2 Dewey's Early Idealism

Since science has made the trouble, the cure ought to be found in an examination of the nature of knowledge, of the conditions which make science possible. If the conditions of the possibility of knowledge can be shown to be of an ideal and rational character, then, so it has been thought, the loss of an idealist cosmology in physics can be readily borne. The physical world can be surrendered to matter and mechanism, since we are assured that matter and mechanism have their foundation in immaterial mind. Such has been the characteristic course of modern spiritualistic philosophies since the time of Kant.

The Quest for Certainty

Dewey worked toward a doctorate in philosophy at Johns Hopkins University in the midst of a debate about whether and how the discipline of philosophy should be retained in a modern research university. His initial response was to reject G. Stanley Hall's scientism in favor of G. S. Morris's idealist conception of philosophy. In the three papers Dewey wrote and published during his graduate years, "Knowledge and the Relativity of Feeling" (1883), "Kant and Philosophic Method" (1884), and "The New Psychology" (1884), he presented contemporary neo-Hegelian interpretations of empiricism and Kantianism, derived from his studies of T. H Green, Edward Caird, Bernard Bosanquet, F. H. Bradley, and of course Morris.[1]

Dewey rapidly became disenchanted, however, with the conciliatory tone mainstream idealism adopted toward the physical sciences, in particular its willingness to surrender to the physical sciences a department of knowledge once exclusively its own. To do so, he would argue, was wrong on two counts. First, it was to construct an artificial dualism in

1. See John Dewey, "Knowledge and the Relativity of Feeling," *EW* 1:19–33; "Kant and Philosophic Method," *EW* 1:34–47; and "The New Psychology," *EW* 1:48–60.

knowledge where none actually existed. Second, it was to misrepresent the relation between philosophy and the physical sciences as a relation between peers. In an 1886 series of articles published in the British journal *Mind*, Dewey argued against mainstream idealism's partitioning of knowledge and in favor of the reassertion of philosophy's claim to the title of queen of the sciences. A year later, he put his principles into practice through the publication of *Psychology*, a textbook that set empirical psychology firmly in its place by presenting it as propadeutic to idealist philosophy of mind.

DEWEY'S INITIAL RESPONSE

In "Knowledge and the Relativity of Feeling," Dewey tries his hand at generating absurd conclusions from central tenets of empiricism: for example, that all knowledge originates with sensation and that all sensation or 'feeling' is relative to its subject. He complains that according to the first, "we must know only our feelings," and according to the second, "we must know the relation of our feelings to an object; this the feelings cannot give, except by transcending their relativity" (*EW* 1:23). Dewey does not deny that sensation is relative to the state or condition of the subject. On the contrary, he insists upon it in order to make the point (more than once) that "the theory of the Relativity of feeling . . . is so far from proving the subjectivity of our knowledge that it is impossible, except upon a theory which assumes that we do have objective knowledge" (*EW* 1:29).

In "Kant and Philosophic Method," a paper believed to be a short version of his doctoral dissertation,[2] Dewey demonstrates his mastery of the neo-Hegelian rejoinder to Kant's critique of reason and its scope. Here Dewey commends Kant for having recognized that the mind is something more than the collection of associating ideas and feelings that empiricism imagined it to be. Kant had demonstrated that the mind was a source of synthetic activity, constructing the phenomenal world with its relations—temporal, spatial, causal—out of a meaningless mass of unorganized raw material. Kant's 'method' of getting at the nature and extent of humanity's capacity for knowledge, however, was limited to determining the fundamental, rational categories of organization implied in it. The distinction between the real and the merely apparent is to be determined by reference to Kant's categories. But, Dewey continues,

2. See Dykhuizen, *Life and Mind of John Dewey*, pp. 36–37.

Kant's method is unable to deliver on its promises. As Kant himself points out, we have no reason to believe that the categories our minds impose upon our experience necessarily reflect real relations in the objective world. So Kant's method turns out to be nothing but a method for distinguishing between coherent and incoherent human experience, rather than between the real and the merely apparent.

Dewey identifies the assumption of an essentially empiricist picture of human experience, in which human percipients respond passively to the impacts of external sources of stimulation, as Kant's undoing. Why, Dewey asks, should we assume there are such objects? Surely, it is simpler, and therefore more reasonable, to postulate that the subject-object relationship is itself a category imposed by the mind on its experience. If so, Kant's method is not the end but only the beginning of philosophical progress toward a perfected method of human determination of reality: Hegelian Logic. "Logic in the Hegelian use," Dewey says, "is just that criterion of truth which we thought at first to find in Kant's Transcendental Logic—it is an account of the concepts or categories of Reason which constitute experience, internal and external, subjective and objective, and an account of them as a system, an organic unity in which each has its own place fixed. It is the completed Method of Philosophy" (*EW* 1:44).

"The New Psychology" has often been cited as evidence that Dewey was as strongly attracted to Hall's as to Morris's vision of philosophy in this period.[3] The paper is, however, an unremarkable example of the neo-Hegelian response to empirical psychology, one that might as easily have been written by Morris as by Dewey. Dewey opens by applauding the rise of the 'new psychology,' in particular its use of physiology as a supplement to introspective analysis of consciousness. Then he announces the purpose of his article: the correction of a "very great confusion and error" about the relation of physiological investigation to psychology, the science of human consciousness. The error Dewey had in mind was the belief that "physiological psychology is a science which does, or at least claims to, explain all psychical life by reference to the nature of the nervous system." He replies: "Nothing could be further from the truth. . . . Explanations of psychical events, in order to *explain*, must themselves be psychical and not physiological." As for the nervous system and the facts of its organization, Dewey proclaims that "it has *of itself* no value for psychology" (*EW* 1:52).

3. See Chapter 1, above, for examples.

Having identified and exposed this popular error, Dewey proceeds to introduce the reader to the neo-Hegelian view of the respective claims of philosophy and physical science to conduct and to interpret the results of the investigation of human psychology. In keeping with that view of mind and body, subject and object, as simply 'aspects' that consciousness presents from different points of view, Dewey depicts 'mental' and 'physical' things and events as phenomena of distinctly different perspectives. But since they are ultimately phenomena of different perspectives on one and the same thing, consciousness, the two orders of phenomena may be presumed to run parallel. On this view, psychophysical parallelism, physiological events never directly reveal the nature of mental events. But they may nevertheless function as valuable clues for the study of mental events. Dewey explains: "[If] a certain nervous arrangement can be made out to exist, there is always a strong presumption that there is a psychical process corresponding to it. . . . In this way, by purely physiological discoveries, the mind may be led to suspect the existence of some mental activity hitherto overlooked, and attention directed to its workings" (*EW* 1:55). Dewey was therefore enthusiastic about the prospects of future psychophysiological cooperative research. He was no less enthusiastic about the contribution to be made by the social and historical sciences, such as cultural anthropology, sociology, and ethnology. Following Hegel, Dewey argues that cultural institutions may be viewed as the 'objective' manifestation of consciousness working toward its self-realization. In such institutions, he writes, we have "a record of the development of intelligence [that] can be compared only to the importance of the paleological record to the student of animal and vegetable life" (*EW* 1:57).

Dewey's 'new psychology' is thus clearly not Hall's Darwinian, empirical science of conscious human behavior. It is instead Morris's neo-Hegelian philosophy of mind, in aid of which physiology and empirical social sciences are to work as handmaidens, supplying observations of the physiological parallels to, and objective manifestations of, consciousness for subsequent philosophical study.

Dewey left Johns Hopkins University in 1884, on the surface at least a signatory to the entente cordiale Morris had tried to establish between academic philosophy and physical science. Moreover, he appeared to believe, as Morris did, that mental and moral phenomena were topics for philosophy rather than empirical science to investigate. But already there are hints in his work of a commitment to a more radical, Hegelian stance on the interrelations of philosophy and science than Morris was,

at least publicly, willing to advocate. Most important in this respect are Dewey's comments on method, particularly those in "Kant and Philosophical Method."

Consider the characterization of philosophic method he offers: "The criterion of experience is the system of categories in their organic unity in self-consciousness, and the method consists in determining this system and the part each plays in constituting it. *The method takes the totality of experience to pieces, and brings before us its conditions in their entirety.* The relation of its contents, through which alone this content has character and meaning, whereby it becomes an intelligible, connected whole, must be made to appear" (*EW* 1:43; emphasis added). Dewey's characterization of philosophic method in this passage is a restatement of Hegel's conception, according to which "the method is nothing but the structure set forth in its pure essentiality."[4]

Two important features of this conception should be noted. First, the method is defined by the characteristics of its end product as opposed to the intellectual means used to arrive at that product. Second, there is only one method of knowing anything. From a Hegelian standpoint, there is but one truth to be known: the truth of the absolute whole as an organic system. Anything less than the truth of the whole will be but a partial truth and hence not, strictly speaking, true. Since there is ultimately only one truth, and since philosophy is the science by which the one ultimate truth may be known, philosophy possesses the only complete method for grasping truth.

According to the Hegelian view, the physical sciences use essentially the same method as philosophy, but in a flawed and imperfect way. The physical sciences, in Dewey's words, take the totality of experience and 'bring before us its conditions,' that is, they bring to our attention the general conditions or laws exemplified in particular classes of experience. But physical science does so incompletely because of its reliance on purely empirical means of investigation. By these means alone, it can never determine the fundamental conditions or categories of experience in their 'entirety' or 'pure essentiality.' To do this, we must further determine what is implied in there being general conditions or laws of nature and in our ability to grasp them. To make such determinations, we must go beyond the narrow bounds of the special, physical sciences

4. G. W. F. Hegel, "Preface: On Scientific Cognition," in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 28. And see, generally, M. J. Inwood, *Hegel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), esp. chap. 3.

and apply dialectical philosophical reasoning to the first-order determinations the special sciences yield.

Morris's depiction of the physical sciences as handmaidens to philosophy originates in this conception of physical science as a defective, first-order form of philosophy. But Morris had practical and political reasons for refusing to antagonize his scientific colleagues, either at Johns Hopkins or at the University of Michigan, by characterizing them as defective philosophers or their research as incomplete until reworked by more philosophic minds. And he had similar reasons to downplay the difference between his own and his colleagues' notions of scientific method. Morris, following Hegel, preferred the traditional usage of 'science' as a synonym for 'knowledge,' from which it followed that scientific method was a method of knowing and that any scientific method that yielded something less than knowledge (hypotheses, for example) could not be a 'scientific method.' But increasingly in the late nineteenth century, 'science' was becoming synonymous with the specialized tools and techniques of contemporary laboratory experimentation and statistical analysis. Morris disliked the trend away from the traditional use of 'science,' but on the whole he diplomatically assented to calling 'philosophy' what he would have preferred to call 'science' and to calling 'science' what he would have preferred to call 'special science' or perhaps simply 'inductive generalization.'[5]

Dewey, however, refused to follow Morris's lead. Unwilling to permit even the appearance of dualism in his conception of knowledge, Dewey was less amenable to trends in modern terminology. When, for example, in "The New Psychology" he wrote that knowledge of the physiology of the central nervous system was of no value to 'psychology,' what he was calling 'psychology' Morris would have called 'philosophy' of mind. And when three years later Dewey called for the construction of a "truly scientific ethics" that would be able to "justify the living ways of man to man" in his 1887 paper, "Ethics and Physical Science," it was not an empirical or naturalistic ethics he was advocating.[6] In 1886, Dewey turned his impatience with British neo-Hegelianism's conciliatory attitude toward the 'special sciences' into a platform and published it in a periodical where British neo-Hegelians and empiricists alike would be likely to see it: the British philosophical journal *Mind*.

5. As he does, for example, in the 1882 paper discussed in the previous chapter, "Philosophy and Its Specific Problems."

6. John Dewey, "Ethics and Physical Science," *EW* 1:226.

PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND PSYCHOLOGY

Through his 1886 series in *Mind*, Dewey introduced himself to the transatlantic philosophical community. It was an important event in his career and he did not waste his opportunity to make an impression. In this two-part series, "The Psychological Standpoint" and "Psychology as Philosophic Method," Dewey criticized empiricist claims that empiricism could explain mental phenomena, such as knowledge, without resort to metaphysics or speculation and also idealist counterclaims that the questions empirical science could answer about mental phenomena are different *in kind* from those philosophic mental science attempts to answer.[7]

In "The Psychological Standpoint," Dewey argues that British empiricism's characteristic insistence on the possibility and desirability of constructing accounts of mental phenomena on a purely experiential basis was to be applauded. Unfortunately, none of the theories actually produced by John Locke, Bishop Berkeley, David Hume, or their successors, J. S. Mill and Alexander Bain, met this description. Despite his stated intentions, each had admitted into his account of mind that "which does not show itself in experience" (*EW* 1:124). In so doing, Dewey argues, he revealed that his metaphysical assumptions, rather than his observations, were the true source of the data on which his generalizations about mental life were based.

The British empiricists' departure from descriptive scientific investigation, or as Dewey calls it, the psychological standpoint, is peculiarly evident in their explanations of knowledge. Knowledge is purported to originate in sensation. But the sensations of which our knowledge is composed, Dewey charges, are unknown and unknowable, hence purely speculative postulations. They are certainly not the sensations of which we do have experience, because these are not given in our experience but rather emerge as the result of processes of discrimination, attention, association, and the like. The sensations of which we are conscious, being products of all these activities, cannot be the simple, original material of experience from which knowledge is constructed. The empiricist account of knowledge turns out to rest on a speculative, not an experiential, basis.

The moral Dewey draws from what he sees as British empiricism's

7. See John Dewey, "The Psychological Standpoint," *EW* 1:222–43; and "Psychology as Philosophic Method," *EW* 1:144–67.

blunders is the danger of departing from the psychological standpoint on mental life. We must resist the temptation to step outside our conscious experience when conducting our investigations into consciousness and its causes. If we do not, he warns, we immediately find ourselves caught in paradoxes and logical circles. For example, he writes: "All that we can know exists for our consciousness; but when we come to account for our consciousness we find that this too is dependent. It is dependent on a nervous organism . . . upon objects which affect this organism. It is dependent upon a whole series of past events formulated by the doctrine of evolution. But this body, these objects, this series of events, they too exist but for our consciousness" (*EW* 1:132). Since appeals to objects or causes 'outside' consciousness invariably turn out to be appeals to some construct of our consciousness, all such appeals trap us in an inescapable circle. "The problem is to reconcile the undoubted relativity of all existence as known to consciousness, and the undoubted dependence of our own consciousness" (*EW* 1:132). Dewey's answer is that we must think the two points 'together.' He suggests: "If this is done, it will be seen that the solution is that the consciousness to which all existence is relative is not our consciousness, and that our consciousness is itself relative to consciousness in general" (*EW* 1:132–33). Or in other words, everything within and without us is conscious experience. This, Dewey insists, explains how we can construct a purely experiential account of knowledge, without denying the relativity of our knowledge to our particular subjective points of view.

In "The Psychological Standpoint," Dewey acknowledged the debt he owed to Green for his criticisms of British empiricism. But in the second of his *Mind* papers, "Psychology as Philosophic Method," Dewey turned his critical guns on Green's school of idealist thought, not excepting Green himself. Instead of arguing for a distinction between empirical science and philosophy and for the necessity of the latter as a complement to the former, Dewey attacks the distinction and the "post-Kantian" British idealists, such as Green and Caird, who approved it. Like their empiricist counterparts, Dewey argued, these neo-Kantians have succumbed to the temptation to find the source or causes of our conscious experience and of our knowledge in something outside that experience—albeit this time in another consciousness, of whose nature we have little or no direct experience.

Dewey illustrates what he calls the 'post-Kantian' (later, 'neo-Fichtean') idealist position with remarks from an article by Caird. Caird distinguished philosophic from empirical sciences of the mind on the

grounds that whereas the former deals with "the conditions of the knowable, and hence with self-consciousness or that unity which is implied in all that is and is known," the latter's contribution is limited to furthering our grasp of "how this self-consciousness is realised or developed in man, in whom the consciousness of self grows with the consciousness of a world in time and space, of which he individually is only a part"[8] (*EW* 1:146). To this Dewey replies:

> When psychology is defined as the science of the realization of the universe in and through the individual, all pretense of regarding psychology as merely one of the special sciences, whose subject-matter by necessity is simply some one department of the universe, considered out of relation to the individual, is, of course, abandoned. With this falls, as a matter of course, the supposed two-fold character of man's nature. If the essence of his nature is to be the realization of the universe, there is no aspect in which, *as man*, it appears as a mere object or event in the universe. (*EW* 1:148)

Hence self-consciousness cannot be distinguished from the absolute self-consciousness, Dewey is saying, without abandoning the psychological standpoint. And to abandon the psychological standpoint is again to land oneself in a paradox. If we suppose there is another, different sort of self-consciousness, we must bear in mind that this other, supervenient, absolute consciousness, on which our limited, finite consciousness is supposed to depend, itself exists in and for our consciousness. British neo-Hegelianism has evidently not sufficiently 'thought together' the ideas of inner and outer consciousness. But this is what must be done if the paradox is to be avoided. We must each recognize that our own consciousness is absolute consciousness, that the two are one and the same. Human consciousness, then, is what absolute consciousness is like when it realizes itself from within one particular, finite perspective.

Of course, in advocating the unity of consciousness to neo-Hegelians, Dewey was preaching to the converted. Green himself had earlier acknowledged that the distinction between finite and absolute consciousness should not be treated as itself absolute. When in his *Prolegomena to Ethics* Green wrote that "our consciousness may mean either of two things: either a function of an animal organism, which is being made . . . a vehicle of the eternal consciousness; or that eternal consciousness itself, as making the animal organism its vehicle . . . but retaining its

8. Dewey is quoting Edward Caird's article "Metaphysic," from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th ed., 16:89.

essential characteristic as independent of time" (72) he anticipated the objection that the distinction makes his conception of consciousness dualistic. Green adds that he is saying not that man has two varieties of consciousness but rather that "the one indivisible reality of our consciousness cannot be comprehended in a single conception" (73). Our limited capacity to grasp the truth forces us to conceive of consciousness both as universal, absolute, and constructive, and as finite, nonabsolute, and merely reproductive (that is, reproducing within its limited point of view the absolute's self-constructed reality).

Dewey argues that despite such disclaimers, Green's conception of consciousness is dualistic. It is a reformulation of the distinction Kant made between the phenomenal appearance of self and its unknowable, noumenal reality. The cause of the dualism in each man's theories, Dewey argues, is the same. Instead of directing their analyses "into the *actual nature* of experience," Kant and Green both made the object of their analyses "the *necessary conditions* of experience," the *logically* necessary conditions (*EW* 1:153). But experience, Dewey argues, is not merely logical, nor is consciousness merely a logical unity. The rich variety of things and relations that make up conscious existence cannot be captured in the thin strands of a purely logical web of relations.

If absolute idealism is to avoid collapsing into transcendentalism, Dewey warns, it must reexamine its fundamental presuppositions. In particular, it must rectify two serious errors: "First, Philosophy can treat of absolute self-consciousness only in so far as it *has become* in a being like man, for otherwise it is not material for philosophy at all; and, secondly, it falls into the error of regarding this realization in man as a time–conditioned product, which it is not. Time is not something outside of the process of conscious experience; it is a form within it, one of the functions by which it organically constitutes its own being" (*EW* 1:160). It is a mistake to imagine that one can study consciousness in isolation from its manifestations, whether it is human consciousness in isolation from its manifestation in a particular individual or the absolute consciousness in isolation from its particular manifestations. Abstract consciousness from what it does, from any content on which it can operate, he argues, and you have nothing at all. So the philosophical project of studying the absolute consciousness itself as distinct from study of its particular manifestations in natural events and human actions is empty.

The notion that such a project could ever be pursued, according to Dewey, arises from commission of the second error: the error of think-

ing of the absolute as bringing about its realization in time. This error is implicit in the suggestions that the absolute is working toward its realization and that philosophers, by studying the underlying logic of the universe, can in effect study the absolute's working out of its own nature. But these suggestions are inconsistent with the assertion made by the absolute idealists themselves that time is simply one form of organic interrelation holding between the finite constituents of the absolute and so not applicable to the absolute itself. As the absolute does not exist in time, Dewey argues, it should not be described, even metaphorically, as more or less realized in one or another spatiotemporal configuration. It is thoroughly misleading to speak as if natural or human history reveals to us the absolute's progressive self-realization. The absolute is eternally realized. The fact that human beings happen to experience the universe as temporally ordered does not entail the conclusion that the absolute operates in accordance with the order that finite human minds impose upon their experience.

The point Dewey is trying to make is that no one of the categories or relations of human consciousness is more peculiarly 'real' or revealing of the absolute than another. None is, so to speak, metaphysically privileged. Dewey viewed the emphasis placed on logic by British neo-Hegelians as a survival of transcendentalism, inconsistent with Hegelianism rightly understood.[9] If we truly are constituents of a greater consciousness, an organic whole, then whatever is integral to the internal structure of our consciousness is integral to the internal structure of the whole. Thus if temporal relations are essential constituents of our conscious experience, they must be essential constituents of absolute consciousness. Since logical relations exclude the temporal, logic alone cannot be an appropriate vehicle for the pursuit of philosophical inquiries into consciousness. Dewey sums it up: "If the material of philosophy be the absolute self-consciousness, and this absolute self-consciousness *is* the realization and manifestation of itself, and as material for philosophy exists only in so far as it has realized and manifested itself in man's conscious experience, and if psychology be the science of this realization in man, what else can philosophy in its fulness be but psychology?" (*EW* 1:157).

9. Whether he thought Hegel has rightly understood Hegelianism in this respect is not entirely clear. Dewey certainly disagreed with the doctrine, sometimes attributed to Hegel, that a philosophy of nature, including the description and prediction of particular events in nature, could be developed directly from Hegelian 'logic.' But Dewey does not make it obvious whether or not he thinks this interpretation of Hegelian logic is consistent with Hegel's own views.

In saying that psychology was 'philosophic method,' Dewey was not saying that philosophers should cease their ordinary activities, epistemological, aesthetic, metaphysical, or moral, and begin at once to do psychology. He meant that they were *already* doing psychology—a sort of metatheoretic psychology. To do it well, whatever the philosophical specialty, philosophers must recognize that the questions they ask are all ultimately questions about constituents of conscious experience. Moreover, if the answers are to be coherent, they must all be integrated with a theory of mind that can encompass all the varieties of interrelations consciousness manifests. For that matter, every researcher is a psychologist and every subject of research—geology, biology, chemistry, astronomy—is a branch of psychology. That is, the categories and fundamental relations that characterize these aspects of our experience, Dewey believed, will turn out to characterize our experience as a whole. By determining what those categories or concepts are, the philosopher creates (or rather reproduces) a framework or 'method' by which the separate contributions of the special sciences may be organized into a coherent whole. Because these categories composing the framework are 'psychological,' psychology is the 'completed method' of philosophy.

By his rejection of any dualism or distinction in absolute idealism's conception of knowledge or of the self, Dewey committed himself to upholding empirical psychology as a legitimate, if inferior, means by which to begin to try to answer *philosophical* questions about knowledge, mind, and the nature of the world. Green or Caird might brush aside the results of empirical psychology as in themselves irrelevant to philosophic inquiries. But henceforth Dewey could not. Insisting that all special sciences be seen as stages along one and the same continuum of knowledge and truth, he had to be able to show that philosophical psychology is related to and develops out of its more primitive, empirical progenitor, if his program for the reconstruction of neo-Hegelianism was to be made convincing. This condition Dewey attempted to meet in his first book, *Psychology*.

DEWEY'S *PSYCHOLOGY*

Given its origins, the 1887 *Psychology* was necessarily a hybrid text, less remarkable for what it contained than for the fact that it existed at all.[10] George Croom Robertson, editor of *Mind*, was struck by Dewey's capac-

10. See John Dewey, *Psychology*, *EW* 2.

ity to "reconcile an idealism of the thoroughgoing modern type . . . with an adoption of the spirit and aims of the English psychological school from Locke onwards. It has been interesting to hear such ungrudging allowance of philosophical import to the work of the English inquirers from one . . . of a class of thinkers with whom it has been a common fashion to regard it with a certain disdain."[11] In the *Andover Review*, H. A. P. Torrey, Dewey's undergraduate professor of philosophy, saw it as the author's intent "to make his work an introduction to philosophy in general. And we think his conception of the science the true one, notwithstanding the claim of the 'new Psychology,' that is to say, of the physiological aspect of the science, to the whole field. . . . Dr. Dewey gives about as much of his book to that side of the subject as is due to it, or profitable."[12]

The space Dewey gave to the new psychology, if sufficient for Torrey, a Kantian, was, predictably, insufficient from the more empiricist perspectives of Robertson and the book's severest critic, Dewey's former professor, Hall. Robertson complained of the lack of "a clear and distinct view of the relation of nervous to mental process and a summary of the really important and relevant physiological data."[13] Hall went further. He not only found fault with Dewey's grasp of modern psychological investigation ("the book . . . might have been written half a century ago, and have been poorer only by a number of pat physiological illustrations") but attacked Dewey's project of reconciling idealism and physiological psychology as scientifically naive. "That the absolute idealism of Hegel could be so cleverly adapted to be 'read into' such a range of facts . . . is indeed a surprise as great as when geology and zoology are ingeniously subjected to the rubrics of the six days of creation," was Hall's backhanded compliment to his disappointing former student.[14]

On the basis of its reviews, it seemed unlikely that the book would have any sort of success. Yet it did. American departments of philosophy held more Torreys than Halls. For those of an idealist bent, not ready to see psychology emancipated from departments of philosophy but open to new ideas, Dewey's *Psychology* offered an acceptable compromise. In the 1880s and 1890s, *Psychology*'s hybrid character worked to its advantage.

11. George Croom Robertson, "Critical Notice of *Psychology*," *Mind* 12 (1887): 439.

12. H. A. P. Torrey, review of *Psychology*, *Andover Review* 9 (1888): 438.

13. Robertson, "Critical Notice of *Psychology*," p. 442.

14. G. Stanley Hall, "Critical Notice of *Psychology*, by James McCosh, *Introduction to Psychology*, by Borden P. Bowne, and *Psychology*, by John Dewey," *American Journal of Psychology* 1 (1888): 157, 156.

The Hegelianism into which the reader is introduced in *Psychology* is Dewey's reformulated neo-Hegelianism of 1886. Not surprisingly, this new position is only partly worked out and on occasion collapses into just the sort of dualism *Psychology* was a protest against. Dewey opens by defining psychology as "the science of the reproduction of some universal content or existence, whether of knowledge or of action, in the form of individual, unshareable consciousness" (*EW* 2:11). Or to put it another way, psychology is the science of how universal consciousness constructs for itself particular points of view (subjective selves) from which to view its universal self: "The universal element is knowledge, the individual is feeling, while the relation which connects them into one concrete content is will" (*EW* 2:22).

Why a universal consciousness would want or need to construct particular perspectives, or subjective selves, in order to realize itself is not explicitly discussed. An answer is implied, however, in Dewey's Hegelian conception of the construction of meaning. Dewey gives it as a general rule that "every act of mind involves relation; it involves dependence; it involves *mediation*" (*EW* 2:205). If every act of human minds involves mediation by some network of categories and relations, we may presume that every act of absolute consciousness must do so as well. The relations constituting each one of our peculiar individual perspectives on the universe are the 'mediating' devices the absolute mind uses to know itself.

What there is for consciousness to discover from any particular perspective is of course one and the same organic reality, so Dewey concludes that "were individuals *knowing* individuals only, no one would recognize his unique distinctiveness as an individual. All know the same, and hence, merely as knowing are the same" (*EW* 2:23). But consciousness is not only self-knowing; it is purposeful. And its purpose of perfectly perceiving itself is both aided and hindered by each one of the particular perspectives or subjective points of view it must adopt. The relation of purpose to opportunity is the reason why "in any actual case knowledge has some emotional coloring, and hence is conceived as being one's *own* knowledge" (*EW* 2:23), that is, the view from one's own perspective. Feeling arises as consciousness perceives a perspective as involving a mix of benefits and burdens or limitations. The will to self-realization is what holds a given perspective or self together.

Dualism is at least superficially avoided in the account of psychology and its subject with which Dewey begins his discussion. Nothing so far is attributed to the particular individual self that could not also be in some

sense an attribute of universal consciousness and vice versa. And if we conceive of the absolute, universal consciousness as consciousness realizing itself as a manifold of particular selves, which stand in temporal relation to one another but as a whole exist outside time—viewing itself through a kaleidoscope of perspectives but having no 'universal' perspective of its own over and above the kaleidoscope—then Dewey's conception of consciousness does indeed avoid dualism. Yet his initial definitions of the three 'aspects' of consciousness make it difficult and ultimately impossible for him to keep his conception of consciousness entirely monistic. In the book's first section, "Knowledge," no serious difficulties arise. But as soon as Dewey begins the second, "Feeling," dualism creeps in.

The reason is not hard to see. Dewey defines 'feeling' as the subjective appreciation of consciousness's subjective situation as helpful or the reverse. Moreover, a subjective situation is ultimately helpful or the reverse as it does or does not contribute to consciousness's perfect self-realization. Of course, no individual's perspective is adequate to consciousness's perfect self-realization. Thus it turns out that every individual's perspective on the world (or self) will be felt to be unsatisfactory. That is, each individual self feels its self to be an imperfect realization of, and thus distinct from, absolute consciousness. This result is surely as deep and as "inwardly lacerating" a divide between universal and individual consciousness as were the "divisions and separations . . . of New England Culture" that Dewey had expected neo-Hegelianism would help him overcome.[15] As Dewey describes it, "the feeling that a universal self is our own true being is necessarily accompanied by the feeling of obligation and responsibility. We feel bound to realize our own [universal] nature because it is *our* nature, and feel responsible for its non-realization" (*Psychology*, *EW* 2:289–90). Our only recourse is to act in the faith that the deficiencies of our particular contributions are being made up elsewhere. Dewey writes: "Feeling finds its absolutely universal expression in religious emotion, which is the finding or realization of self in a completely realized personality"; that is, "in religious feeing we find our self expressed in God" (*EW* 2:245). Only in this way can our unsatisfactory subjective selves be disregarded as unreal manifestations of our true nature.

The same problem about the means and objective of conscious activity gives rise to dualist treatment of the topic of the third section, "The

15. See "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," *LW* 5:153, quoted in Chapter 1, above.

Will." Here we are told: "The will is always holding itself before itself. The self has always presented to its actual condition the vague ideal of a completely universal self, by which it measures itself and feels its own limitations. The self, in its true nature, is universal and objective. The actual self is largely particular and unrealized. The self always confronts itself, therefore, with the conception of a universal or completed will towards which it must strive" (*EW* 2:358). No matter how the 'actual self' struggles to realize its full potential as a particular finite self, not even its perfect realization as such a self would satisfy the demand of the will for complete universal self-realization. Again, our only comfort is in the essentially religious faith that our particular subjective selves are in a sense unreal. In the words of the text, relief from the endless demands of the will is afforded by the faith that "God, as the perfect Personality or Will, is the only Reality" (*EW* 2:361).

The distinction Dewey makes between individual, finite consciousness and universal, infinite consciousness in his discussions of moral psychology, the basis for his depiction of personal life as the struggle to make the 'actual' finite self the vehicle of the realization of one's 'true' or infinite selfhood, is drawn straight from the self-realization ethics of Green, Caird, and like-minded neo-Hegelians. It is a distinction that an unreconstructed neo-Hegelian such as Green would be entitled to make—but that Dewey was not. Dewey's position on the self in "The Psychological Standpoint" put him at odds with Green's notions of the self and of self-realization. This was because Green's moral agent's summum bonum is to become what Dewey's agent already is: a realized organic whole. The irreconcilable aspects of consciousness that make up the human self in Green's theory of mind reappear as two irreconcilable conscious ends in Green's theory of morals. In his *Prolegomena to Ethics*, for example, Green states the case as follows:

> The reason and will of man have their common ground in that characteristic of being an object to himself which, as we have said, belongs to him in so far as the eternal mind, through the medium of an animal organism and under the limitations arising from the employment of such a medium, reproduces itself in him. It is in virtue of this self-objectifying principle that he is determined, not simply by natural wants according to natural laws. . . . The conditions of the animal soul, 'servile to every skiey influence,' no sooner sated than wanting, are such that the self-determining spirit cannot be conscious of them as conditions to which it is subject—and it is so subject and so conscious of its subjection in the human person—without seeking some satisfaction of

itself, some realization of its capabilities, that shall be independent of those conditions. (182)

The first problem such a moral agent has in deciding how to lead his life is to differentiate between his true and his ephemeral, animal desires, so as to focus his energies on realizing his true nature. Having discovered that his true nature demands the realization of his latent personal capacities, the agent next must discover some means by which to bring this about. Like Bradley before him, Green argues that social life is the medium both of self-discovery and of ultimate self-realization.

In Green's unmodified neo-Hegelianism, however, what an agent's true self is must be understood in two ways. We must recognize that a moral agent has the potential to act both *as the medium* of the absolute self-consciousness and *as the absolute* reproducing itself in that medium. Consequently, self-realization entails two ideals the agent cannot resolve into a single summum bonum. He interacts in society so as to realize his personality as a finite self. But he is also aware of himself as potentially absolute, as having the capacity for absolute realization far exceeding that afforded by membership in a social organization.

Thus the human agent on this account of self-realization is in the unhappy dilemma of having the means of partial personal realization available while at the same time having capacities within him that transcend the boundaries of any possible social station. Green remarks: "Each has primarily to fulfill the duties of his station. . . . No one so confined, it would seem, can exhibit all the Spirit, working through and in him, properly and potentially is. Yet is not such confinement the condition of the only personality we know?" (192). Self-realization is the struggle to overcome this paradox.

The paradox is a direct consequence of the duality in this conception of human self-consciousness. The particular self is held to exist as a sort of cell of an overmind. By communication with the whole and partial reproduction of the whole within the cell-like self, the particular self is aware of the greater, freer life the whole leads. The freer, fuller life of the whole is the cell-self's ideal. Because it shares in the self-consciousness of the whole, the particular self feels it has, in some sense, the capacity to realize its ideal, to become the whole it participates in. Hence its dissatisfaction with its life as a cell and its hopeless struggle to realize itself as the whole of which it is after all only a cell. In a paper of 1892, Dewey would remark: "No thorough-going theory of total depravity ever made

righteousness more impossible to the natural man than Green makes it to a human being by the very constitution of his being."[16]

Since Dewey had rejected Green's account of the self as dualistic, together with the hierarchical relation between the self's two aspects, Dewey's moral agents ought not to find themselves in such a paradoxical position. That nevertheless they do in his *Psychology* is an indication of how much more work was needed to develop his protest of 1886 into a coherent position.

Although Dewey was to revise *Psychology*, first in 1889 and again in 1891, he made no significant changes to the passages on moral psychology.[17] The dualism between human and divine consciousness remained. Whether Dewey failed to dissolve the distinction between the two varieties of selfhood because he was unaware of the problem or because he thought it a minor blemish not worth the trouble of removal is not clear. In the end, he judged the problem serious enough to warrant working out in a full-length text, his 1891 *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*.

By his protest of 1886 against dualism in the mainstream of neo-Hegelianist thought, Dewey deprived himself not only of classic formulations of idealism as a model for his own, but also of classic formulations of self-realization ethics—with one notable exception. Of the ethical treatises published by the more important figures in the movement, only Bradley's *Ethical Studies* came near to meeting Dewey's requirements for a nondualist conception of self-consciousness and its realization.[18] The 'true' self each of Bradley's moral agents seeks to realize is his or her own particular, actual self with all its actual, if latent, capacities and potentialities, not a distinct, divine self mysteriously supervening upon the actual self. Although Bradley, like Green, believed that moral life was inherently paradoxical, his account of the paradox avoids overt dualism. Like Green's agents, Bradley's agents may expect to find the means of self-realization—social life and social stations—inadequate to their ends. But this is because their social stations may prevent their perfecting the nonsocial talents of their actual selves, not because their

16. John Dewey, "Green's Theory of the Moral Motive," *EW* 3:160.

17. For an analysis of the changes he did make, see Andrew J. Reck, "The Influence of William James on John Dewey in Psychology," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 20 (1984): 87–118.

18. Of British neo-Hegelians discussed in Dewey's 1886 paper, "Psychology as Philosophic Method," Bradley is the only one who escapes criticism as 'post-Kantian.' See *EW* 1:166 n.

true selves transcend the particular, finite lives open to them as actual selves. But while Bradley's *Ethical Studies* provided a suitable model for the development of Dewey's own ethics, it also posed a serious challenge.

Dewey had opted for an uncompromising stance on the relation of empirical science and philosophy. As far as he was concerned, philosophy was science. The empirical, special sciences were just a sort of first-order, preliminary form of the scientific investigations philosophy conducts. To make his case convincing, he had been obliged to indicate how, for example, the generalizations of empirical mental science provided the first-order generalizations for subsequent analysis and interpretation by higher-order, philosophic investigation, both in his papers of 1886 and in *Psychology*. To be consistent, he would be obliged to do the same with moral science. He would have to show that generalizations from the empirical study of morals could be developed and ordered by the application of philosophic methods of analysis and classification. But Bradley denied that any science of morals was possible. He insisted that the moral world, with its character-forming societies and virtue-forming stations, was in a state of constant flux. Because the moral world is internally inconsistent, negotiating it is impossible unless moral agents invent coherent ideals of the world on which to act. However functional these ideals may be, Bradley holds, one cannot be said to *know* what is merely ideal. Nor can one create a scientific scheme for the classification of something that is not a coherent system.

It was for this reason that in the conclusion of *Ethical Studies*, Bradley argued that the incoherence and incompleteness of the moral world can be reconciled only by an act of faith that our struggles to cope with a confused and confusing world do not go unrewarded. We must abandon the scientific attitude and its demand for 'justification by sight' for an essentially religious attitude that takes its justification on faith. This outcome was not acceptable to Dewey, however. He was not prepared to cede half of philosophy's traditional territory to departments of theology. Nor would he accept Bradley's pessimistic conclusion about the unknowability of the moral world. In his 1891 *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, Dewey made the first of a series of attempts to prove Bradley wrong about the possibility of moral science.