet present and actual, experiences."\(^6\)

The utility of meaning thus lies in the control it exercises over action. A thing, Boyd H. Bode says, "has meaning only in the sense that it controls so as to make our acts appropriate to the situation," and "in proportion as things can be so used they become instrumentalities for our purpose."\(^7\) Snow suggests "cold," "slippery," etc.; clouds indicate the forthcoming of "storm," "rain," etc.; a tree means "solidity," "shade," etc.; and, when we have gained these meanings, as we do through action, our further acts may be directed so as to realize that which we desire and avoid what is undesirable. In this sense, as Lewis points out, meaning or knowledge is "not a descriptive but a normative category."\(^8\) This


\(^8\) C. I. Lewis, op. cit., p. 10.

The normative function of meaning is also recognized by Kenneth Burke who states: "But speech in its essence is not neutral. Far from aiming at suspended judgment, the spontaneous speech of a people is loaded with judgments. It is intensely moral—its names for objects contain the emotional overtones which give us the cues as to how we should act towards these objects.... To call a man a friend or an enemy is per se to suggest a program of action with regard to him. An important ingredient in the meaning of such words is precisely the attitudes and acts which go with them. Regardless of whether we should call the implicit program of action adequate (as when speech aids a primitive tribe to organize a successful fishing expedition) or inadequate (as when speech confuses our handling of non-racial issues by stimulating racial persecution) these emotional or moral weightings inherent in spontaneous speech tend to re-enforce the act itself, hence making the communicative and active aspects of speech identical." (Permanence and Change. New York, New Republic, 1935, pp. 224-25.)
view is, of course, fundamental to Dewey's pragmatic theory of meaning and knowledge.

The idea that has been emphasized is, in short, that meaning involves an inferential function. That is, meaning enables us to go beyond the assuredly present to an absent. Snow, for instance, has meaning in virtue of its indication of the consequences we will undergo if we act upon so as to assume its immediate or forthcoming presence. We do not respond to snow physically and directly; we respond to the possible consequences suggested by it. The consequences to which our response refers as stimuli are inferred and lie outside of immediate perceptions. Reference to unperceived consequences as stimuli to present behavior is the essential function of meaning.

Meaning, therefore, always transcends the immediately given. Failure to acknowledge the relation of inference and meaning leads to the fallacious notion that given sensory qualities are in themselves sufficient conditions of meaning (or idea). Dewey holds that given sense-data remain non-cognitive until active beings take them as means to consequences. "That a perception is cognitive means," he says, "that it is used; it is treated as a sign of conditions that implicate other as yet unperceived consequences in addition to the perception itself." Meanings do not correspond to things as they are perceived. They only influence action

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Experience and Nature, p. 323.
indicating the consequences which will follow when things are acted upon. This aspect of Dewey's philosophical inquiry is very important and will be dealt with more extensively in the next chapter.

3. Modes of Action Determine Meaning. Meaning, according to Dewey, thus refers to consequences, to the future, to the possibilities of what is to come. One's meaning of a thing is simply an idea of what will happen if he acts upon it. The meaning of a thing, in other words, is synonymous with its potential consequences. And, says Dewey:

When the potential consequences are important and repeated, they form the very nature and essence of a thing... Since potential consequences also mark the thing itself, and form its nature, the events thus marked become an object of contemplation as meaning, future consequences already belong to the thing.10

Two things should be mentioned in connection with Dewey's statement above. First, actions, and modes of action, ways of operating, are always involved in meanings. This is but to say that meanings are not exhaustive ingredients of things which exist by themselves; they refer to the operations we perform in dealing with the things. It is probably with this view in mind that Sir James Jeans says that the findings of modern physics are "a description, not of nature, but of human questionings of nature."11 P. W. Bridgman likewise holds that physical concepts are not a description of the supposed ingredients or properties of physical events but consist

10 Ibid., p. 182.

of the operations physicists perform in studying events. "In general," he says, "we mean by any concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations." Prior to any of these writers, C. S. Pierce held that "the whole function of thought is to produce habits of action" and that "there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice." In his oft-quoted words: "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."

The so-called "essence" or "nature" of a thing refers, therefore, not to what it is independently of experience but, rather, represents or implies all the operations performed in dealing with it. The nature of the thing is its meaning or meanings and, as is obvious, these differ according to the operations men perform. A painter, a chemist, and a carpenter add different meanings to, say, a chair, because they act upon it differently. The modes or ways of their action are involved in the meanings they add to the chair.

The second point is related to this illustration. Though three persons may deal with the same thing, a chair, their unique actions will transform it into three distinct objects. For a painter, a chair is something to be "painted"; for a chemist, it is an object

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13 Ibid., p. 45.
whose chemical components may be analyzed; for a carpenter, it is something to construct, repair, or evaluate in terms of workmanship. "The same existential events," Dewey says, "are capable of an infinite number of meanings."\(^{15}\) They thus become the objects of science, of common sense, of poetry, of literature, and the like. It will be recalled that these arts differ, according to Dewey, in the ways they transform existences into new objects (things with meanings). Their unique interests and purposes act upon things and, in consequence, turn them into the objects of unique contemplation. The same view is held by Cassirer when he states that names "are not designed to refer to substantial things, independent entities which exist by themselves. They are determined by human interests and purposes."\(^{16}\)

To repeat, meaning does not describe the way things really are. It organizes and systematizes the operations of inquiry as they take place in the differing contexts of "knowing-known transactions," to use the term put forward by Dewey and Bentley. Common sense meanings are thus instrumental to systematizing the knowing activities as they are performed in solving the characteristic problems of common sense. On the other hand, scientific meanings play a distinctive function, organizing the operations of scientific inquiry in the context of experimental prediction and control. It would be

\(^{15}\) Experience and Nature, p. 319.

\(^{16}\) An Essay on Man, p. 134.
absurd, according to Dewey, to hold that common sense meaning is illusory because it does not correspond to the way things really are, whereas scientific meaning tells us the true and real nature of things. Science and common sense may deal with the same things; they are concerned, however, with different problems which have their own interests and concerns with respect to things. Accordingly, they have unique ways of experiencing and knowing things. In this sense, one cannot say, for instance, that H₂O of the scientific frame is more real than the water as it is used and enjoyed in the community of common sense. The common sense meaning of water is established as it serves the need and purpose of everyday living; the specific meaning of H₂O has its place and serves its purpose in the context of scientific inquiry. In the refined language of science, most of common sense terms are of course no longer employed, and are replaced by a precise terminology, facilitated by mathematical techniques. But this fact does not of itself invalidate the function of common sense language. It is foolish to say that one system of language is more real than the other. The point here is that, in Dewey's view, meaning is simply a way of relating ourselves to the surrounding world, of being and participating in the affairs of nature. There are as many systems of meaning as there are kinds of concerns and operations in our participation in physical and social events.
4. **Language Makes Meaning General and Objective.** As was noted in the previous chapter, human behavior always takes place in a social situation; it is modified and regulated by the mode of communication in which it is involved. What distinguishes human behavior, according to Dewey, is not its organic and physical structure but its function in communication. When communication arises, all organic and physical events are subject to change. They are reconsidered and re-adapted so as to meet the requirements of communal exchange. And when they are so modified as to serve the purposes of communication, they gain meaning. Thus, Dewey says: "Meanings do not come into being without language, and language implies two selves involved in a conjoint or shared undertaking."\(^{17}\) Meaning and language are inseparable.

We now arrive at consideration of how meaning may be defined in terms of communication and how its objective and general nature may be interpreted. Events acquire meaning, according to Dewey, only in virtue of their operational force in communication and, in this sense, meaning is objective. Meaning establishes an "objective" relationship between an event and its consequences or effects. In other words, an event is given meaning as it functions as a means to certain "public" or "objective" consequences. A red light on a street corner, for instance, has meaning because it operates as a

\(^{17}\) *Experience and Nature*, p. 299.
means to co-ordinate the movements of persons and vehicles having reference to the consequences that are shared in a conjoint activity. Physical existences, such as sounds and marks on paper, gain meaning and become a part of language when they are so taken as to promote agreements in social action. In fact, for Dewey, that meaning is objective is a tautology. For meanings are, according to him, "modes of natural interaction." "Meanings are objective because they are modes of natural interaction; such an interaction, although primarily between organic beings, as includes things and energies external to living creatures."\(^{18}\)

Dewey distinguishes "proximate" and "ulterior" or "permanent" meanings.\(^{19}\) The meanings of a red traffic light, for example, refer not only to its immediate consequences in co-ordinating the movements of persons and vehicles, but also to its long-run consequences in the way of keeping social order. Its immediate consequences are its proximate meanings and its long-run consequences are its ulterior or permanent meanings. Dewey says that the ulterior meaning of the traffic light constitutes its essence, that is, "the rule, comprehensive and persisting, the standardized habit, of social interaction."\(^{20}\) Traffic rules are thus generated in the very process of social transactions and concerned with the control of diverse social actions. The rules are made when the meanings of particular

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 190.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
traffic cases are abstracted from their existential contexts; they are taken up into written and published language and become objects to be studied by civic administrators.

This case illustrates the nature of the principles and laws in logical, ethical, and scientific inquiry. It illustrates, also, the essential difference distinguishing this from other philosophic positions. According to this position, all forms, ethical or logical, "arise within the operation of inquiry and are concerned with control of inquiry so that it may yield warranted assertions." They are not imposed on human experience ab extra. The forms or categories are ways or rules of dealing with things, generated in the process of inquiry, and function as what Pierce called "guiding" or "leading" principles in continued inquiry. The principles or rules "state habits operative in every inference that tend to yield conclusions that are stable and productive in further inquiries." That is to say, they are not a priori in themselves, but "operationally a priori with respect to further inquiry." The philosophic fallacy, Dewey repeatedly reminds us, has been committed by taking these functional forms as fixed antecedently to inquiry and conditioning it ab extra: the conversion of functional meanings into antecedent existences.

22 Ibid., p. 13.
23 Ibid., p. 14.
Meanings are general. That is, they are general rules for using and interpreting things. Like traffic rules, meanings are generated in our transactions with our surroundings, physical and social. They are then recorded in our behavior and function as means of generalization.

The meaning, for example, of portability is something in which two persons and an object share. But portability after it is once apprehended becomes a way of treating other things; it is widely extended. Whenever there is a chance, it is applied; application ceases only when a thing refuses to be treated in this way. Such generalization, Dewey says, is carried spontaneously. "Meanings are self-moving to new cases." Rational meanings are acquired when generalizations are based on observation and controlled by deliberate inquiry. Owing to the generalizing force of meaning, the world of experience is elastic to an indefinite extent.

5. Two Kinds of Representative Function. Dewey often appears to use the words "significance" and "meaning," "sign" and "symbol," rather indiscriminately. In his Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, however, he connects "sign and significance, symbol and meaning, respectively, with each other, in order to have terms to designate two different kinds of representative capacity." Though Dewey makes this distinction in order to indicate two different dimensions.

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25 Ibid., p. 188.
26 Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, p. 52.
of representative function, he also intends to show how the two
dimensions may be connected or how the conventional system of
symbols may be related to the existential conditions of human
experience.

Dewey employs the word "signs" in this context to designate so-
called "natural signs" and the word "symbol" to stand for "artificial
signs." Smoke as a natural existence, for example, is a sign of fire,
another natural existence. The representative capacity of this kind
is highly restricted because the signifying thing, smoke, exists only
under special conditions. The situation is quite different, however,
when the mark "smoke" or the sound "s-m-o-k-e" acquires meaning.

As Dewey states:

Not only can the sound be produced practically at will,
so that we do not have to wait for the occurrence of the
object; but, what is more important, the meaning when
embodied in an indifferent or neutral existence is liberated
with respect to its representative function. It is no longer
tied down. It can be related to other meanings in the
language-system; not only to that of fire but to such
apparently unrelated meanings as friction, changes of
temperature, oxygen, molecular constitution, and, by inter­
vening meaning-symbols, to the law of thermodynamics.27

In the former case, "existent things, as signs, are evidence of the
existence of something else, this something being at the time inferred
rather than observed."28 "But words, or symbols," Dewey says,
"provide no evidence of any existence. Yet what they lack in this
capacity they make up for in creation of another dimension. They

27 Ibid. 28 Ibid.
make possible ordered discourse or reasoning." This latter kind of representative function comes into being through the medium of social communication. With language, Dewey says, the qualities of existential sign-behavior are retained in thought and enrich its contents. Without language, the sign-activity of man remains in animal-like fashion.

With the distinction of "sign-significance" and "symbol-meaning," Dewey distinguishes inference and implication. That is, the evidential sign-signified relation defines inference and the relation of symbol-meanings defines implication. In the first case, one actual existence, smoke, indicates another existence, fire, as expected. In the second case, one concept, the idea of smoke, means or implies another, the idea of fire. On the one hand, meanings are functions of things in the environment and, on the other, they are functions of thought. Symbol-meanings (or ideational meanings) introduce a dimension different from that of existential signification, but Dewey holds that these two functions of representation are closely related to one another. Reasoning, of course, functions with symbol-meanings and is distinct from mere inference, but it is powerless apart from it. "Much of logical theory," Dornald Platt says in writing of Dewey, "has been artificial because it has ignored the fact that meanings are given in things before they are taken in language and thought."30

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In a system of language, (1) "symbols are 'related' directly to one another." These symbols gain meaning, as we have seen, when they are employed as referring to objective consequences in a social give-and-take field, or, as Dewey puts it, "by agreements of different persons in existential activities having reference to existential consequences." Thus, (2) these symbols "are 'related' to existence by the mediating intervention of existential operations." Thirdly, "existences are 'related' to one another in the evidential sign-signified function." From the lower sign-significance level to the higher symbol-meaning level, Dewey thus distinguishes "three modes of relation." These relations are illustrated by him, in connection with propositions of mathematical physics as follows:

(1) As propositions they form a system of related symbol-meanings that may be considered and developed as such. (2) But as propositions of physics, not of mere mathematics, they have reference to existence; a reference which is realized in operations of application. (3) The final set of valid reference or applicability resides in the connections that exist among things.31

The gap between thought and existence is thus bridged. Thought consists of related symbol-meanings. The meanings refer and have application to existential happenings. At bottom meaning is a functional relationship between things as signs and other things as signified. As to the relation of signs to symbols, we must note that things both as signs and as signified have certain experienced qualities and that it is by means of symbols that we mark and retain.

these qualities.

Without, for example, words or symbols that discriminate and hold on to the experienced qualities of sight and smell that constitute a thing, 'smoke,' thereby enabling it to serve as a sign of fire, we might react to the qualities in question in animal-like fashion and perform activities appropriate to them. In Dewey's view, an inferential function owes its development to language. As he says, "it is language, originating as a medium of communication in order to bring about deliberate co-operation and competition in conjoint activities, that has conferred upon existential things their signifying or evidential power."

There is thus a close correlation between existential sign-significance and ideational symbol-meaning. This means, also, that the logical or the intellectual is connected with the existential in a continuous and correlative way.

6. Language and the Categorizing of Experience. Language cannot be treated in isolation from the biological and cultural matrix of experience. Failure to acknowledge this fact has led many theorists to split symbols from meanings and linguistic forms from their empirical contexts. Language has been treated as a "third type of 'thing' separate both from organism and environment." This conception of language accompanies the fallacious notion that language is something externally applied to convey antecedent ideas and thoughts. But, as we have repeatedly stated, language is more than an instrument for the conveying of ideas. It is a living behavioral process itself

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\(32\) Ibid., p. 56.  
\(33\) Ibid.
in action, the process in which meanings are developed and reconstructed. Linguistic forms, as well as meanings, are thus in a process of becoming and generation.

Language is the way we organize and categorize experience. It is the way we segment, discriminate, and interpret the surrounding world and make it intelligible to us. "Naming selects, discriminates, identifies, locates, orders, arranges, systematizes. Such activities as these are attributed to 'thought' by older forms of expression, but they are much more properly attributed to language when language is seen as the living behavior of men." Thus conceived, language conditions the way men interact with their physical and social environment. It regulates their expression of feeling and emotion. It constitutes an intrinsic part of human cultural and intellectual activities. As Dewey says, language "permeates both the forms and the contents of all other cultural activities"; it becomes "regulative and 'normative' of specific beliefs and judgments."

Today, we find a group of cultural anthropologists, including notably Benjamin Lee Whorf, Edward Sapir, and Clyde Kluckhohn, who come close to Dewey's view. For them, as well as for Dewey, language is "a means of categorizing experience." "What people think and feel, and how they report what they think and feel, is," according to

\[34\] Dewey and Bentley, Knowing and the Known, p. 147.

\[35\] Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, p. 45.

\[36\] Ibid., p. 62.
Kluckhohn and Leighton, largely determined by "the pattern of linguistic habits which people have acquired as members of a particular society. The events of the 'real' world are never felt or reported as a machine would do it. There is a selection process and an interpretation in the very act of response. Some features are highlighted; others are ignored or not fully discriminated."\(^{37}\)

Benjamin Lee Whorf also states:

> We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.\(^{38}\)

Again, to quote from Edward Sapir:

> It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built on the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.\(^{39}\)

These conclusions reached in the recent anthropological studies of language confirm Dewey's view which states that "every cultural group possesses a set of meanings which are so deeply embedded in...


\(^{38}\) Language, Thought and Reality (Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf, ed., by John B. Carroll). The Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956, p. 213.

its customs, occupations, traditions and ways of interpreting its physical environment and group-life, that they form the basic categories of the language-system by which details are interpreted."  

Language sets forth the basic categories of interpreting reality. It thus profoundly conditions the way we experience things, and think and make judgments about them. Whorf contends that the conception of event, thing, relationship and so on, "always involves a circuitous return to the grammatical categories of the definer's language." It is commonly recognized, for instance, that Greek made a difference in the philosophical reflections and systems of Plato and Aristotle. "Plato unwittingly discovered," says Weston LaBarre, "that Greek, like all the other Indo-European languages, is a noun-language and then thought that the logos of the noun created all the particulars of the real world." Aristotle's theory of substance and attribute also points to the fact that his mother language has subjects and predicates. Likewise, according to Whorf, "Newtonian space, time and matter are not intuitions. They are recepts from the culture and language. That is where Newton got them." These considerations are sufficient to reject the naive notion that philosophy and science deal with absolute reality. Reality is not something pure and absolute. It is an object of

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thought which consists of meanings, and meanings develop in the process of symbolic categorization of existential doings and under-goings. Or it may be described as "a reality-thought-language," language being here used, as Dewey generally uses it, "not just formally, but to include its content of substantial meanings." Thus conceived, reality is in a process of becoming.

7. The Formal Structure of Language. Another noteworthy characteristic of language, according to Dewey, is that "it has its own distinctive structure which is capable of abstraction as a form." It is the formal structure of language which has had "a decisive influence historically upon the formulation of logical theory." The recent remarkable development of formal logic and the philosophy of language is particularly concerned with the abstract formal rules of scientific or propositional language. Though Dewey is not among those formal logicians, he fully recognizes the significance of the formal and deductive role of language. Bella K. Milmed points out that "after elaborately identifying 'logic' with the process of inquiry, thus making it existential and experimental, he (Dewey) nevertheless discriminates within this process a special factor called 'reasoning' or 'discourse,' which is abstract, analytic, deductive, and altogether to be identified with 'logic' in the formal sense." 45

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44 Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, p. 45.

This is not the place to discuss Dewey's logical theory. The point to be emphasized here is that Dewey's life-long revolt against logical formalism should not be understood as an attempt to discredit the significant role of formal propositions in the formulation of scientific hypotheses. On the contrary, he insists that "scientific method is not possible without non-existential if-then propositions." What he has tried to avoid is the notion that such formal propositions are sufficient conditions of scientific method. He says:

An hypothesis concerns what is possible, and a proposition regarding possibles is indispensable in inquiry that has scientific standing. The hypothesis is formulated in an abstract if-then proposition. It then formulates a rule and method of experimental observation. Consequences of the execution of the indicated operations define application in the only logically coherent sense of that conception. One indispensable condition of application in the case of method in natural science is, therefore, that the contents of the hypothetical proposition be themselves determined by prior existential inquiries in such a way that the contents are capable of directing further operations of observation.

The critics of Dewey's logical theory often miss this point.

F. S. C. Northrop, for instance, criticizes operationalism, which he identifies with Dewey's position, by saying that before we are able to perform operations or experiments, we must conceive of them hypothetically or theoretically. In other words, according to Northrop, to say that an operation defines a concept is contrary to

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46 Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, p. 381.
47 Ibid.
the real case of scientific inquiry. But this is a so-called egg-
and-chicken problem. As the passage just quoted from Dewey shows,
an hypothesis concerns what Northrop calls the "hypothetically con-
ceived operation or experiment." A logical proposition regarding
the hypothesis, Dewey says, is a principle which guides further
experimental operations. This appears to be the point Northrop is
trying to emphasize. If so, his criticism of operationalism affirms
Dewey's approach to the function of logical principles in scientific
theorizing. But if he intends to reverse the contention that an
operation defines a concept, he not only fails to understand Dewey's
theory of inquiry but also has to face all of the difficulties of
the egg-and-chicken puzzle.

8. The Philosophical and Educational Significance of Meaning.
The problem of meaning Dewey regards as the essential problem of
philosophical inquiries. "Meaning," he says, "is wider in scope as
well as more precious in value than is truth, and philosophy is
occupied with meaning rather than with truth." This statement,
he immediately warns us, should not be taken to mean the denial of
the great importance of truth. For him truth is "infinitely
important." The statement therefore emphasizes simply that the
world of meaning includes vast regions where the category of truth
or falsity is irrelevant—"truths are but one class of meanings,
namely, those in which a claim to verifiability by their consequences

49 Philosophy and Civilization. New York, Minton, Balch & Company,
1931, p. 4.
is an intrinsic part of their meaning." 50 "As to truth... philosophy has no pre-eminent status; it is a recipient, not a donor. But the realm of meanings is wider than that of true-and-false meanings; it is more urgent and more fertile." 51

Philosophy, according to Dewey, is then concerned with the realm of meaning in which truth has no jurisdiction, as well as with the utilization of truth-qualities in scientific and logical meanings. Its proper task is to liberate and clarify meanings. As he states:

Poetic meanings, moral meanings, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant. And the claim of philosophy to rival or displace science as a purveyor of truth seems to be mostly a compensatory gesture for failure to perform its proper task of liberating and clarifying meanings, including those scientifically authenticated. 52

Philosophy has no private stock of information or body of knowledge, no method of its own for attaining truth, and no private access to goodness or beauty. It is a generalized instrument of criticism, of clarifying, synthesizing and expanding the meanings formulated in specialized compartments of inquiry. "Over-specialization and division of interest, occupations and goods," Dewey says, "create the need for a generalized medium of intercommunication, of mutual

50 Ibid., p. 5.
52 Ibid., p. 411.
criticism through all-around translation from one separated region of experience into another." This generalized medium of intercommunication is the function of philosophy as a critical organon.

This conception of philosophy is "a version of the old saying that philosophy is love of wisdom, of wisdom which is not knowledge and which nevertheless cannot be without knowledge." Philosophy has no competency to rival or displace scientific facts and principles. Instead, it accepts and utilizes them for a purpose. It learns also from literature, from art, from history. Its primary concern is to liberate and expand the meanings attained in science, in literature, in history, and in art, with respect to their bearing upon the enhancement and enrichment of the common life of mankind. Philosophical inquiry is, therefore, basically of moral and educational concern. The liberating and critical function of philosophy, according to Dewey, is best fulfilled in moral and educational practice. "The educational point of view," he says, "enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice." Dewey's conception of meaning and experience and their social implications are such that they naturally lead to an interest in education.

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53 Ibid., p. 410.  54 Ibid., p. 409.

To sum up, then, we may note that "meaning" is an essential category for understanding both Dewey's conception of language and his general philosophical emphases. We discover that Dewey's theory of meaning makes a difference in his treatment of such basic concepts as "knowledge," "experience," "essence," "form," and "reality." His analysis of meaning brings to the fore the social and cultural significance of human experience and thought. It also recognizes that philosophical inquiries are concerned with criticizing, liberating, and synthesizing meanings developed in various fields of inquiry, in ways that influence educational endeavor.
Dewey holds, as we have noted, that there are distinctions within the general realm of meaning, of which the field of knowledge and truth is one. In his approach, knowledge and truth may be described as a system of warranted meanings. They are, in other words, names for a class of specified meanings which involve as their essential part "a claim to verifiability by their consequences." The term "inquiry," in the present context, denotes that process of finding, specifying, and testing meanings. Dewey's theory of inquiry starts, therefore, with a theory of meaning.

1. Language, Meaning, and Knowledge. Things acquire meanings, as we have seen, when they are treated as signs of forthcoming events, thus indicating the direction action must take. Meaning comes into being for the sake of guiding action; it is instrumental to an ongoing activity of the living being. As such, meaning involves an inferential or relational function, making possible "transcendence" from what is at hand to what is to come. It relates the given as means to the future as end-in-view. With such an inferential operation or meaning, action becomes deliberate and purposeful. The man who makes a boat has a plan which carries him from the materials at hand to a boat to be made. A scientist
establishes an hypothesis and designs an apparatus to attain an expected consequence. This inferential or relational function, Dewey holds, constitutes the essence of knowing. "To know (empirically)," to borrow C. I. Lewis' words, "is to be able to anticipate correctly further possible experience. If this is not the whole significance of such knowing, at least it is an essential part of it." Reference to what transcends the immediately given is the sine qua non of both symbolizing and knowing.

This conception of knowledge in terms of meaning may be better understood if we contrast it with the empiricist's notion that immediate sense perceptions are in themselves instances of knowledge. That these "qualitative immediacies" provide a necessary background for knowledge is of course not denied by Dewey. His point of departure is that sense-data "acquire cognitive function when they are employed as signs of something beyond themselves." Sensations and perceptions are non-cognitive natural occurrences, arising under certain physical and biological conditions. When, however, they are taken as representative of other things and happenings, thus controlling action, they are marked as distinctive objects of knowledge. Perceptions may be regarded as existing facts, with certain qualities and in certain spatial and temporal relations, but there is knowledge


2 Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, p. 117.
only when another relation is added, "that of one thing signifying another."3 "Water exists, for example, as water, in a certain place, in a certain temporal sequence. But it may signify the quenching of thirst; and this signification-relation constitutes knowledge."4 The immediate perception of a dark-patch in the sky, taken in itself, tells nothing about that object. The object becomes known only when it is taken, say, as "cloud-presaging-rain." "Unless it serve as a symbol," says George R. Geiger in writing of Dewey, "a sense datum is merely a candidate for knowledge, just as sheer desire is merely a candidate for value status."5 Things are known when meanings are added to them; meanings are conceived, however, not just perceived.

Immediate perceptual qualities cannot be named, according to Dewey. "When we name an event, calling it fire, we speak proleptically; we do not name an immediate event; that is impossible. We employ a term of discourse; we evoke a meaning, namely, the potential consequence of the existence."6 Meaning always transcends the immediately given. The potential consequences to which meanings refer are possibilities and accordingly lie always outside the primary perceptions. Only when consequences are possibilities are in question,

4 Ibid.
does the cognitive function emerge; only then may we say that ideas are at work. Dewey's thesis is well expressed by C. I. Lewis:

"There are no 'simple qualities' which are named by any name; there is no concept the denotation of which does not extend the immediately given, and beyond what could be immediately given. And without concepts, there is no knowledge." In other words, knowledge cannot be immediate.

Things are just used and enjoyed before they are known, according to Dewey. Knowledge is a special kind of experience and must be distinguished from other kinds, those of non-reflective immediate enjoyment and consummation. Anyone may recognize the difference between the two kinds of experience. For example:

... the difference between an experience of quenching thirst where the perception of water is a mere incident, and an experience of water where knowledge of what water is, is the controlling interest; or between the enjoyment of social converse among friends and a study deliberately made of the character of one of the participants; between aesthetic appreciation of a picture and an examination of it by a connoisseur to establish the artist, or by a dealer who has a commercial interest in determining its probable selling value.

Perceptions and sensations are likewise simply had and felt. They are immediate and consummatory. They are fragmentary and unregulated by purpose. In themselves, perceptions have no way of checking their validity and of determining their cognitive standing. A

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8 John Dewey, Essays in Experimental Logic, p. 2.
knowledge-experience, on the other hand, requires perceptions, but is never immediate. It implies judgment and judgment further implies inquiry which occupies a mediating place in the development of a knowing-experience. It has a specific task and is regulated by a particular purpose. It organizes sensory materials which are otherwise fragmentary and casual and converts them into meanings which warrantably signify the conditions that "implicate other as yet unperceived future."

The recognition of the distinction between the two kinds of experience is of fundamental importance in understanding Dewey's theory of knowledge. The question now remains as to how a knowing experience is related to its prior stage, or how knowledge grows out of an immediate qualitative experience, and as to how knowing proceeds. But, before considering this question, there is an important aspect of Dewey's treatment of knowledge which must be mentioned. In Dewey's view, in contrast with the empiricist theory, knowledge is distinctively social in nature.

This conclusion follows from his hypothesis that knowledge relates to meaning. For meanings, of which knowledge is a specification, come into being because of language, and language implies two selves involved in a community. The objectivity of meaning and knowledge, Dewey says, can be defined only by means of communication. Things become known not in their immediate appearances, but only
when they are objectively distinguished and identified through communication. In contrast with this view, the empiricist theory that treats sense-data as instance of knowledge makes the fact of objective knowledge unexplainable. "Since sense-data differ from individual to individual," as C. Morris states, "an objectivity or community of knowledge would be impossible if the bare appearance of an event were to be conceived as a knowledge revelation of its generating conditions." Knowledge must be communicable; that is, it "requires symbolic reference." Immediate perceptions are incommunicable and as such have no objective status in themselves. Some recent studies in psychology also show that pure perceptions cannot be identified. We read meanings into what we perceive, rather than perceive things as they immediately are. In other words, when we distinguish and identify perceived objects, we do so by adding meanings to them. Perceptions are thus influenced by one's past experience. Let us now consider Dewey's explanation of the way perceptions are transformed into meanings and become known.

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10 Ibid., p. 303.
2. Problematic Situations and the Activities of Finding and Testing Meanings. What finally distinguishes Dewey's theory of inquiry is his postulate of a problematic situation that evokes and regulates the activity of knowing. Dewey repeatedly emphasizes that this postulate is the "controlling factor" in his entire view, and warns against the omission of it from his theory of inquiry. "For the problematic situation," he says, "is the context in which everything I say about knowing is placed and by reference to which it is to be understood." Indeed, in Dewey's system, the logical shift from non-cognitive immediate experience to the so-called "knowledge-experience" is not explainable without reference to the intervention of the problematic situation.

Dewey believes it is tautological to say that there must be a problem or doubt at the beginning of inquiry. Inquiry arises simply because there is need for it. It does not occur in a vacuum. It is an activity which emerges when there appears an "indeterminate situation" in the course of immediate and consummatory experiences. Insofar as no difficulties arise in immediate experience, we need no conscious effort to identify the enjoyed objects so as to make them effective means for further experience. This view, as F. S. C. Northrop also states, affirms a tautology.  

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13 The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities, p. 17.
This tautological statement about the initiation of inquiry does not mean, however, that the term "indeterminate situation" is self-explanatory. In fact, it is in Dewey's use of the term that we find characteristics of his theory of inquiry. Dewey uses various terms to characterize indeterminate situations. "They are disturbed, troubled, ambiguous, confused, full of conflicting tendencies, obscure, etc." The situation that has these traits, he says, is caused by the imbalance or discord in the organism-environment transactions. Doubtfulness or ambiguity is not something a personal doubter spins out of his own insides. "We are doubtful because the situation is inherently doubtful. Personal states of doubt that are not evoked by and are not relative to existential situations are pathological; when they are extreme they constitute the mania of doubting." The indeterminate situations are characterized, in other words, by the kinds of transactions in which we are engaged.

The ambiguous or indeterminate situation attracts our attention and provokes us to reflection. It thus sets forth the antecedent conditions of inquiry. Strictly speaking, the indeterminate situation is distinguished from a problematic situation. According to Dewey, the former becomes problematic when it is subjected to inquiry. As to the distinction, he says:

\[\text{Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, p. 105.}\]

\[\text{ibid., pp. 105-6.}\]
The indeterminate situation becomes problematic in the very process of being subjected to inquiry. The indeterminate situation comes into existence from existential causes, just as does, say, the organic imbalance of hunger. There is nothing intellectual or cognitive in the existence of such situations, although they are the necessary condition of cognitive operations or inquiry. In themselves they are precognitive. The first result of evocation of inquiry is that the situation is taken, adjudged, to be problematic.16

When a situation is taken to be problematic, this is "but an initial step in institution of a problem." The definition of a problem or problems which a problematic situation presents for inquiry is an essential part of inquiry. The success of subsequent inquiry depends upon the way in which the problem is conceived.

The problematic situation is the context in, and because of, which anything logically significant takes place. Inquiry proceeds in view of the need for the transformation of the situation into a determinate one. Some aspects or constituents of the situation are discriminated, selected, and taken up "to locate and identify its problematic features with reference to the inquiry then and there to be executed."17 The selected and taken aspects are at the same time arranged, organized, and accounted for in order that they may be employed as "evidence," or "facts," or "signs," on the basis of which ideas or plans for a solution of the problematic situation are formulated. Dewey calls their logical status "data." "To be a datum," he says, "is to have a special function in control of the subject-matter of inquiry. It embodies a fixation of the problem in a way

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16 Ibid., p. 107.
17 Ibid., p. 124.
which indicates a possible solution. It also helps to provide evidence which tests the solution that is hypothetically entertained.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus conceived, data are not those bare facts which, in most discussions, are considered to be self-sufficient and complete in themselves. They are, instead, operationally selected and adopted so as to serve the demand of a particular problematic situation. Their factual and evidential qualities are determined within the process of inquiry. They lose their logical status (i.e., cease to be data) when they are no longer accounted for with reference to the specific purpose and interest of inquiry. The distinction Dewey makes between the \textit{given} and the \textit{taken} is now clear; it is fundamental in his theory of knowledge. What is \textit{given} is the total undiscriminated qualitative situation. What are \textit{taken}, on the other hand, become data when, because of the intervention of problematic factors, they are selected and qualified in view of the need for thought. A datum, therefore, is not just the thing perceived or "pre-sented"; it is always "representative." What it represents is a \textit{meaning} or an idea. That is to say, the meaning or idea is the "meaning-of-datum."\textsuperscript{19} The meanings thus suggested by data are the plans or proposals for a possible solution of a problematic situation. They are suggested ways out of a problematic situation—"the promise of things hoped for, the symbol of things

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19}John Dewey, \textit{Essays in Experimental Logic}, p. 142.
not seen." They are tested and evaluated in terms of their workability in transforming the original indeterminate situation into a coherent and unified whole. When their predicted consequences are warranted at the terminal stage of inquiry, these meanings are classified as "knowledge," that is, as "warranted assertions" or "warranted meanings."

Dewey's use of "datum" and "meaning" (idea) is thus to be understood only in reference to his postulate of a problematic situation. As to "datum," his distinction of the given and the taken, just noted, emphasizes that the datum is what is taken because of the inquiry evoked in a problematic situation. As long as we sit passively before things and find nothing problematic in them, they remain logically indifferent. Only when we become interested in what they signify and take them as materials for thought, are they data, logical subject-matters. It is problems which arise in connection with what is immediately experienced that initiate inquiries; and it is the ensuing inquiries that determine data as such.

By "meaning" or "idea" Dewey means a plan of action, a working hypothesis, based on data. The point, also, is that this plan or hypothesis comes into being only because of the need for the resolution of problems in the course of action. "Whatever is a doubtful situation or undecided issue helps to form a judgment and to bring inference to a conclusion by means of anticipating a possible solution is an idea, and nothing else is. It is an idea because of what
it does in clearing up a perplexity or in harmonizing what is otherwise fragmentary, not because of its physical make-up. An idea, then, must be defined by its function and use, not by its structure or components. It does not come into being as a combination of sense-perceptions. When a man is lost in the woods, what he needs, in short, is a map which leads him out of the woods, not a picture of the trees and rocks surrounding him.

Data and meanings, according to Dewey, are then correlative; they are "functional divisions in the work of inquiry." The existentially observed conditions, that is, data, are responsible for the formation and the test of the validity of meanings, while, on the other hand, meanings control data in the process of inquiry—"a continuous correlative determination of datum on one side and of idea or meaning on the other." Since data are so selected and controlled as to serve the specific purpose of inquiry, they are of course not just external things. Again, meanings are not mere subjective mental states; they are formed out of objective data and capable of yielding existential consequences. "In the logical process," Dewey says, "the datum is not just external things, and the idea mere psychical existence. Both are modes of existence, one of given (in

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21 Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, p. 112.

the sense that it is taken in an actual situation) existence, the other of possible, inferred existence." The difference between the two is not that one is objective and the other subjective. Both are objective. "Objectivity," in Dewey's view, refers not to how things "really" are but to modes of operation, actual and possible.


The term "meaning," according to Dewey, has three different but related senses. As has been noted earlier, meaning is primarily a property of behavior, of the behavior which exhibits a plan of action. Secondarily, it is a property of things used and transformed in the course of that behavior. In carrying out inquiry, certain existent things are selected and used as data on the basis of which ideas or plans for the settlement of problematic situations are formulated and tested. The things selected become "meaningful" in virtue of their workability as means to achieve the proposed ends of inquiry. The third sense of meaning is defined as a set of operational habits previously built-in and automatically brought into play in carrying inquiry to completion. Abstract ideas (meanings), or what Dewey calls "generals" or "universals" or "essences," express sets of operational habits.

Dewey's treatment of general ideas, his third sense of meaning, constitutes an essential part of his theory of inquiry. He holds, as noted in the previous chapter, that modes of operation

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are the ground of generality of meanings. Meanings are generated in the process of our transactions with our surroundings. They are capable of being detached from the existential and factual contexts in which they originally appear and of being incorporated culminatively in habits, thus operating as guiding principles in the continuum of inquiry. They enable us to extend our understanding from one thing to another, from one situation to another.

In the interest of further clarity let us contrast Dewey's views with one of the more influential theories of generalization. According to this theory, general ideas or meanings arise when, in the comparison of a number of particulars, the elements or qualities they have in common are retained and all other points of difference are dropped out. When, for example, children arrive at the abstract meaning of man, says Locke, "They make nothing new; but only leave out of the complex idea they had of Peter and James, Mary and Jane, that which is peculiar to each, and retain only what is common to them all." Dewey criticizes this notion of generalization, saying that "it puts the cart before the horse, taking for granted the very thing that is to be accounted for."2h The children compare Peter and James, Mary and Jane, to get the general idea of man; they do not compare any of these people with dogs and horses. This means that they already know that Peter and James, Mary and Jane, are men. And generalization has already been effected when the

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2h *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, p. 269.
particulars are adjudged to be men. In other words, the comparison
is made between various numbers of a kind already assumed to have
meaning. The theory under consideration thus leaves the problem of
generalization just where it was.

The notion that ideas come into being by combining simple
qualities fails to explain general ideas or meanings. In fact, if
the empiricism of Locke is consistently developed, it leads, as
shown by Hume and Berkeley themselves, to the denial of any generality
of meanings. Dewey avoided the difficulties inherent in British
empiricism by rejecting the view that immediate sensory qualities
are cognitive in status. Accordingly, he denied that generalizations
are instituted by the comparison of the qualities which result in the
recognition of something common to them all. One has only to con­
sider, says Dewey, the way in which scientific categories are formed
to note that generalizations are executed by operations that deter­
mine traits that are not present to immediate perception. As he
states:

Scientific kinds are determined ... with extreme
disregard of immediate sensible qualities. The latter
are irrelevant and often obstructive in the institution
of extensive systems of inference and hence are not
employed to describe kinds.\textsuperscript{25}

The formation of a kind, say, of the electromagnetic, could not be
made by searching for "common" sensory qualities. This kind was
formed by employing certain modes of operation, noting their

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 250.
consequences and organizing the operational procedures that took place. Scientific kinds differ from the kinds generated in common sense inquiries because different modes of operation are employed, not because things are perceived differently in the two realms. This point will become clearer as we deal with Dewey's analysis of objects of knowledge.

Generalizations, Dewey maintains, are naturally effected as we perform "operations which determine the presence of modes of interactions having specified consequences." These generalizations are gradually funded in habits that later constitute the ground of inferences which carry us to new experiences. We are not aware usually of the habits which lead us to infer certain conclusions from certain premises. When the results of generalizations grounded in habits are reflected upon and made explicit by stating them in linguistic forms, they become rules of deliberate inference, logical canons, which then regulate and guide further operations of inquiry. Men did not wait for the rise of logical rules to engage in inquiry. The rules came into being as they reflected upon the habits of inference already built-in. Men establish rules because the latter control the habits of thought, making them explicit and orderly, and enable them to solve problems more intelligently. They function as "leading principles" of inquiry, just as legal rules regulate the relations and transactions of human beings with each other. Thus conceived, logical rules are never complete in them-
selves; they come after something and always function to promote the doing of something.

The chief alternative to Dewey's logical theory is the formulistic theory which holds that logical forms are self-sufficient and purely independent of empirical operations. Dewey's specific objection to the theory is that it fails to formulate the rationale of modern scientific method. Consider, he says, the fact that logical and mathematical devices are now being employed in the empirical sciences. Formal logicians cannot escape admitting that formal rules are capable of application in inquiry into empirical subject-matter and that they are integral to the procedure of scientific method. Their belief in some sort of relation of logic to scientific method is usually expressed by such phrases as "applied logic" or "logic and scientific method." But it is inconsistent to speak of such application when logic is defined in terms of forms independent of existential operations.

The basic question, therefore, is "not whether logical forms are applied, in the sense of being used, in inquiry into existential subject-matter, but whether they could be so used if they are purely formalistic." The formalistic theory, according to Dewey, breaks down at the fundamental point of application, for "application is a matter of existential operations executed upon existential materials."

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26 Ibid., p. 375.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 377.
Though Dewey rejects the formalistic theory, his theory of inquiry does not exclude the use of formal propositions. He says that logical forms are not in themselves a priori, but "they are operationally a priori with respect to further inquiry." The rules of logical inquiry grow out of empirical operations. They are instrumental to continued inquiry, just as the laws of business contract are rules regulating and promoting business transactions. The logical rules are capable, therefore, of being modified and reformulated. "Logic is a progressive discipline," says Dewey.30

2. Two Modes of Generalization. An adequate treatment of Dewey's theory of generalization must include a further discussion of the distinction he makes between generic (existential) and universal (non-existent, ideational) generalizations.31 "Generic generalization," according to Dewey, refers to the empirical procedure of determining characteristic traits which form a kind.


30 Ibid.

31 In his recent article, "Experiment and Necessity in Dewey's Philosophy," Morton White criticizes Dewey's distinction between generic and universal generalizations. White contends that, though Dewey rejects the sharp division between the analytic and the synthetic, he himself makes the same division when he formulates his distinction between generic and universal statements. This distinction, White states, "is not only founded on a distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, but it also leads Dewey to say, in effect, that there are analytic a posteriori statements." The writer agrees with White's criticism of the ambiguities inherent in Dewey's distinction between generic and universal statements. But he does not go into this problem here, for it raises many other issues which are irrelevant to his present concern. (See The Antioch Review, Fall, 1959).
The traits that describe kinds are operationally determined; that is, they are discriminated out of the total perceptual field and related to each other so as to function as evidences or signs in promoting and controlling extensive inference. We do things with and about, say, horses, and horses do things with and about us. Certain traits are noted in such doings and undergoings and these form the meaning of "horse." The traits thus generated become signs of what to expect in dealing with horses. Such a generalization is called "generic"; it is descriptive of existential traits operationally determined to describe kinds. "Universal generalization," on the other hand, is prescriptive of the traits an object (say, horse) should have if it is to be a horse. This type of generalization is expressed in the if-then form; for example, "if anything is horse, then it must have such and such traits." Universal terms are all abstract and non-existential in reference. They define "horseness"; they do not describe existential horses.

Generic generalization is effected as we perform operations in dealing with existent things, while universal generalization is an abstraction out of the operational habits previously established. To illustrate the difference between the two kinds of generalization, let us take, for instance, the proposition "All men are mortal." The proposition may be interpreted in two ways. In one interpretation, it means "All men have died and will die"—a generic generalization. It states the facts of life and death and their existential relation. In another interpretation, the proposition
means "If anything is human, then it is mortal"—a formal or universal generalization. The former describes the traits which must be observed in existential operations. The latter, on the other hand, does not describe existential traits as such. It is concerned with a necessary interrelation of the abstract traits of being human and being mortal. The universal generalization is, in other words, "a matter of definition"; it is valid, "if valid at all, by definition of a conception." Of definitions he says: "in a definition a single symbol having a total meaning is resolved into an interrelation of meanings," adding, in definition "conceptual meanings... are resolved into characters that are necessarily interrelated just because they are an analysis of a single conception."

Thus, a distinction has been made by Dewey between "truth" and "validity," though each is characterized by the verification procedure associated with it. Formal or universal propositions, according to him, have no truth-claim; they are either valid or invalid. For example, the syllogism "All satellites are made of green cheese; the moon is a satellite; therefore, the moon is made of green cheese" is formally correct. The conclusive statement that the moon is made of green cheese is valid, because it necessarily follows from its premises. The validity of a proposition is thus

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33 Ibid., p. 243.
related to its inner consistency or to its consistency with other propositions. The truth of a proposition, on the other hand, is related to experience. A proposition has a truth-claim only if stands up to the tests involved in satisfying the following conditions: (1) implied predictions, possible modes of operation to be employed in order that problematic situations may be resolved; (2) experiments carried out to test the predictions; (3) the verification of the predictions by the experiments. The category of truth-falsity is therefore applicable only to the experimental verification of propositions, whereas the validity-invalidity category has nothing to do with experiments. It relates specifically to the relations of universal propositions in discourse.

Though the two forms of generalization are thus distinguished, they are functionally correlative in the continuum of inquiry. "There is a continued to-and-fro movement between the set of existential propositions about data and the non-existential propositions about related conceptions." Existential generalizations consist of the complex of experimental operations which modify given antecedent objects of perception so as to obtain data which indicate and test proposed plans for the solution of problematic situations. The proposed modes of solution are hypothetically entertained and must be formulated in abstract if-then propositions. Dewey insists that "non-existential propositions, in the way of hypothetical

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Ibid., p. 427.
universals, are necessary in order to arrive at fully grounded conclusions in natural science." It is important to note here that the contents of such universal propositions must themselves be "determined by prior existential inquiries in such a way that the contents are capable of directing further operations of observation."

The if-then hypothetical-deductive reasoning thus occupies an intermediate place in the transition from doubt to warranted conclusion. Though Dewey identifies "logic" with the existential and experimental process of inquiry, he also emphasizes the role of analytic and deductive reasoning in the process. His fundamental concern is to integrate experimental method and deductive reasoning in such a way that they can be functionally correlative in the process of continued inquiry. In this attempt, as we have seen, Dewey began by criticizing the dualism of form and matter.

The ground upon which Dewey's criticism of the formalistic theory is based is found in his treatment of language and meaning. An adequate theory of inquiry, he says in the Preface to Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, must await the "development of a general theory of language in which form and matter are not separated." He maintains that the dualism of form and matter is grounded on a false conception of language. When the relation between linguistic forms and meanings is properly understood, the formalistic theory will be

36 Ibid., p. 381.
shown to be groundless. As the preceding discussion shows, Dewey’s theory of language and meaning has indeed made a difference in his theory of inquiry.

5. **Meanings and the Cognocenda.** We now come to another important aspect of Dewey’s theory of knowledge: his analysis of objects of knowledge (the cognocenda). Knowledge—experience, as we have already seen, has its prior stage—that of immediate qualitative experience. Immediate experiences are in themselves fragmentary, casual, unregulated by purpose. They may have esthetic qualities, but as such they are not objective contents of knowledge. The immediately experienced qualities set problems and provide materials with which inquiry works. Immediate qualities are assorted, controlled, and transformed into "things-with-meanings," just as crude ores are refined so as to produce metals. They undergo a change of character in virtue of the uses which are made of them with respect to the special concern of inquiry. When they are employed and organized in a logical order so as to be relevant to solving problems and to effecting warranted conclusions, they acquire distinctive meanings. The meanings thus resulting constitute objects of knowledge; "**Meaning** is the characteristic object of thought."^37

Known objects, Dewey maintains, thus arise as the consequences of controlled inquiry. They are not just the things perceived but are determined by operations of inquiry performed in the transition

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from doubt to warranted conclusions. As Dewey says: "Objects of
knowledge in their capacities of distinctive objects of knowledge
are determined by intelligence." A planet as known in astronomy
is, for instance, a very different thing from the speck of light
observed in direct experience. In Dewey's own illustration:

Suppose one of those persons of extraordinarily
keen vision who abound in the Grimm fairy tales were
in fact to see, sensibly to perceive, an object which
had all the qualities a physicist attributes to the atom.
He would surely see something. But would he see an atom in
the definite sense of seeing that which is an object of
physical science? I can find but one possible answer,
namely: "It depends. If he himself has had a scientific
training and if in sensibly perceiving this particular thing
he explicitly identifies it as having all the relational
properties required by the scientific theory of atomic
structure and with no properties incompatible with the
latter, the answer is Yes. But if he sees it merely as
another man of lesser power of vision sees a rock, the
answer is No." In other words, it is not just the thing
as perceived, but the things as and when it is placed in
an extensive ideational or theoretical context within which
it exercises a special office that constitute a distinctively
physical scientific object.

Objects of knowledge are the products of inquiry. That things are
known after they are inquired into is a tautology, says Dewey. "We
know whenever we do know; that is, whenever our inquiry leads to
conclusions which settle the problem out of which it grew. This
truism is the end of the whole matter—upon the condition that we
frame our theory of knowledge in accord with the pattern set by
experimental methods."

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38 Ibid., p. 30.
The problematic situations regulate, as well as evoke, inquiry. The patterns or types of inquiry are thus largely determined by the problematic situations out of which they grow. It is then reasonable to suppose that there will be as many kinds of the operations of inquiry as there are kinds of problematic situations. In principle, the operations dealing with different problems never repeat one another and do not determine the same consequences.

It follows that kinds of known objects vary according to the varied sets of the operations employed in inquiry which result in varied conclusions or consequences. The operations dealing with the problems in the community of common sense determine characteristic objects of common sense, whereas the distinctive operations executed in the matrix of scientific activities define scientific objects. H₂O is a proper object of chemical knowledge and quite different from the water of common use and enjoyment. Things are capable of being known in numerously differing ways. What is at issue in each instance are the operations uniquely performed in dealing with them.

Objects of knowledge thus express sets of operations and not kinds of independent external reality. The distinction that exists between physical and social and moral objects is "one of methods of operation not kinds of reality." Our knowledge of external things depends largely upon the means or methods for approaching them. To quote from Einstein: "Rather than considering a system

Ibid., p. 217.
which comprises only a radioactive atom (and its process of transformation), one considers a system which includes also the means for ascertaining the radioactive transformation...

Dewey's position may be better understood when stated in contrast with both realism and idealism. It is frankly realistic in assuming that natural existences, having their own brute quality and structure, are in no way constituted out of thought or any mental process. It is one thing, however, to assume such brute existences independent of judgments and quite another thing to know or to make judgments about them. Dewey does not call such existences "real" simply because so to speak of them is itself a matter of judgment. We cannot determine whether they are real or not without knowing or making judgments about them in some way or another. "The realities which we know, which we are sure of, are precisely those realities that have taken place in and through the procedures of knowing."

Dewey's view is idealistic, on the other hand, insofar as it holds that objects of knowledge are conceptual in character and determined by intelligence. The term "idealistic" is here used to designate a philosophical temper rather than to identify Dewey's position with that of idealism. Dewey rejects, of course, the idealist notion that known objects are purely mental constructs.

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Idealists, according to him, fail to note that meanings, objective contents of knowledge, are determined by existential transactions. In short, it is neither the knower nor the known but the "knower-known transaction" that defines objects of knowledge.

In summary, we may note that Dewey's theory of inquiry starts with a theory of meaning. It deals with the specific process of finding, specifying, and testing meanings. Knowledge, in this view is a special kind of meaning, denoting a system of warranted meanings generated in the activities of solving problems. This means that knowledge does not correspond to things as they are perceived but, instead, states meanings which warrantably signify the courses of action to be taken in dealing with things. Thus viewed, knowledge can never be absolute; its meanings and their warranted qualities are subject to change as the operations of inquiry advance.

Being a kind of meaning, knowledge is distinctively social in origin and function. It is through language, communication, therefore, that things and events become possessed of "meanings" which, when they are studied, specified, and tested, are classified as "knowledge." The objectivity of knowledge is then defined in terms of its communicability, not in terms of its correspondence to perceptions. Perceptions, taken in themselves, are logically neutral. They become known when they are translated into the relational structure of the language of a certain kind. The difference between science and common sense, Dewey says, "is a
difference of language." Science differs from common sense because of its advanced techniques of specifying, categorizing, and verifying meanings for the sake of prediction and control.

Dewey holds that knowledge is a specification in a wider relational context of meaning. It follows that knowledge is not something independent and self-sufficing. It is, rather, involved in the process by which a whole life of meaning is sustained and evolved. It is continuous with the whole behavioral process of man.

Finally, we discover that Dewey's theory of inquiry replaces the dichotomy between form and matter by the idea of continuity and, in doing so, bases his arguments on a theory of language in which form and meaning are not separated. Dewey's theory of language and meaning thus plays a decisive part in his treatment of inquiry.
CHAPTER V

LANGUAGE, BEHAVIOR, AND VALUATION

This chapter deals with Dewey's value theory—particularly, his views concerning the possibility of a scientific treatment of valuation-behavior. It will endeavor to show that Dewey's theory of language provides the logical conditions required for a scientific theory of valuation. Though Dewey does not always discuss explicitly the relation of language and valuation, his insistence on the role of language and communication in human behavior provides an important clue for the present study.

1. Introduction. The hypothesis that gives direction to Dewey's treatment of valuation is that the field in which the phenomena of valuation occur is behavioral; hence, the phenomena "must be treated in and by method appropriate to behavioral subject matter." Since it is Dewey's use of the words "behavior" and "behavioral" that makes this hypothesis distinctive, we shall begin by considering the meaning he gives to them. The words, he says, refer to the events of the transaction of organism and environment—namely, life-processes. The transactional life processes, of course, have an organic-physical aspect. They cannot be reduced, however, merely to physiological mechanisms.

1 John Dewey, "The Field of 'Value,'" Value: A Co-operative Inquiry, ed. by R. Lepley, p. 64.
The key to understanding human behavior is the fact of language. As we have noted throughout, language cannot arise without organic and physical conditions; but, it "cannot be reduced to them without making nonsense of all its characteristic traits." Language, being itself behavioral, originates in the activities of the organism as it seeks to maintain its life processes. And, as is obvious, linguistic behavior is continuous with organic processes. This is, however, an entirely different matter from reduction to merely physiological terms. The emergence of language transforms the whole mode of human behavior, making it unique and distinctive, so that any attempt to reduce it to something else is disastrous.

Certain methodologically significant conclusions follow from the hypothesis that the field of value is transactional-behavior. First, all transactional processes are essentially adjustive processes; hence, processes of selection-rejection, preferential-discriminatory processes, to which the value-field is limited, are included. This definition of the field of valuation includes three basic assumptions: (a) The processes of selection-rejection are those of a going concern. This is to say that they are carried on in view of an end, not in the metaphysical or the mentalistic sense of that term, but "in the sense in which end is equivalent to result, outcome, consequence—in short, is a strictly descriptive term."² (b) This transactional-behavioral approach rejects any theory that

treats the activity of valuation as something independent and self-sufficing. Valuation is a transactional phenomenon; it is involved in the process by which a whole life is sustained and evolved.

"Valuing" is not a special isolated type of act performed by a peculiar or unique agent, under conditions so unique that valuations and values can be understood in isolation from orders of fact not themselves of the 'value' kind.\(^3\) (c) The approach means, also, that valuations are spatial-temporal occurrences whose conditions and consequences are open to empirical observation and test.

Second, the projection of an end-in-view or future outcome constitutes an essential part of valuation-behavior and this fact, in turn, proves that valuation is essentially sign-activity. Things which are selected or rejected are often not present but merely signified. Without such reference to the absent (symbolic reference), human behavior is blind, purposeless, and no occasion exists for creative effort and struggle. The acts of judging values, in other words, are concerned with future possibilities, with things which should be brought into existence, and not merely with the already existing facts. They thus involve an inferential function; that is, they are mediated by signs and symbols. A behavioral theory of valuation will make extensive use, therefore, of the scientific study of sign-behavior.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 68.
Third, since valuation-behaviors are a kind of linguistic facts, they take place in social or interpersonal situations. Dewey's behavioral conception of language rules out the exclusively subjective or private realm of Being, the realm "that is directly open to observation only by one person, and by a special kind of knowing called 'introspection' or 'self-knowledge'—an order of Being which accordingly is 'inner' and 'private.'" Things which are wholly private and, therefore, incommunicable have to be left "in private seclusion"; they are not admissible in discussion. The phenomena of valuation may include "inner and private aspects" which are inaccessible to public inspection but, for that very reason, these aspects are irrelevant to any attempt to establish an objective theory of value. According to Dewey, valuations are communicated or shared activities. Language provides the conditions for the objective test and verification of value-propositions.

Fourth, since the selection-rejection processes always take in some-thing, which is selected or rejected, values that come into being in the processes are always of some particular things. Dewey says that evaluation is a judgment of the worth of things which enter as ends and means into the carrying on of the selection-rejection behavings. His behavioral hypothesis states, therefore, that value is not anything previously given, but is something to be given or gained in and through a behavioral process. Things

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become value-objects as they are taken as ends to be enjoyed or employed as means to procure this or that end held in view in a course of action. The word "value" thus designates a functional force that a thing possesses in promoting a course of selection-rejection. It does not denote something self-contained or substantial. It is "an adjectival word, naming that which is a trait, property, qualification of some thing."\(^5\)

Fifth, the processes of selection-rejection involve connective or relational operations; they take things not in themselves but always in relation with other happenings in a course of action. The phrase "in-themselves," Dewey says, "is always a sure sign of denial of connections, and hence is proof of an affirmation of an absolute. As long as this continues, discussion of valuings-values will remain in its present backward state as compared with the subjects in which 'scientific' advance has taken place because inquiry has abandoned search for anything 'in itself,' and has devoted itself instead to search for observable connections."\(^6\)

Dewey holds that evaluation is a kind of inquiry and, like scientific operation, establishes "meaningful relations" among things and events for the sake of guiding action. Scientific and evaluative inquiries differ, therefore, not in their method but in their classification and selection of predicted consequences.

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\(^6\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 67-70.
Finally, the adjustive life processes consist of a series of discord-harmony events, of struggles in which the organism is compelled to maintain its unison with the march of surrounding things. It is in such strugglings that the organism reveals its capacity to turn surrounding forces into means for its own conservation and to enhance these means through participation in new situations. The so-called "problem-solving" activity is essential to life-processes, particularly to the existence of valuation-behavior.

In what follows, we shall discuss these conclusions more in detail, with special reference to the basic assumptions we have found in Dewey's theory of language and meaning.

2. Action, Prediction, and Judgment. The processes of selection-rejection, Dewey says, "serve, from the amoeba to the highest form of primate, to maintain all life-processes as a going concern." They are the adjustive processes without which no living things can survive. Yet, while the processes are necessary, they are not sufficient conditions for the existence of evaluational behavior. No genuine valuation-behavior is found, for instance, in the case of subhuman animals. That this is so may be traced to the lack of one basic condition—namely, the selection-rejection processes in the animals "do not include express recognition of their result as the ground or reason for their being engaged in." 7

7 John Dewey, "The Field of 'Value,'" Value: A Co-operative Inquiry, pp. 57-68.
words, what distinguishes genuinely evaluational activities from the animal selection-rejection processes is that the former involve symbolic reference to the outcomes or consequences, thus making possible a deliberate choice among possible courses of action. "If the animals in question," says Dewey, "have an anticipation or foresight of the outcome and if they perform the caring-for behaviors so that they are colored and directed by the foresight, then, on the basis of the hypothesis advanced, they fall within the value-field proper. The selection-rejection processes become evaluational only if they include a predictive element or an element of symbolic pointing to future action, that is, if they are carried forward with intention or purpose. If a bird performs its nest-building behavior by what is called "pure instinct," it does not have to pass judgment on materials and operations with respect to their usefulness for an end. On the other hand, were the outcome, that is, the nest, contemplated as an object of desire, then there would be at least a consideration of the fitness and usefulness of materials and processes to attain the desired object. In the latter case, the selection-rejection behavior of the bird would be evaluational. The use of signs and symbols distinguishes the evaluational behavior from the animal selection-rejection mechanism.

We now arrive at consideration of one of the basic assumptions in Dewey's theory of value. It is that every evaluative judgment

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involves a prediction and its predictive nature is an important factor that accounts for its "de jure quality." Dewey distinguishes between de facto and de jure qualities rather carefully in The Quest for Certainty, where he contrasts "desired" with "desirable," "enjoyed" with "enjoyable," "admired" with "admirable," and so on. The first term of each pair serves to give a "mere report of an already existent fact." As Dewey puts it, "To say that something is enjoyed is to make a statement about a fact, something already in existence." The second term, on the other hand, is used to make a "judgment as to the importance and need of bringing a fact into existence; or, if it is already there, of sustaining it in existence." The former—direct finding of facts and qualities in existent situations—is not a judgment; and unless it becomes the basis of some further prediction, it is not cognitive. Only the latter—prediction (significant indication) of possible qualities which are to be disclosed in future experience—marks "a genuine practical judgment"; and it is "the only type of judgment that has to do with the direction of action."

Like knowing, judgment of value or evaluation is a judgment of what is to be done; that is, it concerns itself primarily with a


10 Ibid., p. 261.

11 Ibid.
course of action. Its purpose is not to describe something already in existence but to make a choice among possible courses of action. The judgment is never complete in itself, therefore. It is always made for the sake of determining "what ends are to-be-chosen, what lines of conduct are to-be-followed, what policies are to-be-adopted." To consider whether a thing is good and how good it is, Dewey says, "is to ask how it, as if acted upon, will operate in promoting a course of action." The judgment of value is "a claim on future action"; it implies a predictive or inferential function.

A judgment about what is to be desired and enjoyed is... a claim on future action; it possesses a de jure and not merely de facto quality... It is, in effect, a judgment that the thing _will do._ It involves a prediction; it contemplates a future in which the thing will continue to serve; it will do. It asserts a consequence that the thing will actively institute; it will do.13

In every case of action, except those of sheer instinct and complete hit-and-miss, there is always an anticipation of the outcome to be attained; and only when the outcome is thus foreseen as an object of desire, are the instrumental qualities of things brought into question. This symbolic pointing to future action, as C. I. Lewis says, "represents one of the most essential of cognitive capacities... the root of all practical wisdom."14 The genuinely empirical and

13 John Dewey, _The Quest for Certainty_, p. 263.
14 _An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation_, p. 365.
cognitive nature of evaluative judgment, however, has been obscured by the failure to acknowledge the predictive element involved.

3. Dewey's Criticism of the Emotive Theory of Value. There are varied opinions, of course, as to whether "value-propositions" are possible; that is, whether evaluative judgments represent a form of empirical cognition, so that they can be treated by methods appropriate to empirical subject matter. The Dewey-Russell debate on this issue is well known. The issue is a continuing one in the social sciences, as well as in philosophy. An inquiry into the controversy shows, however, that the disagreements among theorists are essentially based on their conception of value. Bertrand Russell, for instance, rejects the possibility of a scientific treatment of valuations on the ground that questions of value are "legitimately matters of feelings" and as such lie outside the domain of science which is concerned with asserting the facts involved and stating these facts in true propositions. He says: "Questions as to 'values'-that is to say, as to what is good or bad on its own account, independently of its effects—lie outside the domain of science, as the defenders of religion emphatically assert. I think that in this they are right, but I draw the further conclusion, which they do not draw, that questions as to 'values' lie wholly outside the domain of knowledge."\(^{15}\)

Ethical and moral judgements, according to Russell, appeal only to emotions or feelings and not to objective facts. Ethical sentences lack cognitive meaning and are not employed to inform but to express feelings, to persuade and influence people. This is a new version of Hume's famous saying that "Morality is more properly felt than judged of." The moral skepticism of Hume and Russell has been developed further by A. J. Ayer, whose view affirms that: "Sentences which simply express moral judgments do not say anything. They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth or falsehood... Aesthetic terms are used in exactly the same way as ethical terms." 16

Analytic philosophers, including Russell and Ayer, have for the most part emphasized the emotive aspects of value-expressions and concluded that they are non-cognitive in meaning and, as such, may not be reasoned about, since reasoning must appeal to evidence in support of either the truth or falsity of a statement. Questions of value are thus removed entirely from the realm of rational discourse. Value-expressions, Ayer holds, are merely ejaculations of feelings or emotions, so that they cannot be stated in propositional forms, that is, in sentences which affirm or deny. They are regarded as of the same nature as phenomena like crying, smiling, blushing, and the like, which admittedly say nothing. They do not state anything but merely evince feelings or sentiments of the

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speaker and evoke similar feelings or attitudes in the hearer. Indeed, ejaculatory phenomena or purely emotive expressions state nothing. But are they value-expressions?

The facts which Ayer refers to as value-expressions, like crying, smiling, and blushing, Dewey points out, are rather "facts of organic behavior and are not in any sense whatever value-expressions." The cry of a baby, for example, is merely an organic overflow of energy having no intent. Oftentimes it does attract the attention of the mother and evoke a response useful to the baby. But it is not yet a linguistic or expressive behavior. The baby does not anticipate any specific response from the mother as the outcome of his act, the cry. As the baby matures, however, he learns to perform his acts with the express recognition of the consequences to be attained. The cry becomes linguistic or expressive only if it is made "in order to evoke the activity and in order to experience the consequences of that activity." There is thus "a difference between the original cry—which may properly be called purely ejaculatory—and the cry made on purpose, that is, with the intent to evoke a response that will have certain consequences. The latter cry exists in the medium of language; it is a linguistic sign that not only says something but is intended to say, to convey, to tell."

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
The serious difficulty Dewey finds in the so-called emotive theory of value is that it has no theoretical ground, since the word "feelings" as introduced in the theoretical account is "unnecessary in report of what actually happens." Even though there are "feelings" of the sort Ayer mentions, they are, by description, inaccessible to communication. The terms which refer to the feelings, therefore, cannot be employed, even to persuade people and influence their attitudes, because they are incapable of conveying one's intention to others. Where such terms are used, there cannot be any communication and, in consequence, no intention can be serious and no persuasion can be successful. "If there are 'feelings' of the kind mentioned, there cannot be any assurance that any given word when used by two different persons even refers to the same thing, since the thing is not open to common observation and description." 20

In a community where the members had no words to communicate their moral beliefs, but only their sheer feelings, no moral standards or norms could be established—consequently, one conduct would be as right as another and one belief as correct as another. This is indeed "one of the strangest aberrations ever to visit the mind of man." 21

4. Language and Valuation. It will be noted that in criticizing the emotive theory of value Dewey's emphasis has been placed upon

20 Ibid., p. 10.

the fact that value-expressions exist through the medium of language and as such their meanings are communicable and open to public inspection. Linguistic expressions exist whenever a person makes sounds in order to evoke certain responses from other persons. And when the person makes sounds in that capacity, what he expresses is not his sheer feeling but his intent to bring about certain consequences. Such an intent always assumes an interpersonal or social relationship, for no one intends to say anything unless he expects participation from another person. Taken as linguistic facts, value-expressions are then "social or interpersonal phenomena"; that is, they "have to do with or are involved in the behavioral relations of persons to one another." The question now remains as to whether the contents of value-expressions, taken in their interpersonal context, are capable of being stated in propositions and of empirical observation and verification.

Dewey gives the following case to show how the linguistic signs that are employed in order to attain certain consequences provide material for propositions about observable facts:

Take, for example, the case of a person calling "Fire!" or "Help!" There can be no doubt of the intent to influence the conduct of others in order to bring about certain consequences capable of observation and of statement in propositions. The expressions, taken in their observable context, say something of a complex character. When analyzed, what is said is (1) that there exists a situation that will have obnoxious consequences; (2) that

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John Dewey, Theory of Valuation, p. 11.
the person uttering the expressions is unable to cope with the situation; and (3) that an improved situation is anticipated in case the assistance of others is obtained. All three of these matters are capable of being tested by empirical evidence, since they all refer to things that are observable.\textsuperscript{23}

Value-expressions, in short, are the expressions of intent—the expressions that are intended "to influence the conduct of others in order to bring about certain consequences." And, as is shown in the example above, the conditions under which the expressions are employed are open to empirical description. The contents and meanings of the expressions are thus capable of being stated in genuine propositions. What they mean or propose refers, as the above case illustrates, not only to an existing situation which has negative value but also to future conditions which are desirable and, hence, have positive value. Both existing and future conditions are describable in empirical terms. "Valuations exist in fact and are capable of empirical observation so that propositions about them are empirically verifiable. What individuals and groups hold dear or prize and the grounds upon which they prize them are capable, in principle, of ascertainment, no matter how great the practical difficulties in the way."\textsuperscript{24}

Dewey's conception of language thus provides the ultimate ground upon which he rejects the notion of that "subjective or private realm of meaning" which is inaccessible to public observation, as

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\item\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 12.
\item\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 58.
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well as the view that value-expressions possess emotive meanings which are experienced only by one person. Meanings are public and objective in nature. For they come into being through the medium of language, and language implies two selves in a communal undertaking. Language is something learned, and learned under public or social conditions. Thoughts and values arise in the process of learning language. Language, to repeat, is not something we externally apply in order to express inner thoughts and values. On the contrary, it is by learning language, by participating in communication, that we learn the meanings of things, the meanings which, when they are studied and specified, are called "thoughts" or "values."

Valuations represent operations of meaning which concern themselves with the on-going processes of selection-rejection. They exist through the medium of language. Their conditions and consequences are therefore subject, in principle, if not in practice, to public investigation and verification. Thus viewed, the statements of value must appeal to objective facts in support of their truth or falsity. The same method of inquiry can be employed in both the factual and evaluational fields. And if this is the case, then the facts of value are no longer merely bias-phenomena which are beyond scientific control. This is not to say, however, that the evaluative judgments are identical with scientific ones. The former,
according to Dewey, differ (and do so basically) from the latter "with regard to selection and classification of the consequences predicted." There is no difference, however, in the method employed in reaching each.

5. Value-Judgments Imply Means-Consequence Connections. For Dewey, then, there is nothing inherent in the nature of valuations as subject-matter that precludes the application of the method which is employed in scientific inquiry. The scientific procedure of hypothesis-prediction, Dewey holds, can be and should be followed in deciding what ends are to be chosen so as to bring about further goods and in providing means to achieve whatever ends we may entertain. Let us note here that Dewey does not use the word "scientific" in a narrow technological sense but uses it to mean any attitude of inquiry in the search for "the relations between changes which enable us to connect things as antecedents and consequences."

Scientific inquiries, in other words, imply "relational operations," the operations that establish casual connections between things in ways which become grounds for prediction and control.

In his analysis of language, Dewey insists, it will be recalled, that this relational or connective function is the *sine qua non* of man's instrumental power in controlling nature. Language itself is a complex system of connected meanings and symbols. Symbols are related to each other in a system of language and they are further related to existences. Human thought consists of inter-
related meanings. As was noted in the previous chapter, knowledge is also irreducibly relational. Charles Morris states that "the greatest objectivity and community of knowledge is found precisely in those fields where emphasis upon relational structure is the greatest." All these considerations point to one important fact—namely, that what is most distinctive of man is his relational capacity. That Dewey emphasizes the quality of scientific intelligence means, therefore, that he is concerned primarily with liberating and expanding the relational capacity of man. The supreme value of science lies in its method and technique in discovering connections among events. As Dewey says, scientific progress has taken place because inquiry has devoted itself to search for observable connections.

Now Dewey believes that connective operations are also involved in judgments of value. The judgements have to do with action and as such always relate means to consequences. As will be discussed, Dewey does not call mere preferences or immediate enjoyments "values" but, instead, holds that things are values only when they are related to certain desirable consequences. When we evaluate things, we always think of their possible consequences and judge their values in terms of their instrumentalities in satisfying the conditions under which desired ends may be attained. Take, for instance, the case of a person who wants to buy a car and tries to judge the value of possessing it. He has, of course, many things in mind which might happen to him if he gets the car. One thing may be that the car

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will bring him convenience for attending school from his distant home. Or he may be interested in owning a car mainly because it influences his social prestige. Whatever ends he may have in mind, the point is that his evaluation is always made in terms of means-consequence or if-then connection. If he buys a car, then such and such things will happen in consequence. He likes some consequences and dislikes others. The value of buying a car is then judged by its instrumentality in achieving desired ends.

Judgments of value thus involve connective if-then or means-consequence operations. This means, according to Dewey, that scientific method of inquiry is applicable in the field of value. It means, also, that judgments of value represent a form of empirical cognition and are not merely matters of feeling. Since this is a crucial point in Dewey's theory of value, we may now proceed to a further discussion of his conception of value so that his insistence on the application of scientific method may be better understood.

6. Value and Immediate Enjoyment. As usual, Dewey is interested in the genesis and growth of evaluational activities. The activities, he says, grow out of and are continuous with organic selection-rejection mechanism, without being reducible to the latter from which they emerge. Organic energies and tendencies, in their transactions with the surrounding forces, provide raw materials out of which refined methods of connective thought and judgment develop. Language is the natural bridge that joins the gap between the world of organic-
physical existences and that of meanings and thoughts. Being originally a biological existence, human nature has mechanisms, of course. Dewey maintains, however, that operations of meaning begin to arise when sheer mechanism fails to solve the more complex problems of human existence.

In the case of subhuman animals, the processes of selection-rejection are instinctive and mechanistic. They are not guided by meanings and, hence, do not come under the category of value. Though human preferential behavior also includes mechanistic processes, genuine evaluational activities take place when the processes are confronted with difficulties and when there arises the need for making a choice among possible courses of moving forward. That is to say, the activities are evaluational simply because they are not mechanistic or routine. They are always carried on, as noted at the outset of this chapter, with significant recognition of the consequences to be attained and with a critical appraisal of things in terms of their functional qualities in attaining the consequences. This fact, according to Dewey, proves that there is present a cognitive factor—a factor of inquiry—whenever there is evaluation or appraisal.

In the naturalist camp, the question has been raised as to whether intrinsic qualities or experiences, such as are "had" in desiring, enjoying, satisfying, liking, and so on, are by themselves sufficient conditions for the existence of values. Some naturalists
regard them as basic or primary values. Since immediate qualities are experienced only by one person and are thus incommunicable, they conclude that values are primarily subjective and emotive. But, as the foregoing discussion indicates, it is an essential part of Dewey's view that immediate experiences of enjoyment or satisfaction become values only as the result of critical judgment in which the qualities are examined in terms of their conditions and consequences. Values cannot exist without being subjected to critical appraisal or judgment.

Without the intervention of thought, enjoyments are not values but problematic goods, becoming values when they re-issue in a changed form from intelligent behavior. The fundamental trouble with the current empirical theory of values is that it merely formulates and justifies the socially prevailing habits of regarding enjoyments as they are actually experienced as values in and of themselves. It completely sidesteps the question of regulation of these enjoyments. This issue involves nothing less than the problem of the directed recreation of economic, political and religious institutions.26

There is no knowledge without perception; but objects perceived are known only when they are determined as consequences of connective operations. There is no value except where there is satisfaction, but there have to be certain operations fulfilled to transform a satisfaction into a value.27

Judgments about values are judgments about the conditions and the results of experienced objects; judgments about that which should regulate the formation of our desires, affections and enjoyments. For whatever decides their formation will determine the main course of our conduct, personal and social.28

27 Ibid., p. 268.
28 Ibid., p. 265.
Dewey goes even so far to claim that "as far as non-cognitive, extra-cognitive, factors enter into the subject-matter or content of sentences purporting to be legitimately ethical, those sentences are by just that much deprived of the properties sentences should have in order to be genuinely ethical." 29

Immediate enjoyments involve no comparative-connective judgments. We enjoy foods which taste good and there is no explanation of why we should enjoy what tastes good. The writer prefers rice, whereas his American friend likes bread, and that is the end of the matter. The immediate enjoyments that the two persons get from the foods they prefer cannot be compared in terms of good or bad. As Boyd H. Bode states: "An argument between two such persons as to the relative values of such preferences would seem as fruitless as a discussion between an elephant and tiger as to the comparative merits of vegetarianism and a meat diet." 30 Such an intrinsic or immediate appreciation is strictly a matter of preference or taste and, hence, no scientific verification is possible. No cognitive factor is involved in such a taste.

Evaluation, on the other hand, implies comparative-connective judgment. The judgment is always concerned with "possibilities" and not with "immediacies." We can ask, for instance, which of these foods, rice and bread, is more nutritious? In this question, we

are concerned with the possible effects these foods may have upon our physical health. It is scientifically possible to examine the nutritive qualities of the foods in connection with physiological mechanisms. The qualities are then judged by their instrumentalities in improving the conditions of physical health. Another good example may be the case of a medical doctor who knows what happens to his patient's health as the result of taking certain medicines. His judgments in his recommendation of one medicine rather than another can be scientifically verified by testing their consequences. It is such judgments of means-consequence connections, not the immediate enjoyments of things, that define values.

7. Interest, Desire, and Value. An evaluative inquiry, as we have seen, takes place when there appears a situation of crisis or conflict in a course of action. Its function is specific. It is to transform the situation into an ordered and determinate one. This postulate of the thought-evoking situation is an essential element in Dewey's theory of evaluative judgment. Evaluation activity, in Dewey's theoretical account, has as its prior stage the situation in which things are simply enjoyed, liked, prized, held dear, loved, and so on. The prior stage is "directly and immediately qualitative." It involves no judgmental operation. It evokes desires and interests, stimulating inquiries, however, only when it becomes problematic in its immediate quality, because of conflicting, disordered qualities. Many theorists, according to Dewey, fail to distinguish evaluative judgments from the qualities experienced in immediate enjoyment or
satisfaction and are unable to relate the former to the latter because of their "failure to make an empirical investigation of the actual conditions under which desires and interests arise and function, and in which end-objects, ends-in-view, acquire their actual contents." But what, it may be asked, is the relation of desire to evaluation? Desires arise, according to Dewey, when some obstacles or troubles appear in an existing situation. This seems quite obvious, of course. The desire for food arises only when we are hungry; we seek water because we are thirsty, and so on. When life-activity goes completely smoothly, desires do not arise. And where there is no desire, "there is no occasion to project ends-in-view... no need for effort and struggle." But life is not a smooth process. We live in a series of discord-harmony events, so that desires arise at all moments of life, urging us to move toward a better future. "Desire is the forward urge of living creatures. When the push and drive of life meets no obstacle, there is nothing which we call desire. There is just life-activity. But obstructions present themselves, and activity is disppressed and divided. Desire is the outcome. It is activity surging forward to break through what dams it up." 

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Desire, then, is an indispensable aspect of evaluation. The lack of it means, simply, that there exists no need to modify an existing situation, to attempt to bring a better situation into existence. But desiring is not by itself a sufficient condition of evaluation. Desire without thought is unstable and often destructive. Desires arouse evaluative inquiries and even determine their directions. The final authority that determines the value-properties of things is not, however, desires themselves but judgments or thoughts whose role is to regulate desires and their objects in terms of their consequences. Desires themselves provide no means to attain their objects. They end in mere wishes, therefore, without the aid of thought, that is, without intelligent consideration of means-end connections.

Evaluation, it must be stressed, is a reflective activity that takes place with the emergence of desire. It controls "the conditions and causes, the workings and consequences of the greatest possible variety of desires and combinations of desire." "Intelligence," Dewey says, "converts desire into plans, systematic plans based on assembling facts, reporting events as they happen, keeping tab on them and analyzing them." The products of such intelligent control of desires are called "values."

Dewey's conception of interest is also essential to his theory of evaluation. Desire and interest are in fact inseparable causal conditions of judgments of value. The word "interest," as Dewey

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Ibid., p. 255.
puts it, means, etymologically, "what is between—that which connects two things otherwise distant." Interest, in short, is the natural bond that connects the present and the future, the achieved and the desirable. It relates means and ends. Interest reveals an active concern for the results which are wanted or desired. This is to say, then, that interest should not be thought of as in opposition to effort. It expresses, rather, the "need for effort." It is, indeed, an indispensable condition for the existence of effort. Where interest is lacking, as all in education should know, there is no need for striving, nor is there an occasion for an anticipation or foresight of outcomes to be attained.

Though an evaluative inquiry arises only because of interest, the latter is not by itself a sufficient condition for the existence of value. Theories which, like E. Perry's, identify values with any objects of interest, according to Dewey, are based on misconception of the nature of interest. Objects of interest, as well as of desire, are candidates for value-status, becoming values only when the qualities are tested by their actual consequences. Values are always dependent upon judgments. There can be no values which do not have their grounding in reflective thought.

What is implicit in all these considerations is Dewey's emphasis on the relational or connective intelligence of man which is grounded in his theory of language and meaning, and which has been carried

Democracy and Education, p. 1149.
throughout this dissertation. Evaluational activities take place through the medium of language. Consequently, interests and desires undergo a change of character as they are translated into the relational structures of language and thought. They are put into moral and intellectual uses by means of communication. Values are generated in the process of such transformation. We are thus brought back to the point stressed earlier in this chapter—namely, values occur under observable conditions and have objective consequences. Accordingly, they are subject to scientific consideration. The scientific study of socio-cultural elements which form the scene or situation in which valuation-activity takes place is, for instance, essential to regulating the conditions of moral attitudes and beliefs.

We may add, in conclusion, that Dewey's insistence on the communicability of values and the operation of intelligence in evaluational behavior has significant bearings upon educational theory and practice. For no deliberate and effective teaching of values can be assumed where the emphasis is lacking. Teaching assumes communication. It concerns itself with the growth of intelligence and moral sensitivity. Values must be communicable and involve cognitive elements if they are to enter the teaching-learning situation. The denial of this assumption means the denial of the possibility of teaching in this area of human experience, and this would be destructive to human culture. All of this confirms, of course, the major thesis of this study—namely, the central place occupied by language in Dewey's philosophy.
CHAPTER VI

SOME EDUCATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have been devoted to clarifying those aspects of Dewey's theory of language and meaning which are basic to the general philosophic distinctions he has made, and to understanding their bearings on two of Dewey's most known theories, those of inquiry and valuation. It is the purpose of this concluding chapter to interpret the conclusions previously reached as they bear upon Dewey's educational thought. We are unable, of course, to cover all aspects of his theory of education in this short chapter. Though there is a need for an extensive study of the educational implications of the previous findings, this chapter cannot do more than attempt to show how Dewey's theory of language and meaning makes a difference in his educational views and why it may be appropriate to view his educational thought along the lines we have followed. For this particular purpose what follows will consider some of the concepts and ideas which are central in Dewey's educational philosophy, exploring them in the light of the preceding discussions.

1. Experience and Education. Dewey states his "technical definition of education" as follows: "It is that reconstruction or recorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct subsequent experience." He has also said that the philosophy he advocates "is, to paraphrase

1 John Dewey, Democracy and Education, pp. 89-90.
the saying of Lincoln about democracy, one of education of, by, and for experience. The distinctive claims that these statements imply can be understood only when we grasp the meaning Dewey gives to the word "experience." His concept of experience is one of the most essential ideas in Dewey's philosophical and educational thinking.

Dewey began his own reconstruction of philosophy and education, as was appropriate in terms of his definition of education, by a critical evaluation of the older notion of experience. According to the traditional view, experience is "primarily a knowledge-affair." Dewey rejected this view, holding instead that experience is "an affair of the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment." He states:

The organism acts in accordance with its own structure, simple or complex, upon its surroundings. As a consequence the changes produced in the environment react upon the organism and its activities. The living being undergoes, suffers, the consequences of its own behavior. This close connection between doing and suffering or undergoing forms what we call experience.3

The transactions of the living being and its surroundings are the primary fact, the basic category of experience. The experiential world is much wider than that of knowledge. For Dewey knowing itself is experience, a particular kind of experience; it arises because a human being, engaged in some other kinds of activity,

2 John Dewey, Experience and Education, p. 19.
3 John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, p. 83.
encounters problems he needs to solve. "Knowledge," in this view, "is relegated to a derived position, secondary in origin, even if its importance, when once it is established, is overshadowing." 

The fact of language, according to Dewey, sufficiently refutes the orthodox view of knowledge, as well as of experience. It was held formerly that experience consisted of sense-impressions, separately and passively received. The received sense-impressions were thought to be formed, through laws of retention and association, into images and conceptions and it was the latter that constituted human knowledge. But this view fails, as we have seen, to explain the generalizing power which is distinctive of language and mind. A mere collection of particular sense-data, as shown by Hume and Berkeley, can never lead to general ideas. Secondly, in this view, the mind becomes "wholly passive and acquiescent in knowing," whereas, as was noted previously, it consists for Dewey of meanings whose function is to guide action, forecasting the consequences the organism may undergo. Mind is an active planning and guiding factor within experience and not a mere recorder of sense-impressions. The human brain, says Langer,

... is not merely a great transmitter, a super-switch-board; it is better linked to a great transformer. The current of experience that passes through it undergoes a change of character, not through the agency of the sense by which the perception entered, but by virtue of a primary use which is made of it immediately; it is sucked into the stream of symbols which constitutes a human mind.5

4 Ibid.

5 Philosophy in a New Key, pp. 33-34.
Thirdly, the older view makes the fact of communication and "shared experience" purely mystical, because it conceives of experience in an atomistic or particularistic sense and ignores the social or communal basis of experience. It has been repeatedly emphasized that language is not something man uses to communicate the images or ideas he already had. It is communication, the establishment of shared or transactional activities, in virtue of which meanings and ideas come into being. Experiences grow out of such communal relationships and are not isolated, particular phenomena.

Finally, the old laws of retention and association cannot do justice to the principles of continuity and unification inherent in experience. This failure led Kant and other rationalists to postulate the a priori categories of unification, the categories which were thought to be imposed on experience ab extra. But this postulate is fallacious; it reverses the fact that linguistic forms grow in and through experience, guiding the latter in a continuous and ordered way. These criticisms of the older view of experience and knowledge provides a general picture of Dewey's view.

Experience, according to Dewey, consists of the transactions of doing and undergoing. The transactions in which human being engage are not merely physical and direct; they are mediated by meanings and, thus, involve the operations of language. The occurrences of doing and undergoing would be disconnected, perishing as they happen, were they not preserved in meanings. We perform
certain acts. We then undergo certain consequences. We institute connections between these actings and undergoings, and the connections are culminating funded in our habits of action. In this way, the doing–undergoing operations are gradually classed into kinds or transformed into general rules of behavior, that is, meanings. We can never learn particular things in themselves, for without being classified, says Dewey, particular things and events cannot be characterized and identified. "Learning from experience" involves this generalizing or categorizing operation; in other words, it involves language in its generic sense. "Learning, in the proper sense," Dewey says, "is not learning things, but the meanings of things, and this process involves the use of signs, or language in its generic sense." 6

Experience and meaning are thus inseparable in Dewey's thought. To experience things is to add meanings to them so that they may become signs of future experience, of what is to be done. Experiences are continuously preserved and carried or transferred into new situations by means of signs and symbols. They are at the same time reconstructed or reorganized so as to yield further meanings and to increase power of inference and imagination. The result of such experiences is the capacity for further experience. This process Dewey calls "education." In his view, education is then concerned with the growth of experience in richness of meaning, not merely

6 John Dewey, How We Think, p. 236.
with knowledge as previously viewed by dualistic conceptions. It will be remembered that the realm of meaning is wider than that of knowledge and truth. "Poetic meanings, moral meanings, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant." 7

Education should deal with this wider realm of meanings and not be identified with cramming knowledge and information into the minds of children. This view in no way minimizes the importance of knowledge in education, however, as some critics of Dewey suggest. To Dewey knowledge is "infinitely important." His point of emphasis is simply that the educational significance of knowledge can be realized properly only if we have an adequate understanding of its origin and role in experience and of its relation to other realms of meaning.

In this connection there are two mutually contradictory criticisms of Dewey's educational view. One holds that Dewey overemphasizes the role of intelligence and scientific method and thus ignores other aspects of human significance. The other accuses Dewey of minimizing intellectual efforts in schooling. Dewey's writings have often misled his critics, as these criticisms suggest. His consistent emphasis is that meanings are contextual occurrences and should be studied in terms of their operations in the differing contexts of human concern. Literature, art, religion, and science

represent different systems of meaning; they differ from each other because of their unique interests and concerns and because of their distinctive roles in serving the various purposes of human life. The differing emphases (esthetic, moral, intellectual, and so on) must be considered, therefore, in teaching these subject-matters in schools. And it is this truism which is implied in Dewey's "contextual emphasis." He does not minimize intellectual effort, nor does he ignore the qualities of esthetic and moral experiences.

Experience is more than a knowledge-affair and so is education. Yet this view is in no sense incompatible with the claim that the central aim of education should be the development of man's power of thought and intelligence. This aim has been Dewey's fundamental concern in his considerations of the educational undertaking. Dewey intends no quarrel with those who stress the significant role of knowledge in schooling. But knowledge, if it is to be important in the life of the student, should be taught properly; and a proper teaching of knowledge must await an adequate theory of the learning process. Learning is the way of coming at knowledge. But how do we come to know? What is knowledge? How is it developed? And knowledge for what? These are the questions we have to answer in some way or another if we are concerned with teaching knowledge. Dewey's theory of learning attempts to answer these basic questions and in no way supports the claim of certain critics that he minimizes the value of knowledge.
Dewey rejects any theory that treats knowledge as something cut off from the experiential realm and views it as capable of being taught in isolation. Knowledge, according to him, is a specification in a wider realm of meaning, it is continuous with the latter. It is thus involved in the process by which a whole life is sustained and evolved. Knowledge is developed and advanced, therefore, not for its own sake or in itself but because of what it does in promoting the life-process. Its educational value is then determined by its instrumentality in the organization of impulse and feeling, the control of action, and the enrichment and liberation of meanings. Dewey's educational theory, in short, emphasizes the understanding of the nature and function of knowledge, of its place in the wider context of human concerns, and of how schools can develop the ability to know and think, without disregarding, at the same time, other factors which not only influence thought but contribute particularly to the growth of esthetic and moral sensibility. Moreover, for those whose special interests emerge in these terms, knowledge-getting as a process may become as a directive an aim as any other aim to which knowledge is primarily instrumental.

2. **Language and the Training of Thought.** Dewey's conception of language introduces an important problem in education which seems often to have been ignored; that is, language plays a decisive part in categorizing experience, in the learning process, and in forming ideas and conceptions. The child learns early the language of his culture and, in this process, he learns attitudes toward objects,
persons, and events, as well as how these objects, persons, and events are named. To learn to call things by their names is the first important step in the child's intellectual growth. The process of learning language involves such activities as discrimination, specification, ordering, and identification. These activities Dewey calls "knowing." The child thus comes to know through the medium of language. Through language, experiences otherwise disconnected and fragmentary are categorized and transformed into ordered forms of thought. Systematic reflection, Dewey says, becomes possible in virtue of consecutiveness of language. Learning language, therefore, is much more than an exercise in memorizing items presented by a vocabulary list.

Language also advances the esthetic enhancement of life. Human emotions and feelings are enhanced and enriched in meaning as they undergo symbolic transformation. Art and poetry come into being through the medium of language. Language not only advances the enrichment of the esthetic life of man, it also brings his moral consciousness into being. The child participates in the give-and-take communication of a shared life and, as a result, comes to discriminate his "self" from those of others, realizing his unique role and responsibility in relation to them. He thus develops social and moral consciousness by means of language.

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The child does not learn to use language merely to express the thoughts and ideas he already possesses. On the contrary, it is by using language that he develops the capacity to respond to the meanings of things and becomes capable of knowing and of valuing. The modes of his behavior, the ways of his thinking and evaluation, and thus largely determined by the pattern of linguistic habits which he acquires in his particularized culture. As Dewey says,

"The chief intellectual classifications that constitute the working capital of thought have been built up for us by our mother tongue. Our very lack of explicit consciousness, when using language, that we are then employing the intellectual systematizations of the race shows how thoroughly accustomed we have become to its logical distinctions and groupings."  

The language habits of a community predispose individuals to certain ways of interpretation, selection, and analysis. Language and thought are inseparable. And it is this fact that makes language of utmost importance in education.

These considerations lead Dewey to emphasize, among other things, the teaching of language in connection with the training of thought. Successful teaching, he says, "requires (a) enlarging the pupils vocabulary, (b) rendering its terms more precise and accurate, and (c) forming the habits of consecutive discourse." All these aspects of teaching language are considered and stressed because of their effects upon the development of thought. To enlarge the pupil's vocabulary is to widen the fund of his meanings and concepts,

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9 Ibid., p. 235. (Italics in original)
10 Ibid., p. 240.
to extend the realm of his understanding, and to deepen his thought. The precise and accurate use of language increases the power of specifying and clarifying differences in meaning. The clarity and accuracy of meaning is essential to clear thinking. Dewey maintains, also, that habits of consecutive discourse must be formed in order to promote consistent and systematic thought. "The habits of sporadic and fragmentary discourse," he says, "have a disintegrating intellectual influence."\footnote{Ibid., pp. 245-46.} This point assumes especial significance today in view of the many "objective" testing instruments used by teachers which relieve the student of the necessity of using complete sentences to express his ideas.

We must conclude, then, that the teaching of language is of central importance. Dewey's educational theory emphasizes the value of thinking and intelligence and, in consequence, equally stresses the significance of teaching language. Dewey has insisted that reflective thought owes its origin and growth to language, yet this aspect of his educational view seems to have been ignored by educators. We even find some critics who accuse him of being responsible for a lessoned emphasis on teaching languages as subject-matter in schools. Dewey has rejected, of course, the way languages (including classic languages) have been taught in traditional schools, believing as he did that the sheer memorization of words which was encouraged in
traditional schools made no difference in the pupil's thought and conduct. He denied, in other words, the educative value of sheer verbalism, not the teaching language itself. Rich cultural and historical meanings are available, under proper conditions of teaching, in classical languages; they constitute an important part of our language and thought. There is no reason, therefore, why Dewey should reject the values classical languages may transmit. His point of emphasis is simply that languages (classical or foreign) should be so taught as should everything else, that the meanings and thoughts they are capable of conveying may be utilized for the growth of our present culture and thought.

3. Meaning and the Nature of Mind. Dewey's theory of language has also profoundly conditioned his conception of mind, a fact that warrants specific mention here. It bears directly upon his educational thought. As was noted in Chapter II, Dewey defines mind as the whole system of meanings, as these are embodied in the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment. Thus, mind, as we have seen, arises in and because of language or communication and not the other way around. "'Mind' is an added property assumed by a feeling creature, when it reaches that organized interaction with other living creatures which is language, communication."¹² Dewey reached this premise as he found the influential theories of mind of his day inadequate. Thus, he rejected

the ontological dualism which regarded mind as a separate entity, 
existing on its own account and possessing a mysterious power that 
enabled it to experience nature. This dualistic view, according to 
Dewey, commits a "category-mistake" or, to state it differently, 
puts the cart before the horse. It describes mind as something the 
contents of which may be expressed via language, instead of viewing 
language as the casual condition of mind. Dewey states:

That language is something learned, and learned under 
social or public conditions, hardly needs argument. If we 
eliminate the influence exerted by traditional doctrines 
owning their present currency to the force of tradition 
rather than to scientifically ascertained facts, we shall, 
I believe, have no difficulty in accepting the view that 
instead of there first being 'thoughts' which are private 
and which become public by being clothed externally in 
language, it is by language, by communication, that events 
otherwise dumb become possessed of 'meanings' which, when 
they are studied in a cut-off way, are called 'thoughts.'

Dewey's definition of mind in terms of language and meaning 
also avoids the error of that mechanistic behaviorism which reduces 
human mentality to non-symbolic or non-mental stuff. Such reduction, 
as H. Gordon Hullfish points out in his study of Thorndike's 
behavioral theory, makes the fact of meaning and language un-
intelligible and, consequently, destroys all the characteristic 
features of what we call "mind" or "mental function." Mind arises 
only at the level of communication or symbolic behavior. It is 
continuous with non-symbolic events but not reducible to them.


14 See Aspects of Thorndike's Psychology in Their Relation to 
Educational Theory and Practice. Columbus, Ohio, The Ohio State 
University Press, 1926.
Following William James, Dewey introduced the category of function to replace that of entity or substance. It was James, who, before Dewey, rejected the existence of consciousness of an entity and held rather that consciousness stands for function. There is, he says, "no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts are made." But, he continues, "I mean only to deny that the word (consciousness) stands for an entity, but insist most emphatically that it does stand for function." Dewey developed James' idea of "mind as function," putting more emphasis, however, on "symbolic function" or operation of meaning than James did. As Charles Morris states: "The definition of mind in terms of the symbolic functioning of events is given a decisive formulation by John Dewey."  

According to Dewey, mind is a natural function that symbolizes the future in such a way as to stimulate and guide present behavior. It appears in the ongoing activity of the organism when future consequences are anticipated and thus become controlling factors in the present planning and ordering of activities. Mind denotes a whole system of meanings and meanings relate to behavior. Things are said to have meanings when they become signs of what may be done with them and of how one may behave in reference to them. Meanings

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15 Radical Empiricism and Pluralistic Universe, p. 3. 
16 Ibid. 
17 Six Theories of Mind, p. 290.
are described as "the promise of things hoped for, the symbol of things not seen." They signify, therefore, that understanding of the functioning of events which makes significant prediction and control possible. Mind is simply the presence and operation of such meanings. Thus conceived, mind becomes an active pursuit and control of future possibilities or ends. As Brand Blanshard well puts it, "Whenever mind is present, there the pursuit of ends is present. Whenever that pursuit is wholly absent, mind is absent. And when mind is present, it is present in the degree to which ends are in control." 18

Mind then grows as the realm of communication expands and as meanings are enriched and liberated. The growth of mind means the increase of ability to predict and control future possibilities. It means the development of a creative and reflective attitude, which should be a central educational concern. Dewey's theory of mind recommends the kind of education that provides opportunity for learners to engage in activities which require the exercise of this complete act of creative and reflective thought. There is nothing more absurd than to hold that Dewey encourages mere physical activity in schools. It should be clear, from our preceding discussions, that his emphasis falls upon activity which finds and tests meanings, activity in which moral and intellectual pursuits are of utmost importance. "The pupil must learn what has meaning, what enlarges

his horizon, instead of mere trivialities. He must be acquainted with truths..."19

Dewey insists, furthermore, that the educational treatment of mind must refer to the whole system of operational meanings which arise and grow in the differing contexts of human concern and inquiry. Meanings are contextual phenomena. Their operation and growth are therefore to be observed not in isolation but in connections of one with the other and with things and events or, to state it differently, in the intricate context of their social conditions and consequences. Again, meanings are distinctively instrumental and experimental in nature; they are not finished and static products that need only to be transmitted, neither controlling future experience nor being reconstructed within it. Already acquired meanings and truths are instrumental to the development of further new meanings. Their prime significance lies in the uses they are put to in the continuing reconstruction of human growth; and this, it should be noted, is an educative use.

4. Communication, Democracy, and Freedom. Mind arises, therefore, within communication; with "the establishment of co-operation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership."20 Mind is the functioning of signs and symbols. Such signs and symbols


20 Experience and Nature, p. 179.
emerge only in the give-and-take of a social process. The individual mind, as well as self, is an emergent character at the level of social or shared behavior. The subjective or private life of mind is simply an internalization of the objective communication process. Mind, in other words, may be described as a way of co-operative and participative behavior. This assumption of social mind and self provides the ground upon which Dewey's basic social concepts, such as community, democracy, freedom, and education, are to be understood.

In Dewey's view, things which are distinctively human are learned; and they are learned through communication, or in the process in which they become common properties. Human beings join in behavior in virtue of their natural structure. When communication, a new kind of action, intervenes in their natural association, the results of what they do together are transformed into shared meaningful ways of behavior, thus becoming signs of co-operative interests and purposes. By means of such transformation, the merely organic association becomes a genuine community of mutual understandings, "one of meanings which are appreciated and mutually referred by each to every other on the part of those engaged in combined action."21 The members of a community develop their individual distinctions as they play their unique roles and establish their unique ways of participation in the activities which are shared and communicated. An individual, isolated from the context of such communal relationships, is but a pure abstraction, having no existential and practical significance.

"A separate individual," as C. H. Cooley says, "is an abstraction unknown in experience, and so likewise is society when regarded as something apart from individuals. The real thing is Human Life. ... In other words, 'society' and 'individuals' do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing." 22

Dewey does not associate freedom with an abstract individual. The concept, rather, is related to the creative processes of shared and co-operative life. Communal living is a fundamental human necessity. It is the primary fact of human existence. A society is not merely a collection of separate individuals; on the contrary, the latter become what they are in virtue of their participation in an associated life in which they share with others. As Karl Jaspers has said: "We are what we are only through the community of mutually conscious understandings. There can be no man who is a man for himself alone, as a mere individual." 23 With this assumption, he has wisely remarked that "I am not free unless others are free."

The problem of freedom does not arise apart from a social context of concrete human existence. Withdraw freedom from that context, as does a pure "individualism," and its significance is lost. It is an illusion to suppose that, like Rousseau's "Emile," an individual may enjoy freedom when isolated from that associated life which is society.


Where there is no participation in the responsibilities of the community, there is no need for freedom. Dewey insists that freedom denotes a way of life and is to be observed in a context of communicated meanings. The educational system that prizes and strives for freedom must concern itself, therefore, with the qualities of individual participation in the shared activity, as well as with those qualities of the community which influence the freedom and creative activities of the individual. It should be clear that Dewey's emphasis is placed neither on society nor on individuals in separation but on the quality of shared living. Actually, it is its potential for improving the quality of human experience which leads Dewey to prefer democracy to other forms of human association.

Thus, the significant distinction is no longer between individuals and society; it is, rather, between differing modes of sharing and cooperating in a communal life. More specifically, it is between a totalitarian way and a democratic way. Dewey chooses the "democratic way" to be the best form of social life. What is then a "democratic way," according to Dewey? We must realize, first of all, that, in Dewey's definition, "democracy" means "more than a form of government." As he says, "it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." To quote further: "The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be realized in the state at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion."25

Two fundamental traits have been listed by Dewey as characteristic of the democratically controlled way of life:

The first signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control. The second means not only freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention keep up a separation) but change in social habit—its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse.26

What underlies this characterization, of course, is Dewey's assumption of free communication. The sharing of varied points of view, interests, purposes, and activities, and the co-operative works for social reform and progress, are possible only when there exists free communication between individuals and between groups. He states further:

In search for the conditions under which the inchoate public now extant may function democratically, we may proceed from a statement of the nature of the democratic idea in its social generic sense. From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common.27

Such a way of life is not given in nature, of course; it is something to be created and achieved by means of nature. Democracy can only be established through continuous and co-operative efforts. Unlike the totalitarian society which, according to Dewey, fixate

26 Democracy and Education, p. 100.

27 The Public and Its Problems, p. 147.
the existing beliefs, values, and aims, making them absolute and changeless, the democratic society is one which is being continuously planned and reformed by means of organized intelligence. Dewey insists that the role of "intelligence" is of utmost importance in a democratic society. The lack of intelligence means the inability to predict future possibilities and to select the effective means to achieve the consequences desired. This means, in turn, that there can be no deliberately planned reconstruction of the social beliefs and habits already established. Where there is no organized intelligent effort to determine desirable ends and reform existing social situations, there can be no growth of individuals and of their shared life. The democratic way of life demands a kind of education, therefore, that develops a socially organized method of transmitting and reconstructing past achievements and of creating new aims and ideals to guide individual members as they seek to improve their manner of living together. The search for a democratic community, to emphasize the point once again, is primarily of educational and moral concern.

5. Education and Communication. Our discussion now arrives at the specific consideration of Dewey's conception of the nature and significance of education in a democratic community. The title of Dewey's classic volume, Democracy and Education, may indicate that he has viewed the two in an intimate and inseparable relation. He has in fact maintained that, in a democratic community, education must become the basic controlling force in social reform and progress.
To Dewey, the democratic faith is faith in the intelligently organized and controlled way of shared life in which the potentialities of each participant may be liberated and fulfilled. In other words, it is the faith in education and it is based on a moral interest.

Education involves as its social role both transmission and reconstruction of meanings, of values, knowledge, aims, beliefs. "Such things," as Dewey says, "cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces." There is not transmission, in other words, unless both those who transmit and those who receive come to be involved in a transaction in which they use and appreciate things in common and acquire "similar emotional and intellectual dispositions—like ways of responding to expectations and requirements." From the standpoint of the young, education as transmission means the way of coming to appreciate and live with the meanings of the adult in their unique way. The young, through their participation in a communicated life, gradually develop the ability to respond to the meanings of adult sounds and signs and enter the intricate symbolic world. This is, for them, a long way to go. "With growth of civilization," as Dewey says, "the gap between the original capacities of the immature and the standards and customs of the elders increases." The increase of the need for

28 Democracy and Education, p. 5.
29 Ibid., p. 5.
30 Ibid., p. 3.
education corresponds to the growth of civilization. What is of basic importance in the continuous development of civilization and education is of course communication—the tool of sharing and expanding meanings. Language, as H. Gordon Hullfish states, "may be thought of as essential equipment necessary to the conduct of the initiation rite which growing is."  

The process of transmission in communication, to be sure, entails reconstruction. We cannot accumulate meanings as we may pile up bricks. When a person gains a new meaning, the consequence is not merely a quantitative addition to the list of his past experiences; it is instead a gestalt change in his entire emotional and intellectual attitude. His way of living as a whole is involved. This contextual or gestalt reconstruction is the characteristic of learning through communicated experiences. This notion of reconstructive experience is still optimistic, however, when the educative or intelligent operation is not illuminated by it. There are experiences which are miseducative. As Dewey states: "Any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting and distorting the growth of further experience." The "central problem of an education based on experience is," therefore, "to select the kind of experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences."  

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31 The quotation is taken from a non-published article by H. Gordon Hullfish.

32  *Experience and Education*, p. 13.

When the educative operation intervenes in the reconstructive aspect of experience, the outcome should be an added power of controlling and guiding subsequent experience. The distinctive nature of meaning is such that its growth "corresponds to the increased perception of the connections and continuities of the activities in which we are engaged." A meaningful or educative experience is then one which increases the ability to foresee future happenings and to choose among alternative consequences, thus reforming the existing situations so as to adjust them to new conditions. The continuation of such meaningful experiences requires a community in which creative communication and inquiry must take place.

The fundamental concern of a democratic education is to fulfill this requirement. As Joseph K. Hart phrased it,

The democratic problem in education is not primarily a problem of training children; it is the problem of making a community within which children cannot help growing up to be democratic, intelligent, disciplined to freedom, reverent of the goods of life, and eager to share in the tasks of the age. A school cannot produce this result; nothing but a community can do so.

Thus we may conclude that communication, language, and meaning are fundamental categories in Dewey's educational philosophy. This chapter tried to show that Dewey's philosophy provides a meaningful and fruitful description of the relation of language to experience, to thought, to mind, and, accordingly, to education. Learning from

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34 Democracy and Education, p. 90.

35 The Discovery of Intelligence. New York, Century Co., 1924, p. 383. (Italics in original)
experience takes place through the medium of language. The structures and contents of the language of a particular culture thus play a decisive part in forming the moral and intellectual life of the child. Dewey's educational theory stresses, therefore, that languages must be taught in connection with the training of thought and mind. It emphasizes, also, that means of communication, arts of social converse, must be developed not only to establish an effective teaching-learning situation but also to promote a shared way of life. Dewey's concept of communication is essential to understanding his idea of freedom and democracy and his interpretation of the educative process of transmitting and reconstructing experience.
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Articles


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