

John Dewey was a student of the pragmatic philosophers Pierce and James. He was a mathematician. Pragmatism is based upon the philosophy of science. It seeks to find undoubtable truths. Like a scientist, the pragmatists try to disprove a fact or theory until there is no doubt. The pragmatist, however, believes there are no totally undoubtable truths, because truth can only be obtained by the future results of current events. Therefore, we never know if something is true until it proves to be so. What is accepted as a truth today, may be proven false in the future. For instance, it was at one time believed the world was flat, and the planets revolved around the earth. This was considered fact. However, when it was proven false, new ideas were accepted as facts, and will be accepted as fact until proven they are proven false. Pragmatic truths, therefore, are the future results of current events. There are no pragmatic truths or undoubtable facts, only probable truths based on empirical experience.

John Dewey reflected upon the traditional philosophic works and saw that they were out of tune with a world that is constantly changing. The goal of traditional philosophy was to discover concrete truths from which to build a philosophical metaphysics. Dewey realized that truth is dependent upon many different factors (instruments), and changes according to those factors. Dewey asks is philosophy the search for truth or the best way to find the truth? He defends the idea that concrete truth cannot be obtained, therefore; the best thing to do is find what is the true meaning according to the values we place upon it our current culture. Therefore, in the 14th Century the idea that the world was flat and the sun, moon, and planets was true, because according to the facts available to that culture it was the best theory they could muster. Dewey recognizes the importance of the context, situation and problem we are involved with and uses reflection and criticism to dispute former philosophies and cure them of any ills they have; specifically, there use of selective emphasis. In "Dewey's Metaphysics," Richard Rorty accuses John Dewey of the greatest sin a philosopher can make. Dewey, according to Rorty, is guilty of his own criticism. Dewey's goal of developing a Naturalistic Metaphysics, or a god's eye view of the world, places a precondition, a selective emphasis on his philosophy which is the same mistake made by the philosophers he criticized.

If we apply Dewey to Dewey we find that his naturalistic metaphysics

does not wash. Rorty is correct he makes the same mistakes he criticizes. How can there be a definitive naturalistic metaphysics of experience, if the world is constantly in flux and truth is only relevant to the values and meanings that currently define it? Will the naturalistic metaphysics of experience change with history like values and meanings? Will it change the different experiences of each individual? If the door no longer closes, but did close before, it still closed previously. The first experience does not change. It still remains true. Rorty explains:

. . .no man can serve both Locke and Hegel. Nobody can claim to offer an "empirical" account of something called "the inclusive integrity of 'experience,'" nor take this "integrated unity as the starting point of philosophic thought," if he also agrees with Hegel that the starting point of philosophic thought is bound to be the dialectical situation in which one finds oneself caught in one's own time. (Rorty, Richard, Qtd. in Cahn, New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1977, P. 81)

Dewey is asking us to accept the selective emphasis of the "inconclusive integrity of experience" as a starting point, but by doing so he is guilty of what he criticizes. How can there be "an empirical account of inconclusive integrity of experience," if experience is always changing? There cannot. What would define the account? Experience? Experience cannot be defined if it constantly changes. If experience is constantly changing, it can only be used to direct us to new and better meaning. If the "inconclusive integrity of experience" is the starting point for Dewey's philosophic method, it can not also begin with current society. It must start with the first experience. Either the basis for philosophic discussion is a historical account of the inconclusive integrity of man or the experiences of current society in which one finds oneself. It cannot serve both. One is based upon the reflection of historical data without the benefit of experience, the other on the reflection of experience in the current society or culture. The experiences of past cultures may very well have been much different, and therefore they came to different conclusions about those experiences.

Dewey states previous philosophers used a non-empirical method that "starts with a reflective product as if it were primary, as if it were the original given" (Dewey, John, Experience and Nature. Dover: New

York, 1958, P. 9). Dewey then contradicts himself on the same page by stating:

Now empirical method is the only method which can do justice to this inclusive integrity of "experience." It alone takes this integrated unity as the starting point for philosophic thought. Other methods begin with results of a reflection that has already torn in two the subject-matter experienced and the operations and states of experiencing. The problem is then to get together what has been sundered-which is as if the king's men started with the fragments of the egg and tried to construct the whole egg out of them. (Dewey, John, Experience and Nature. Dover: New York, 1958, P. 9)

The integrated unity can not be the starting point, because there can be no starting point in the empirical method except reflection itself and reflection is contingent upon the value and meaning each individual gives it in the current historical time. Dewey, in essence, is using integrated unity as a selective emphasis "as if it were primary, as if it were the original 'given'" (Dewey, P. 9). However, it can only be the primary if it is the first time anyone has had that experience, and that is not likely.

Hofstadter, a supporter of Dewey's metaphysics describes "the aim of metaphysics as a general theory of existence. . .the discovery of the basic types of involvement's and their relationships" (Qtd in Cahn, P. 77). The problem, however, is there cannot be a general theory of existence, when our experiences are all different, and the world is in a constant flux of change. The theory of existence should be subject to the same unstable world as all other theories. Dewey, himself, seems to believe that yes they would be subject to nature's ambiguity. Near the end of Experience and Nature, Dewey waffles about the need for a metaphysics in philosophy:

If philosophy be criticism, what is to be said of the relation of philosophy to metaphysics? For metaphysics, as a statement of the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds without regard to their differentiation into physical and mental, seems to have nothing to do with criticism and choice, with an effective love of wisdom. It begins and ends with analysis and definition. When it has revealed the traits and characters that are sure to turn up in every universe of discourse, its work is done. So at least an argument may run. But the

very nature of the traits discovered in every theme of discourse, since they are ineluctable traits of natural existence, forbids such a conclusion. (Dewey, P. 412-413)

The statement is confusing. It seems that Dewey wishes to have his cake and eat it too. He spends over four hundred pages arguing that we should accept his method of philosophical criticism. Dewey criticizes other philosophers of selective emphasis then claims we should accept his theory of the ineluctable traits of natural existence as a starting point for philosophic discovery or his selective emphasis. Dewey's method of philosophy claims the world is constantly changing and that truth can only be obtained according to the values we place on it. Dewey shows how our values, experiences, and culture change what we perceive as true. Truth, like nature constantly changes and hence, cannot be predicted or permanently defined. Dewey, by offering a selective emphasis of the natural traits nature, Dewey is, once again, guilty of his own criticism. There cannot be a selective emphasis in the system of philosophy Dewey espouses. Dewey states of selective emphasis:

Gross experience is loaded with the tangled and complex; hence philosophy hurries away from it to search out something so simple that the mind can rest trustfully in it, knowing that it has no surprises in store, that it will not spring anything to make trouble, that it will stay put, having no potentialities in reserve. . . . Another striking example of the fallacy of selective emphasis is found in the hypnotic influence exercised by the conception of the eternal. The permanent enables us to rest, it gives peace; the variable, the changing, is a constant challenge. (Dewey, PP. 26-27)

Selective emphasis of any kind is not necessary for us to use Dewey's method to unmask new truths. The only thing necessary according to Dewey, is empirical experience. When the experience is completed, we will uncover the truth. In fact, selective emphasis, according to Dewey, leads to experiences without problems or nothing to discover (since there are no problems)! Selective emphasis removes the need to reflect, because it removes the problem. There is no enhanced meaning through reflection, valuation, and experience if we use selective emphasis; only a question for which the answer has already been determined.

Dewey is not far off with his theory of a philosophical method. He just gets caught up in trying to develop a better version of metaphysics. In so doing, he is guilty of starting at an end-point (a vision of a better metaphysics or naturalistic metaphysics) and working backwards. It is like reconstructing the broken egg. It can not be done. Richard Rorty uses Dewey's method of criticism to develop a method in which Hegel and Locke can be combined into a useful method of reflection and criticism toward, better and more enhanced, meaning and value. Rorty states:

Dewey wanted to be as naturalistic as Locke and as historic as Hegel. This can indeed be done. One can say with Locke that the causal process that go in the human organism suffice, without the intrusion of anything non-natural, to explain the acquisition of knowledge (moral, mathematical, empirical, and political). One can only say, with Hegel, that rational criticism of knowledge-claims is always in terms of the problems that human beings face at a particular epoch. These two lines of thought neither intersect nor conflict. Keeping them separate has the virtue of doing just what Dewey wanted to do-preventing the formulation of the traditional, skeptically motivated "problems of epistemology." (Rorty, qtd, in Cahn P. 82)

Rorty is not asking us to abandon Dewey. Instead he attempts to show how Dewey, in his quest for a metaphysics, loses his direction and falls prey to his own criticism. Rorty avoids selective emphasis. He does not ask us to use any specific as a starting point. Instead, he suggests that we allow experiences and the problems faced by current society to lead us into philosophic discovery. Dewey was close he had the right tools to do the job to develop his scientific method, he just used the wrong tools for the job. Instead of accepting Locke's starting point, what he needed was Locke's version of causal processes. Instead of using Hegel's version of causal processes, what he needed was Hegel's starting point or the current society. In this way, we can do what Dewey wished; the use of reflection and criticism toward better and more enhanced meaning and value. Meaning and value will be enhanced by using current society as a means for empirical study, and by using only the natural or nature in the empirical method. We cannot use artificial stimuli in empirical studies. We must use the real thing, nature. If we use Locke as a starting point, our reflection and criticism are meaningless, because they have no basis upon current society.

Fortunately, the benefits of Dewey's achievements tower over the petty criticism Richard Rorty and myself note. Rorty says:

Dewey set out to show the harm which traditional philosophical dualisms were doing to our culture, and he thought that to do this job he needed a metaphysics--a description of the generic traits of existences that would solve (or dissolve) the traditional problems of philosophy, as well as open up new avenues for cultural development. I think he was successful in this latter, larger, aim; he is one of the few philosophers of our century whose imagination was expansive enough to envisage a culture shaped along lines different from those we have developed in the West during the last three hundred years. (Rorty, Richard "Dewey's Metaphysics, Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1980. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982, P. 85)

Perhaps the leap from philosophical metaphysics to philosophical pragmatics was too steep for Dewey. Nature changes slowly and so do our values and the way we experience nature. Dewey's pragmatism builds upon a theory by adding meaning and value through empirical experience. Previous philosophers ignored empirical experience, and therefore were stuck being prognosticators, predicting what the results of future events would be, and accepting those predictions as truths. By adding experience, Dewey changed the way we discover and accept facts. Dewey was unable to avoid all the cultural values of his predecessors because it was these values and meanings he wished to make better and more enhanced. He would have been better off scraping previous philosophy and its inherent flaws and starting from current societal and cultural experiences. Rorty criticizes Dewey and uses that criticism toward better and more enhance meaning and value of Dewey's method. Rorty states:

Dewey's work helps us put aside that spirit of seriousness which artists traditionally lack and philosophers are traditionally supposed to maintain. For the spirit of seriousness can only exist in an intellectual world in which human life is an attempt to attain an end beyond life, an escape from freedom into the atemporal. The conception of such a world is still built into our education and our common speech, not to mention the attitudes of philosophers toward their work. But Dewey did his best to help get rid of it, and he should not be blamed if he

occasionally came down with the diseases he was trying to cure.
(Rorty, Richard, "Dewey's Metaphysics," P. 87-88)

Dewey opened up the door between empirical philosophy and the arts. The scientific method of discovery combined with the values of the current culture produce new beliefs or meanings. One is contingent upon the other. We can not have facts without values anymore than we can have values without applying them to facts. The only way to discover what is the meaning in the current society or situation is to look at facts and experience at the same time.