
DEWEY'S LOGIC:

The theory of inquiry

— a critical analysis of its philosophical implications and of the place
of its conception in the history of philosophy — *)

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of the work of JOHN DEWEY, especially on the North-American Continent, has been, and still is, profound and immense. Education, political life, the community, industrial and other organization, the armed forces, and so on without end, all bear the mark of this versatile and productive thinker. Of all pragmatistic philosophers no one has affected the world in which he lived so lastingly, extensively, and deeply as DEWEY. An understanding of contemporary American civilization can not exist without an understanding of his attempted reformation of society.

If the moulding of a civilization were DEWEY'S only contribution to his contemporaries, he would have done enough to establish his position among the important men of our age. But in addition to this he was a central figure in the institution of a new movement in philosophy: pragmatism, a significant school from its very start.

These two considerations led me to take DEWEY'S philosophy as the subject of this paper. But it was necessary to find a more specific topic, suited to the limitations set by a study of this kind. For this reason I decided to concentrate on an intensive, rather than an extensive analysis.

Now, the center of all of DEWEY'S work was reconstruction; the reconstruction of society through education, and of education through philosophy. As early as 1920 he published his *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. And when a new edition was printed in 1948, the author wrote a special introduction for it, in which we find his latest, and maturest interpretation of the reconstruction in which he was engaged all of his life. "From the position here

*) This study was written in the summer of 1962, with the intention to publish it as part of a larger study on DEWEY. Since the original intention has been abandoned, it can now be published separately. Accordingly, the article is here printed with some minor correction. Readers not acquainted with the techniques, terminology, and findings of the problem-historic method may wish to skip Section III, since it presupposes a more or less thorough knowledge of that method. It should be noted, however, that the entire study is based upon a problem-historic analysis. The article may both be read and understood apart from the latter; it could not have been written and conceived apart from it.

The page references are all to JOHN DEWEY, *Logic: the theory of inquiry*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, edition of 1955 (original edition 1938).

taken, reconstruction can be nothing less than the work of developing, of forming, of producing . . . the intellectual instrumentalities which will progressively direct inquiry into the deeply and inclusively human . . . facts of the present scene and situation." (Beacon edition, p. xxvii.)

DEWEY states here in so many words that the theory of inquiry lies at the very heart of all reconstruction. For this reason also, I believe that his *Logic, The Theory of Inquiry* is the key to DEWEY, pragmatism, and the spiritual climate of North-America. The basic importance of this book will, I believe, warrant a study such as follows here: the analysis of just this volume.

But because a book like this involves so many aspects and problems; further, since it is impossible to deal with them all in a paper which is designed to be intensive, rather than extensive, I shall be concerned mainly with the basic philosophical implication of the logic. Thus, not logic as logic, but as outcome of philosophic commitment; and not the outcome but the source is the subject of this paper.

The discussion will be about the need for reconstruction, the contents of the new construction, and the position of the conception in the history of philosophy, with some critical remarks at the end.

SECTION I — THE NEED FOR A RECONSTRUCTION

DEWEY would have been the last one to deny that his publications were profoundly anti-traditional and that they attempted to effect a revolution in philosophy: this is precisely what he tried to do. The novelty of his thought is not a by-product of his work, but the heart of it. He did not merely continue to think in a traditional way, only to discover that he had improved upon his predecessors; much rather, he consciously left the old road and developed new avenues of thought. Doing this was the outgrowth of a basic conviction, viz. that something wrong in the "classic tradition" constituted a need for present reconsideration and reconstruction. Contemporary society is threatened by "... the outstanding problem of our civilization... the fact that common sense... is a house divided against itself." (78) This is a serious problem for DEWEY, who is a prophet of unity, and, consequently, against inner division. The split exists because common sense "... consists in part... of regulative meanings and procedures that antedate the rise of experimental science. In another part, it is what it is because of application of science. This cleavage marks every phase and aspect of modern life. . . ." (78, 79) The results of modern science, the industrial revolution have changed the world. But the way in which we deal with our world is impotent to do what is required of it. No wonder that a reconstruction is then necessary. Logic has not kept pace with life. This is really DEWEY'S basic problem. The "regulative meanings and procedures" are ultimately those of logic, and common sense is our dealing with the world of every-day experience. Since the former must, as shall become clear (cf. II B 2c), regulate the latter, and since both are closely interrelated, there can be no discrepancy between them. Therefore DEWEY writes that "... the basic problem of present culture and associated living is that of effecting integration where division now exists." (79)