CHAPTER 3

EXPERIENCE AND VALUE
This chapter deals mainly with Dewey's argument to establish value judgment as an instance of scientific knowledge. It is argued that although his treatment of value judgment is not entirely true to his naturalistic position, yet it significantly enlightens contemporary thinking in its attempt to arrive at a decisive status of value judgments.

Dewey's pragmatic conception of knowledge registers its two kinds of instrumentality. In the first instance, knowledge is instrumental to further problematic inquiries — since the attainment of a true belief is, according to him, a progressive matter — this theoretical instrumentality of knowledge manifests itself in the autonomous nature of scientific inquiry. Secondly, knowledge through the development of intelligence, is instrumental to the enrichment and enhancement of the life process. Dewey makes sure that, "... the instrumentality of propositions in the process of inquiry, to knowledge as warranted solution of a problem, and, on the other, to the instrumentality of attained knowledge, through development of intelligence
to enrichment of subsequent experiences" are not confused. But his critics usually mix up the theoretical and practical instrumentalities of knowledge. Confusion arises, of course, due to the potential co-existence of these two functions of knowledge in totality of empirically meaningful statements. Moreover a constant hesitation on Dewey's part to separate the theoretical from the practical modes of experience has led his critics to charge him even of an incapacity to set apart a theoretical issue from the practical one.

It cannot, however, be so easily concluded that Dewey has failed to distinguish theoretical issues from the practical ones, because this distinction itself forms the very basis of his conception of a value judgment as different from a theoretical scientific generalization. Yet the fact that he does not choose to completely separate theoretical context from the practical one is not without significance. Dewey rather seriously realizes that a thorough separation between the two had already resulted in an unfortunate split that exists between ideas having scientific warrant and uncontrolled emotions that dominate practice. He

---

maintains that the existing unbridgable gulf between theory and practice or between ideas and action, is destructive on both its edges. It denies on the one side the possibility of direction of human activity by well established scientific ideas, and on the other it is equally suicidal to scientific knowing for then scientific knowing loses touch with wider interactions of human activity and grows narrow, superficial and stagnant.

In his *Theory of Valuation* Dewey discusses the possibility of scientifically grounded propositions for the direction of human activity. His empirical investigations readily come across rules, principles, standards etc. in every mode of human activity. These rules, principles or standards, it is his opinion, develop within empirically observable phenomena of human behavior. Human beings form plans, purposes and values as and when they do not act in accordance with their natural impulse. Original impulse by its very nature is short sighted and irrational and valuation signifies a rational and intellectual dimension of human behavior. Dewey's empirical-cum-rational conception of rules, principles and standards brings out his deep insight into the nature of moral conflict and various factors that constitute it. He surveys that some philosophers consider moral conflict
to arise in the opposition of self love and benevolence, i.e. in the basic opposition between individual and social good. There are others who suppose it to lie in the opposition of reason which is a priori and the factual desires of men; still others find that social and individual considerations are irrelevant to moral ideas which are completely unbiased by any existential considerations.

Dewey rejects all these positions to hold that moral conflicts, doubts or confusions arise only because man has acquired a capacity to think, imagine and learn from his own past experience. Science, values and art are evident results of these capacities of men. It is due to the symbolically and neurologically stored capacities of men that any practical problematic situation is tremendously increased in its range of reference that could provide a solution to it, and a wide gulf is created between blind and intelligent action. Whether one has to act in the interest of others, or in his own interest, becomes in such a situation only secondary question, for primarily one has to settle as to where lies either his own interest or that of others. An interpretation, for example, of Kant's maxim — treat every one as an end and never as means — according to Dewey's position depends for
its significance on what is treating men as ends is like in the actual human context. Presupposing, therefore, that the meaning of the phrase "treating as ends" is obvious, is a mistaken and uncritical assumption.

Again a practical problematic situation is complicated further for Dewey, as he realizes that the conflict between immediate gratifications and long-range satisfactions is not the only cause of valuation. The situations demanding valuation often grow highly complex due to the presence of different courses of action promising varied and competing goods. Moreover no one preference is a preference in isolation, it is connected with every other preference within man's life of increasing complexity in ever widening culture.

To clarify and analyze the nature of authority behind rules, principles and standards Dewey raises a more decisive but a biased question. He asks, "... whether they express custom, convention, tradition or are capable of stating relations between things as means and other things as consequences, which relations are themselves grounded in empirically ascertained and tested existential relations as are usually termed those of cause and effect." To accept values as mere customs,

---

conventions or tradition, Dewey correctly holds, is to misconstrue the nature of values. But the only other alternative to conceive the nature of values, he then thinks, is scientific.

To arrive at conclusions about values entirely analogous to science Dewey investigates the nature of values from various angles. As mentioned earlier, one simple but significant argument, which suggests the possibility of scientifically grounded propositions for the direction of human action, follows from the distinction he draws between intelligent actions and those actions which are either blindly impulsive or mechanically routine and habitual. Dewey argues that the continuity of life requires, on the part of living organism, an activity which is other than merely blindly impulsive. In simple environments, with lower organisms, habitual and instinctive activity suffices to maintain the continuity of life. At human level, too, habits constitute the most efficient mechanisms to secure prompt and exact adjustment with the environments. Habitual activity differs from original impulse because habits howsoever mechanical and routine, are as a matter of fact acquired. But habitual activity is an acquisition which works unknowingly through an unconscious capacity of the organism to benefit from its own past experience.
Whereas the complexity of human life requires a consciously controlled utilization of past experience to live present experiences.

According to Dewey, the developing natural intelligence is the sole measure of human progress and it refers to the ever growing consciousness to acquire knowledge and to utilize the so acquired knowledge to provide insight, direction and increased depth of meaning to entire human experience. Dewey writes, "The history of human progress is the story of the transformation of acts which, like the interactions of inanimate things, take place unknowingly to actions qualified by understanding of what they are about; from actions controlled by external conditions to actions having guidance through their intent: their insight into their own consequences. Instructions, information, knowledge is the only way in which this property of intelligence comes to qualify acts originally blind."\(^3\)

In this passage Dewey not only equates human progress with the developing intelligence; he even maintains that an intelligent action is nothing else

but a well informed action. In his *Theory of Valuation* he abbreviates impulsive actions as "affective-motor" and intelligent actions as "affective-idealional-motor" actions and explains that the difference is characterized by the presence of knowledge in the latter. Undoubtedly, of course, the possibility of idea oriented behavior explains all intention and purpose which qualifies human behavior, but such an empirical observation does not prove that this ideational content is necessarily scientific. This observation, in fact, grows questionable with reference to the distinction he himself draws between knowledge and moral judgment in his book *Moral Principles in Education*. He says, "Just as the material of knowledge is supplied through senses, so the material of ethical knowledge is supplied by emotional responsiveness." Dewey further distinguishes ideas about morality from moral ideas which very clearly brings out the difference between intellectual and moral sensitivity of human mind. The idea that for the development of man's character it is not enough to impart scientific information to him is the problem with which Dewey is seriously faced while occupied with his educational theory and practice.

---

Chapter on education, therefore, takes up this idea for elaborate discussion.

Dewey's theory of value finds an easy evidence of a scientific conception of values in technical values. Codes of engineering, medicine, agriculture, technology or law are scientifically grounded principles of human practice. Normally philosophers do not dispute the scientific status of technical values. Technical values, they do accept, provide scientific means to achieve certain desired and intended ends. They, therefore, exclude technical values from their domain of interest which is confined to ends and does not include means. They name technical values as instrumental values because the discussion of these values only clarifies what must be pursued in order to attain certain other aims to which these values are subordinated in the sense of means to an end.

Hans Reichenbach in his book *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* maintains that the decisions about means are scientific but decisions about ends are volitional decisions, hence, "the decision for a goal is not an action comparable to the recognition of truth". Cognitive clarification about means, ethical philosophers generally

---

hold with Reichenbach, does not change the volitional decisions about ends. Dewey's conception of values suggests an alternative precisely to this separation of considerations of ends from the considerations about means. The most distinctive contribution of his theory of value to the domain of empirical ethics is contained in his idea of inseparability of means and ends.

Dewey is of the opinion that the conception of ends having value in isolation from means follows directly from metaphysical individualism, a theory which treats man apart from the cultural setting in which he has his being. He considers any theory of human volition including particularly human desires and purposes as thoroughly mistaken if it attempts an explanation of human volition in isolation from the environment, in terms of which formation of desires and the projection of purposes take place. What a man prizes or holds dear is a direct function of his transaction with his world. A moral judgment, according to Dewey, depends for its justification completely upon man's enlightenment about himself in relation to his society and the universe. He emphatically maintains that with the progress of knowledge of man about himself and his world a scientific conception of moral values will be automatically accepted. Dewey argues that metaphysical individualism loses its scientific
support because Darwin's theory of evolution has rendered man continuous with nature.

Referring to now an established continuity of man with nature, Dewey rather strongly advocates the application of scientific techniques to the study of man. He, in fact, finds no difficulty in extending his semantic-cum-epistemological postulate about the empirical knowledge of physical things to the knowledge about men. Objective empirical knowledge even of physical things is possible because a vast network of physical relations naturally surrounds every object. From the standpoint of knowledge these relations do not surround the object but actually constitute it. Similarly individuality of a person is unintelligible apart from its peculiar patterns of relations and reactions towards other men and nature. This unity of acts with the self, provides an objective basis of knowledge of one's self and that of the other selves, not because acts belong to the individual selves in some private way, but because these acts relate them with their environment in empirically observable ways. Knowing a human individual means knowing him in associations like domestic, professional, economic, religious, political, artistic, educational and so on. Dewey's behavioral approach to the understanding of men only suggests that the whole framework of man's
personal dispositions i.e. his mental and moral structure, the patterns of desires, interests and purposes get formed and shaped through patterns of interactions which can be empirically ascertained. He rightly claims that his approach overcomes the limitations of mentalistic psychology, for it is mentalistic psychology which has so operated as to reduce values and purposes and aims to mere mental states. But he overlooks the contextual aspect and maintains a total identity of the method of science and the method for arriving at genuine values. The contextual requirements of the methodological criterion, the fulfilment of which promote an enjoyment or a satisfaction to the status of a value, differ from the context of a scientific inquiry. It is significant to note that Dewey's empirical conception of values differs from a usual empirical conception of them. According to him, although values are desired objects and are satisfying, yet all desired objects are not valuable. Desirability, therefore, is not arbitrary but existential. Again it is existential in a de jure not de facto sense of the term. Authority which such values enjoy is neither a priori nor conventional but methodological.

Paul W. Taylor is of the opinion that any claim for genuine moral knowledge is implausible as long as values are based upon arbitrary decisions. He argues
that ethical scepticism is one serious implication of methodological relativism. To avoid ethical scepticism contemporary ethical philosophers are already attempting to develop a uniform method of moral reasoning, a method whose principles are rationally admissible to any culture. Taylor writes, "By considering how any reasonable being could carry on his thinking when he understood clearly the meaning of moral concepts and the function of moral judgments, the philosopher attempts to show that there is a valid way of determining whether any moral judgment is true or false and hence that there is a warranted method for obtaining genuine moral knowledge."  

In addition to the importance of a definite and uniform general methodology to arrive at genuine moral knowledge, Paul W. Taylor puts forth, in these words, an idea that the considerations about meaning and function of moral judgments are significant and decisive with respect to the investigations into the nature of moral beliefs. Dewey, too, though not very explicitly distinguishes and relates moral judgments with other types of judgments on these bases, for it is certainly

in tune with his thinking to review his *Theory of Valuation* as an attempt to empirically find out whether his behavioral theory of meaning is general enough to accommodate value concepts as well. Unfortunately he fails to appreciate the far reaching implications of his behavioral theory of meaning and identify them with the scientific criterion. A value judgment differs from a scientific generalization both functionally and semantically, but Dewey's analysis in this respect remains incomplete, for he does not choose to argue linguistically. Linguistic analysis he feared, had a tendency to degenerate into empty verbal dialectic. As referred to in the last chapter, behavioral approach is fundamentally opposed to the kind of separation G.E. Moore makes between two types of questions: What things are good and what does the word good mean. Behaviorally, to analyze the meaning of a word, it is not enough to study its verbal usage; it requires to know what events in actual behavior account for this usage and what specific observations will enable one to determine the meaning in this behavioral respect.

Dewey is justified in avoiding a mere linguistic treatment of man's symbolic behavior, for, as with contemporary linguistic philosophers, analysis of meaning at its best is confined to syntactic analysis.
Syntactic analysis forms only a part of the method suitable for obtaining grasp over moral or any type of language symbols and serves only a narrow purpose. Syntactic analysis confines itself to linguistic or logical justification of terms in a very limited sense. Dewey draws a distinction between moral reasoning and moral thinking. Contemporary analytical thinkers confine the problem of moral justification to moral reasoning i.e. a search for conceptual connections, for moral thinking indespensably involves an attempt to get at existential connections by means of language tool. Ever growing moral problems are certainly existential in nature; they are not mere conceptual.

A value judgment, Dewey rightly holds, is warranted outcome of an empirical inquiry into a practical problematic situation. A practical problematic situation grows due to blocking of efficient overt action. Inquiry consists of a choice for a line of action out of various competing lines of action; the presence of which leads to the conflicting situation. Knowledge acquired in theoretical context becomes an important instrumentality for the clarification of many details within this practical context. Due to this utility of theoretical knowledge in the practical context, Dewey finds an easy definition of value propositions with reference
to this context. He says that value propositions are, "... rules for the use, in and by human activity, of scientific generalizations as means for accomplishing certain desired and intended ends." But this practical or choice making context is forgotten by Dewey himself when he conceives value judgments methodologically similar to scientific generalizations. It is only within a practical context that any scientific relationship of cause-effect is transformed into a new relationship of means — ends or means-consequences. At another place Dewey clearly distinguishes a scientific generalization from a value judgment. He says, "Laws and facts, even when they are arrived at in genuinely scientific shape, do not yield rules of practice.... If we retain the word "rule" at all, we must say that scientific results furnish a rule for the conduct of observations and inquiries, not a rule for overt action. They function not directly with respect to practice and its results, but indirectly, through the medium of an altered mental attitude." Contextual considerations are so important

7John Dewey, Theory of Valuation, p. 23.

in Dewey's case that only in the absence of these he could be accused of naturalistic fallacy. Prof. Hook clarifies Dewey's naturalistic position in an extremely pertinent manner. He says that whenever a person confronted with alternative courses of action, asks as a moral agent "What I ought to do" and argues in favor of a choice then "the underlying premise of the argument is not an explicit statement at all but the situation."  

Contemporary empirical tendency to consider values as exhortation, choices or rules by great ethical thinkers like Hare, Ayer or Stevenson can be more intelligibly grounded if these are oriented on Deweyan lines. Who assigns them not only an empirical but a methodological status. Values certainly are not just arbitrary but methodologically developed rules, registering definite existential relations within human experience. R.M. Hare joins G.E. Moore in rejecting scientific ethics as valid ethics at all because ethical values impose a kind of obligation foreign to scientific statements. Value judgments, in fact, even according to Dewey, are not reports of existential relations in the form of propositions like "It is satisfying". Values

---

take the form "It is satisfactory". Syntactically the two forms are different, for the latter is not at syntactic level derivable from the former. The status of value in Dewey's thinking is obscure because he does not work out the exact nature of methodological and contextual interventions by means of which values are linked with knowledge.

Due to his scientific bias he rather emphatically advocates that scientific intelligence is the sole method which could find appeal with all those men who decide to think rationally about moral matters irrespective of the culture to which they belong. Scientific intelligence, he argues, accepts any empirical idea on the basis of observation and experimental test. Since in this respect he happens to equate scientific method entirely with the technique of observation and experimentation he puts older values simply to this test. He finds that values as empirical ideas are still in an extremely obscure state. Value concepts till to-day adhere to the old logic of definition and classification. A priorism, dogmatism and absolutism in the conception of values are the direct results of the older kind of Aristotelian logic. Within such a logic it is difficult to conceive values as anything other than fixed principles of categorization. Normative standards, according to
the old logic, are fixed principles of categorizing things or persons as good and bad, desirable and undesirable and worthy or unworthy. Similarly normative rules of conduct are a priori prescriptions which tell categorically what actions are right or wrong and what duties and rights do people have in relations to each other. In such a state of affairs Dewey very correctly holds that value concepts demands not a logical clarification but an introduction of an appropriate methodology to arrive at genuine moral beliefs. Yet to say a priori that this methodology is one and the same with the method of science is a claim which cannot be made according to his own thinking. Whether values are or are not scientific concepts is within his own thinking a factual question. Unless, therefore, values are found so, no prophesy can be made in this direction.

A pure empiricist physicist, P.W. Bridgman, says, "Experience is determined only by experience. This practically means that we must give up the demand that all nature be embraced in any formula, either simple or complicated. It may perhaps turn out eventually that as a matter of fact nature can be embraced in a formula, but we must so organize our thinking as not to demand it as a necessity." 

---

A recourse to scientific conception of values, in fact, displays on Dewey's part an anxiety to get rid of ethical a priorism, dogmatism and absolutism. Paul W. Taylor who shares this anxiety considers the case of an individual who has either consciously imbied or unconsciously absorbed the older kind of dogmatic moral beliefs from his environment. If such an individual with strong dogmatic beliefs, says Mr. Taylor, "Suddenly be confronted by others who have moral beliefs contradictory to his own and who holds them with as much certainty as he holds his own, he will feel lost and bewildered. His state of confusion might then turn into a deep disillusionment about morality." Interestingly enough what Mr. Taylor says is true not only of a common man, but also of great ethical thinkers, who find themselves completely lost and bewildered; the state of conflict and confusion has already led them to a deep sense of disillusionment about moral beliefs. Failing to explain the facts of cultural variability in moral beliefs, ethical thinkers have a recourse to theories of value like relativism, emotivism or at times complete ethical scepticism.

According to Dewey, of course, the state of affairs is far from disappointing. He rather finds such a situation the appropriate turning point from customary to reflective morality. He holds that a reflective search for values could arise only when custom failed to provide the required guidance. He says, "Moral theory cannot emerge when there is a positive belief as to what is right and what is wrong, for then there is no occasion for reflection." An occasion for reflection is an occasion of conflict, confusion and challenge. Valuation certainly is a continuation of the humble attempt of human mind to find order out of chaos through some methodologically developed means. But Dewey is wrong to suggest that scientific method is the only genuine empirical methodology. To determine a value is to institute a decisive factor with respect to, what is to be done, in a situation demanding choice.