# 3 *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 1891

*Why has modern philosophy contributed so little to bring about an integration between what we know about the world and the intelligent direction of what we do? . . . [T]he cause resides in our unwillingness to surrender two ideas formulated in conditions which both intellectually and practically were very different from those in which we now live. These two ideas, to repeat, are that knowledge is concerned with disclosure of the characteristics of antecedent existences and essences, and that the properties of value found therein provide the authoritative standards for the conduct of life.*

The Quest for Certainty

The development of Dewey's early ethical views mirrored the development of his early theory of mind, metaphysics, and philosophy. Before attempting an original interpretation of his topic, Dewey produced a short series of essentially academic exercises. In 1887, in a paper entitled "Ethics and Physical Science," he first tried his hand at a rebuttal of Herbert Spencer's evolutionary ethics, arguing that ethics is an evaluative enterprise and therefore makes assertions that cannot be confirmed, denied, or justified by inductive scientific techniques.[1] In *Psychology* of the same year, Dewey demonstrated his grasp of mainstream Anglo-American idealist ethics of self-realization. Four years later, he began an overhaul of idealist ethics that led eventually to his rejection of absolute idealism. His first book on the subject, the 1891 *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, was to self-realization ethics what *Psychology* was to absolute idealist theory of mind. And as was the case with *Psychology*, the text offered Dewey's answers to problems raised in a preceding journal article. On this occasion, the journal was the first volume of the

1. See John Dewey, "Ethics and Physical Science," *EW* 1:205–26.

*International Journal of Ethics* and the article was Dewey's 1891 "Moral Theory and Practice."[2]

Contemporary neo-Hegelian ethics diverged from such rivals as utilitarianism and Kantianism in denying that moral philosophy could provide any practical guidance for solving moral dilemmas. Neo-Hegelians held that moral philosophy, or the science of morals, is a descriptive, analytical enterprise, whose purpose is to justify judgments about what *is* the case with regard to morality. Moral action is about making real what *is not* the case. But what is not the case cannot be an object of knowledge. Thus moral action cannot be reliably guided by moral philosophy.

Moral character, on the other hand, though perpetually 'becoming,' is at least partially realized at any given moment. To the extent it is realized, it can be an object of knowledge. Thus idealists concluded that moral science is necessarily a science of character, its aim being to grasp the fundamental principles and conditions of personal realization. This conception of ethics grew out of the neo-Hegelian's tendency to see logical relations and conditions as providing privileged access to absolute reality, on the ground that these relations were more 'objective' and independent of finite perspectives on the world than any others and so more likely to be applicable to absolute as well as finite human consciousness.

In 1887, Dewey still accepted this view of moral science and its relation to moral practice, despite its incompatibility with his own evolving conception of absolute consciousness. He had come to believe that the subjective relations constitutive of human conscious experience mirror relations in absolute conscious experience and that absolute consciousness is nothing more than the totality of the particular subjective perspectives of which it is composed. Consequently, he held that all the fundamental categories of human experiences, not merely those of reason, are equally revealing of absolute reality. To be consistent, he should also have rejected the view that self-realization is the attempt to realize one's self as the absolute. He should have argued instead that our realization lies in perfecting our own unique subjective construction of the world, that it is through this that we simultaneously realize ourselves both as finite and as absolute consciousness. Further, he should have argued that the sort of rigid distinction he had made between natural science and morals in "Ethics and Physical Science" was insupportable.

2. See John Dewey, "Moral Theory and Practice," *EW* 3:93–109.

Given Dewey's conception of 'science,' the practical art of managing one's life and developing one's character must necessarily be a prescientific stage in moral knowledge—not on a par with, but of the same order as, theoretical moral philosophy. Dewey began to address these inconsistencies in his ethics in "Moral Theory and Practice."

## "MORAL THEORY AND PRACTICE"

"Moral Theory and Practice" was ostensibly a response to four essays published in the first issue of the *International Journal of Ethics*, each arguing that scientific reasoning, natural and philosophical, was irrelevant to individual or collective efforts to elevate private and public morality through the then popular medium of ethics societies. Two of the authors, Felix Adler and W. M. Salter, were founders of the Ethical Culture movement; the other two, Bernard Bosanquet and Henry Sidgwick, were philosophers involved with similar societies.[3] Actually, Dewey's targets are two versions of the view "that moral theory is something other than, or something beyond, an analysis of conduct—the idea that it is not simply and wholly 'the theory of practice'" (*EW* 3:94). On the one hand, Dewey argues, moral theory is mistakenly supposed to be the study of the foundations of morals, that is, an analysis of the physical, metaphysical, ontological, logical, or psychological presuppositions implicit in morality. On the other hand, moral theory is equally wrongly supposed to be the moral equivalent of "a nautical almanac, or an ethical prescription or cook-book" (*EW* 3:94), that is, the setting out of rules for the solution of particular problems. Both versions fall short of the mark. The first conception of moral theory is clearly theoretical but not moral, whereas the second is moral but not theoretical. The first sort of theory analyzes everything but morals; the second analyzes nothing at all.

"What then is moral theory?" Dewey asks. "It is all one with moral *insight*, and moral insight is the recognition of the relationships in hand. This is a very tame and prosaic conception. It makes moral insight, and therefore moral theory, consist simply in the every-day workings of the

3. All four papers appeared in the first issue of the *International Journal of Ethics* (1890). See Felix Adler, "The Freedom of Ethical Fellowship," pp. 16–30; Bernard Bosanquet, "The Communication of Moral Ideas as a Function of an Ethical Society," pp. 79–97; William M. Salter, "A Service of Ethics to Philosophy," pp. 114–19; and Henry Sidgwick, "The Morality of Strife," pp. 1–15. Dewey's paper is supposedly a reply to all four of these works, but only the first three are discussed in any detail.

same ordinary intelligence that measures dry-goods, drives nails, sells wheat, and invents the telephone" (*EW* 3:94–95). As Dewey defines it, moral theory is the theoretical investigation of moral life, investigating that life as biology investigates organic life. Moreover, moral theory is not discontinuous with the sort of practical observations and generalizations ordinary people make, any more than biology is discontinuous with the sort of observations and generalizations farmers, fishers, and hunters might make. Yet when it comes to explaining just what it is in moral life that is analogous to the organic life processes studied by biologists, Dewey is coy. Moral theory, he says, "is the analytic perception of the conditions and relations in hand in a given act,—it is the action *in idea*" (*EW* 3:95). What he does not say is to what end he thinks acts are related or what ideals they are conditioned upon. Presumably, the answer in each case would be self-realization. But this was apparently not an issue into which he wished to be drawn.

Instead, Dewey attacks what he takes to be the first and more fundamental misconception of moral theory: the conception of moral theory as a propadeutic to morals. It is only because of the evident shortcomings of the first misconception, he suggests, that the second misconception has made any appeal. To correct the first error and thus remove any motivation for the second, Dewey argues for a reconstruction of the "aborted conception of theory" in which the error originates (*EW* 3:94). But he might equally have called it an aborted conception of practical reason.

'Theory' was traditionally distinguished from 'practice' on the grounds that theoretical activity involves reason, yielding changes in the state of our knowledge, whereas practice can (and often does) rely on intuition and habituation, yielding changes in the state of the world. Consequently, neither activity seemed integral to the other. Appealing to this traditional distinction, one of Dewey's nominal interlocutors, Felix Adler, had asserted that theories of morals were as inessential to moral practice as theories of aeronautics or locomotion were inessential to the practices of plowing and walking. Dewey replies:

> What the well-worn illustrations of walking without knowledge of the theory of locomotion, of reasoning without knowledge of the syllogism, etc., prove is that a man may know some things without knowing others—others which, in ultimate analysis, are related. Where, however, there is anything which deserves the name of conduct, there is an idea, a "theory," at least as large as the action. Because the theory is narrow in scope it is not lacking; and it is

> narrow only so far as the corresponding act is abstract and partial. The average man can walk without *much* theory because walking is not an act of *great* content. (*EW* 3:96)

Dewey's point seems to be this. Theoretical inquiry appears inessential to practical affairs only when we take as our paradigm of theoretical inquiry the sciences that we now call sciences of basic research, such as physics, astronomy, pure mathematics, and theoretical chemistry. Although we hope the products of these sciences will benefit other human practices, none is required to be directly beneficial to any particular practice. But there are, in addition to these special sciences, other genuinely 'theoretic' investigations whose relations to practical activities are considerably more direct. Dewey lacked a term for these practical sciences, which I will group under the general rubric of 'materials sciences.' Materials sciences are those 'practical' or 'applied' sciences that investigate the nature of the resources on which various practical human projects depend. Examples include metallurgy, aerodynamics, and human physiology.

If we expand our paradigm of scientific or theoretical inquiry to include materials sciences, then it appears that every goal-directed human activity can be said to have some body of 'theory' lying behind it. The accomplished plowman will have a working knowledge of soil composition, land navigation, draft animals, and so forth. The accomplished chef must have a considerable grasp of the practical chemistry of foodstuffs and the interactions of their constituents with various other materials (e.g., coloring agents). Practitioners of such arts are never wholly innocent of theories about the materials with which they work.

Turning to the relation of moral practice to moral theory, Dewey argues that it is the same as that which holds between the arts of plowing, bridge building, or cooking and their respective materials sciences. The artisan, no less than the philosopher, has a stock of theoretical notions about moral conduct and character upon which his judgments about his own and others' lives are based. Dewey states: "The sole difference between the idea of a child, that he ought to learn the multiplication-table, or be kind to his baby-sister, and the widest moral theory—the one recognized as theory by every one—is simply one of degree of analysis of what practice is, and not a difference of kind. Action to the child is narrow and partial, and his theory is limited" (*EW* 3:97).

After introducing his own view of moral theorizing, Dewey uses it to attack a distinction drawn by another interlocutor, Bernard Bosanquet,

between 'moral ideas' and 'ideas about morals,' similar to Bradley's distinction between the moral facts (moral perceptions) and moral theory (generalizations from the facts). On the basis of this distinction, Bosanquet had argued that concrete moral dilemmas cannot be solved by appeal to councils of moral theorists, since their 'ideas about morals' are ideas about the logic of moral concepts, bearing no special relation to their realization in practice.

But if every agent acts on the basis of some theoretical understanding of the materials available for the pursuit of his ends, then it ought not to be the case that a council of moral theorists would be of no use to agents in moral dilemmas. The council ought to be able to assist agents by increasing their understanding of the materials—dispositions and actions—of moral practice. Dewey suggests that if such councils are of no use to those facing moral dilemmas, it is because they misconceive their roles as theorists:

> What I am getting at, in a word, is that the ordinary idea of moral theory shears off the very factors which make it *moral* theory at all and reduces it to the plane of physical theory. Physical theory does deal with abstractions, with hypothesis. It says, "If this, then that". . . . Now, the pundit who should allow his final deliverances [about a specific case] to go out in the form of "If this, then that" (except as a way of saying "I do not know enough of this concrete case to have any theory about it"), would be denying the sole condition of *moral* theory; he would be mutilating the moral fact, the individualized act, till it was a mere bundle of abstractions. (*EW* 3:98)

Because sciences of basic research are not conducted with reference to any particular human practical activity, the products of sciences such as physics are universal laws concerning the relations of objects and events in various hypothetical situations ('if this, then that'). Materials sciences, on the other hand, are conducted on the understanding that the purpose is to facilitate particular practices and that the products of their research must bear some relation to actual situations arising in those practices. Moral theory should be conducted on the same understanding. Dewey goes on: "In the last analysis, then, the value of our council of pundits will depend upon this: not whether theory helps practice, but whether the council is capable of the kind of theory demanded" (*EW* 3:99). If moral theorists act on the assumption that moral theory is a science of basic research, then their analyses of moral ideas may be as empty of practical value as Bosanquet claims. If, however, they were to

conceive of moral theory as a practical science of the resources available for the construction of a morally satisfactory life, then their analyses would be of enormous value.

Moreover, Dewey argues, once we recognize that moral theory is a practical, or materials, science of the human self and its realization, then the supposed distinction between moral rules and scientific laws will fall away. Contrary to common belief, he argues, moral rules do not in fact 'tell us what to do.' Like the conclusions of any materials science, moral rules and principles are simply general statements of the nature of the resources available to us and about their performance when put to various uses. Dewey writes:

> Some . . . entertain the idea that a moral law is a command: that it actually tells us what we should or should not do! The Golden Rule gives me absolutely no knowledge, of itself, of what I should do. . . . About the specific act to be done it tells, I repeat, not a jot. But it is a most marvelous tool of analysis. . . .
>
> What this rule is, that every rule is which has any use at all. This is the grain of truth in Mill's idea of a nautical almanac. The almanac, after all, does not tell the sailor where he is or how to navigate. It is an aid in his analysis of the required conditions of right navigation. (*EW* 3:100–101)

In rejecting the traditional conception of moral theory as irrelevant to practical action, Dewey warns, we must not go too far in the opposite direction and begin to imagine that moral theory is nothing but practical guidance or instruction. Nor should we defend philosophical moral science from the territorial advance of the natural sciences by arguing that it consists solely in nonscientific prescriptions and evaluations of conduct. Moral principles such as the Golden Rule, Dewey argues, are descriptive, not prescriptive. He writes: "Taken in any full meaning, the law of gravitation indicates an order of physical fact in which matter behaves thus and so; the Golden Rule indicates an order of social fact in which it is true that persons act thus and so, and not simply desirable that they should act thus and so" (*EW* 3:106). Here Dewey is clearly leaning on the unstated premise that the moral end is personal realization. His claim that there is an order of social fact that the Golden Rule describes makes sense only if we suppose human beings do not always act as 'persons' do.

Dewey's claim that moral principles are not prescriptive has another source. Moral theory, as Dewey understands it, is not a pure theoretical

enterprise, as philosophy is. Moral theory does not pursue knowledge for its own sake. Dewey says that "the difference between a practical and a theoretical consciousness is that the former is consciousness of *something to be done*" (*EW* 3:108). A practical science, such as medicine or engineering, presumes its ends are justifiable. It does not concern itself with the question of what the justification might be. It confines itself to determining how those ends may best be pursued. Consequently, no explanation is given why its recommendations should be acted upon. Similarly, Dewey thinks, no reason need be given by moral theorists why their recommendations should be acted upon. Given the object of moral life, moral theorists simply recommend ways that end may best be pursued.

Of course, this way of dealing with the status of moral principles does not tell us why we ought to adopt the particular end that Dewey presumes moral theory promotes. Dewey's handling of the matter might seem disingenuous until we consider how moral theory would fit into his pantheon of knowledge. Because moral theory is concerned with a limited subject matter (action in relation to the end of self-realization), it would be a 'special science.' As such it would be subordinate to the science of sciences, philosophy. Philosophy, using psychological method, provides the justifications for the basic assumptions of each special science, by appeal to the fundamental categories of the universe that its analysis reveals. All the special sciences are equally defective, on this view, precisely because they operate on the basis of assumptions they are not themselves able to prove. Consequently, justification of the ends of moral theory is a problem for pure philosophy rather than for moral theory. For this reason, Dewey could feel entitled to leave this problem to another day. It is a problem for a higher level of inquiry than that on which Bosanquet's council of moral theorists would be operating when making recommendations regarding specific moral dilemmas.

## MORAL JUDGMENT AND IDEALIST LOGICAL THEORY

In "Moral Theory and Practice," one of the reforms for which Dewey called was reconstruction of the theory of moral judgment. Idealist philosophers' efforts to defend philosophy's claim to the realm of values had resulted in a partition of intellectual territory. Idealists argued that morality involves the realization of the self as an absolute self, and since the absolute is not empirically observable, morality is not a subject for empirical investigation. Further, they argued, moral judgments differ in

kind from the judgments about events in the natural world, so that the latter are not necessarily relevant to the former. This had been Bradley's position in *Ethical Studies*, as well as the position of most of the papers to which Dewey responded in "Moral Theory and Practice." As was the case in 1886, he objects that the partition is inconsistent with the best tenets of Hegelianism—specifically, the best tenets of neo-Hegelian logical theory. Ironically, Dewey's protest of contemporary idealist treatments of moral reasoning and judgment drew upon the work of the very contemporaries he was attacking, most evidently in the case of F. H. Bradley's *Principles of Logic*, a text Dewey used in his own logic classes at the University of Michigan.[4]

According to idealist logic, the basic unit of meaning is not the word but the proposition. Propositions, however, do not spring from our minds like Athena from the forehead of Zeus. Each is the conclusion of a process of judgment. Therefore, the basic unit of thought, as opposed to meaning, is judgment. Judgment is a tripartite process, including analysis, inference, and predication. First, some portion of an agent's experience is isolated for investigation (analyzed). Next, the agent performs 'ideal experiments' (inferences) upon the isolated fragment of experience. The agent experimentally projects upon it various possible predicates ('blue,' 'winged,' 'heavier than that') in order to discover which predicate(s) fit(s) the isolated element onto which each is projected. The ideal predicate(s) that fit(s) best will then be adopted (predicated or asserted) as the correct characterization of the real.

Working from this conception of judgment, Bradley arrived at three further conclusions: (i) all judgments are logically general, (ii) all judgments are general hypotheses, and (iii) the subject of which all judgments predicate qualities or properties is reality as a whole.

All judgments are general, because the ideas of which judgments are composed are themselves general. Thus they are incapable of referring uniquely to any particular thing. The idea of blueness, for example, may be a particular thing occurring at a particular moment, but it cannot uniquely refer to any one individual thing. The idea of blue refers to a general class of qualities. Consequently, all judgments, being composed

4. F. H. Bradley, *Principles of Logic*, 1st ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1883). See, e.g., John Dewey, "Philosophy at the University of Michigan" (1890), a report on course offerings, written for the *Monist* (*EW* 3:90–92). Dewey also used a text by Bernard Bosanquet, *Logic, or the Morphology of Knowledge*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1888] 1911), which espoused a logic and epistemology very similar to Bradley's. Where disagreements arose between Bradley and Bosanquet, Dewey seems to have sided with Bradley (see, e.g., note 5, below).

of general ideas, are necessarily about general classes of things and not about individual bits of reality.

Judgments are hypothetical because any particular entity that we may try to qualify by means of judgment is itself merely a hypothetical entity. What we are given in our immediate experience of the world, idealists agreed, was certainly not a set of discrete objects standing in discrete relations but rather an unindividuated whole of raw feeling. It is the nature of the human mind to analyze what is given in immediate experience, to break it into particulars standing in particular relations. But we cannot know whether the products of our analyses of immediate experience correspond to real objects in real relations. To know this, we would have to be able to step outside our own experience, to compare our analyses with reality itself. Since this is impossible, we cannot know if what we take to be particular objects really are what we suppose them to be. Hence every judgment we make, every judgment that treats a bit of experience as a genuinely discrete, particular bit of reality, is merely hypothetical. Its truth is conditional upon the truth of our hypothesis that the products of our analyses of experience correspond to real particular components of reality.[5]

In which case, Bradley reasoned, all judgments are really general hypotheses about reality as a whole. The propositions in which we express the conclusions of our judgments, such as 'this dog is heavy,' should be viewed as incomplete expressions of the judgment actually made. A fuller rendering would be, 'reality is such that this is a dog and it is heavy,' or 'if reality is what we take it to be, this dog is heavy.' So, for example, Bradley argued that what we ordinarily call 'assertions' should be interpreted as complex predicates asserted as true of an unstated subject: reality as a whole. We do not bother to mention the true subject of our judgments, he thought, because the subject is invariably the same. Only the predicates we assert as true of reality vary from case to case, so only these require overt expression.

As a result, idealists such as Bradley and Dewey arrived at a double-barreled conception of the truth of our propositions about the world. Strictly speaking, to be (absolutely) true, the content of a judgment must

5. One might go another step and argue that since we cannot know the relation of our ideas to reality, we might as well view our judgments as categorical assertions of fictions or of our ideas about how the world ought to be. For an example of an alternative along these lines, see Bosanquet's *Logic*. Dewey appears to have stopped short of this further inference, holding with Bradley that all judgments are hypotheses.

correspond to reality.[6] This, however, we are never in a position to check. All we can be sure of is that some of our judgments 'work' or 'fit' our experience but others do not. Since the truth of our judgments is undeterminable, our judgments can at most be said to be warranted by how well they perform for us. This outcome has led some commentators to argue that idealists such as Bradley, or Dewey in the early 1890s, should be viewed as protopragmatists.[7] The superficial similarity of Dewey's idealist and later pragmatic theories of the 'fixation' of our beliefs (in C. S. Peirce's terms) by their serviceability has considerably complicated the problem of determining when exactly Dewey abandoned idealist logical theory for a pragmatic epistemology. It is important to bear in mind, however, that in 1891 he had not come round to Peirce's view of truth as that to which all men are fated to agree. In this period, truth, to Dewey, meant correspondence to absolute reality, however unverifiable that correspondence might be.

The fine points of idealist logical theory need not detain us, but two implications of this way of thinking about judgment should be noted. First, every proposition is the result of a *process* of judgment. Second, no proposition merely reports the 'facts.' Or in other words, every proposition about the world is 'theory-laden.' There is no such thing as an 'observation statement' pure and simple. Whenever we try to characterize what is given in our immediate experience, we necessarily first analyze or break up the unindividuated experiential whole into discrete 'objects.' What we observe when we do so is always partially a product of our expectations. If we live in a culture that looks for demonic activity in the world, for example, we are likely to observe a demonic activity in

6. Bradley is not usually classified as a 'correspondence theorist' for the excellent reason that in the second edition of his *Principles of Logic* (1922) and other later works, he specifically repudiated this doctrine. But in the first edition of *Principles of Logic*, the edition available to Dewey in 1891, Bradley describes truth as 'correspondence' to reality. For recent commentaries on Bradley's conceptions of truth, see Anthony Manser, *Bradley's Logic* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1983); Stewart Candlish, "The Truth about F. H. Bradley," *Mind* 98 (1989): 331–48; James Allard, "Bradley's Principle of Sufficient Reason," in *The Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, ed. Anthony Manser and Guy Stock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 173–89.

7. The locus classicus for this view of Bradley's idealism appears to be F. C. S. Schiller, "The New Developments of Mr. Bradley's Philosophy," *Mind* 24 (1915): 345–66. An influential commentary on Bradley's protopragmatism that links the development of his philosophy with Dewey's is "F. H. Bradley and the Working-out of Absolute Idealism," chap. 8 of J. H. Randall, Jr., *Philosophy after Darwin: Chapters for the Career of Philosophy, Volume 3, and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

our animals, relatives, or crops. If we live in a culture that does not look for such things, what we will observe in similar circumstances will be very different. In no case are our observations untainted by our theories of what the real is like.

Within any theoretical framework, there is always a class of statements that play the role of observation statements, statements arrived at by following what are, for that framework, the primitive, unquestionable rules of analytical procedure, the products of which all accept as unarguably real. These, Dewey and Bradley agree, are our 'judgments of perception,' those judgments that report without further analysis just what any observers operating in a given theoretical framework would observe in a given case; for example, 'this is a tree' or 'that dog has spots.' Scientific judgments, by contrast, involve more specialized analytical procedures, meant to uncover the hidden structure of ordinary perceptual objects, often by reference to a set of theoretical objects (e.g., electrons, genes, forces) that are not themselves perceived. Scientific judgments treat judgments of perception as if they were pure observations reporting the facts of a given case. Nevertheless, the 'facts' are what they are by convention. And conventional rules of analysis are themselves determined by our theories.

Bradley wrote his *Ethical Studies* about a decade before his *Principles of Logic*, but it was in the light of the later text that Dewey would have read the earlier work. And in this light, Bradley's claims in *Ethical Studies* about the nature of moral judgments and their relation to nonmoral practical judgments and to theoretical judgments are insupportable.

First, there can be no basis for Bradley's claim in *Ethical Studies* that there is a difference *in kind* between judgments of perception (such as moral practical judgments) and theoretical judgments. Theories and theoretical judgments must be revised to fit the facts, as Bradley so often insisted. But since facts are determined in part by theories, facts are revised and revisable with revisions in our theories. Since this was held to be true of judgment generally by Bradley, Bosanquet, and Dewey in the 1890s, Dewey had solid idealist grounds for rejecting any distinction between moral practical judgments (moral observations) and theoretical judgments about morals.

And he had grounds for questioning the strong distinction Bradley had made between moral practical judgments and nonmoral practical judgments. Because, on this theory, all judgment is to be interpreted as an activity, we must think of judgment as a goal-directed practice. The goal all specific acts of judgment seek in common is the construction, so

to speak, of maps of reality by which we can direct our efforts toward our public and private ends. Consequently the suggestion that there is a type of judgment that is not practical must be rejected. It simply cannot be correct to say that moral judgments differ in structure or kind from nonmoral practical judgments. Moral practical judgments, if they are judgments at all, must have the same structure as their nonmoral counterparts. All are instruments for the achievement of human ends. In rejecting the claim that the plain man's moral judgments differ from the theorist's judgments about morals, and in rejecting the claim that moral judgments differ in kind from nonmoral theoretical judgments, Dewey was simply applying to morality the principles he had drawn from contemporary idealist logic.

## MORAL THEORY AND PRACTICE IN DEWEY'S *OUTLINES*

In 1891, Dewey's dispute with Bradley turned primarily on epistemological issues, in particular the interpretation of moral judgments. On most other fundamental moral issues, Dewey followed Bradley closely. Like Bradley, Dewey believed that (1) the object of life and action is self-realization, (2) one can realize one's self as a person only by participation in a social group, and (3) self-realization ethics can and should be defended on the basis of appeals to experience rather than metaphysical reasoning. Dewey's *Outlines* could almost be read as a corrected, revised edition of Bradley's *Ethical Studies* for the American undergraduate student of ethics.[8]

On Dewey's reading of idealist logical theory, there was no bar in principle to treating the practice of self-realization 'scientifically,' that is, as a 'materials science' of self-realization. Still, there remained serious obstacles to be overcome if the idea of making ethics scientific was not to seem naive. In particular, there were the two practical obstacles Bradley had emphasized: (1) the moral world, in contrast to the purely physical world, is in an unfinished state and contains internal inconsistencies making complete and consistent description of its structure a practical impossibility, and (2) there are nonsocial forms of personal realization that cannot be realized except at the expense of the duties of one's stations. Inconsistencies in the moral world and between the means and end of self-realization as we experience them necessarily entail the generation of contradictory conclusions about what our roles

8. See John Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, *EW* 3:237–388.

and duties to ourselves and others really are. Thus, Bradley argued, we are regularly obliged to choose between conflicting generalizations that are equally valid on the evidence available. Choosing to accept either one or the other is arbitrary, rationally speaking, and nothing more than the expression of faith in the view adopted. If, for example, an agent chooses to realize some nonsocial personal capacity at the apparent expense of his social duties, Bradley believed, the agent's sole justification is his faith in an underlying identity of his own and others' good. So Bradley concluded that neither private nor public decisions about self-realization can be assisted by scientific methods of inquiry or justification.

If the *Outlines* is any guide, Dewey was not deeply impressed by the first of these practical obstacles. His treatment of the problem is brief to the point of brusqueness. As in "Moral Theory and Practice," he simply asserts that a misconception of scientific or theoretical understanding is involved. Because he agreed that social arrangements evolve over time, Dewey accepted Bradley's conclusion that the social institutions existing at any one time can seem and even genuinely be mutually inconsistent. But social institutions, as Dewey saw them, are only expressions of our judgments about how self-realization is to be achieved. Inconsistencies in these institutions will mirror the inconsistencies in our theories about the best means of arranging for our realization. But he did not consider that the existence of inconsistencies in our theories about the moral world indicated fundamental inconsistencies in the moral world. Nor did he agree that, because choices between conflicting conclusions about the world may be undetermined by the facts, all such choices are, strictly speaking, rationally arbitrary acts of faith. As Dewey rightly points out, if this line of argument were accepted, we would have to say that the physical world was likewise fundamentally inconsistent. As Dewey notes, "all science rests upon the conviction of a thorough-going and permanent unity of the world of objects known—a unity which is sometimes termed the 'uniformity of nature' or the 'reign of law'; without this conviction that objects are not mere isolated and transitory appearances, but are connected together in a system by laws or relations, science would be an impossibility" (*EW* 3:323).

All the special sciences are founded upon such 'acts of faith,' themselves not scientifically justifiable. A special science of ethics must likewise make

> an assumption analogous in kind to that which intellectual experience makes for the world of knowledge. And just as it is not the affair of science, as such,

> or even of logic (the theory of science) to justify this presupposition of science, or to do more than show its presence in intellectual experience, so it is not the business of conduct, or even of ethics (the theory of conduct) to justify what [is to be termed] the "ethical postulate." In each case the further inquiry belongs to metaphysics. (*EW* 3:323)

To postulate the existence of an order in the moral world is not to make a leap of faith at odds with scientific inquiry. It is the first step to putting our inquiries on a scientific basis.

Thus Dewey claims the right to assert as a fundamental postulate of the moral world, what Bradley was willing to offer only as an article of faith, that "IN THE REALIZATION OF INDIVIDUALITY THERE IS FOUND ALSO THE NEEDED REALIZATION OF SOME COMMUNITY OF PERSONS OF WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL IS A MEMBER; AND, CONVERSELY, THE AGENT WHO DULY SATISFIES THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH HE SHARES, BY THAT SAME CONDUCT SATISFIES HIMSELF" (*EW* 3:323; capitalization in original). Although it is true that presupposing an underlying order in the world, moral or physical, is a necessary condition of inductive methods of the special sciences, Dewey's postulate is not such a presupposition. It is one thing to postulate that there is order, say, in the movements of astronomical bodies and quite another thing to postulate that their movements are ordered by mutual gravitational attraction. Similarly, it is one thing to say that there must be an order in moral life and quite another to say that it takes the form of a reciprocal identity between private and group self-realization. Dewey's suggestion that his 'ethical postulate' is merely a necessary assumption of scientific inquiry into conduct, analogous to the assumption of uniformity in nature, is incorrect. The postulate is more nearly analogous to Newton's law of gravity or the first law of thermodynamics, neither of which is a fundamental postulate but rather a 'secondary' or 'intermediate' principle standing between the fundamental principle of uniformity in nature and statements about particular objects and events. Had Dewey nothing further to say in support of his postulate, his position would be wholly indefensible.

In fact, Dewey arrived at this not-so-fundamental principle after a lengthy analysis of self-realization meant to show that the facts of personal and social life afford grounds for concluding that the means and end of self-realization are incompatible neither in principle nor in normal practice. That Bradley's second obstacle could be overcome, that personal and public self-realization could be shown to be reciprocal, was to Dewey a foregone conclusion. To deny it would be counterintuitive. If we take the position that to be a person just is to be the holder of a complex of social stations, then a 'personal capacity' or 'personal ex-

cellence' that is not a condition or component of a social station(s) seems impossible. So if on Bradley's definitions of 'person,' 'self,' and 'self-realization' there can be 'personal' capacities that are essentially nonsocial, so much the worse for Bradley's definitions. Dewey takes the position that intellectual, cultural, and artistic interests "*are themselves* social, when considered in the completeness of their relations" (*EW* 3:315); each is a species of realization of intelligence, which is both essential to realization of personality (so its realization is a justifiable social function in itself) and an essential ingredient of every social station. But to point out that a claim seems counterintuitive is not to prove it wrong. To back up his intuitions, Dewey had to reconstruct idealist accounts of the nature of personality and the conditions of its realization so as to remove any hint of discrepancy between them.

Dewey's reexamination of personal realization begins with his analysis of the nature of human desire and its ideal. Not surprisingly, he finds that the true object of desire was simpler and more readily realizable than Bradley supposed. Bradley had argued that since our capacity to give particular form to the enduring human ideal was not limited by either logical consistency or practical possibilities of its realization, it cannot itself be conceived as limited. Thus he came to the conclusion that the fundamental ideal is to be an infinite whole or to *be* free of external determination. Dewey also holds that the essential object of desire has an 'infinite' character. But he asserts that the ideal we desire is to *act* freely, to be free of external obstacles to one's activity.

When we analyze human desire, Dewey says, we find three elements: states of feeling, an act of will, and some external object. Like Bradley, Dewey thought it evident that the external objects toward which desires tend are never desired for their own sakes but only as means for the production of internal modifications in one's self. So it would seem that the true 'object' or ideal of desire must be the modification of either one's feelings or one's will. Utilitarians had opted for the first alternative, Kantians for the second. But to conclude that these are the only alternatives, Dewey argues, would be incorrect.

In the course of his critical commentary on hedonistic utilitarianism, Dewey holds that hedonism commits a fatal error in its analysis of the relation of external objects to the production of states of feeling. To say simply that the true end of desire is production of favored states of feeling, and that objects are pursued merely for their ability to stimulate the desired feelings, raises more questions than it answers. It is a commonplace that objects that give rise to pleasure in an individual on one occa-

sion fail to do so on others to all intents and purposes identical to the first. How is the irregularity in the causal operations of external stimuli of pleasure to be explained?

Clearly, hedonists misunderstand what the relation between pleasure and external objects really is. Dewey attributes "the error of the hedonistic psychology" to their "omitting one's consciousness of an *object* which satisfies" (*EW* 3:253). Objects are not simply valued as means to pleasure. Instead, pleasure is a by-product of obtaining the objects for which we have an appreciative desire. What then do we want external objects for? For what we can do with them, Dewey answers. We want external objects for the sake of satisfactory activity. For example, when I say to myself, 'I want that dress,' it is true that I expect to get pleasure from obtaining that dress. But 'dress' in this instance does not stand simply and directly for the physical dress I propose to buy. 'That dress' operates as a symbol of all the activities I will be able to perform once the object is at my command. It is from those activities, rather than from the dress itself, that I expect to get pleasure. Dewey concludes that the "real object of desire is activity itself" (*EW* 3:254)—unobstructed, free, self-absorbing activity.

Appetites and impulses impel all living creatures into activity. Self-conscious creatures, however, know that they act and know that their capacities are realized through their activities. It is through the relations of objects to their ends that self-conscious creatures are able to define the manifold forms their activity might take. Moreover, it is through analysis of objects and their nature that self-conscious creatures are able to discover new ways objects might be used, new varieties of action not hitherto experienced. Take, for example, the definition of hunger:

> To be conscious of an impulse for food means to give up the unreasoned and momentary seizing of it; to consider the relation of things to this want, what will satisfy it best, most easily, etc. The *object* of desire is not something outside the action; it is an element in the enlarged action. And as we become more and more conscious of the impulse for food, we analyze our action into more and more "objects" of desire, but these objects never become anything apart from the action itself. They are simply its analyzed and defined content. Man wants activity still, but he knows better what activity means and includes.
>
> Thus, when we learn what the activity means, it changes its character. To the animal the activity wanted is simply that of eating the food, of realizing the momentary impulse. To man the activity becomes enlarged to include the satisfaction of a whole life. (*EW* 3:255)

Unfortunately, Kantianism is equally guilty of supposing that the external objects toward which desires tend are desired only as instruments for the production of pleasure. But Kantianism does at least correct hedonism's neglect of the role of our wills in desire. At any given time, an agent is subject to a manifold of impulses and appetites that might be channeled into a variety of mutually conflicting lines of action. And one cannot assume that one course of action will always stand out as certainly best, thus determining the agent to pursue that and only that course of action. Usually, a number of comparably fulfilling courses of action seem open to us. In these situations, we must choose or will which of these possible objects we shall desire and pursue and which we shall not.

When, by an act of will, we focus our efforts upon some one possible course of action, Dewey thought, we effectually *identify* ourselves with the modified self that will be the outcome of our choice. We will to be that self, rather than any one of the other selves we might become. Clearly, such choices can be rational or irrational. For one who numbers rationality among her capacities, satisfaction can be found only in realizing her capacity to will her self-realization in accordance with reason. Not to do so would be an act of self-mutilation, to cut one's self off from those activities that are peculiarly human for the sake of those that any animal may enjoy. It is thus to Kant's credit that he showed "the necessity of putting in abeyance the immediate satisfaction of each desire as it happens to arise, and of subordinating it to some law not to be found in the particular desire. He showed that not the particular desire, but only the desire as controlled by the idea of law could be the motive of moral action" (*EW* 3:300).

Dewey then sums up his analysis of desire and its ideal as follows. The ideal of all our particular desires

> is for an entire and continuous activity, and its satisfaction requires that [each particular desire] be fitted into this entire and continuous activity; that it be made conformable to the conditions which will bring the whole man into action. It is this fitting-in which is the law of the desire—the "universal" controlling its particular nature. . . . The problem then is to find that special form of character, of self, which includes and transforms all special desires. This form of character is at once the Good and the Law of man. (*EW* 3:300–301)

Dewey's answer is that such a form of character or personality can be constructed only through collective social action. To become such a self,

a person, is to become a member of a group, participating in the group's common project via the filling of socially determined stations within the whole.

But self-realization does not begin and end with the performance of the duties of one's station. Social stations are rarely tailored to individual tastes and needs. As a rule, they are designed as loosely as possible to accommodate the widest possible range of potential performers. Although this is beneficial overall, it might seem a handicap to particular individuals in ill-fitting stations. Some of their capacities may be stifled, some weaknesses reinforced. So it would appear that in most cases, individuals' personal realizations can come only at the expense of attention to the duties of their stations.

But this unhappy conclusion, Dewey thinks, follows only if our analysis of what it is to be or be realized as a person is prematurely cut off. Precisely because social stations are so loosely defined, they can be adapted to each individual's needs and interests. No two people ever can or ever do really fulfill the duties of their stations in the same ways others do. Their capacities are unique to themselves, and they stand in unique relations to the social and physical world. They have simply to bring their own unique capacities to bear on their stations to tailor them to the needs of their own personal realizations.

To be a person then is not only to perform the roles society assigns. That constitutes at most a sort of minimum condition of personhood. To be a person is to make that unique adaptation of a station to one's capacities and to the resources and obstacles the social and physical environment furnishes. It is to find or construct an individualized social station that no other individual possesses. The ideal of desire is to realize not simply personhood but individual personhood, to be *an* individual person. Or in Dewey's words, it is the "realization by a person and as a person of individuality," individuality being defined as "the performance by a person of his specific function, this function consisting in activity which realizes wants and powers with reference to their peculiar surroundings" (*EW* 3:304).

Communities of persons do in a sense share an ideal of personal life, as Bradley had suggested. But for Dewey, this does not entail the conclusion that what the members of communities do is to try to construct and realize a greater self of which each individual is literally an organ. Given his view of the metaphysics of consciousness in this period, Dewey could not have thought this outcome possible in any case. The ideal shared is that a maximum of satisfactory self-conscious activity

shall be enjoyed by each individual member—to which end it enjoins the performance of those interactive functions that are essential if persons are to live in close proximity. It is only through proximity, through interaction with others, that each is able to discover and develop one's own individual personal identity.

Although the end each seeks to realize, an individual life of satisfactory self-conscious activity, is unique to himself or herself, the achievement by any one person of his or her end is dependent upon the achievement by other community members of their ends. One cannot learn how to be a satisfied person or learn how to be a person at all except through the example of and interaction with other beings who are already persons. And in achieving a satisfactory personal life for one's self, one is bringing about the conditions necessary for one's fellows to do the same.

Dewey's 'ethical postulate,' the postulate that there is a reciprocal relation between the realization of each individual's interests and the realization of the interests of all, is an induction from the 'facts' of the nature of our desire and the conditions of its achievement. Since it is our own individual realizations that we seek, we must each create for ourselves our own peculiar 'niches' in the social and physical world. In doing so, we must take care how our niches interact with others'. They should not take forms that destabilize the environment that supports us. The relations of persons to persons, as Dewey conceives them, are like the relations that hold between members of a ecosystem. In an ecosystem, no act is without some effect upon the whole. Nor is the failure of any one individual or species to 'realize' its desires for food, shelter, reproduction without effect on the whole. The failure of an organism to adapt itself to the carrying capacity of its surrounding environment may destroy not only itself but the other species dependent upon it. In ecosystems composed of unselfconscious creatures, such disasters do occur, because the members are unable to recognize when their pursuits are destabilizing. Persons, however, have the capacity to understand the interrelation of their good with the goods of others. Thus the rational moral agent will construct his or her own niche in the world with an eye upon the effects upon the whole, recognizing that its preservation and his or her own are inextricably entwined. Individual and communal self-realization are thus mutually interdependent.

With that, Dewey completes his case for rejecting the second of Bradley's two objections to the possibility of rendering the moral world a fit subject for scientific inquiry. On Dewey's definitions of desire, its ideal, and the conditions of its realization, there is no incompatibility

between the realization of one's self as an individual and as a member of a social group. Society is a sort of self-generating ecosystem of a multitude of individual yet interdependent niches. Granted, the activities that constitute one individual's niche may be very like those of another. Nevertheless, those activities are never identical, nor do they ever draw on exactly the same capacities of the two individuals in exactly the same ways. Hence my niche, or my individuality, is a unique achievement and makes a unique contribution to the social whole. But although I and my niche are unique, they are not nonsocial. In cultivating my personal capacities for satisfactory activity, even if these are for activities such as aesthetic enjoyment or the acquisition of knowledge, which outwardly benefit no one but myself, I necessarily act for the public or social good. In realizing my own individuality, I contribute to the realization of all my fellows.

If there are no fundamental incoherences in moral life, Dewey reasoned, then there is no bar to the construction of a materials science of moral life, that is, a genuinely scientific ethical theory that could be used to tell us how or by what means we can achieve our special ends with the special materials available. The creation of our individual niches, and the relations of each to the whole, must obey universal principles similar to those observed by other special sciences. Certain sorts of capacities can make use of certain materials and not others. Certain sorts of social arrangements permit of certain niches and not others, and so forth. Scientific inquiry, far from being irrelevant to the promotion of the project of morality, our respective self-realizations, is an indispensable tool of that project's success.

## CRITICAL OBJECTIONS TO THE *OUTLINES*

In reply to an appreciative note from William James, Dewey wrote: "The book has received a little of what is called 'favorable comment' as well as more or less of the reverse, but so far as reported you are the first man to see the point,—and that I suppose is the dearest thing to a writer. The present perceptual structure is so great, and such a weighty thing, both in theory and in practice, that I don't anticipate any success for the book, but when one man like yourself expresses what you wrote me, the book has already succeeded."[9] From the philosophical community it was more rather than less of the reverse that Dewey received. Of the seven reviews of the *Outlines* published in English-language periodi-

9. Dewey to William James, May 10, 1891. See Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. 2 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1936), p. 517.

cals, five were highly critical.[10] It must have been a serious disappointment to Dewey that one of his severest critics was a fellow idealist, Josiah Royce, who dismissed Dewey's resolutions of the problems of ethical theory as the result of his youthful, "untroubled optimism . . . in the presence of all the harder problems of ethics." Royce commented further that "the deeper problems of ethics, the antinomies of self and task, of inner and outer, of ideal and fact . . . our author, after all, rather too gayly ignores."[11] Since it was from idealists such as Royce that Dewey was most likely to receive support and encouragement, the fact that the one man who saw the point was a critic of idealism did not bode well. Few empiricists could be expected to be as broad-minded as James was toward a neo-Hegelian ethics.

Dewey's efforts to reconstruct idealist ethics of self-realization had backfired. His revisions to idealist conceptions of self, the self's ideal, and the self's realization entailed conclusions so far out of line with ordinary moral conceptions that not even idealists could readily accept them. Most objectionable to the reviewers were the conclusions entailed by Dewey's account of moral good and evil. Royce asked, if morality were as Dewey depicted, "where would be the true problem of evil?"[12] Royce's question was echoed in a letter to Dewey from Thomas Davidson, the reviewer for *Philosophical Review*, in which Davidson asked if Dewey had not created an ethics without evil.[13] The questions are illuminating, for their answers reveal the considerable distance Dewey's revisions had departed from the mainstream of idealist ethical thought.

According to the ethical theories of Bradley and Green, both the ideal of desire and its pursuit are social. The ideal is constructed and defined by a group, and the pursuit of the ideal is a group project. The ideal is the standard against which the contributions of the group's members are evaluated. The fundamental principle of this sort of consequentialism might be summed up as 'act so as to maximize the realization of personality in yourself and others.' The obligation to accept and to respect the principle is assumed by all those who voluntarily participate in

10. The book received eight reviews altogether, three of which were unsigned: Thomas Davidson, *Philosophical Review* 1 (1892): 95–99; James Hervy Hyslop, *Andover Review* 16 (1891): 95, and *Educational Review* 2 (1891): 297–98; G. Rodier, *Revue Philosophique* 33 (1892): 97; Josiah Royce, *International Journal of Ethics* 1 (1891): 503–5; *Mind* 16 (1891): 424; *Monist* 1 (1891): 600–601; and *New Englander and Yale Review* 55 (1891): 275.

11. Royce, review of *Outlines*, p. 505.

12. Ibid.

13. See Dewey's reply, Dewey to Davidson, March 14, 1891, Thomas A. Davidson Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University, discussed in Coughlan, *Young John Dewey*, p. 84.

the group's life as the price of membership. What in particular one is obligated to do depends upon both the opportunities an agent has to realize personality and the constraints imposed by the social roles he undertakes. The morally good man recognizes and respects the duties membership entails. The morally bad man is the free rider or social saboteur who either enjoys the privileges of membership without contributing his due or who actively interferes with the members of the group and their pursuit of the common project.

Dewey meant his theory to incorporate a substantially similar account of the nature and origin of an individual's moral obligations. But he failed to note that it was not the fact that personality is a social construct that alone gave rise to moral obligation in Green's or Bradley's ethics. Obligation arose instead from voluntary assumption of membership in a group. In Dewey's ethics there is no group practice to which individuals can commit themselves in this way. Dewey's moral agents seek the realization of their own 'individuality.' But 'individuality' is an essentially private attribute. Moreover, a principle urging the maximization of individuality in oneself and others would be empty. One's adaptation to circumstance is either unique or it is not. And as defined by Dewey, everyone's adaptation is necessarily unique. So realization of individuality cannot be the goal of a social practice.

Dewey presumably accepted this result because it seemed to translate the neo-Hegelian concept of society as an organism into the metaphysically neutral terms of biological science. Describing the ideal of self-realization as an organic adaptation of capacities to an environment had the scientific ring Dewey was aiming to give his theory as a whole. But he seems not to have seen that on this description the origin and justification of moral obligations is incomprehensible. One does not become a member of an environment or take on responsibilities to an environment, even if that environment happens to contain sentient beings like oneself. It was for this reason that Royce and Davidson concluded that Dewey's ethics had no room for ordinary notions of moral obligation or of moral evil. If no individual has or can have obligations to his environment, no agent can be, or be judged, morally at fault.

A brief examination of what Dewey called 'moral badness' in *Outlines* confirms the concerns of his critics. Dewey writes: "Badness originates in the contrast which thus comes about between *having* the repetition of former action, and *doing*, pressing forward to the new right action. Goodness is the choice of doing; the refusal to be content with past good as exhausting the entire content of goodness" (*EW* 3:374). Lacking any

other basis for evaluating action, Dewey resorts to what can only be called self-interest. A good self acts rationally to ensure future satisfaction in a changeable, sometimes dangerous, environment. A bad self irrationally ignores the fact that environmental conditions and personal capacity vary over time and so are unlikely to yield in future the same satisfactions yielded in the past. Such a self becomes 'demoralized,' that is, passive and unresponsive to changing reality. Demoralization unchecked ultimately results in 'disintegration,' the inability to maintain one's niche in the world. It would seem then that 'evil' action is self-destructive or imprudent action and that the ultimate human evil is suicide.

Two reviewers took the criticism of Dewey's account of evil a step further, asking whether Dewey was not bound to consider evil (irrationality) essential to, hence good for, the health of individuals and social groups. Davidson noted in his review that it is through failed actions that Dewey's agents learn the necessity of critical self-examination and prudent deliberation about actions. So it seemed to Davidson that moral badness is integral to the progressive development of Dewey's agents' individuality. The *Monist* reviewer took up the question in relation to social groups. He asked Dewey whether socially disruptive (imprudent) actions were not integral to the health of social groups. He wrote:

> Progress is itself the ideal, since "permanence of *specific* ideals means moral death." But this progress must originate with the individual, who by the formation of the new ideal ceases to be in perfect accord with the community, and will continue to be in disaccord with it until the community has accepted his ideal. A perfect realisation of individuality in the community would be the "fixed millennium" which the author properly objects to, and to escape which it is necessary, that the equilibrium towards which the individual, as well as the social, organism is ever tending shall never be actually attached.[14]

The *Monist* reviewer's point is that rational or 'good' choices of action are paradoxically self-defeating and so evil. Since rational choices can be made only on the basis of an individual self's or society's past experience and past satisfactions, rationality will tend to work to conserve a self or society in one form and promote only those satisfactions already judged good. But conservation of the self or society in a given state and resistance to risk taking for the sake of novel satisfactions is evil, according to Dewey. Consequently, the social group must encourage imprudent, ir-

14. *Monist* 1 (1891): 601.

rational actions by at least some of its members so as to ensure change and variation in its internal organization and idealizations. So it turns out to be in one's own and society's self-interest to ignore or suppress rational consideration of one's own or society's self-interest. In which case, not even self-interest supplies Dewey a coherent basis for the evaluation of actions.

But this complaint is not as serious as it looks. First, it could be in one's self-interest to limit actions to pursuit of guaranteed satisfactions only if one were also guaranteed that one's capacities and environment would not alter in future. No human agent is in possession of such a guarantee. So no rational human agent would limit her pursuit of satisfactions to the repetition of past satisfying actions. Second, even if one's environment and/or capacities were to remain constant, it would still not be rational simply to repeat past lines of action. It could be rational to do so only if one were in possession of a guarantee that no better or other satisfactions were attainable. Again, no rational agent is in possession of such a guarantee. Consequently, it can be both rational and in one's self-interest to experiment with novel actions and forms of satisfactions.

There is, however, a deeper paradox in Dewey's ethics not specifically mentioned in the reviews. If the aim of a Deweyan agent is to realize individuality, then the goal has been achieved at the outset. Any further efforts after self-realization are pointless, and Dewey's ethics devolves into a variety of hedonism. This paradoxical result Dewey would have had to admit because it follows from the theory of the self he had developed in his previous publications. In his metaphysics, consciousness is absolute, but absolute consciousness, he insisted, is simply the concrete universal made up of all the finite worlds of experience that compose it. Since all finite consciousnesses are already fully real components of the system to which they contribute, finite selves cannot become more 'real' over time. There is no room for 'realization' in Dewey's self-realization ethics.

Forced by critical reviews to rethink his position, Dewey came to see that his self-realization ethics of individuality had no coherent account of moral evil, of a group project of self-realization that explained the origin of moral obligation, or even of self-realization as the ideal of desire and action. But instead of trying to remove these flaws and secure his theory, Dewey accepted the flaws as facts about morality and rewrote his theory accordingly. Since self-realization was a paradoxical

ideal, he decided it had to be jettisoned and with it all the associated concepts of moral good and evil, obligation, and progress hitherto formulated by idealist moral philosophers. If it was on the basis of a shared ideal of self-realization that idealist ethics evaluated conduct as good or bad, then idealist ethics had no justifiable basis for making those evaluations. If obligation arose from voluntary assumption of a role in a group project, then idealist ethics could not coherently speak of moral obligation.

Dewey decided his revisions of idealist ethics had not gone deep enough. A more thoroughgoing analysis and reconstruction of its fundamental tenets was necessary if idealist ethics was to be put on a firm, scientifically respectable footing. Between 1891 and 1894, Dewey systematically reviewed and attacked what he had thus come to see as the central problems of idealist theories of the self. He forcefully reiterated his earlier criticisms of Green's conception of the relation of particular selves to absolute self-consciousness[15] and then attacked the conceptions of progress with which idealism worked,[16] the notion of volitional determination involved in the notion of progress,[17] and the notion of self-realization itself.[18] In 1894, he published the results of his critique in a new textbook: *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*.

15. See John Dewey, "Green's Theory of the Moral Motive" (1892), *EW* 3:155–73.
16. See John Dewey, "The Superstition of Necessity" (1893), *EW* 4:19–36.
17. See John Dewey, "The Ego as Cause" (1894), *EW* 4:91–95.
18. See John Dewey, "Self-realization as the Moral Ideal" (1893), *EW* 4:42–53.