6 Pragmatic Ethical Science: The 1908 *Ethics*

> *It is not claimed, therefore, that there is* no *philosophical problem of the relation of physical science to the things of ordinary experience. It is asserted that the problem* in the form *in which it has chiefly occupied modern philosophy is an artificial one, due to the continued assumption of premises formed in an earlier period of history and now having no relevancy to the state of physical inquiry. Clearing the ground of this unreal problem, however, only imposes upon philosophy the consideration of a problem which is urgently practical, growing out of the conditions of contemporary life. What revisions and surrenders of current beliefs about authoritative ends and values are demanded by the method and conclusions of natural science?*
>
> The Quest for Certainty

The 1908 Dewey and Tufts *Ethics* was remarkable in two respects.[1] First, the text was so popular that it was reprinted at least yearly from 1909 to 1931 (when it was replaced by a revised, second edition). Second, *Ethics* originally appeared as a volume in the Holt Company's American Science Series. And it was the 'scientific' character of the work that most recommended it to some of its early reviewers. G. A. Tawney, writing for the *American Journal of Sociology*, said that "probably no more convincing effort to construct a system of moral philosophy by a strictly scientific method has ever been carried out."[2] Norman Wilde wrote in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* that *Ethics* "marks the end of the abstract, speculative treatises and the beginning of the positive studies of established human values."[3] In the *Psychological Bulletin*, E. B. McGilvary described *Ethics* as "well worthy to take

1. See John Dewey and J. H. Tufts, *Ethics*, 1st ed., *MW* 5.
2. G. A. Tawney, review of *Ethics*, *American Journal of Sociology* 14 (1908–9): 690.
3. Norman Wilde, review of *Ethics*, *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* 5 (1908): 636.

its place beside James's *Psychology*, Remsen's *Chemistry*, and Chamberlin and Salisbury's *Geology*."[4]

In retrospect, it may be hard to believe that the publishers, the reviewers, or Dewey and Tufts themselves took any of these claims very seriously. On the surface, *Ethics* bears little resemblance to a scientific text. It neither describes ethical experiments performed nor provides directions for sample experiments to be run by students entering the field. Indeed, there is no evidence that Dewey or Tufts ever tested, or intended to test, any one of their hypotheses experimentally. Not surprisingly, the use of the term 'science' by authors and reviewers alike has subsequently come to be read as merely honorific. It might even be argued that sympathetic criticism demands such a reading. Only if we refuse to credit Dewey with claiming his ethics was scientific, the argument would go, can we save his ethics from absurdity.[5] But it is unlikely that Dewey would have welcomed such sympathy. The development of his moral philosophy shows that there was nothing about which he was more serious than a reconciliation of ethics and experimental science.

In any case, more is lost than saved by this sort of sympathetic interpretation—including the key to the structure of the book. Unless *Ethics* is read as an introduction to a unified, scientific inquiry, the organizing thread that binds the three parts into a whole is lost. The damage that results is exemplified by Arnold Isenberg's struggles to explain the relation of Dewey's theoretical Part II to Tufts's historical and social Parts I and III. Isenberg wrote: "Part II *came at the right place* between Parts I and III; but it is in no way *dependent* for the coherence of its argument upon anything that comes before or after. [It] . . . is not 'open-ended' at

4. The texts mentioned were earlier volumes in the same American Science Series. Evander B. McGilvary, review of *Ethics*, *Psychological Bulletin* 6 (1909): 14–22, p. 14.

5. It is difficult to be sure precisely why Dewey's sympathetic critics ignore or pass over his insistence that ethics could and should be rendered 'scientific,' since defenses are rarely offered. Presumably, some believe that an ethics that operates on scientific principles must somehow violate Hume's proviso. Others appear to believe that if ethics can be a science, then, in Richard Bernstein's words, "'value' or 'good' is the name of an empirical property that could be *discovered* by science" (Richard Bernstein, *John Dewey* [Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, 1966], p. 117). Since Dewey is committed to the position that values are constructs, it is thought that for him a science of ethics ought to be a contradiction in terms.

Neither fear is well founded. A scientific ethics, as Dewey conceives of it, does not necessarily commit Hume's fallacy (see Chapter 5, above). Nor does it entail that values are 'discovered.' 'Values' are an ethical science's analogues of the 'facts' of physical sciences. Since, as Dewey sees it, facts are constructs rather than discoveries, values too will be constructs rather than discoveries (see Chapter 7, below).

either end; it would be a disappointment . . . if a good reader should form the opinion that it is."[6]

One can only wonder why Isenberg thought the right place for Dewey's discussion of moral theory was between the two parts written by Tufts, if he saw no important connections between them.

For *Ethics* to make sense as a whole, the book must be read as its authors intended, as an overview of what ethical science is (or should be) like. This brings us to the question of how we can possibly do so. What would justify our treating it as a scientific work despite the notable absence of experimentation and experimental results?

THE FUNCTIONS OF SCIENTIFIC THEORIES

In one respect, *Ethics* is rather like an introductory science text. The possibility of the subject's being treated scientifically is neither raised nor defended explicitly. Like an elementary science book, *Ethics* demonstrates the applicability of scientific method to the subject matter by its use. Only its (presumably) evident serviceability in advancing our understanding of ethics justifies its adoption. For those fortunate enough to have access to Dewey's "The Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality," no explanation would have been needed. But such readers would have been few and far between. To the majority, Dewey's methodology and his reasons for adopting it must have been something of a mystery.[7] Happily, we are better placed.

Putting together what we have learned about science from "The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality" and "The Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality," we can construct a general statement of what Dewey believes the method and object of scientific *ethical* inquiry are. We know that scientists define and explain the phenomena of ordinary life in terms of the processes that produce them. Scientists experiment in order to reproduce those processes in laboratories, in order to determine what conditions must be in place if a given phenome-

6. See Arnold Isenberg's foreword to a reprint of *Ethics*, 2d ed., Part II, *Theory of the Moral Life*, ed. Arnold Isenberg (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960), p. v. The structural relations on which Isenberg comments are identical in both editions.

7. In the years following 1908, Dewey made intermittent replies to calls for further explication of his conception of moral and evaluative reasoning, including especially "The Logic of Judgments of Practice" (1915), *MW* 8:14–82; "Valuation and Experimental Knowledge" (1922), *MW* 13:3–28; "The Construction of Good," in *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), *LW* 4:203–28; and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *LW* 12.

non is to occur. So it would seem that the *object* of any scientific inquiry is to discover and explain the principles of design of natural objects and events with a view to facilitating judgments about their future occurrence. And from the second of these two papers, we know that the method by which scientists construct and confirm their judgments about the principles of design of natural objects and events includes (1) provisional warranting of hypothetical judgments by their coherence with antecedent judgments (i.e., warranting for further investigation) and (2) the warranting proper of a hypothetical judgment by the experimental confirmation of the predictions it yields.

But we also know ethics is a practical science and that its aims differ in some important ways from those of 'basic research' sciences. The objects with which such practical sciences as civil engineering, architecture, and medicine concern themselves are artificial rather than natural, things and events that would not occur at all, in the same way, or as often, were it not for human activity. So we might say that practical sciences concern themselves with discovering and constructing principles of the artificial design of things and events, with a view to facilitating our judgments about their future occurrence. Although the principles of design in these cases are artificial rather than natural, the same general method of testing should be used. We should provisionally warrant hypotheses about future experience by their coherence with our antecedently established judgments, and then check the provisionally warranted hypotheses against our experience in experimental conditions.

Human experience is a natural event. But the construction of a coherent, satisfying life requires artifice. Thus ethical science would be a project of constructing hypothetical judgments about the design of a special class of artificial objects or events—satisfactory life or selfhood—and of confirming these hypotheses (depending upon the type in question) in one of two ways: (1) by their coherence with our antecedently constructed theoretical 'categories' and previously confirmed hypotheses and their coherence with our experience under experimental conditions or (2) by their adequacy to fulfill the function of fundamental principles.

Ethical hypotheses would, of course, be descriptive on this view. But it would not follow from this that ethical science cannot make recommendations about what ought to be believed or done. As Dewey sees it, any special science is capable of justifying some conclusions about what ought to be believed or done. This is because being scientific is some-

thing we choose to do. In general, what we choose when we choose to be scientific is to join in a social practice defined by rules of procedure that are categorical for that practice. It is this commitment to a practice of investigation that obliges us to treat certain outcomes of investigation as guiding or compelling belief and action on our parts. Not everyone chooses to be a scientist, natural or ethical. But virtually everyone chooses to be a rational agent, that is, to engage in a practice defined by peculiar rules of procedure, rules included among and underlying the more specialized rules and procedures of the sciences. As a result, everyone who chooses to be a rational agent is (to some extent) obliged to adopt certain attitudes toward the outcomes of properly conducted scientific investigations. By the same token, everyone who chooses to be rational is (to some extent) obliged to adopt certain attitudes toward the outcomes of properly conducted scientific *ethical* investigations.

Read as an introduction to a newly emerging ethical science, the peculiar structure of the 1908 *Ethics* begins to make sense. Tufts's Part I, "The Beginnings and Growth of Morality," reviews the background data available to the ethical scientist of 1908 about how different peoples have organized their lives and characters and then, in an elementary way, tries to single out the processes—social, psychological, environmental—that participate in producing these ways of living and being. Part II, "Theory of the Moral Life," takes the first step toward scientific investigation of the principles of the design of the sort of life persons want to lead by selecting and provisionally warranting a set of fundamental principles, defining the field of inquiry and its constituents. The outcome of Dewey's Part II is a set of theoretical principles by reference to which specific hypotheses about conduct or character may be provisionally warranted. Tufts's Part III, "The World of Action," demonstrates the functional adequacy of Dewey's Part II theory, by showing that it can be used to warrant experimentally fruitful hypotheses about the outcome of designing lives in certain ways (i.e., by instituting certain specific social and political arrangements). As a rule, Tufts's demonstration of the functional adequacy of Dewey's Part II theoretical framework stops short of actually experimentally confirming the hypotheses the theory provisionally warrants. Occasionally, particular social or legislative experiments proposed or under way in 1908 are cited as means of achieving (some) experimental confirmation.

Virtually none of the hypotheses selected by means of Dewey's theory is actually shown to be fully scientifically warranted. Does this con-

stitute a problem for the claim that the authors had constructed a 'scientific theory' of moral life? The answer is no. It is not required of scientific theorists that they should actually experimentally confirm hypotheses provisionally warranted by the fundamental principles they construct, so long as they do not claim that the hypotheses are anything more than provisionally warranted. They are only required to show that the principles they construct can fulfill the function for which they were designed. This is all Dewey and Tufts claim to have done: to have constructed theoretical underpinnings for subsequent experimental confirmation of various hypotheses.

The hypotheses and the predictions they yield must eventually be experimentally tested—a task for which moral philosophers are singularly ill-fitted. But this is less of a problem than it might appear. For reasons discussed below, the hypotheses a pragmatic ethical science will need to confirm are primarily hypotheses about the development, suppression, and expression of settled dispositions to action; the roles of specific dispositions in forming a harmonious, stable, and satisfactory character; and the relations of dispositions to the surrounding environment, social and physical. Such hypotheses should in principle be experimentally confirmable by existing sciences, such as sociology, anthropology, physiology, and psychology. The frequent calls for social scientific investigation into labor conditions, class divisions, family organization, and education issued by Tufts in *Ethics*, Part III, indicate that it was to the existing human and social sciences that Dewey and Tufts looked for confirmation of ethical hypotheses.

So although *Ethics* neither records nor gives directions for the performance of ethical experiments, the reader is not left in the dark about the sorts of experiments to be used. Nor is the reader left wondering about what 'experimental fruitfulness' means for ethical science. An ethical scientist's hypothesis is experimentally fruitful if it suggests or generates predictions that can (in principle) be confirmed by social scientists. Moreover, we can see that although the 'coherence,' as Isenberg put it, of the principles of moral life and conduct Dewey arrives at in Part II may not 'depend' upon what goes before or after, the justification of those principles most certainly does. Internal coherence is not sufficient warrant for the adoption of a given set of principles as the fundamental principles of a science. Nothing but the demonstration of the principles' ability to fulfill the function for which they were designed warrants their adoption—which is why Dewey's Part II had to be followed by Tufts's Part III.

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF MORAL SCIENCE: MORAL AGENCY AND ITS OBJECT

The fundamental principles of any special science will include rules of procedure as well as definitions categorizing the phenomena to be studied. The most basic of the rules of procedure are those common to every science: rules about the selection and warranting of hypotheses. What Dewey has to supply, and justify, over and above these basic procedural rules are definitions categorizing moral phenomena, together with any special rules of procedure unique to ethical inquiry. This is the task of *Ethics*, Part II.

The method of construction he adopts is pragmatic. In formulating definitions, he will not accept as a real constituent of the field of ethics anything that lacks 'practical bearings,' that is, anything whose absence would make no difference to our experience. If, for example, Dewey can leave out the faculty of 'will' without finding a 'remainder' of human experience uncaptured, then he will not hypothesize the existence of such a faculty or seek to define it. On the other hand, if a proposed definition of some class of phenomena seems to leave a remainder unaccounted for, he will question or reject that definition. No definition visibly failing either test is to be accepted, even tentatively, as a building block of his theory.

What then does he need definitions for? Dewey gives several (inconsistent) lists of phenomena.[8] From these lists it appears that a minimally adequate ethical theory must be able to define moral agency, the object of moral agency, the nature of the reasons we have to pursue that object, and what grounds, if any, there are for adjudicating between action-guiding reasons where these appear to conflict.

Opening Part II with a relatively uncontroversial definition of an agent as a self-conscious being whose choice of ends is amenable to rational foresight and deliberation, Dewey then notes that not all agency is considered moral: "As currently conceived, stirring the fire, reading a newspaper, or eating a meal are acts with which morality has no concern"[9] (*MW* 5:190). What distinguishes these acts from acts of moral agency, he suggests, are the "two differing ways in which activity is induced and guided by ideas of valuable results" (*MW* 5:191). The difference lies in the complexity of the deliberations and choices that moral and nonmoral agency involve.

8. See his introduction and Chapters 10, 11, 12 (*Ethics*, *MW* 5:7–20, 187, 199, 220).

9. Dewey is quoting from Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton, 1892), p. 5.

Nonmoral choices and acts, Dewey argues, are guided by a single type of end or 'value.' When, for example, our deliberations are guided by the single end or value of amusing ourselves, all that has to be decided is which of the acts open to us will be most amusing: reading a newspaper, stirring a fire, or eating a meal. Nonmoral agency is essentially "a technical rather than a moral affair" (*MW* 5:191). Agency becomes moral only when a second and incompatible end or value begins to compete with the first. Then, as Dewey puts it, "there is no longer one end, nor two ends so homogeneous that they may be reconciled by both being used as means to some more general end of undisputed worth. We have alternate ends so heterogeneous that choice has to be made. . . . The problem now becomes what *is* really valuable" (*MW* 5:192).

Because our objectives are incompatible, moral situations raise questions technical situations do not; most significantly, questions about the relation of our ends to our moral characters. Dewey argues, "This is the question finally at stake in any genuinely moral situation: what shall the agent *be*?" (*MW* 5:194). As he sees it; "When ends are genuinely incompatible, no common denominator can be found except by deciding what sort of character is most highly prized and shall be given supremacy" (*MW* 5:195). The ends we reject represent roads not taken, leading to experiences we are not to have. Consequently, the choice between incompatible ends is always potentially a choice between significantly different ways of life. Thus a decision about what course of action is most desirable is at the same time always a decision about what sort of life and character it is most desirable to achieve.

Dewey now has the constituents of a definition of moral agency. Moral agency is activity in a situation where a voluntary choice is made between incompatible, character-determining courses of action by an agent exercising some degree of foresight and deliberation. At the same time, we have a definition of moral agency that is controversial. Although Dewey does not draw attention to the point, his definition of moral agency entails that neither classical hedonism nor Kantianism can be theories of *moral* conduct. For example, classical hedonism holds that all objects of desire are commensurable, since all desires are ultimately for the same end: pleasure or happiness. Consequently, all hedonistic deliberation about action is technical rather than moral. So if we accept Dewey's definition of moral agency, we must conclude that hedonism is a critical theory of nonmoral conduct.

It might appear that Kantianism could claim to be a theory of moral agency, as Dewey defines it, because Kant recognized the existence of

two incommensurable ends of choice and action: happiness and good. But in Kant's ethics, the determination of which end is *really* valuable is not open to debate. There is only one correct answer. Good is by definition the one unconditionally valuable end. So it turns out that a Kantian agent's deliberations about how to act are technical rather than moral. The Kantian agent is always on the lookout for the course of action most likely to realize the one certainly good end. Although Dewey's definition of the moral agent is one that Kantians and hedonists could possibly accept, his definition of moral agency is not.

This brings us to the question of the object of moral agency. Agency becomes moral whenever a situation presents us with a choice between incommensurable ends. And the object of this sort of agency, Dewey holds, is to achieve a solution with the best overall implications for the future development of our characters. But how is this determined? What is to be counted as a positive implication for one's character and how can it be reliably detected?

According to Kant, the positive implication we should be concerned for is the reinforcement of our devotion to duty by courses of action that suppress desire. The method by which we detect this is analysis of our intentions. So long as our analysis shows our intention to be of the right sort, we may safely go ahead with the action. By contrast, hedonistic utilitarians have argued that the significant implications of actions are their pleasant and painful consequences alone. Naturally, the methods of detection favored by utilitarians are empirical and probabilistic. Dewey rejects both sorts of suggestions.

As he sees it, the Kantian account of the object of moral agency fails in two respects. It defines the object without reference to 'practical bearings,' and its implications conflict with ordinary or common-sense moral experience. It follows from Kant's moral theory that the consequences of an act are not directly relevant to its moral worth, since it is the intention alone that is the focus of moral consideration. But people do not ordinarily treat the consequences of one another's acts as irrelevant to an agent's moral character (although on occasion bad results will be overlooked if they can be attributable to something other than the agent's intentions). Indeed, if we are not to treat consequences as directly relevant to the worth or essential character of an agent's intentions, by what verifiable means are we to detect or measure intention or character? The answer, of course, is none. Third parties have no access to an agent's intentions. The agent's own access via introspection is private and unconfirmable by any public, scientifically admissible means.

The only public, scientifically admissible means available to determine what a person's intentions, desires, or dispositions to action may be in any given case is observation of the person's acts. And this is true, Dewey holds, not only for others' intentions, desires, and dispositions but for our own as well. Just as we divine another's state of mind as angry, fearful, charitable, or ambitious by attending to the consequences of that person's acts, so we learn to detect anger, fear, charity, or ambition in ourselves by the same means. Because hedonism defines dispositions, desires, and intentions in terms of the consequences of the acts to which they regularly give rise, Dewey credits hedonism with a claim to scientific consideration.

What vitiates hedonism's claim is its conflation of the plurality of desires and dispositions for distinct ends into one desire: the desire to maximize pleasure. Although it is true that the satisfaction of urgent desires or dispositions is typically accompanied by pleasure, Dewey argues, it does not follow that pleasure is the object of our desires and dispositions. For example, a majority in the Electoral College is an indicator of success in a campaign for the presidency of the United States. But it does not follow from this that a presidential candidate's object is a majority in the Electoral College. The candidate's object is to become president. Similarly, Dewey argues, the experience of a preponderance of pleasure over pain is (usually) an indication that one of our active dispositions has successfully achieved its object. It does not mean pleasure was the object of that disposition.

Moreover, since moral agency is agency in a situation presenting incommensurable ends, it cannot be the case that all our dispositions and desires are aimed at the production of pleasure. So although hedonism is correct in emphasizing the importance of consequences for defining and distinguishing intentions, desires, and dispositions, its account of the object of moral agency is fatally flawed. In this respect, Dewey claims, Kant was more nearly on the right track in looking to the internal rather than the external concomitants of action. What we choose in a moral situation has implications for who we will be and how we must see ourselves in the future, because we choose (in effect) the suppression of certain of our dispositions to action for the sake of enhancing the expression of others. So Dewey recommends that we 'synthetically' define the object of moral agency as the construction of a satisfactory *character* overall and our immediate objective in problematic moral situations as the discovery of the option most conducive to our long-term ends.

THE GOOD AND THE RIGHT

The definition of the object of moral agency as the development or construction of a satisfactory character, together with the suggestion that the pleasure we take in our characters is an indicator of moral success, gives *Ethics* a decidedly naturalistic—even utilitarian—ring. Though Dewey certainly meant *Ethics* to offer a naturalistic ethical theory, utilitarianism was not the theory he had in mind. In his discussion of the evaluation of character and character-determining conduct, he sought to distinguish his view of the significance of pleasure for motivating and assessing possible acts from utilitarianism's.

Mature moral agents faced with a problematic situation understand themselves to be faced with mutually exclusive courses of action toward incommensurable ends. Based on past experience, they can predict the likely outcomes of each course of action. And using those predictions, they can discriminate and define the dispositions urging them toward those outcomes. Now classic utilitarianism, Dewey argues, sees the prediction of pleasurableness of options as directly determining the selection of the most pleasant option in more or less complex ways. For example, Jeremy Bentham sees the prediction of pleasure in a given outcome as directly determining the agent to act for that outcome. John Stuart Mill, on the other hand, sees the outcome as being reason-giving rather than directly determining, but holds that only the maximization of pleasure or minimization of its opposite provides adequate reason for action. Of Dewey's replies, the one to Bentham is particularly interesting, as it suggests how Dewey might have responded to the common charge that his ethics is essentially Hobbesian.

As Dewey understood Bentham's position, we are determined by nature to desire the expression of a disposition whenever we foresee that the results of doing so will be pleasurable. It is the pleasure foreseen that makes the expression of the disposition good to an agent. And the greater the pleasure, the greater the value of expressing the responsible disposition. What is good is at the same time right, for there is nothing else about the good foreseen result that can motivate our pursuit of it but that quality that makes it good to us. What the eulogistic terms 'good' and 'right' eulogize is pleasure. Thus 'good' and 'right' must be synonymous terms.

This account Dewey rejects as inconsistent with our experience of how we order our competing dispositions to action. Even were it correct to say that we are causally motivated to act from a disposition by the

anticipation of the pleasure it would produce, this motivation is not the only influence on our decision. The presence of another factor is revealed by certain ambiguities Bentham is forced to introduce into his account of moral agency. Bentham claims that it is for pleasure and pain "alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do"[10] (*MW* 5:241). To this Dewey replies that "if happiness is the *natural* end of all desire and endeavor, it is absurd to say that the same happiness ought to be the end" (*MW* 5:245). To say that we *ought* to base our estimates of possible acts on the likelihood of their producing pleasure or pain implies that (1) it is open to us to reject the pleasant alternative, which further implies that (2) ends other than pleasure or the absence of pain attract our interest. Either then we have ends other than pleasure that give different sorts of reasons or motivations for choice and action (which Bentham denies) or there must be different *kinds* of pleasures, giving different kinds of reasons for action. If so, then 'good' and 'right' would not be synonymous. Acts would be evaluated for their 'goodness' as sources of pleasure without thereby settling the question of the 'rightness' of choosing any particular one.

Is this argument specious? Could Bentham reply that the only real difference between the ends of particular acts is the quantity of pleasure they involve? Anticipations of pleasurable results causally motivate us to perform particular acts with a force proportionate to the quantity of pleasure anticipated. A greater quantity of pleasure provides a stronger, not a more rational, motivation to act from the disposition that would produce it. Dewey does not directly deal with this question, but from what follows in his text, his answer would probably go like this. When two foreseen and incompatible results each promise us pleasure, though in differing degrees, Bentham should say that we *will* pursue the greater. But instead, he tends to say that we *ought* to pursue the greater. What grounds does Bentham have for holding this? Why 'ought' the agent to prefer the greater pleasure? Presumably, Bentham must feel that we desire not only to be pleased but to be rationally pleased.

Dewey sees another ambiguity in Bentham's account of how the process of selection of foreseen pleasures takes place. Or rather, he sees it in the fact that a selection takes place at all. Were we simply causally determined to pursue pleasure foreseen, foreseeing pleasure in the results of acting from a particular disposition would set us moving toward that

10. Dewey quotes from Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, rev. ed., vol. 1, chap. 1 (London: W. Pickering, 1823).

pleasure before any other results could be foreseen and compared with the first. No genuine selection or deliberation about alternatives could take place. But Bentham holds that we can foresee and compare several alternative possible pleasures before we act from any one. Dewey continues: "From Bentham's own point of view, there is a difference between the good which *first* presents itself, which *first* stirs desire and solicits to action, and the good which being formed *after and upon the basis of consideration of consequences*, is the *right* good. In calling the latter the *right*, we mean it has supreme authority over the end which first appears. . . . So it is again evident that we are using happiness in two quite different senses" (*MW* 5:245). These ambiguities in Bentham's explanation of the motivation of our choices of actions in moral situations and in his account of the meaning of 'good' and 'right' decide the case against both. What we foresee as the results of acting from a given disposition is action-guiding but not directly determining.

Other hedonistic utilitarians, such as Mill, mindful of these sorts of problems with Bentham's ethics, had also come to the conclusion that anticipations of pleasure or pain do not directly determine us to act in one way rather than another. Moreover, Mill argued that pleasures do differ in kind and thus differ also in the kind of reason they give us for action. Choices between competing courses of pleasant ('good') action will be more or less rational ('right') depending on the kind of pleasure chosen. Mill argued that Bentham's error was his failure to recognize that pleasures differ in quality as well as in quantity. So whenever we are faced with a choice, we have but to consider the relative value of the different kinds of pleasure available to us, to isolate and identify the 'higher' kinds of pleasure, to have adequate reason for making a selection and considering it right. All pleasure is reason-giving, but some pleasures give better reasons than others.

To adopt Mill's interpretation of rational choice of action, we would also have to adopt his hypothesis that pleasures are qualitatively distinct. As Dewey points out, this we have absolutely no reason to do. Thus if there are qualitative differences between the ends that would 'please' competing dispositions to action, Dewey reasons, they must reflect qualitative differences in the dispositions themselves. But surely this is going too far. If we grant that differences in 'pleasures' cannot do the work required in either Mill's or Bentham's theories, and that the differences in the worth of ends depend on differences in our dispositions, does it follow that the differences are qualitative? Why not consider Thomas Hobbes's suggestion that desires and dispositions them-

selves differ quantitatively, that is, in force or urgency? Hobbes's theory, moreover, does not violate Dewey's first principle of scientific moral theory: his definition of moral agency as involving choice among incompatible or incommensurable ends. Hobbes does not hold that all our desires are for pleasure or that the desires we have for food, shelter, security, power, esteem, and so forth, are commensurable in any single end. Instead, he treats the conflicts of our desires on analogy to conflicts of nonrational forces in nature. The stronger of two mutually interfering forces cancels out the weaker. Similarly, the stronger of two mutually interfering desires cancels out the weaker. Thus selection from among a set of competing dispositions to action can be accounted for without appeal to qualitative differences between dispositions.

It is a pity that Dewey did not consider this possible objection. Had he done so, the popular misconception that his ethics is a species of Hobbesianism might have been avoided. Still, a Deweyan answer can readily be constructed on the model of Dewey's argument against Bentham, discussed above. Given Hobbes's view of how deliberation occurs, Dewey could argue, there can be no meaningful distinction between 'good' and 'right' in respect to possible objects of desire, because what we ordinarily speak of as being a true good or a right good is simply the most compelling good of which we are aware. There would be no sense in speaking of the chosen good as rightly or wrongly chosen. Yet this is precisely how Hobbes does speak of the results of deliberations. In *Leviathan*, he writes:

> In Deliberation, the Appetites, and Aversions are raised by foresight of the good and evill consequences, and sequels of the action whereof we Deliberate; the good or evill effect thereof dependth on the foresight of a long chain of consequences, of which very seldome any man is able to see to the end. But for so farre as a man seeth, if the Good in those consequences, be greater than the Evill, the whole chain is that which Writers call *Apparent*, or *Seeming Good*. . . . so that he who hath by Experience or Reason, the greatest and surest prospect of Consequences, Deliberates best himself; and is able when he will, to give the best counsel unto others.[11]

If selection between goods was achieved through an internecine war of desires, it would make no sense to speak of the result as right or wrong, more or less reasonable. We could, at most, call an individual fortunate or unfortunate in the sorts of desires he has. If, however, the

11. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 129.

conclusions of deliberations can be called either right or wrong, then the strength of our competing desires and dispositions does not alone determine the outcome of our deliberations.

Like Mill, Dewey holds that the pleasure we feel as we anticipate a certain result does give us reason to call that result 'good' and to prefer it to imaginary plans of action in which we can take no pleasure. But unlike Mill, Dewey holds that the reason given is simply reason to believe that a desire or disposition will be satisfied by that result. As in the *Study of Ethics*, he argues that pleasure is to be viewed as a 'subjective signal' of a relation between a disposition demanding expression for its own sake and the courses of action through which it might be expressed. When in the course of the thought experiments we perform in our search for satisfactory choices of action we hit upon a plan of action that could express an active disposition, our subjective experience of the 'fitness' of the plan to the disposition is a feeling of pleasure. When an imagined plan of action gives us pleasure, we have reason to believe that the plan would satisfactorily express at least one of our dispositions. That is, the imagined plan of action is pleasant because it is the means to a desired end, the expression of a disposition.

In a problematic moral situation, when mutually incompatible and incommensurable dispositions compete, we review the possible solutions open to us, using the 'subjective signal' of pleasure to screen out the acceptable from the unacceptable alternatives. Solutions whose imagined results are unpleasant even to contemplate are solutions that we have no reason to think satisfactory to any one of our active dispositions. Those that are pleasant to imagine are solutions that we have prima facie evidence to believe satisfactory in some respect and so 'good.'

Dewey argues, however, that the pleasure we take in imagining a possible option does not necessarily give us sufficient reason for selecting that option. Since more than one disposition is in play in a moral situation, more than one option will be prima facie good. And an option that is prima facie good when viewed as a means to express one disposition may also be prima facie bad when viewed in terms of another with which it is incompatible. So although pleasure felt at the idea of acting in a certain way gives us reason to call that act 'good' and even to pursue it, pleasure does not give us reason to prefer that action to any alternate goods that may be available to us.

What makes one disposition qualitatively superior to another and thus its satisfactory expression more desirable than another's? Accord-

ing to Dewey, it is the nature of the contribution that the disposition and its expression will make to a satisfactory character overall. So in order to determine which dispositions will make the most valuable sorts of contributions, we must first understand what the necessary conditions of such a life and character may be. These will form the basis of our subsequent evaluations of acts and choices in problematic situations. In keeping with his pragmatic conception of definition, Dewey attempts to define a set of minimum necessary conditions of a satisfactory character in terms of their practical bearings. Whatever these conditions may be, he reasons, they will be manifest in the character and conduct of a truly good man. So we should consider what such a man might be like—a man truly good by nature, who is able to maintain the goodness of his character and conduct over time.

No matter how the naturally good man has come by his natural goodness, we can infer that his character and dispositions must necessarily have the following features. First, his character must be a complex of fairly *coherent* dispositions. Were they not, the frustration ensuing from the good man's effort to act from his incoherent dispositions would have moved him to reflect on and to reform his character. Second, since the good man remains good over time, the coherence of his active dispositions cannot have been achieved by fiat, that is, simple arbitrary closure of the set of dispositions to be acted upon, thereby excluding incompatible alternatives. Over time, our dispositions and capacities to realize them in action change. New capacities are developed, old ones diminish. Thus the good man would eventually have become frustrated and unhappy acting from the same fixed set of dispositions and so would have altered his character and conduct accordingly. His dispositions must form a harmonious system that is flexible or adaptable to changes in the agent's capacities for action.

Third, the realization of the dominant dispositions in the good man's character must be relatively independent of any specific environmental conditions. If, for example, the good man's dominant desires were like the desire to possess rare objets d'art or climb hitherto unscaled mountain peaks, then the naturally good man would be unlikely for the most part to find his conduct satisfactory. In which case, the naturally good man's conduct would not seem good to him, and again we would find him abandoning his naturally good conduct.

The necessary conditions of the naturally good man's being naturally good over time, Dewey argues, may be taken as necessary conditions of a rational choice of prima facie goods by a moral agent who is not naturally good. The good man's character is naturally *harmonious, flexible,*

and *stable* in the face of changing environmental circumstance. Those of us who are not so fortunate as to be naturally good should consider whether the alternative prima facie goods we are faced with in moral situations are such as to contribute to a life of harmonious, flexible or adaptive, stable character and conduct. These qualities, Dewey argues, are "the signs of a true or moral satisfaction" (*Ethics*, *MW* 5:259).

If this is correct, we have material for the construction of minimum conditions for determination of the worth of conflicting prima facie goods, or as Dewey puts it, for constructing a "standard" for the evaluation of competing but incompatible good courses of action. Anticipation of possible future conduct gives prima facie reason for action if the act anticipated is (to some degree) immediately satisfactory or pleasant. The reason is sufficient for action if it also promises to contribute to realization of a harmonious, flexible, and stable, character and conduct. According to Dewey, there is one and only one set of dispositions whose selection is justifiable on his criteria, and this one set that "fulfills these conditions is the social good" (*MW* 5:261). Only social or other-regarding dispositions cooperate to form a character that is harmonious, flexible, and stable in its predominant dispositions.

This last assertion might provoke one or both of the following objections. First, how do we know that social or other-regarding dispositions actually are good to the agents who have them? Even if social dispositions meet all the criteria Dewey proposes, this is beside the point unless agents do in fact find these dispositions pleasant in anticipation and so prima facie good.

Second, if we do suppose that social dispositions are actually good to the agents who have them, surely self-regarding, nonsocial dispositions may be good as well. Is it not possible that an agent could form a stable, harmonious, flexible or adaptive character from predominantly nonsocial dispositions? A life devoted to realizing one's artistic talents could result in a harmonious integration of nonsocial desires for one's own education and training, health, self-discipline, production, and so forth. Such a life might be practiced over the course of a lifetime, adapted and reformed harmoniously as the agent's capacities developed and altered.[12] It could be adapted to a variety of environmental circumstances and so would revolve around relatively stable goods. If so, the sociability

12. Consider, for example, Matisse's switch to collages from painting as his eyesight failed, Beethoven's continuing to compose after the loss of his hearing, the ability of some notable pianists to continue playing after the loss of a hand through the commissioning of special works, the fact that some dancers are able to continue in creative dance despite age or injury by switching from performing to choreography, and so forth.

of a given set of dispositions would not seem to give one sufficient reason to prefer it to a set of nonsocial dispositions.

Evidently, Dewey anticipated both sorts of objections. He responds with appeals to experience intended to show that we have every reason to suppose that social dispositions are good to their possessors and that qualitative differences exist between these and other nonsocial dispositions. Replying to the first, he argues that common sense has always treated the possession of social dispositions as good for their possessors. What grounds have we for holding that centuries of human experience is mistaken? Dewey insists the answer is none.

Replying to the second, Dewey argues that the testimony of both common sense and human history is that human beings are inherently social beings, unhappy and frustrated when prevented from participating in social activity. In support of his point, he notes that even utilitarians accept that we are inherently social, and he cites John Stuart Mill: "The social state is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that except in some unusual circumstances or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, *he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body*. . . . Any condition, therefore, which is essential to a state of society becomes more and more an inseparable part of every person's conception of the state of things he is born into and which is the destiny of a human being"[13] (*MW* 5:268). As Dewey interprets him, Mill is saying that "we cannot separate the idea of ourselves and of our own good from our idea of others and of their good" (*MW* 5:268). But what of it? Does it follow from the fact that human beings have tended to think in this way, that they must continue to do so in future? Why may they not distinguish themselves and their own private interests from the community and the community's interests henceforth, if they choose? It appears that Dewey has made the elementary mistake of imagining that he can derive an evaluative conclusion from purely descriptive premises.

Arthur Lovejoy's review of *Ethics* was highly critical of Dewey's failure to make clear his reasons for holding that an individual's happiness is a function of that individual's pursuit of communal happiness. Lovejoy noted:

> The moral criterion at which the author arrives is not—in itself or in its premises—so thoroughly distinct from the "self-realization" standard of Green and his disciples as it seems meant to be. The crucial transition in the argument

13. Dewey is quoting from John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1869), pp. 143–44.

> seems to depend upon the observation that the individual's real good or happiness demands social well-being because the self is essentially a social self . . . —a characteristically abstract, loose, and shifty piece of neo-Hegelian phraseology that is susceptible of several senses and is, in some of its senses, decidedly open to question.[14]

Had Dewey left the matter as it stands, he would indeed have been open to the charge, so often made against naturalistic ethics, of having fallaciously derived an evaluative conclusion from purely descriptive premises about human nature and human society. In fact, he does not leave the matter as it stands. But oddly, the argument that would fill in the gap appears in one of the two chapters Dewey contributed to Part III, rather than in Part II, where it belongs. Odder still, nowhere in Part II is it indicated that a further argument exists or where it can be found. Why Dewey undercut his own case in this way is something of a mystery.

The argument offered in Part III for the qualitative superiority of our social dispositions as constituents of a satisfactory life and character is simply a highly compressed version of the rationale for a functional definition of selfhood we first saw in Bradley's *Ethical Studies*. Dewey argues that personality or selfhood is not a property of human beings, like their natural endowments. It is instead a complex set of functions that these natural endowments may be used to perform. One *becomes* a person as one learns to perform the functions constitutive of personality, in accordance with the social rules for their performance. Dewey explains "Only in participating in already fashioned systems of conduct does [a child] apprehend his own powers, appreciate their worth and realize their possibilities, and achieve for himself a controlled and orderly body of physical and mental habits. He finds the value and the principles of his life, his satisfaction and his norms of authority, in being a member of associated groups of persons and in playing his part in their maintenance and expansion" (*MW* 5:386–87).

Social interaction is a necessary condition of moral agency in at least two important respects. "Apart from the social medium," Dewey says, "the individual would never 'know himself', he would never become acquainted with his own needs and capacities" (*MW* 5:388). To 'know' is to assign meanings in controlled ways to one's experiences. To be able to assign meanings in controlled ways requires an apparatus, a system of

14. Arthur O. Lovejoy, review of *Ethics*, *American Journal of Theology* 13 (1909): 143.

signification and symbolization together with rules for their application. No such apparatus is part of our natural endowments. Such systems are social institutions. By participating in this sort of social institution, we learn to know ourselves.

Second, Dewey holds, "social conditions not only evoke what is latent, and bring to conscious recognition what is blind, but they select, encourage and confirm certain tendencies at the expense of others. They enable the individual to discriminate the better and the worse among his tendencies and achievements" (*MW* 5:389). Language is a necessary condition of knowing, that is, a system for the symbolization of experience, by which experiences may be conveniently stored (in memory or via writing) or communicated. But another institution is necessary if we are to choose among possible symbolic representations of experience: judgment. Judgment can occur only when there is, in addition to a system of symbolic representation, a system of rules for relating symbolic meanings to one another and to the world. Judgment, he argues, is not a natural endowment; it is a function our natural endowments can be used to perform. Rule-governed functions, like judgment, are the products of social interaction and social construction. No individual can make agreements with himself of the sort indicated by the term 'rule of logic.' Thus participation in social institutions is a necessary condition of one's being a *self-conscious* and a *rational* agent. Because these are necessary conditions of moral agency, participation in social institutions is a necessary condition of one's being a moral agent.

Whatever sort of moral agent one may choose to become, one chooses to be a moral agent, that is, free, self-conscious, and rational. And in choosing to be a moral agent, one must at the same time choose that the social institutions necessary to one's being a moral agent exist to sustain and enrich one's personhood. Now these social institutions cannot and will not exist unless individuals cooperate in their formation and continuation. Thus the exercise of social dispositions is necessary to one's attaining and sustaining personality. Social dispositions turn out to be constitutive of personal flourishing in a peculiarly fundamental way. All one's dispositions and desires go to make up the sort of person one is. But one's social dispositions determine not only what sort of person one is but whether one is (or will be likely to remain) a person at all. And so it seems that common sense is right in supposing other-regarding or social goods as peculiarly right or true goods. Social goods are those that no rational agent could rationally choose permanently to forgo. To neglect the exercise of one's social dispositions, once recog-

nized for what they are, is knowingly to invite or permit the dissolution of the institutions necessary to the maintenance of personal life. Nonsocial goods, however prima facie good they may be to oneself, are never necessary constituents of satisfactory moral agency in the same way. It will always be rationally permissible (in principle) to forgo or ignore a possible nonsocial good. So it turns out that Dewey's claim that social dispositions and their satisfactions are qualitatively superior to their nonsocial counterparts is not after all fallaciously derived from a set of merely factual statements about human sociability.

Why was this argument not included in Part II where it belongs? One can only guess. But Lovejoy's remarks may provide an important clue. Dewey's conception of personality as a social construct and thus of social cooperation as constitutive of personhood is characteristically neo-Hegelian. It was as a neo-Hegelian that Dewey had originally made his philosophical reputation. Throughout his career as a pragmatist, he was to face recurrent skepticism about whether he had really abandoned idealism and its assumptions altogether.[15] In 1908, when he had yet to produce the major works of his pragmatic period, the skepticism must have been rife. In this case, he might have feared that if he were to allow his ethics to be identified as characteristically neo-Hegelian in any one of its components, the whole would be written off as simply one more attempt to update idealist ethics. Could he have been certain that most readers would understand that the 'self-realizing' character of certain prima facie goods only provides grounds for *preferring* those to other sorts of goods, as Lovejoy seems to have done, rather than being the reason that they are good, Dewey might have stated more openly why he thought prima facie goods should be judged on the basis of their likelihood to be harmonious, flexible, stable, and social or self-realizing.

In sum, then, Dewey holds that any disposition or disposition-expressing plan of action whose realization is pleasant is prima facie good for the agent in question. Rational choice among prima facie goods is to be based on other qualities of the goods available and their relation to the agent's other projects. Prima facie goods whose qualities taken together are harmonious, flexible, stable, and social are the goods any rational agent ought to prefer. In a moral situation, these are the sorts of goods the agent would be right to pursue. Dewey states: "For all alike, in short, the chief thing is the discovery and promotion of those activities and

15. Consider, for example, the argument over whether or not Dewey's aesthetics is really pragmatic. For a helpful discussion of this debate, see Alexander, *Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature*.

active relationships in which the capacities of all concerned are effectively evoked, exercised, and put to the test" (*MW* 5:275).

MORAL JUDGMENT

The first six chapters of *Ethics*, Part II, are devoted to analysis, criticism, and construction of theoretical principles and categories with which we may screen and provisionally warrant hypotheses about particular varieties of moral phenomena. In the following four chapters, Dewey turns from the construction of fundamental principles for scientific moral inquiry to their explication and defense. In effect, he 'tests' them against our common-sense notions of what moral life involves, in order to show that his principles and categories can capture or adequately explain such phenomena as conscience, obligation, egoism, altruism, and the virtues. In this section, I discuss only the first, his treatment of the phenomenon of 'conscience,' or moral knowledge. There is probably no aspect of Dewey's pragmatic ethical constructivism that it is more essential to grasp if his position as a whole is to be understood—and no aspect of his position that has been more often or more disastrously misinterpreted.

A modern scientific investigator's facts are not given, they must be discovered or uncovered through observation and experimentation. Moreover, those facts must in principle be verifiable by others—that is, the observations and experimentation cannot be inherently private events. Traditional moral philosophies, however, have not infrequently claimed that moral data are given. Though some theories hold that intuition, a sort of observation, is involved, experimentation is not supposed to be required to uncover 'hidden' moral qualities. Moral data differ from scientific data in their immediate availability to some special faculty: 'conscience,' moral sense, or practical reason.[16]

Consequently, most moral philosophers have held that there are significant disanalogies between moral and physical inquiry. First, discovery plays little or no role in morals, since the data of morals are immediately or directly accessible. Public procedures for experimental confirmation are unnecessary. Second, moral inquiry and deliberation are not primarily inquiry and deliberation about whether given acts, choices, or persons are good or bad, right or wrong. These facts are known, or at least readily knowable. Moral deliberation and inquiry are as a rule deliberation and inquiry about whether to do what one ought

16. Classic utilitarianism is an exception.

to do or whether instead to follow one's nonmoral inclinations and egoistic impulses.

To dissolve the disanalogies, Dewey tries to show that there is no faculty either of moral perception or of a priori moral knowledge that obviates the need for the discovery of moral data. Only if, as he puts it, "the relevant bearings of any act are subtler and larger than those that can be foreseen and than those which will be *unless* special care is taken" (*MW* 5:278) will it be reasonable to claim that 'special care,' in the form of experimental investigation, is required. He begins by attacking the two versions of the traditional claim that moral data are always immediately accessible represented by Kant and by moral sense theories.

If Kant's account of moral deliberation were correct, as Dewey sees it, deliberation about the morality of a maxim would be purely a matter of a priori reasoning. Kant assumes that every agent values rationality and thus cannot rationally approve the satisfaction of desire at the expense of his rationality. To be rational is to be consistent in one's actions and one's selections of ends of action. And so Kant believed a simple a priori test can be applied to any problematic proposal. One has simply to consider whether a proposed act is one the agent could consistently approve if it were acted on universally. If he cannot, performing the act would be irrational and clearly wrong.

Dewey charges that the a priori appearance of Kant's method is misleading. Assume, for example, that I am to consider the coherence of universal theft. I may be able to determine that it would be irrational and wrong of me to commit an act of theft. Yet how do I know that the act I am contemplating is an act of 'theft'? And how have I come to know what 'theft' involves? Clearly, I must have made inductive generalizations from the observations of acts of theft or be relying on the inductions of others. In either case, if those observations are incomplete, poorly formulated, or misinterpreted, I may unknowingly arrive at a wrong conclusion. Thus it is not the case that we can or do rely on a priori reasoning alone in our moral inquiries. Nor is it the case that the state and amount of our empirical data about the objective features of the dispositions and conduct being considered have no effect upon our moral estimations.

Even less credible to Dewey was the hypothesis that humanity possesses a special sense or faculty by which it can invariably gather sufficient data for correct moral judgments of the rightness or goodness of motives and acts. For though it is certainly the case that we sometimes

seem immediately to perceive values in given situations and to make immediate estimations of the rightness of competing ends, there is no good reason to resort to the postulation of a faculty of moral perception to explain this. After all, we know from *Ethics*, Part I, that individuals' perceptions of moral qualities and moral principles have varied widely from age to age, culture to culture, and within cultures, even from class to class. This wide variation in people's moral perceptions argues against our being endowed with a faculty of moral perception analogous to our faculties of sense perception.

Moreover, we can readily explain the phenomenon of immediate perception without positing the existence of a special sense or faculty. As a matter of fact, frequent repetition of any activity causes its performance to become habitual, virtually mechanical. Although the original performances of the act required thought and conscious effort, subsequent repetitions may involve little or none. Judgment is itself an act. And very similar judgments may be repeated so frequently in the course of one's life that arriving at a given conclusion eventually becomes a habit. Thereafter, the conclusion immediately comes to mind upon apprehension of the situation that stimulates that particular habit.

Although every problematic situation is potentially a moral situation, presenting a morally significant variety of options, Dewey argues that very few ever become genuine moral situations. Typically, decisions made in past dealings with similar situations are adequate to present needs. One simply scans the current situation one is in for options previously approved. And when discovered, they are immediately recognized as appropriate. This process of recognition is no more mysterious than recognition of any familiar object. Immediate recognition is possible only because of prior investigation and discovery. The frequency of moral 'recognition' relative to the infrequency of any need for deeper investigation of the competing options with which situations present us accounts for the traditional belief that the question of what is good or right is either immediately given or accessible a priori. At the same time, it reveals the inadequacies of the traditional account. A problematic situation resolvable by an immediate recognition of previously selected options is not a genuinely moral situation. It is merely a 'technical' rather than moral affair, to use Dewey's words, where the problem solved is the problem of the best means to a previously determined end, rather than a problem of deciding what one's end is to be.

Moral deliberation, Dewey argues, is never immediate. It begins with an effort to discover what the options of a problematic situation really

are or involve so that a rational selection from among them may finally be made. He writes: "Deliberation is a process of active, suppressed, rehearsal; of imaginative dramatic performance of various deeds carrying to their appropriate issues the various tendencies which we feel stirring within us. When we see in imagination this or that change brought about, there is a direct sense of the amount and kind of worth which attaches to it, as real and direct, if not as strong, as if the act were really performed and its consequences really brought home to us" (*MW* 5:292). By means of this process, which Dewey refers to as "dramatic rehearsal," we discover whether and how particular dispositions are expressed in the various courses of action open to us, by imagining ourselves acting out those options. The 'direct sense of worth' we get as a result is a sense of relief or frustration, pleasure or pain. That pleasure or relief is a subjective signal that the course of action anticipated will express some one of our active dispositions. Dewey continues, "When many tendencies are brought into play, there is clearly much greater probability that the capacity of self which is really needed and appropriate will be brought into action, and thus a truly reasonable happiness result" (*MW* 5:293).

Our appreciation of possible lines of conduct is thus genuinely immediate. We feel some immediate satisfaction in the idea of expressing a disposition in a certain way, and this immediate satisfaction stamps that course of action as good. We rehearse another option and feel immediate dissatisfaction at the idea of conduct along that line, and this dissatisfaction stamps the conduct as bad. Of course, the quality of our background information about the physical and social worlds is not without influence on our direct appreciations of goodness. Ignorance or faulty reasoning might prevent us from foreseeing consequences of an act that would, had we foreseen them, have caused us to stamp as prima facie good what we in fact stamp as bad or indifferent. Nevertheless, it is the direct appreciation of an idea or plan of action that gives it its prima facie value.

When at the conclusion of a dramatic rehearsal of the opportunities of action open to us we have perceived which possibilities are good, a decision about what goods to pursue still has to made. This judgment is *not* immediate. Thus 'dramatic rehearsal,' as Dewey describes it, is not a method of making moral judgments. Dramatic rehearsal is a method of *gaining information necessary for moral judgment.* Moral judgment takes place when the incompatible goods giving conflicting reasons for action are evaluated in terms of the principles discussed above.

The distinction to be made between the processes of moral judgment and moral discovery has frequently been overlooked, thanks in part to Dewey himself. Because we normally think of deliberation as involving both the gathering of evidence and the drawing of conclusions, it has been natural to suppose that dramatic rehearsal *is* Dewey's account of both the gathering of moral data and of how we arrive at conclusions from that data. Of the various innovative features of Dewey's theory of moral deliberation, from 1908 onward, the process of discovery is invariably given the greatest emphasis. That this should have been so is not surprising when we consider the weight of philosophical opposition to the idea that anything like empirical discovery plays a role in moral decision making. Unfortunately, in his effort to dispose of one problem, Dewey spawned two more. He fell into the habit of describing the process of moral discovery, "dramatic rehearsal," not merely as part of the process of moral deliberation but *as* moral deliberation, as for example, in the statement that "deliberation is actually an imaginative rehearsal of various courses of conduct" (*MW* 5:293).

Having been educated in the neo-Hegelian tradition, Dewey never conceived of definitions as exclusive. That is, 'definitions' merely direct attention to some distinctive aspect of a given phenomenon, without excluding the possibility that other equally distinctive aspects may exist. So, for example, Dewey could define morality as a matter of conduct at one point, of character at another, and see no contradiction between the two 'definitions.' Similarly, he could define deliberation as dramatic rehearsal, the discovery of prima facie goods in a problematic situation, and subsequently hold that deliberation is the evaluation of discovered goods in accordance with rationally constructed principles of judgment, and yet see no contradiction between his definitions.[17]

Critics, on the other hand, expecting Dewey's definitions actually to exclude properties, processes, or characteristics not mentioned, have understandably been puzzled to know what they are to make of his conception of pragmatic moral deliberation. Perhaps the most common response is to interpret dramatic rehearsal as the whole of Dewey's account of moral deliberation, in which case, of course, the theory collapses into a form of Hobbesianism for which it is then duly criticized.

17. In his review of Dewey's 1887 *Psychology* (discussed in Chapter 2, above), G. Stanley Hall complained that "definitions make the fibre of the book, and even the favorite form of sentence. The author is always working from partial to complete definitions or conversely" (Hall, "Critical Notice," p. 156). Definition was still Dewey's favorite form of sentence, probably because it seemed to him such a flexible form.

Charles L. Stevenson's introductory essay to the recent critical edition of the 1908 Dewey and Tufts *Ethics* provides a classic example. As Stevenson describes it, dramatic rehearsal "provided a *method* for reaching evaluative opinions—a method of *reasoning*, since it required an individual to foresee consequences. Dewey was not merely pointing out the possibility of such a method; he was taking it to exemplify the only sort of reasoning that had a place in ethics" (*MW* 5:xiii). It is by this method, Stevenson continues, that Deweyan moral agents will determine both which possible acts have consequences they desire and which one of those acts they would be right to pursue. For Deweyan agents, then, to say 'act X is good' is to say that desire for the consequences of X has been discovered through a dramatic rehearsal. To say 'act X is right,' Stevenson goes on, is to say that "a dramatic rehearsal based on scientifically true propositions, if the speaker were to carry it out completely, would lead [the speaker] to have a predominating favor of X" (*MW* 5:xx). If Stevenson were correct, if dramatic rehearsal were the only method of moral deliberation Dewey endorsed, then it might be correct to argue that Dewey's account of moral deliberation is Hobbesian. But from the foregoing, it should be clear that Stevenson was wrong. Dramatic rehearsal is *not* the only method of reasoning that has a place in ethics. Moreover, if it were, the lengthy construction of principles for the rational evaluation of prima facie goods that takes up the bulk of Part II would have been for naught. Since Dewey clearly believed that rational criteria of evaluation can and should play a role in moral life, he must have thought there was more to moral deliberation than dramatic rehearsal.[18]

18. Alternately, it is sometimes suggested that moral deliberation might be interpreted as a special case of aesthetic appreciation, as Dewey was later to describe it in his 1934 *Art as Experience* (*LW* 10). That is, the problematic situation is interpreted as a situation whose meaning is indeterminate. Dramatic rehearsal is interpreted as the process by which the beholder/agent constructs a series of alternative interpretations culminating in the construction of an interpretation that yields a 'consummatory experience' of the situation as unified, meaningful, and fulfilling. The objections to this approach scarcely need to be pointed out. If moral situations were structured so that they could end only in a happy or fulfilling manner, an immediate feeling of fulfillment or of unified meaning at the thought of some one option might be an adequate basis on which to prefer that one over other prima facie good options. But as Dewey defines them, moral situations do not necessarily end in any particular fashion. Moral situations may offer us nothing but a choice among evils, no one of which could conceivably be experienced as fulfilling. And it may remain the source of chaotic rather than unified thought and feeling, whatever choice we make. Thus immediate feelings of fulfillment or unified meaning at the thought of one of a set of competing options will not be a reliable guide to the resolution of problematic moral situations.

After accounting for the element of immediate appreciation in the identification of goods and evils, Dewey analyzes the nature of moral judgment. In our judgments, he holds, we aim not only at the discovery of valued ends of action but at the justification of a choice of a particular value or set of values as an end of action. So in judgment there is explicit appeal to and use of theoretical principles. Some of the principles to which an agent may appeal in the course of making a moral judgment will be the broad, intersubjectively valid, fundamental principles of ethics Dewey has just sought to construct. But these principles provide only a general framework for moral inquiry. Intermediate generalizations relating specific features of actual moral situations to the framework definitions and classifications must also be formulated. These include principles stating the special relations holding between certain types of dispositions and of consequences and/or of their special relations to certain conditions required for those dispositions or consequences to be realized.

What are typically referred to as 'moral principles' and 'moral rules,' Dewey holds, are intermediate generalizations inductively derived from past observation of human conduct and its consequences. Unfortunately for the scientific ethical theorist, the function and purpose of these intermediate generalizations have been poorly understood. Morals, being practical, have been often treated as analogous to 'crafts.' Thus the intermediate generalizations of morals have been thought to be analogous to a craftsman's rules of thumb. So moralists have tried to construct rules of thumb dictating the sorts of overt behavior appropriate to specific circumstances. Rules of thumb can be as useful in morals as they are in crafts. But it is important to note how they are useful. They do not facilitate moral judgment. They eliminate the need for judgment. Ideally, one simply recalls and applies the rule.

The idea that judgments about what our objectives should be could be eliminated, Dewey thought, was a product of wishful thinking. The rules human beings have formulated for themselves, as the student of history knows, have never been so consistent, harmonious, expedient, and socially beneficial as to justify unreflective reliance upon them. So rather than try to design intellectual tools for the impossible project of making moral judgments unnecessary, moralists should stick to the more manageable project of designing principles that could function as intermediate generalizations to facilitate moral judging, on analogy to the intermediate generalizations used in natural sciences.

In other words, moralists should devote themselves to reviewing crit-

ically the manifold moral rules that human beings have constructed to determine which are worth serious scientific consideration and testing. To be worth considering scientifically, of course, they must be consistent with the judgments and principles already scientifically constructed. Principles of virtue, Dewey argues, that is, principles defining social dispositions such as charity, justice, and sympathy, appear to meet the first test. All presumably need the check and correction of further experimental testing. Happily, this is something social scientists are independently working to provide. In the meantime, ethical scientists can hasten the process by theoretically reviewing our other prescientific, common-sense moral rules for experimental fruitfulness in the hopes that hypotheses can be identified that social scientists may be induced to see as worth their while to test.

SCIENTIFIC PRACTICAL JUDGMENT

Ethics, Part II, was devoted to the construction of fundamental principles for the special science of ethics. The process of construction was guided by Dewey's conception of the function such principles perform in any scientific inquiry: the provisional warranting of experimentally fruitful hypotheses, that is, hypotheses entailing predictions about what would be experienced under specified conditions. Consequently, Dewey accepted among his fundamental principles of ethics only those empirical definitions that seemed to him to capture the characteristics of moral phenomena without significant 'remainders.' The result, he presumes, is a theory or set of principles that is minimally adequate to perform the function for which his principles are designed.

But at the end of Part II, as we discussed above, this is only a presumption. To be warranted, it must be shown that the principles actually can function as scientific principles ought to do. This is the object of Tufts's contributions in Part III. In Part III, Tufts considers several sets of competing hypotheses about the methods of the design of life most likely to produce the sort of outcomes we think rationally desirable, starting with hypotheses about the design of political systems, passing on to hypotheses about the design of economic systems and then to hypotheses about the design of family life. Each discussion is in effect a thought experiment, meant to show that the principles adopted in Part II do permit us to discriminate rationally between competing members of each set of hypotheses. Along the way, Tufts occasionally develops, from the hypotheses he selects, predictions about the effects to be ex-

pected from social or legislative experiments contemplated or then under way in Europe and the United States. The implication of these references is not only that the Part II principles permit us to make rational selections among competing hypotheses, but that the hypotheses selected are in fact experimentally fruitful.

Above I argued that the fact that neither Tufts nor Dewey actually designed or ran experiments to confirm the hypotheses warranted by their theory did not by itself preclude the recognition of the theory or the hypotheses it warranted as scientific. It is not necessary that theoreticians of any science test their hypotheses, so long as the hypotheses they provisionally advance are experimentally fruitful and are in principle confirmable or disconfirmable by practitioners of the appropriate physical, life, or social sciences. This at least Dewey and Tufts can claim to have done by the conclusion of Part III. Be that as it may, it might be argued, cooperative inquiry of the sort Dewey envisions between moral theorists and social scientists is still a long way off in the future. If individuals are now to try to make scientific practical judgments, they must attempt to confirm their own hypotheses experimentally. Moreover, if and when ethical science gets truly under way, it will still be necessary for individuals to perform experiments themselves. It will not always be the case that moral decisions can be deferred until scientific advice or analysis can be obtained. How then are these experiments to be performed?

It is a question to which Dewey effectively committed himself to answering when in his Introduction to *Ethics* he urged:

> If we can discover [scientific] ethical principles, these ought to give some guidance for the unsolved problems of life which continually present themselves for decision. Whatever may be true for other sciences, it would seem that ethics at least ought to have some practical value. "In this theater of man's life it is reserved for God and Angels to be lookers on." Man must act. . . . If he has reflected, has considered his conduct in light of the general principles of human order and progress, he ought to be able to act more intelligently and freely, to achieve the satisfaction that always attends on scientific as compared with uncritical or rule-of-thumb practice. (*MW* 5:10)

Clearly, Dewey believed that individual moral agents can settle their dilemmas in moral situations by scientific methods of reasoning. That is, if they committed themselves to the rules of scientific inquiry, they would be able to discriminate reliably between hypotheses about the

courses of action available to them and between the goods of expressing the dispositions urging those acts. Further, they would be able to decide rationally which course of action open to them it would be right to view as desirable. But to discriminate scientifically between hypotheses about the outcomes and values of various courses of action would involve experimentation. And about ethical experimentation Dewey said less than he might and a great less than he should. At the very least, he should have explained how individuals are to validate their hypotheses experimentally and whether or to what degree individuals would be at fault if they did not. Since Dewey did not take the trouble to spell out the procedures he thought individual moral agents ought to use, we shall have to try to spell them out for ourselves.

We might begin by considering a hypothetical situation and applying the decision procedures Dewey recommends. Imagine that Jane, the adult daughter of an increasingly infirm elderly woman, June, is wondering whether she should try to persuade her mother to give up the large, physically challenging home in which she now lives alone, in favor of some other arrangement that would be safer and more convenient. Jane knows that June will agree to whatever Jane thinks best. What should Jane do?

The first step Jane should take is to perform a dramatic rehearsal of the options open to her in this novel situation. She should try to imagine possible responses to this situation and their respective probable objective consequences. The options whose probable consequences she finds immediately attractive will be the prima facie good options that she has reason to believe potentially satisfactory. Let us further imagine that after she performs a dramatic rehearsal, three inconsistent options emerge as prima facie good: to accede June's request that Jane move back into the family home (a request Jane has hitherto resisted out of a desire to maintain her own privacy and independence); to hire a live-in companion; and to persuade June to sell her home and move into a bungalow or condominium in a retirement community, an environment in which she can continue to manage on her own for some time.

Each option is in some respect prima facie good, which is to say that each would give free play to some one or more of Jane's dispositions to act, the expression of which would contribute to her satisfaction. The next step is to try to determine (1) what are the dispositions each option would express and (2) which other dispositions to act might be thwarted were any one option adopted.

Here Jane should begin to make use of both scientific principles of

moral reasoning and any intermediate generalizations antecedently formulated. Using those principles and generalizations, she should try to identify the dispositions urging her toward each course of conduct. Are they 'virtuous' or socially constructive dispositions? If she acts to satisfy any one disposition (or set of dispositions), what dispositions will be repressed or reinforced as a result? For example, would any one of her options repress or reinforce dispositions to be generous or just to others or to herself? Would any one tend to encourage expression of dispositions to anger, rejection, self-pity? Such assessments would have to be made of each one of her three options.

Once she has settled the questions of what dispositions her three options would express, reinforce, and/or repress, she can construct hypotheses about the sort of person she would be and the sort of life she would live if she were to commit herself to any one. She then has to decide which sort of person she has reason to think it desirable (or more desirable) to try to be. Using Dewey's standard for the evaluation of prima facie goods, she would ask herself whether each of these three sorts of personalities or characteristic ways of behaving will be flexible, stable, harmonious, social, and so on. Eventually, she should be able to decide which one of these options she is provisionally warranted in believing desirable (or the least undesirable of the three).

Here the problem of experimental confirmation arises. Since it is not feasible to appeal directly to social scientists in such a case, Jane will have to play the roles of theorist and experimentalist herself. Perhaps it would be possible for Jane to make an experiment of moving in with June without giving up her own (Jane's) current residence. Or perhaps June could be persuaded to visit local retirement communities or to hire a live-in companion on a trial basis. In that case, Jane could make up a detailed list of the expectations she has of the option she has judged most desirable and then carefully observe the effects she actually produces when she tries that option. If the results cohere with her expectations, she would have some experimental warrant for her provisionally warranted judgment. If not, she would have some experimental warrant for rejecting her beliefs about that particular option as incorrect. This presumably is the course of action Dewey would recommend.

It is not always possible to make trials of our options in moral situations, however. The effects of such trials cannot always be reversed. What should we do in such cases? Where experimental trials are not practical, another possibility is to search out historical trials of options relevantly similar to those we would wish to make and to compare the historical effects with the effects we expect in our own case. Rather than

predicting future events, we would try to 'retrodict' past events, validating a hypothesis by demonstrating that the predictions it entails would have been successful predictions of what are now past events (a technique often used in such sciences as geology and astronomy). Case studies compiled by social workers or health care professionals might be able to provide Jane with empirical data relevant to her situation, which might tend to confirm or refute her hypotheses about the effect of her preferred option on June's welfare and happiness. Dewey would probably recommend that she try this procedure in addition to or, if necessary, as a substitute for an experimental trial of her hypothesis.

But even this will be impossible in many situations. We can readily imagine circumstances that would constrain the most conscientious agent to act upon merely provisionally warranted hypotheses. This being the case, would Dewey's decision procedure be inapplicable in such circumstances? And if so, how will such cases be rationally resolved? Assuming for the moment that we were to say that Dewey's procedure as a whole was inapplicable, we could still respond that the situation has been rationally resolved. If the hypothesis accepted as action-guiding is provisionally warranted by the framework and intermediate principles of morals and scientific principles of preliminary warranting, and if circumstances permit no further trial or test of the hypothesis, then it would be rational to pursue the option provisionally warranted rather than the alternatives.

Nevertheless, there is usually some scope for experimental confirmation. Imagine that Jane must make an immediate decision, because an injury has made it impossible for June to manage on her own any longer. To complicate matters further, Jane works as the live-in supervisor of a halfway house for juvenile delinquents. As supervisor, she must be on call in the building sixteen hours a day, six days a week, a condition she can meet only if she resides in the building. Thus moving home with June would cost Jane her job and her independence for some time to come. Suppose now that this is precisely the option she thinks she has most reason to believe desirable.

Dewey might remind us that although Jane is committing herself to a single option, no one option in this situation is a single act but rather an interconnected series of acts occurring over time. Provided Jane had researched her options as thoroughly as is possible under the circumstances and reasoned carefully before deciding in favor of any one of her options, her decision to pursue that option is justified. But whether she will be justified in persisting in her pursuit of that option once its concrete consequences begin to emerge has yet to be determined.

Dewey wrote: "A truly moral (or right) act is one which is intelligent in an emphatic and peculiar sense; it is a *reasonable* act. It is not merely one which is thought of, and thought of as good, at the moment of action, but one which will continue to be thought of as 'good' in the most alert and persistent reflection" (*MW* 5:278–79). An agent forced to act upon a merely provisionally warranted hypothesis must be especially attentive to the concrete effects produced when she begins to act. And she must be ready to abort that line of action or to undo it as far as possible should the effects be significantly different from those she anticipated.

If the actual consequences of Jane's decision confirm her predictions, Jane may treat that as empirical confirmation of her original judgment and may consider a judgment to continue as she has begun both provisionally and experimentally warranted. If, however, the consequences do not confirm her predictions, her original decision, though justifiable given the circumstances, must now be judged unreliable and a decision to continue as she has begun unjustified. Jane's deliberation must be resumed from scratch.

Assuming that the consequences of moving home with June are much worse than Jane had expected and that these consequences cannot be reversed for some time, ought Jane to blame herself for what has occurred? Ought we to blame her? We may presume that Dewey's reply would be negative. Surely, Jane need not hold herself responsible for bad effects of acting upon merely provisionally warranted hypotheses, if those effects could not have been predicted at the time the decision had to be made and if her failure to test the hypothesis before acting was not due to negligence. Only if on reflection it emerges that the consequences could have been foreseen or that experimental trials might after all have been made should Jane blame herself or be blamed by others. In his discussion of a similar problem in *Ethics*, Part III, Tufts writes: "The more conscientious a person is, the more occasions he finds to judge *himself* with respect to results which *happened because he did not think or deliberate or foresee at all*—provided he has reason to believe that he would have thought of the harmful results if he had been of a different character [or unconstrained by circumstances]" (*MW* 5:415). Only if on reflection Jane realized that the fault did not lie in the circumstances would she be obliged to hold herself liable for the poor outcome of her choice. He continues: "Because we were absorbed in something else we did not think, and while, in the abstract, this something else may have been all right, in the concrete it may be proof of an unworthy character. The very fact that we permitted ourselves to become so absorbed that the thought

[of foreseeable bad consequences] did not occur to us, is evidence of a selfish, i.e., inconsiderate, character" (*MW* 5:415). But for unavoidable errors made through no fault of our own, we are not culpable. A decision, in constrained circumstances, to accept and act upon merely provisionally warranted hypotheses is justified even when the hypotheses accepted subsequently prove false. But a decision to persist once the error has been detected would be unjustifiable. It would suggest moreover that the dispositions from which the persisting agent acts are unworthy.

If the foregoing is correct, then Dewey's failure to spell out in detail what he took ethical experiments to be like is not fatal. Nor does the decision procedure he advocates seem likely to prove impracticable. Interestingly, to the early reviewers, the practicality of Dewey's decision procedures was among the chief merits of his theory.

Only one, W. Caldwell, questioned whether practicality was quite as central to ethical theory and conduct as Dewey imagined. Caldwell wrote:

> Analysis and experiment may be good practical politics, or good sociology, or they may indeed be the one need of the student of social questions, but they are hardly important results for ethical theory, or even for "Applied Ethics," for both of which . . . all mere "experimentation" and all "good living" even . . . are subservient to an ethical ideal. . . . I mean that many things might liberate and "set free" character and capacity, but they might not be ethical at all; and the fault alike of our Western (or American) civilization and the general Pragmatist outlook on life and morals is their eternal belief in "experimentation" and "setting free," instead of in the *legitimacy* or the *illegitimacy* of certain kinds of "experiments."[19]

Caldwell's was among the first of what was to become a chorus of voices calling for assurance that Dewey's minimally adequate set of fundamental principles for ethics really would be adequate to preserve individuals and communities from those unwilling to submit to reason or to the spirit of compromise. In the following chapter, I discuss how Dewey attempted to answer those calls in articles and books that followed the publication of *Ethics*. For the moment, we may note that Caldwell's very complaint is a testament to Dewey's success in at last resolving the problem that had driven his ethical thought since the later 1880s: the reconciliation of scientific and moral philosophical theorizing.

19. W. Caldwell, review of *Ethics*, *Philosophical Review* 18 (1909): 226.