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Materialism and Natural Events in Dewey's Developing Thought

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IS JOHN DEWEY A MATERIALIST? The answer, of course, depends on the meaning of the term. In Dewey's thought the meaning of materialism and the part it plays in his theory of natural events go through several stages; as a result the employment of the question as a directive focus offers distinct advantages in approaching his philosophy. First, it enables us to examine a problem which occupied Dewey from the very beginning of his career to the end. Second, it leads us to an immediate consideration of his theories of inquiry and experience, and to the ontic commitments they imply. Finally, tracing Dewey's developing thought concerning the nature of reality manifests a continuity reaching back through his Hegelian period and stretching to his last works.

I. THREE STAGES IN DEWEY'S THOUGHT CONCERNING MATERIALISM

Critics of Dewey have sometimes charged that his naturalism is really simply a materialism.[1] These objectors would have found an ally in the Dewey working in the last part of the nineteenth century. In his first published article, "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism" (written in 1881), Dewey found the doctrine "which declares that matter and its forces adequately account for all phenomena—those of the material world, commonly so called, and those of life, mind, and society"—to be lacking both in clarity and logical consistency. Of the several destructive conclusions which he discovered to be implicit in monistic materialism one was to be of particular importance for his later naturalism: if the materialist begins with the assumption that mind and the molar forms of matter are constructed ultimately from molecular blocks of matter, he must end "with the conclusion that the ultimate form of matter has dualistic 'mind' and 'matter' properties. . . . If a materialist were to say that this double-sided substance is what he means by matter, we could only reply that he is playing with words—that it is just as much mind as it is matter." [2]

[1] For example, see W. H. Sheldon, "Critique of Naturalism," *Journal of Philosophy*, XLII (1945), 253-270.

[2] "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism," *The Early Works of John Dewey*, Vol. I: *1882-1888*, ed. George E. Axtelle et al (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University

From 1882, when in the graduate department of Johns Hopkins he came under the tutelage of the neo-Hegelian George S. Morris, to the beginning of the 1890's, Dewey's own position was that of absolute idealism. His construction of that doctrine began with the premise that "all existence with which philosophy or any thing else has to do must be known existence"; and by identification of "known existence" with "existence" simply, he concluded that all objects of individual consciousness are elements *in* consciousness and that individual consciousness itself, insofar as it too is known, is but a partial realization of absolute consciousness.[3] Idealism, he felt, could account for the telic activity which he saw characterizing even reflex biological behavior; but more fundamentally, it could explain the organic relationship of individual conscious life with the rest of the world.

Unlike many of the neo-Hegelians who either sought direct metaphysical knowledge of the absolute (e.g., Edward Caird) or contented themselves with merely negative knowledge of what the absolute is not (e.g., T. H. Green), Dewey argued for the *via media* approach of psychological method. He was convinced that the absolute is realized only through individual consciousness and, consequently, that the way of careful examination of conscious experience leads to partial but ever increasing knowledge of universal mind. Dewey's insistence upon psychology as philosophic method—an insistence nurtured by generous consumption of the new experimental psychology, particularly that of Wundt—distinctly characterized his early idealism. But more significantly for our considerations, it was heavy with consequence for his later naturalism. For it established experience as the sole guide in achieving knowledge: "if psychology as method of philosophy means anything, it means that nothing shall be assumed except just conscious experience itself, and that the nature of all shall be asserted from and within this." [4] And it directed that the several relations obtaining between the individual and the world, between mind and matter, be described, not in absolute terms, but according to the scientific principles necessary to "render intelligible the relations of the physical and psychical." [5] The employment of the directing guide of experience and the instrumental use of interpretative principles were to become permanent characteristics of Dewey's philosophic method.[6]

The second stage of Dewey's thought on the question of materialism reached clear definition in his important study in descriptive metaphysics, *Experience and Nature* (1925). In this work Dewey attempts to overcome the antithetic ontological positions of mechanistic materialism and teleological spiritualism through the

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Press, 1969), pp. 3-4. (First published in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, XVI [1882], 208-213.)

[3] "The Psychological Standpoint," *Works*, I, pp. 134-136. (First published in *Mind*, XI [1886], 239-263.)

[4] "Psychology as Philosophic Method," *Works*, I, p. 145. (First published in *Mind*, XI (1886), 153-173.)

[5] "Soul and Body," *Works*, I, p. 94. (First published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, XLIII [1886], 239-263.)

[6] The contribution of Dewey's early idealistic theory of experience to his naturalism has been investigated by James Collins, *Three Paths in Philosophy* (Chicago: Regnery, 1962), pp. 189-196.

recognition of their partial and instrumental characters as interpreters of nature. Both views, he readily acknowledges, descriptively focus on significant aspects of the world:

> Mechanistic metaphysics calls attention to the fact that the latter occurrence could not have taken place without the earlier; that given the earlier, the latter was bound to follow. Spiritualistic metaphysics calls attention to the fact that the earlier, material affairs, prepare the way for vital and ideal affairs, lead up to them; promote them.[7]

In an effort to explain these facts, however, the spiritualist hypostatizes mind into a fixed substance which is to act as final cause for the existence of matter; the materialist, on the other hand, postulates that matter is "the efficient cause of life and mind, and that 'cause' occupies a position superior in reality to that of 'effect'." [8] As explanations, Dewey believes, both err fundamentally in three ways: (1) they attribute to cause an arcane power that purports to permeate the whole causal series; (2) each takes only one aspect of events and by perverse logic maintains that the chosen aspect must be the cause of the others; and (3) both assume that the cause is more real than the effect.

Dewey attempts to avoid the distortions of these fragmented views. Insofar as the concept of causation is applicable at all, "not matter but the natural events having matter as a character, 'cause' life and mind." And insofar as 'effects' mark the release of potentialities, they "are more adequate indications of the nature of nature than are just 'causes'." [9] The question of the relationship of the material and the mental to natural events is, Dewey contends, an empirical one. It is evident from the data of evolutionary biology and the careful observation of nature that what distinguishes the physical, psycho-physical, and mental orders is the "level of increasing complexity and intimacy of interaction among natural events." [10] Each order simply displays the traits characteristic of a certain complexity-level of nature: "matter expresses their sequential order, and mind the order of their meanings in their logical connections and dependencies." [11]

Briefly then, Dewey, at this second stage of thought on materialism, maintains: if "materialism" means that life and mind are caused by matter and that matter is, for that reason, the ultimately real, then he rejects the epithet "materialism" as characterizing his philosophy; but if "materialism" means that one denies as explanatory the doctrine that mind or spirit is a fixed substance and fundamental reality, and that matter is caused by spirit, then his naturalism is a materialism. There are, however, two key distinctions which keep him out of the camps of both the materialistic and the spiritualistic metaphysicians. First, he regards the traits of matter and mind to be properties *of natural events*, and not mind the property of matter or vice versa; this is a position similar to that of his early article on

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[7] *Experience and Nature* (2nd ed. rev.; New York: W. W. Norton, 1929; reprinted by Dover, 1958), p. 273.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 261.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

materialism. Second, he holds neither mind nor matter to be reducible to the other—which is to say, even a complete knowledge of the physical will not provide an adequate knowledge of the mental; for, though physical concepts may be instrumentally applied to interpret and direct vital phenomena, the application to these latter "does not exhaust their character nor suffice wholly for their description." [12]

Some twenty years after *Experience and Nature*, in response to an article by W. H. Sheldon, a third stage in Dewey's reflections on materialism was reached.[13] Sheldon had declared against the naturalists that materialism is not merely a question of the logical reducibility of one order of nature to another, but one of power:

> The crucial point is whether the *behavior* of the higher (mental) can be *predicted* and therefore *controlled* surely and accurately from a knowledge of the lower. It is power that counts, it is power that the naturalist hopes by his scientific method to gain; power to ensure the arrival of things on the higher level by proper "redistribution" of things on the lower.[14]

In meeting the charge of materialism Dewey and his collaborators Sidney Hook and Ernest Nagel quickly concede that though the logical reducibility of mentalistic predicates to physicalistic predicates is one brand of materialism, it is not theirs. But they do indeed advocate a materialism which maintains that the "occurrence of a mental event is contingent upon the occurrence of certain complex physico-chemical-physiological events and structures—so that no pains, no emotions, no experience of beauty or holiness would exist unless bodies appropriately organized were also present." This type of materialism, therefore, affirms that "the relation between the occurrence of pain and physiological process is a contingent or 'causal' one," not a logical one.[15] But to illustrate a little more precisely the relationship between the physical and the mental they employ an example drawn from chemistry. When the chemist properly combines hydrogen and oxygen "a distinctive mode of behavior is exhibited by the structured unity [water] into which they enter." Yet, they contend, this structured object "is not an *additional* thing which, in manifesting its properties, controls from some external vantage point the behavior of its organized parts." Rather, "the structured object in behaving the way it does behave under given circumstances is simply manifesting the behavior of its constituents as related in that structure under those circumstances." Thus the naturalist maintains, just as the chemist in reference to the properties of water, that "the states and events called mental exist only when certain organizations of physical things also occur." Accordingly, the mental is simply the causal result of the operational organization of the physical.[16]

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 284.

[13] John Dewey, Sidney Hook, and Ernest Nagel, "Are Naturalists Materialists?" *Journal of Philosophy*, XLII (1945), 515-530.

[14] Sheldon, p. 256.

[15] "Are Naturalists Materialists?" 519.

[16] *Ibid.*

A shift, though subtle, can be detected from the Dewey writing in 1925 to the Dewey of 1945. Dewey now, in his third period, no longer asserts that the causal relation holds between the complexity of the natural event and the mental property, but rather considers the relation of causality to obtain between the complexity of the physico-chemical-physiological event and the mental—a position expressly denied in *Experience and Nature*.[17] Also he now allows for the possibility that the necessary and sufficient conditions for the mental may be given in terms of the physical. Again, this possibility was precluded in his middle period.

The change in Dewey's thought in his third period is due primarily to the drawing out of the implications of his epistemological study *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938) and his investigations with Arthur Bentley into the problems of language and the knowing-known relationship. His partnership with Bentley, begun in earnest in the early 1940's, led to the joint publication in 1949 of *Knowing and the Known*. In his second stage Dewey spoke of natural events as *inter-acting* complexes. The word "interaction" suggests, as he later recognizes, that natural events have separate existences and features, and retain these even in their interconnections with each other. This implicit assumption of independent constituents of events may indeed be the hidden logical foundation for Dewey's contention that even an exhaustive knowledge of one set of traits, e.g., material, cannot lead to sure knowledge of another, e.g., mental. To avoid the implications of the word "interaction" and to correct any mistaken metaphysical assumptions its usage might have suggested, Dewey in his third period offers the substitute "transaction" to characterize the complexity of natural events. Thus what distinguishes a transactional from an interactional event is the absence of supposed independent entities and the recognition that "no one of its constituents can be *adequately* specified as fact apart from the specification of other constituents of the full subject matter." [18] The stress on an Anaxagorean transactional view, as opposed to an Empedoclean interactional view which would countenance determinate elements, essences, or realities as the sources of the phases of events, is the basis for Dewey's assertion in his third period that it is in principle possible for the necessary and sufficient conditions of the mental to be stated in terms of the physical; for in the manner of Anaxagoras, the seeds of the mental would also contain the seeds of the physical and consequently the latter could serve as an adequate sign of the former.

Other modifications mark Dewey's third stage of thought. Instead of describing the generic phases of natural events of increasing complexity as material, psychophysical, and mental, he now refers to them as physical, physiological, and behavioral. Describing events as material or mental connotes, he feels, a dichotomy of two events having autonomous properties. By substituting the newer terminology he means to imply a reference to the particular techniques of inquiry that define these regions of scientific investigations.[19] But in order to understand the exact role which inquiry plays in determining the features of natural events we must turn

[17] *Experience and Nature*, p. 262.
[18] John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), p. 122.
[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

in the next section to Dewey's theory of inquiry—which holds, I believe, the key for unlocking the peculiar ontic secrets of the Deweyan universe.

With the third stage of Dewey's thought, then, come these conclusions regarding materialism: if materialism means logical reducibility of the mental to the physical, then his naturalism is not a materialism. But if materialism means, as Sheldon states, that "the behavior of the higher (mental) level can be predicted and therefore controlled surely and accurately from a knowledge of the lower," then the naturalist —who believes that the occurrence of the mental is causally dependent upon certain complex physico-chemical-physiological events and who, consequently, believes that it is in principle possible to arrive at the necessary and sufficient conditions of the mental in terms of that physical complex—is a materialist.

II. Nature and the Theory of Inquiry

Dewey takes his theory of inquiry to be fundamentally an articulation and refinement of scientific method. The discovery of the method of inquiry, he insists, was not only that of a method by which science could advance; but also it was a critical discovery of the way in which thinking is actually carried on, the way in which thought takes place and knowledge is secured. In short, the real scientific discovery during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was that of thought becoming conscious of its own activity. That activity, whether it ranges over scientific problems or work-a-day difficulties, has, he further remarks, the same general objective: to transform an indeterminate situation into a determinate one.[20] And to achieve this end, despite the diversity of its subject matters, inquiry proceeds according to a common pattern or plan, which can be discriminated in its general phases. A close examination of this pattern reveals the ontic situations which Dewey presupposes inquiry, that is, thinking, can accommodate.[21]

The first phase or condition of inquiry is the engagement of the human organism in a situation which is precognitively experienced as unsettled and disturbed, a situation which, though considerably organized through past inquiries and settled biological and psychological dispositions, is pervaded by an unreflective feeling of uncertainty, coloring it with "a unique doubtfulness which makes that situation to be just and only the situation it is." [22] Eschewing, as he has from his earliest period, the interpretations of subjectivistic psychology, Dewey asserts that it is the situation itself which is doubtful. Since the situational ground of inquiry is found precisely in the organic *intersection* of events, one of which is the human organism, there is no metaphysical reason to assign the problematic character of the situation to any one of the particular events involved. In fact the categories of 'subject' and 'object' have only pragmatic value and thus are merely instrumental to the situation. The events themselves which constitute the situation are inextri-

[20] *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Holt and Co., 1938), p. 105.

[21] The discussion which follows relies primarily on the two key sources in Dewey's work which detail the different phases in the pattern of inquiry: *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916; reprinted by The Free Press, 1966), chap. 12; and *Logic*, chap. 6.

[22] *Logic*, p. 105.

cably unified, not in an encompassing consciousness, as the early Dewey had claimed, but in the organic transactions of nature.[23]

The 'had' feeling of uneasiness and perplexity generates the second phase of inquiry, the cognitive apprehension of the problematic of the situation. When the firm habits of past experience no longer allow us to glide through situations and the mind is shocked into awareness, inquiry is underway.[24]

The progressive determination of the problem marks the third stage of inquiring thought. This involves reliance on established knowledge and meanings, and the testing of various components of the situation in light of this knowledge. To do this is already to form plans or tentative solutions and to responsibly develop them in a logical and orderly fashion. In this way "the possible solution presents itself . . . as an idea, just as the terms of the problem (which are facts) are instituted by observation. Ideas are anticipated consequences (forecasts) of what will happen when certain operations are executed under and with respect to observed conditions." [25]

Finally, ideas are tested by application to the experimental situation which gives rise to them; accordingly, their meaning becomes clear and their validity is ascertained. This final step in the process of rational inquiry is of fundamental importance for Dewey. It was the impossibility of taking this last step which persuaded him of the inadequacies of idealistic logic and hastened his adoption of experimental logic. As he critically observed in an early transitional article, "The Logic of Verification," idealistic logic offers no criterion, no satisfactory standard for the measurement of ideas other than mere logical consistency: "and everyone knows that ideas may be self consistent, and yet untrue, or even highly absurd." [26] The assumption, however, of an *extramentally articulated nature* provides the measure he requires. It allows the possibility of testing our ideas against things for existential adequacy, if not for exact correspondence.

If inquiry is to successfully render indeterminate situations determinate, then meanings and significance must be related to existential events. The early Dewey saw this relation as identity; events were simply mind-constituted meanings. However, the idealistic hypothesis offers nothing against which meanings may be tested. Naturalism, as the later Dewey construed it, postulates real, non-mental events to serve as the guide and control for the development of significance through inquiry. To 'signify' for the later Dewey means that something experienced as

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[23] A compendious exposition and defense of the position of his *Logic* regarding the status of 'subject' and 'object' can be found in part VI of Dewey's reply to a letter by Albert Balz; both letter and reply are reprinted in the *Journal of Philosophy*, XLVI (1949), 313-342. Dewey's thesis that subject and object are organically unified in the situational transactions of nature is a direct descendant of a strikingly similar one from his earlier Hegelian period: "Whether we consider the relations of subject and object, or the nature of the categories, we find ourselves forced into the presence of the notion of organic relation. The relation between subject and object is not an external one; it is one in a higher unity which is itself constituted by this relation. The only conception adequate to experience as a whole is organism." ("Kant and Philosophic Method," *Works*, I, p. 42. [First published in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, XVIII (1884), 162-174.])

[24] *Logic*, pp. 107-108.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[26] *Open Court*, IV (1890), 2226.

existent stands in evidence for the unexperienced existence of something else.[27] Thus, for example, smoke is a sign of fire. But the signifying property which smoke has is not an inherent natural quality, rather it accrues to the event in virtue of the special function smoke plays in this particular inquiry.[28] The process of thinking gives to the experience the significance which we often take for granted. And this is the case not only for more specific meanings, such as 'smoke', but also for generic and categorically basic meanings. It is Dewey's thesis that even logical forms, taking 'logic' in a broad, epistemological sense, are "intrinsically postulates of and for inquiry, being formulations of conditions, discovered in the course of inquiry itself, which further inquiries must satisfy if they are to yield warranted assertibility as a consequence." [29] The logical form of causality, for instance, is yoked to natural events because of the need of the mind to order, in some kind of systematic and productive way, the histories of events. However, "when events are taken strictly existentially, there is no event which is antecedent or 'cause' any more than it is consequent or 'effect'." [30] Rather, only when situations involve human organisms do they take on such forms; the inquirer discriminatively selects out of an infinite variety of interlocking events 'antecedents' and 'consequences' for his own purposes.[31] The same is no less true, Dewey claims,[32] of 'objects' and 'qualities'. Perceptual objects and the qualities which characterize them are the laid-down discriminations of past inquiries; that is, they are the result of past selective determinations from the total environing field which have become habitual. The everyday objects of the naive realist are really the 'alienated' meanings of mind as they are employed in the practical involvements of events. In fact even to speak of '*an* event' as that to which logical forms accrue is to obscure the pragmatic function that category serves. For as Dewey insists, the category of 'event' implies a unity and discreteness which the existential situation does not possess:

> In actual experience, there is never any such isolated singular object or event; *an* object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an environing experienced world—a situation. The singular object stands out conspicuously because of its especially focal and crucial position at a given time in determination of some problem of use or enjoyment which the *total* complex environment presents.[33]

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[27] *Logic*, p. 52.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 528.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 459.
[31] Dewey's deontologizing of causality provides the ground for the shift in his discussion of that relation. In his second period he spoke of the natural event, not its properties, as the cause of life and mind. In his third period he stresses that 'cause' is an instrumental designation: an inquirer simply designates certain manifest phases (e.g., physical) in the history of events to instrumentally control other phases (e.g., mental). Along with the instrumentalizing of causality Dewey in his third period came to appreciate and recommend the loosening of Laplacean causal determinism through what he felt were the 'transactional' investigations of quantum mechanics, especially those undertaken by such men as Niels Bohr (see, for example, *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence, 1932-1951*, edited by Sidney Ratner and Jules Altman [New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1964], pp. 631-633).
[32] *Logic*, pp. 140-145, 150.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

The end for which inquiry is undertaken and meaningful ideas or signs developed is to effect the "existential transformation and reconstruction of the material" with which inquiry deals.[34] Dewey's postulation of this goal for inquiring thought echoes the Hegelian notion that changing objective situations are the result of the evolutionary self-realization of absolute mind. And indeed, Dewey's theory of inquiry does bear structural similarities to his earlier psychological method of investigating universal consciousness. However, the basic entities of concern have changed since his Hegelian period. The 'situation' which is transformed as the result of intelligent inquiry is now understood in two fundamentally different senses. First, there is the situation which is the complex of established and indeterminate meanings; this is reconstructed when mind makes determinate the problematic meanings and realigns the relations of significance within the complex. Second, there is the situation which is the matrix of existential events, one of which is the human organism; this is transformed only when inquiry leads to doing, when the ideas and meanings of inquiry guide the active rearrangement of the environment.

Though Dewey stoutly maintains his theory of inquiry commits him to no particular ontology,[35] the above examination reveals, I believe, ontic commitments of a peculiar sort. First, there is the fundamental commitment to non-material, non-mental, i.e., neutral, events in intimate connection and undergoing incessant transactions with one another. These natural connective occurrences achieve meaning or 'essence' according to prescribed situational ingredients: the events designated as sign, those designated as signified, and the inquiring person who brings to the situation a complex history of prior experiences, meanings, and conceptual frameworks. Second, there is the commitment to entities called "inquirers" or, more generally, "persons." These entities have a priviledged position; for while other events have meaning only through becoming involved in a situation which includes a person, persons are the necessary sources of meaning both for other events and themselves.

The implication of Dewey's theory of inquiry is that the terms "matter," "psycho-physical," and "mental" (or "physical," "physiological," and "behavioral") are symbols having meanings which do not actually characterize natural events or real connections *in se*; for, such events and connections do not have any significance except within inquiry. Therefore, whether, for example, we say that a human being is matter, a psycho-physical process, or a thinking thing depends upon the situation, the context of inquiry: for some aspects of the bio-chemist's work man is matter as the physicist defines it; for the medical doctor he is, more often than not, only a psycho-physical system; for the ethician he is an intelligent creature bearing certain responsibilities. What man is *in himself*, i.e., outside of the context of inquiry, we are in principle unable to determine. The evident conclusion we are forced to draw from Dewey's contextual theory of meaning is, paradoxically, that the significance of man, the source of meaning, is merely a

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
[35] See part IV of Dewey's letter to Balz.

function of his status as an object for an inquiring mind. Again, the idealistic substratum of Dewey's naturalism makes itself felt.

While our discussion has attempted to bring into relief the contours of Dewey's theory of inquiry, it has also sharpened some of the difficulties that theory suggests for his naturalism and its phases. (1) Since an event can have several meanings, depending on the context of inquiry, what is the foundation in the situation for selecting one meaning rather than another? (2) Does not Dewey's instrumentalism undercut his evolutionary naturalism by requiring a consciousness to determine the complexity of situations and accordingly designate the 'material' and the 'mental'? The resolution of these difficulties does not lie with Dewey's theory of inquiry; it has rather generated them. Perhaps if experience is the final arbiter in all philosophical matters, as Dewey urges, the solution may be found in his theory of experience.

III. The Theory of Experience

Even in the early idealistic phase of his development Dewey had a well worked out theory of experience. This early stage of his theory of experience is important for our considerations; for even though, interestingly enough, it tended to dampen the emphasis on the 'absolute' of his idealism, it nonetheless preserved in its evolution into naturalism latent idealistic presuppositions.

The sphere in which experience takes place, argues the early Dewey, is infinite, living self-consciousness, whose elements, finite minds and the natural world, are so organically interrelated that distinctions among them can only be artificially made: all is for and in universal consciousness. However, he further maintains that this absolute consciousness is only realized through individual human consciousness.[36] If an objector expostulates that this subordinates the whole to the part, Dewey replies: "Were not the universe realized in the individual, it would be impossible for the individual to rise to a universal point of view, and hence to philosophize. . . . The universe except as realized in an individual, has no existence." [37]

Dewey draws two important corollary conclusions from his thesis of mitigated absolute idealism. The first is that *to be* is *to be experienced:* "In short, the real *esse* of things is neither their percipi, nor their intelligi alone; it is their experiri." [38] And second, the science which deals with conscious experience is psychology—which is to say, psychology is philosophic method.[39] The significance of these conclusions for his earlier as well as later development is that all questions about the reality of things are to be decided by appeal to the ways in which those things present themselves in experience.

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[36] "Psychology as Philosophic Method," p. 157.
[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 151.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Dewey's later naturalism replaces universal self-consciousness with nature rather than within absolute mind. However, the way into this nature and, ultimately, the hooks for securing the meaning of events are still experiences of the individual. Experience, he insists in *Experience and Nature*, reflecting earlier observations, is not a "veil or screen which shuts us off from nature," something to be transcended in order to get at nature;[40] rather, man is a part of nature and his experience "is *of* nature as well as *in* nature." [41] Experience is simply the intersection of two natural events, one of which is human and the other the object of inquiry: "Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience." [42] To be sure, the interaction which constitutes experience does reflect certain traits of the object and certain traits of the subject (e.g., organic dispositions, past experience, particular conceptual schemes); yet these traits can really only be distinguished and assigned for instrumental purposes.

Dewey's developed theory of experience—that it is the interaction of inextricable natural events, rather than of elements of absolute consciousness—and his view that meanings are instrumentalities which do not reside *in* natural events are grounded in a basal postulate of his naturalism, the postulate of immediate empiricism:

> Immediate empiricism postulates that things—anything, everything, in the ordinary or nontechnical use of the term "thing"—are what they are experienced as. Hence, if one wishes to describe anything truly, his task is to tell what it is experienced as being. If it is a horse that is to be described, or the *equus* that is to be defined, then must the horse-trader, or the jockey, or the zoologist or the paleontologist tell us what the horse is which is experienced.[43]

The implications of the postulate of immediate empiricism are important for understanding Dewey's conception of reality and, consequently, for resolving the difficulties with which we ended the previous section. First, the postulate points out that to experience is already to inquire. Experience, from the mere perception of an object to the manifold process of scientific experimentation, is an inquiry which endows natural events with a sign value. And by the fact that it is an inquiry it arises out of the context of an inquirer with a complex ideational framework and cannot be divorced from that context. Thus even the mere 'seeing' of an object depends upon the meanings the observer brings to the occasion. The second implication of the postulate is that reality itself is contextual. Things, Dewey asserts, *are* what they are experienced as being. Thus, a scientist (if he had the requisite vision and atoms in principle could be seen) who sees an atom *really* perceives what the thing is. Yet a layman (also with keen sight) would see something else; but what he sees would be *really* what the thing is. Reality is contextual

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[40] *Experience and Nature*, p. 1a.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 4a.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1910; reprinted by Peter Smith, 1951), p. 227.

and questions as to its nature can be answered only relatively or contextually.[44]

The examination of Dewey's theory of experience reveals the beginning of an answer to the first of the two questions with which we concluded the previous section: experience is the tie binding meaning to events. However, what is the character of experience such that it can accomplish this task? The answer to this query yields also an answer to the second question concerning the part consciousness plays in constituting natural events.

IV. Conscious Experience and Natural Events

Earlier we observed that in order to understand the manner in which inquiry transforms situations we must distinguish between the situation which is the complex of existential events and the situation which is the matrix of established and indeterminate meanings. In a similar fashion we must now make a distinction between experience as an existential affair and experience as a cognitive affair. In some places in his writings Dewey is most insistent upon this distinction, in others he glosses over it. Existentially experience is the situational interaction of natural existences: "Existences are immediately given in experience; that is what experience primarily is." [45] For the sentient organism these interactions are anoetic qualitative occurrences; that is to say, such qualities *are* the interactions between man and the rest of nature; they are not properties of existents, but the very existents themselves. Experience becomes cognitive only when immediately felt qualities are instrumentally employed in inquiry to the effect that sign values are assigned to them:

> An experience is a knowledge, if in its quale there is an experienced distinction and connection of two elements of the following sort: One means or intends the presence of the other in the same fashion in which itself is already present, while the other is that which, while not present in the same fashion, must become so present if the meaning or intention of its companion or yoke-fellow is to be fulfilled through the operation it sets up.[46]

Hence, it is only when naturally existent qualia are used as signs for absent qualia that there is cognitively meaningful experience.

The distinction between experience as complex of qualia and experience as complex of cognitive meanings has its epistemological parallel in Dewey's distinction between *having* and *knowing*. On the one hand, he says, we *have* "certain qualities in their immediate apparency, qualities of things of sentiency, such as are, from the psychological standpoint, usually termed feelings." [47] This affair

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[44] "Experience, Knowledge and Value: a Rejoinder," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Wisconsin: George Banta, 1939), p. 538.

[45] *Logic*, p. 522.

[46] *Darwin*, p. 90; see also *Logic*, p. 250.

[47] *Experience and Nature*, p. 298.

may, loosely speaking, be called "consciousness"; but it is consciousness on a psycho-physical level, a non-cognitive happening: "This is consciousness wherever meanings do not exist; that is to say, apart from the existence and employment of signs, or independently of communication." [48] Qualities which are merely *had* are properly termed "subconscious." [49] On the other hand, there is consciousness properly so-called. Here "consciousness" denotes "meanings actually perceived, *awareness* of objects; being wide-awake, alert, attentive to the significance of events, present, past, future." [50] Conscious experience is a *knowing;* as such it is constituted by the recognition of relations and connections, and the use of signs to bind together known events.

Dewey's constantly reiterated position concerning the character of the immediate qualities of experience is crucial to both his theory of natural events and his theory of inquiry. Felt, immediate qualities are the termini of the intersection of man with other existences; they are, therefore, our only existential link with natural events. Because of this unique ontological situation immediate qualities serve an indispensable function in inquiry. They are, Dewey contends, the sole anchors by which meanings can be adequately fastened to events. During the beginning phases of inquiry they act as the control and guide for the selection of meanings; and in the testing phase they provide the standard of measure against which meanings are validated. The use of immediate qualities is thus a prerequisite for knowledge; for without them "there is no way to determine the relevancy, weight or coherence of any designated distinction or relation." [51]

However, acute logical difficulties infect Dewey's discussion of these immediate qualities. The difficulties arise as a result of the implications of his postulate of immediate empiricism and his theory of inquiry. The postulate declares that things *are* what they are experienced as being. Yet the 'experience' which constitutes their reality is thoroughly cognitive, as Dewey's own description of the principle (cited in section III) makes obvious. Hence, if things are what they are (cognitively) experienced as being, then there is no ground for affirming the existence of immediate qualities; for they are never experienced in their non-cognitive purity. If the reply be made that inquiry requires the postulation of immediate qualities in order to explain its existential possibility, or simply to make sense out of experience, then immediate qualities become the result of an inquiry into inquiry and experience. They are not then the beginning of inquiry but its end. This last objection may be stated in another way: the only ground for asserting that there are such things of which we can in no way be immediately conscious or aware is that established by the *cognitive* process of inquiry. But this is only to say that meanings ultimately found immediate qualities, immediate qualities do not found meanings.[52]

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[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 299.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 398.
[51] *Logic*, p. 68.
[52] In his third period Dewey began to sense the paradoxical difficulties of his *having-knowing* dichotomy. In a letter to Bentley (*Philosophical Correspondence*, p. 215) he admitted

Yet it is not only the character of the immediate qualities of events that is questionable; the precise metaphysical status of mind-independent natural events themselves is uncertain. Events as components of situational complexes lack inherent unity—a fact emphasized by Dewey's recommended term "transaction." The logical categories we apply to natural situations, Deweyan logic maintains, such as 'subject' and 'object', 'cause' and 'effect', 'one' and 'many', are the instrumental products of mind. These fundamental discriminations are not, therefore, lodged in nature herself; transactional nature offers no fixed ontic dividing lines. But if these distinctions are not characteristic of natural events in themselves it is difficult to understand how those events could ever provide an independent test-standard for the validation of ideas, which Deweyan logic also demands. We must conclude, it seems, that existential situations, far from being independent of consciousness, are the necessary postulates of inquiring mind; for without the insinuations into nature of basic articulations by an actively productive intelligence, one could not even begin to employ *an* experienced event or event*s* as criteria for making warranted assertions. From the beginning of his career to the end, mind remained a fundamental presupposition of Dewey's logic and metaphysics.

V. Conclusion

The use of the directive question concerning his materialism has enabled us to observe several interesting turns in Dewey's thought. It has, first of all, helped us to distinguish three stages in his developing philosophy. In the early years of his career he was an absolute idealist and in no way could be considered a materialist. The second stage of his thought on this question, reaching definitive proportions with *Experience and Nature*, revealed him to be a neutralist: the ultimate reality is neither physical nor mental, but such that it permits the ascription of those properties through inquiry. The sense in which he might be considered a materialist at this stage is in his disavowal of mind as an independent entity shaping the destinies of matter. In the final period of his thought Dewey still affirmed the ultimately neutral character of natural events, but saw their transactional phases so inextricably linked in the situational complex that the hope was provided that

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that there "certainly can be no reference to 'having' outside of knowing, and if the distinction-connection in question suggests there is such a reference it is viciously bad." The recognition, which brought no resolution, may really have been a case of reminiscence. For in his neo-Hegelian period he quite adamantly objected to the procedure which, "discovering a certain element *in* knowledge to be necessary for knowledge, therefore concludes that this element has an existence prior to or apart from knowledge. The alternative is not complex. Either these sensations are the sensations which are known—sensations which are elements in knowledge—and then they cannot be employed to account for its origin; or they can be employed to account for its origin, and then are not sensations as they are known. In this case, they must be something of which nothing can be said except that they are *not* known, *are* not in consciousness—that they are things-in-themselves. If, in short, these sensations are not to be made 'ontological', they must be sensations which are elements in experience; and if they exist only for knowledge, then knowledge is wherever they are, and they cannot account for its origin" ("The Psychological Standpoint," pp. 125-126).

with the advance of scientific inquiry someday the necessary and sufficient conditions for mental behavior might be given in terms of its physical matrix. Thus, if the hypothesis that the proper manipulation of the physical properties of the human organism can assure control of its mental properties is materialistic, then in his last years Dewey was indeed a materialist.

There are two ways of estimating the ontic commitments a philosopher makes. The first is to examine his own overt characterization of those commitments. This we have done in the stage analysis of Dewey's development. The second way is to investigate the commitments entailed by the theoretical framework the philosopher employs. In the investigation of Dewey's theories of inquiry, experience, and natural events, and their relations to one another we have discovered, I believe, a fundamental commitment to consciousness, to inquiring mind; it is precisely this entity which is presupposed in all of his discussions of the nature of experience and events. Accordingly, it appears that Dewey was never 'really' a materialist; for, as his logic and metaphysics imply, it is not matter which controls mental behavior, but mind which postulates and articulates matter.

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ERRATA

The *Journal* wishes to call to the reader's attention two recent misprints:

In Elisabeth Feist Hirsch's review of *Martin Heidegger on Being Human* and *A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time* (IX, 3 [July, 1971], 403, third line from the end), "*Primitive Dasein*" should read "*Primitives Dasein.*"

Maryanne Horowitz's article on Pierre Charron (IX, 4 [October, 1971], 457, middle of final paragraph) should read "The crux of the book *De la Sagesse* is thus Charron's acceptance on faith of the existence of natural law and of the existence in mankind of the seeds of virtue and knowledge."

The *Journal* regrets these errors and hopes they have caused the authors no embarrassment.