CONCLUSION

DEWEY: AN ASSESSMENT.

The word pragmatism is a method of philosophizing, often identified as a theory of meaning that was first stated by Charles Peirce. It was revived primarily as a theory of truth by William James; and it was further developed by John Dewey and F.C.S. Schiller.

Pragmatism is a doctrine holding that the meaning and truth of thought is determined by criteria of practical usefulness. But the founders of pragmatism were neither very clear nor very consistent in the accounts they gave concerning the historical origins of their doctrines.

John Dewey is unquestionably the pre-eminent figure in American philosophy; no one has done more to keep alive the fundamental ideals of liberal civilization and there could be made an office as that of national philosopher, no one else could be properly mentioned for it. ¹

¹ Morris R. Cohen, American thought, A critical sketch, P. 364.

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For half a century Dewey was acknowledged leader in the development of American Pragmatism. In agreement with Peirce he viewed pragmatism as providing a logic of inquiry. Ideas must be brought to a test in terms of their experimental consequences. Consequently, one of Dewey's most important contributions to philosophy has been his careful and extensive work in experimental logic and theory of knowledge. Dewey's instrumentalism adds a new and important dimension for the inclusion of education and social aspects. Dewey goes beyond Peirce and James by making pragmatism wider in scope and application in theory and practice.

Actually Dewey and Woodbridge were very close together philosophically, in all but their very different languages. Woodbridge uses the language of the philosophies of being; Dewey that of the philosophies of experience—usually of Hegelian experience. He differs from the Platonists and put it in a still wider context in experience. Dewey can thus be said to be 'more Aristotelian' than Aristotle himself. He has travelled further than Aristotle, did away from Platonism towards the experienced world. So like Woodbridge and Aristotle Dewey may be described in our present day label, functional realist and objective relativist, contextualist.
For Dewey metaphysics is primarily an instrument for criticizing philosophical and intellectual assumptions; and it is also the ground map of criticism. Philosophy as conceived by Dewey is concerned primarily with what is called normative problem of social inquiry. But its function is also to provide leading speculative ideas and science — natural and social. According to Dewey, philosopher must bring some vision to bear the perspective that upon the world — that makes possible the analysis of normative problem of social inquiry more sensitive.

The account of Dewey's philosophy that we have given shows that it is not what is called "metaphysics" but a study of meta-empirical reality. Dewey simply takes the world as he finds it. He does not really prohibit all attempts to determine the generic traits of existence of all kind. What he does is to insist that the generic insight into existence which along can define metaphysics in any empirically intelligible sense is itself an added fact of interaction,
and is therefore subject to the same requirement of intelligence as any other natural occurrence, namely, inquiry into the bearings, leading and consequences what it discovers. The universe is not infinite self-representative series, if only because the addition within it of a representative makes it a different universe. 2

Dewey's own world view is such a working hypothesis.

If Dewey's Philosophy of experience, his general world view is coherent and a unified whole, then no hypotheses can go beyond the limits of naturalism. But he denies absolute value and fixed ends. He only asserts the objectivity of value which is relative to the problematic situation and need for inquiry. On the other hand, Dewey himself says that 'growth' leads to absolute value. This seems to contradict his relativistic view of value. This shows that Dewey's theory of experience is in need of some correction.

Dewey makes inquiry the essence of logic, not truth or knowledge. He defines inquiry thus:

Inquiry is the controlled or direct transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relation as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.  

The word 'inquiry' as conceived by Dewey is part of the general process of attempting to make the world more appear organic. Unified wholes are to be outcome of such inquiry. This emphasis on the organic character is due partly to biology, partly to some lingering influence of Hegel. There is no certainty that by the process of inquiry, unified result is will obtain.

Russell has restated Dewey's theory of inquiry as follows.

3. Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, pp. 104-105
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The relation of an organism to its environment are sometimes satisfactory to the organism, sometimes unsatisfactory; when they are unsatisfactory, the situation may be improved by mutual adjustment, when the alterations by means of which the situation is improved are mainly on the side of the Organism - they are never wholly on either side - the process involved is called "inquiry".

Criticing Dewey Russell says,

your ideas are altogether static. I am a dynamic person and when I inquire into any subject-matter I first alter it in such a way as to make the inquiry easy. The notion that such a procedure is legitimate can be justified by a Hegelian distinction of appearance and reality, the appearance may be confused and fragmentary, but the reality is always orderly and organic.

4. History of Western Philosophy, P. 852
5. Ibid, P. 852

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The difficulty of this theory concerns the relation of belief and what is a fact appears to be true after the verification of the statement or judgment but beliefs are not thus verified. Dewey, like James, in emphasizing different phases and then another of the same philosophy in different times makes statements that seem to be verbally inconsistent. He however defends the position that the same words may be used in different context with different meanings.

One difficulty in understanding Dewey is caused by the fact that, like most original philosophers, he frequently used old words with new meaning. 6

It is not also clear whether the theories of Dewey are operational or existential. In The Quest of Certainty Dewey says,

It is still questioned whether many of the objects of the most valuable and indispensable hypotheses in the present use have actual existence; the existential status of the electron is still, for example, a matter of controversy. 7

On the same page he writes,

progress beyond the Newtonian scheme as made possible when the ascription of the antecedently existing inherent properties was dropped out, and concepts were regarded as designations of operation to be performed. 8

These statements show that inspite of his advocacy of operationalism Dewey could not free himself from the existential mode of thought.

His logical theory also is not free from inconsistencies. He recognises that there are basic logical principles which are basic instruments for problematic situation. He also insists that from a purely logical point of view no principle is sacrosanct. All principles are reversible. At the same time Dewey evidently assumes that intelligence cannot rest satisfied with a problematic situation with an unresolved conflict or contradiction. And this seems to imply an absolute demand of intellect, a demand which is difficult to reconcile with the view that no logical principles are absolute.

The word 'consequence' appears an an ambiguity in Dewey's philosophy. A scientific hypothesis is interpreted as predictive, and it is verified if the predicted consequences, which constitute the meaning of the hypothesis are realized. Whether verification brings subjective satisfaction to people or not, is irrelevant. In this context Dewey is careful to avoid the objection to which James exposes himself, that the satisfying character of the proposition is the test of truth. In practice Dewey discriminate between political plans and solutions on the one hand and theories in terms of their contribution to growth, their promotion of an end on the other. But the test of truth is no longer simply the verification of the consequences which are said to form the meaning of the hypothesis.

Accordingly to Dewey, the truth is substituted by 'Warranted assertability'. Dewey judges a belief, by its effects. But if truth means 'warranted assertability', it depends upon the future and future can be altered by human power and freedom. But truth is actually determined by its cause where a past occurrence is concerned. Truth is only obtained if we find a certain kind of relation.
to its cause. This means that truth is not something that varies from enquirer to enquirer.

Dewey's philosophy is described as naturalism. But from the reading of Dewey's Experience and Nature, it appears that inspite of his advocacy of naturalism, there are thoughts in his writings which might tempt one to describe his views as a type of materialism.

while the theory that life, feeling and thought are never independent of physical events may be deemed materialism, it may be considered just the opposite .......... Historically speaking, materialism and mechanistic metaphysics - as distinct from mechanistic science - designate the doctrine that matter is the efficient cause of life and mind, and that cause 'occupies a position superior in reality to that of effect'. Both parts of this statement are contrary to fact. As far as the conception of causation is to be introduced at all, not matter, but the natural events having matter as a character, 'cause' life and mind. 'Effect', since they mark the release of potential-
-lities, are more adequate indications of the nature of the nature they are just causes. 9

The above citation will show that though Dewey claims that his naturalism must be distinguished from materialism it is difficult to get rid of materialism. One cannot shake off materialism by simply indeterminate statement like

not matter, but natural events having matter as a character cause of life and mind.

Santayana caught the distinctively American and democratic character of Dewey's philosophy when he wrote,

The master burden of his philosophy which lends it its national character, is profound sympathy with the enterprises of life in all lay direction, in its technical and moral complexity, and

especially in its American form, where individual initiative, although still demanded and prized, is quickly subjected to overwhelming democratic control. 10

Santayana here criticises Dewey's naturalism for its practical moral and social focus. He alleged that because Dewey's naturalism was dominated by a pragmatic or instrumental interpretation of nature and purpose of all experience and all ideas, it was, therefore, only 'half-hearted' or 'short-winded'.

It is to be noted that Dewey did not reply to Santayana's objection to his article "Half-Hearted Naturalism" but he continuously sought to dispel the misinterpretation that his philosophy was a partisan defence of Americanism or a glorification of technology and practical affairs.

The pragmatic character of Dewey's philosophy may be clearly seen in his insistent objection to all forms of dualism that would be fragment and scatter our understanding of thing. He insisted that a truely pragmatic


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philosophy would have to be applied as widely as possible.

Early in his career, Dewey came under the influence of dialectical idealism. Like Royce, he was much impressed by the attempt of idealism to include social, religious, scientific, artistic and all other important realms within the scope of philosophic inquiry. It gradually became apparent to Dewey that the method and conclusion of absolute idealism were inconsistent with the method of genuine inquire and problem solving. Subsequently he departed from the idealistic attitude and concurred with Peirce that all intellectual concepts have meaning located in experimental consequences. He agrees with James that all truths and values must be found in definite consequences within experience. However, Dewey demanded more of pragmatism than did either Peirce and James. He required that logical thinking and experience must be satisfactorily integrated. But Peirce did not conceive logical thinking as relevant to all experience or all problems. On this point James agreed with Peirce but he went even further than Dewey in claiming a break between logic and life or intellect and experience. James not only agreed that experience has more volume than thought, but gloried the fact since

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it gave him an opportunity for a practical supernaturalism. In order words, James cut off science and thought from the whole of experience in order to save religion.

James' theory of objective reference to the future of the stream of experience was accepted by Dewey but he added the meaning of an idea always contains a plan of action or operation. In his 'Studies in Logical Theory' he said that the test of the validity of an idea, is its functional or instrumental use in effecting the transition from a relatively conflicting experience to a relatively integrated one. 11

Truth is definitely a verification and verification is definitely the realization of a prediction, brought about by an operation.

It had been objected to James' theory that he provided no theory of truth about the past. Dewey tries to remedy this defect. His explanation of truth about the past is given thus.

The past event has left effects, consequences, that are present and that will continue in the future. Our belief about it, if genuine, must also modify action in some way and so have objective effects. If these sets of effects interlock harmoniously, then the judgment is true.  

Thus, for Dewey, truth consists in a future verification or verifiability.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, there were only two significant theories of truth - the correspondence theory of Aristotle and the Scholastics and coherence theory of Spinoza, Kant and Hegel. The first is the theory of common sense and the second one is concerned with the deductive method. The inductive and experimental methods were imperfectly used at that time. It was mainly Dewey who rightly insisted on the intimate connection between truth and verification, between truth and inductive and experimental methods. The origin of theory of pragmatism may be traced to the introduction of the above two methods. This theory may prove to be more acceptable than earlier theories. It is a serious revival and it seems

12. Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and other essays, P. 106
to be most outstanding contribution that America made to the development of philosophy.

Dewey is the most prominent spokesman of the naturalistic philosophy. He rejects theological animism, idealism, positivism. For him the world consists of historical, natural events. His philosophy is an emergent naturalism with a place of emergent facts of life and mind. His instrumentalism is the only naturalistic theory of truth. Mind and matter are both functions of natural events. His naturalism contains much more than what is described in Peirce and James' philosophy. His ethics shows the path for the realization of end. It is an instrumental theory of good as well as truth. The two are closely connected, since what is good in conduct can only be experimentally tested. The experimental method has solved in principle the fundamental problem of medicines and technology. His social philosophy by the way of the scientific method can solve social problem. Dewey has been a most thorough-going and influential exponent of naturalism. This is the main current of recent American thought which has been directed by Dewey himself.

The scientific method as introduced by Dewey is the only method for the solution of all meaningful
problems because its application is not restricted to only theory. It is, Dewey, who built a foundation of education, democracy, science and philosophy on experience. Dewey's philosophy is distinctive in calling for a newer and broader approach to the questions of the nature of experience and its applications to the solution of problems. It is for Dewey rightly urges that experience should be viewed as neither self-enclosed nor subjective character but interaction between organism and social aspects. Experience is not one but many, not static or simple. The important thing about experience is that it may be meaningful, cognitive and valuable. Consequently, Dewey's major writings emphasize the central position of experience for philosophy. For Dewey the pragmatic and scientific method based on experience are not two separate methods with restricted applications; rather it selects the approximate means for achieving worthwhile purposes. Both the social and scientific development of the present century require a kind of philosophy that can unify the natural science with the complex changes occurring in man's social life. And it is Dewey's naturalism and instrumentalism that is required to deal with the problem. It is his intention to make philosophy as relevant as possible to the changing conditions of...
man's experience. It is Dewey's original contribution to have attempted to integrate everything into precise framework of natural phenomena and to make the distinction of the subjective and objective, of the psychological and physical disappear for the sake of totalitarianism of experience. His significance for philosophy must be located in his empirical approach to unifying our ways of looking at the world and its problems. It is to be noted that Dewey's logical theory is an elaboration of the thesis that the only way to secure continuity is to recognize an indefeasible facts of ordinary experience. His logic deals with the common sense world in which people act, love, suffer, in response to settled and unsettled environment because they are the actual and necessary presuppositions of inquiry.

It would be erroneous to assert that Dewey advocates a scientific ethics or value theory without the assistance of philosophic theory and criticism. He does not advocate turning moral problems over to biologists or Chemists. Moral problems generally are man's problem and not the possessions of a privileged group. For this reason Dewey refuses to isolate morality
and values from general education, since the only hope for moral improvement lies in letter education. It is, therefore, instructive to see the manner in which he attempts to integrate value concerns with education and art. Moral problems and value concerns in human life are so complex that no real headway can be made towards adequate solution until science, art and education in theory and practice co-operate with one another. But no co-operation is possible unless these endeavours are viewed philosophically and we make use of intelligent and testable methods.

Any account of Dewey’s achievements must note his impact on education. Dewey’s theories have not only notably influenced the course of twentieth century education, but he stands also as the most important philosopher of education that America has produced. As an empirical philosopher he is outstanding for his concern with the social role of science. He himself declared,

that the most penetrating definition of philosophy which can be given is that it is the theory of education in its most general phases. 14

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Dewey's social theory of education coupled with his logic of experimental method has been quite influential in the development of modern educational practices. The greatest change has been in the recognition of the worth of experience of the child. Dewey's writings have been influential in moulding the thought and practice of modern education in the U.S.A. and also elsewhere. Dewey has been one of the significant leaders who have tried to introduce a more human touch in the processes of education. He has been a powerful influence in interpreting the school as a community for realization of the significance of the immediate experiences and present opportunities of the child. Only such a social theory of education can be suitable in the complex interdependence of the modern economic and industrial world. Dewey's emphasis on scientific method and on humanistic ethics are very great contribution to educational theory. He has been emphatic on defining democracy as a mental disposition developed in conjoint shared experiences of a socially serviceable character. He has thus challenged the attempt of some thinkers to narrow down democracy to a political connotation only. His keen vision has noted that political democracy cannot succeed the foundation of genuine psychological disposition.

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Dewey's influence has been tremendous not only upon professional philosophy but upon the entire field of education and upon social thinking over the world. The chiefest contribution of Dewey to educational thought lies in his enunciation of the aim of education as 'securing a balanced interaction of the theoretical and practical attitudes of education.'

Dewey is the sponsor and forerunner of the movement known as "progressive education", which is one of the most significant trends in modern education. John Dewey's concept, doctrines and seminal ideas have been, are and will be tremendously influential in the life and thought of many generations of people in different parts of the world.

Dewey's own philosophical development represents, therefore, a remarkable combination of reconstruction as well as creation. His naturalism and instrumentalism are the development from Peirce and James. Clearly his philosophy is pragmatic. However, it is not mere reworking of Peirce and James, but goes for beyond them. Neither Peirce nor James worked out a comprehensive or integrated theory of values or social philosophy. Peirce showed that
concepts required logical and operational test of their meanings; James showed that truth as well as life concerns required humanistic and functional test of their meaning. Dewey attempted to show how a comprehensive experimental philosophy could integrate all these factors (meaning, truth and value) and at the same time apply them to man's social life. Since it is social or cultural in emphasis this philosophy is more comprehensive and includes the logical and psychological within its naturalism. If Peirce's pragmatism calls for logical and experimental consequences, and if James' pragmatism demands concrete and humanistic results, Dewey's pragmatism may be said to require social applications as well.

Among the three contemporaries of pragmatic school Peirce led to James and James to Dewey and the result was an inductive and experimental theory of truth. It is now famous as theory of pragmatism or instrumentalism. According to this the original of truth is verification and its most extended meaning is verifiability. This theory may prove to be more acceptable than either of the old theories and it seems undeniably to be the most significant contribution to American Philosophy.