

Dewey's Empirical Naturalism and Pragmatic Metaphysics

Dewey was vitally interested in leaving behind most of the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy. To provide a bridge to his radically new vision of the tasks of philosophy, Dewey continued to talk about metaphysics to his philosophically sophisticated colleagues, but it didn't look like *metaphysics* to them (where are the a priori premises, for example). Dewey continued to talk about experience too, but in his hands it didn't sound like *their* experience (where are the private inner mental states, etc.). To the unsophisticated, and to those who have climbed Dewey's ladder to adopt his conclusions, Dewey doesn't have to talk about metaphysics or experience anymore, but rather about life; the ladder can be kicked away. Does Dewey offer a metaphysics of experience? Yes, to those who need one; his metaphysics has pragmatic value where it is useful, and it will remain useful so long as traditional Western metaphysics competes for attention. My book *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality* is likewise a pragmatic effort to present Dewey's philosophy as a challenge to philosophers still needing a confrontation with a very different standpoint. There is still some metaphysical work, some criticism of criticism, to be done.

In *Dewey's Empirical Theory* I show how examining Dewey's metaphysics of experience is a useful way to not merely resolve long-standing questions about Dewey's philosophical development away from transcendental idealism towards empirical naturalism, but also about some core commitments of his entire philosophy. The dangers of that approach are as great as the rewards, since "experience" itself is just about the most treacherous topic in philosophy, as Dewey notoriously advised. When combined with the slipperiness of "metaphysics," any work on Dewey's metaphysics of experience is a natural magnet for critical examination. Shaun O'Dwyer's paper "The Metaphysics of Existence Rehabilitated"¹ offers just this sort of critical examination, to which I reply in the first section of this paper, followed by further reflections on the proper relation of Dewey's pragmatic metaphysics to his empirical naturalism.

One: Metaphysics of Experience vs. Metaphysics of Existence?

If inquiry into experience must be a quite distinct metaphysical method from

inquiry into existence, then O'Dwyer's claim that I find no metaphysics of existence in Dewey would be far more intelligible. If there are indeed two different kinds of inquiries here, and if Dewey only intended to seek traits of experience, not traits of existence, then I suppose that Dewey should be viewed as a type of ontological idealist asserting that only experienceable reality exists. With a firm dichotomy between the nature of experience and the nature of existence, then Dewey's refusal to use his metaphysical methods to inquire after any experience-independent reality would make sense: Dewey's metaphysics excludes philosophical interest in any such reality. Therefore, Dewey is some sort of a metaphysical idealist.

Assume a dichotomy of types of inquiry (experience vs. existence), and a dichotomy between experience and existence, and Dewey cannot possibly be a realist. But this sounds very familiar — with these assumptions in play, many philosophers during the early 1900s, both idealists and realists, were unable to classify Dewey as a realist. Has my close study of those years' debates warped my grasp of Dewey himself? Did I promise an interesting interpretation of Dewey in *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*, but really only returned to those early murky debates?

I doubt it. My book attempted to build a thorough argument that Dewey rejected both tempting dichotomies: the dichotomy of metaphysical inquiries and a dichotomy between the nature of experience and existence. O'Dwyer accuses me of needing just such dichotomies to reach my preferred conclusion, that Dewey did not attempt any metaphysical inquiry into existence (or into "nature," following O'Dwyer's usage of that term). But this accusation cannot be supported by any careful reading of my (entire) book. True enough, opening passages of *Dewey's Empirical Theory* divide many Dewey scholars into two camps, those who prioritize the metaphysics of experience and those who prioritize the metaphysics of existence/nature. However, by aligning myself with one side in those early pages, I hardly meant to express my final standpoint, but only to motivate readers to read the remaining chapters. By reaching the concluding chapter, from which O'Dwyer quotes on p. 712, the reader should have been ready for my rearrangement of the divided camps. If metaphysical inquiry into experience is simultaneously inquiry into existence (as I argue was Dewey's view), then those who prioritize metaphysics of existence, in order to still have a distinct standpoint from their opponents, must be demanding some way of inquiring into existence quite apart from experience. That is the final dilemma I apply to the issue, and it forced me to take the position that I did.

O'Dwyer believes that I have relied on false dilemmas, but I have great trouble discovering why. Let us begin with where we seem to agree. He accepts what Dewey scholars must, that Dewey relied heavily upon his immediate empiricism and firmly held that experience and nature are continuous (though this simple formulation hides many complex issues). O'Dwyer also claims that Dewey believed this crucial tenet:

Nature Extends Beyond Actual Experience (NEBAE):
Existence/nature is not limited to the ranges of
experiences actually existing at any one time.

NEBAE just declares that nature outruns human experience. This is my view of Dewey's position as well, as I explain several times in *Dewey's Empirical Theory*. Here is a typical passage from my book:

Dewey expressed his immediate empiricism and naive realism in many different ways, depending on the argumentative purpose at hand. As we observed above, Dewey asserts that "a thing is what it is experienced to be." Elsewhere, he defends the "assimilation to each other of the ideas of experience and reality" (*MW* 3: 101) and states in *Experience and Nature* that experience means "something at least as wide and deep and full as all history on this earth, a history which, since history does not occur in the void, include the earth and the physical relatives of man" (*LW* 1: 370). Another way of stating naive realism, which Dewey finds useful for distinguishing it from epistemological realism, declares that the knower has natural relations to other things besides known objects (*MW* 6: 111–122). These relations, constructing the naturalistic setting of experience, situate the knower as an organism interacting with the environment. Dewey is well aware that he is contravening the time-honored metaphysical position that experience could not possibly be part of natural reality.... Dewey's metaphysics has no intention of making everything both experience and reality; it only claims that some portions of reality are experience.... [T] here is no recourse but to find experience and reality together in the same realm, permitting "experience" to be just a label for a distinctive kind of reality. (p. 240)

The nasty question remains whether existence always extends beyond *all possible experience*; here I claim that Dewey was agnostic, refusing to declare a conviction on this matter, and O'Dwyer doesn't appear to disagree. O'Dwyer further seems to believe that part of the proper understanding of Dewey's "continuity principle" requires taking Dewey to assert that a field of experience is also a field of existence/nature. I quite agree as well; this interpretation of continuity is necessary (but not sufficient) for making Dewey's anti-Cartesian view of mind intelligible. For example, this interpretation accounts for his direct

realism in perception: the perception is the actual region of nature attended to, and not some inner mental representation.²

Where does disagreement between O'Dwyer and myself begin? O'Dwyer is obviously unhappy with my frequently expressed claim that Dewey held that there can be no metaphysical inquiry into experience-independent entities. But of course this claim by itself hides an ambiguity. Does this claim mean:

Metaphysics of Experience Only (MEO): Metaphysical inquiry into experience has no bearing on entities as they are beyond experience, and such transcendent things should not be discussed at all.

Or does it mean this instead:

No Independent Metaphysics of Existence (NIME): The only way to draw metaphysical conclusions about entities as they are apart from experience is to assume that such entities retain some of their observed traits when not experienced.

The third, clearly non-Deweyan, alternative would seem to be:

Independent Metaphysics of Existence (IME): Metaphysical inquiry into existence apart from experience can provide information about independent entities that cannot be learned by metaphysical inquiry into experience.

My *Dewey's Empirical Theory* in fact depends on the utility of this trilemma. (The fourth possible option, that the two separate kinds of metaphysical inquiries yield similar results, is not relevant here.) O'Dwyer and I agree that IME is not a viable interpretation of Dewey; IME is precisely the rationalistic sort of metaphysics that Dewey wanted to leave behind, in favor of an empirical metaphysics. In my terminology of *Dewey's Empirical Theory*, this rationalistic metaphysics is "transcendentalism" and not NEBAE, which is a much weaker claim. Where I attack transcendentalism, only IME is the intended target, and not NEBAE.

That leaves MEO and NIME for consideration. O'Dwyer's preference is clearly NIME. To make his preference interesting, he burdens me with denying NIME and instead claiming MEO in *Dewey's Empirical Theory*. I quote from O'Dwyer: "However, should we limit talk of generic traits of existents only to experienced things, and is the extension of general metaphysical concepts to be similarly so limited, as Shook would have us believe?" (p. 724). O'Dwyer pushes

me into the MEO option, and seems quite unimpressed with my wielding of Dewey's crucial postulate of empiricism that permits meaningful reference to things when they are not being experienced. O'Dwyer admits that we do experience things as having existed before our experience of them. But he then says something quite mysterious: "But this does not prevent us from also inquiring into the generic traits of events in nature, *including those we have not yet experienced.*" (p. 724, my emphasis) Does O'Dwyer actually mean to assert the viability of IME and rationalistic transcendentalism? What would metaphysical inquiry into non-experienced entities be? It couldn't, by definition, be any sort of empirical inquiry; but O'Dwyer and I do seem to firmly agree that the only kind of metaphysical inquiry for Dewey must be empirical inquiry. The charitable interpretation of O'Dwyer would seem to point back to NIME.

However, my wish to sympathetically understand O'Dwyer as preferring NIME (leaving aside for now the question of my own preference), is obstructed by his own efforts on pp. 724-727 to show that Dewey was comfortable with discussing things not yet experienced. His contemporaries, intent upon knowing whether Dewey could admit experience-transcendent realities, demanded to know whether Dewey found his empiricist scruples compatible with transcendent realities. The question came down to this: is NEBAE compatible with Dewey's empiricism? If Dewey could be forced to confess an incompatibility (here the debate properly turns on meanings; the object/event distinction so stressed by O'Dwyer is not really relevant), then idealism would loom. As O'Dwyer rightly notes, Dewey had no trouble ascribing intelligibility to the notion of NEBAE, and further, he had no trouble holding that his philosophy hardly demanded contradicting NEBAE. Dewey had been saying as much in articles in the 1900s and 1910s to answer early critics, so this is no later development, as O'Dwyer seems to imply. Nowhere in my book do I claim that Dewey rejected either the bare intelligibility of the notion of NEBAE or its correctness. But somehow O'Dwyer concludes that I fail to find proper adherence to NEBAE in Dewey. Worse yet, according to O'Dwyer, I also fail to notice that Dewey's adherence to NEBAE is a shining example of Dewey's willingness to use metaphysical inquiry to draw conclusions about still-transcendent entities.

However, Dewey's belief in NEBAE was never a conclusion of any metaphysical inquiry for Dewey, as O'Dwyer rashly supposes.

Dewey accepted NEBAE because we do experience things as persisting while not being experienced (due to learning in infancy), and also as a matter of useful hypothesis for the advanced sort of learning called science. This acceptance of NEBAE not merely relieved Dewey of having to confess to metaphysical idealism (although Dewey would never satisfy some realists who demanded not just NEBAE but faith in forever-transcendent realities). It more interestingly explains why Dewey was not a bare-bones positivist in philosophy of science. Like Peirce, Dewey was quite comfortable with science abductively postulating processes undetectable by ordinary experience. That does not mean that Dewey was

comfortable with standard scientific realism, either, since his pragmatic realism places some limits on interpreting theoretical entities realistically.³ But returning to the crucial issue: when Dewey conducts his version of metaphysical inquiry, using the denotative method in *Experience and Nature* and elsewhere, did Dewey ever attempt to draw conclusions about transcendent matters permanently beyond experience? I find nothing in Dewey's writings to even remotely suggest such an effort, and O'Dwyer offers no evidence either. Indeed, his many quotations from Dewey and his own concluding section defend a contrary view: that "a metaphysics of existence is also a metaphysics of experience." My entire book, even the portions involving my controversial use of the notion of "absolute experience," strenuously defend the identity of the two metaphysics. This cannot have escaped O'Dwyer's notice; the only way for O'Dwyer to open up a debate is to argue that I hold that the results on metaphysical inquiry into experience only have validity within that sphere. In other words, O'Dwyer must pin MEO on me, so that he can take the better NIME option. Have I truly raised a false dilemma? How could that be, when a charitable interpretation of O'Dwyer's position against me demands that this dilemma be quite compelling and unavoidable?

If the MEO–NIME dilemma remains, and if I have indeed chosen the wrong horn of the dilemma, then my error would indeed stand revealed. I will directly discuss which horn is best shortly. But let it be understood that I find that O'Dwyer's complaints about false dilemmas only obscure both his argument procedure and the most interesting issues in Dewey's metaphysics. We agree that inquiry into experience is simultaneously, by the continuity principle, inquiry into existence/nature. We also agree that Dewey accepted experience-independent realities (nowhere has O'Dwyer really shown that I have said otherwise). The only remaining key question is whether I have argued that the results of metaphysical inquiries cannot be extrapolated beyond the sphere of experience. That question is easily answered. Since Dewey's belief in NEBAE, I repeat, was never a conclusion of any metaphysical inquiry, O'Dwyer's effort to show that I overlooked Dewey's metaphysical establishment of NIME is a failure. While I do hold that NIME cannot be established by any empirical metaphysical method, it remains the case that nowhere have I argued that the results of metaphysical inquiry ought not to be extrapolated beyond the sphere of present experience, notwithstanding O'Dwyer's repetitious use of "metaphysics of experience" in connection with my name.

The reader has been patient long enough: I here reveal (if somehow my book failed to do so) that my interpretation of Dewey agrees with NIME, not MEO. Adopting the MEO interpretation would obfuscate every crucial point that I tried to make (and which Dewey tried to make) about the supreme significance of the principle of continuity. It was precisely the "metaphysics of existence" camp which stands in my book accused of an inability to fully accept continuity. The concluding chapter of *Dewey's Empirical Theory* describes the "metaphysics of existence" camp as seeking an account of world and organism

independent from experience. This account, they thought, would permit an explication of how experience and its particular traits could arise from the transaction between world and organism. I accused this camp of what might be called excessive naturalism: they sought a primary naturalistic account of existence that would serve as the setting for a secondary account of how experience could arise within it. They feared that experience would swallow up reality, instead of remaining just a portion of it. They wanted to ensure that when Dewey used "transaction" to describe the nature of experience, it was a transaction between two things, organism and environment, whose prior existence did not in any way depend on the resulting experience. Some in this "metaphysics of existence" camp were committed to a scientific naturalism bordering on materialism, by inviting scientific inquiry, rather than metaphysical inquiry, to supply knowledge of experience-transcendent reality. Others in this "metaphysics of existence" camp were intrigued by emergent naturalism, which offers a variation upon the primary-secondary quality distinction in order to depict experience as an emergent complex from simpler independent properties. They all wanted Dewey to be a naturalist first, and an empiricist second. In the last three decades, one popular way of establishing this ordering of priorities was to follow Quine's depiction of empiricism as an epistemological commitment only; the "naturalization" of epistemology would guarantee that science's knowledge would decide what exists.⁴

The other "metaphysics of experience" camp consisted of interpreters who have been quite comfortable to let Dewey's primary commitment to empiricism (a broad and radical empiricism) and to the continuity postulate do all the work needed to avoid falling into metaphysical idealism. These interpreters have believed Dewey when he began the second edition of *Experience and Nature* by remarking that "the philosophy here presented may be termed either empirical naturalism or naturalistic empiricism."⁵ After Quine's tremendous impact, it has seemed advisable to me that "empirical naturalism" is presently a better label for Dewey's philosophy than "naturalistic empiricism," since the latter term now seems to invoke an alliance with Quine. In any case, upon Dewey's death the conflict over the nature of metaphysics broke into the open, and it is to this conflict and the divided camps that I refer to in my book. If O'Dwyer would prefer to not align himself with the "metaphysics of existence" camp as I depict it, then that reluctance would satisfy me. As I read his paper, especially his emphasis on the competence of the metaphysics of experience to decide the metaphysics of existence and vice-versa, it seems to me that the "metaphysics of existence" camp would have rejected his membership application.

Two: Empiricism, Continuity, and Naturalism

Discussion of Dewey's pragmatic metaphysics should move on to deeper issues involved with the principle of continuity, among the most important foundations of Dewey's philosophy. I am well aware that Dewey was comfortable

with saying that, for example, "metaphysics is cognizance of the generic traits of existence."⁶ My view is that Dewey's confidence in talking about generic traits of existence is grounded on his confidence in the continuity principle: since the generic traits in experience are simultaneously traits of existence, there should be no difficulty grasping why Dewey writes this way. However, the metaphysics of existence camp was never very impressed with Dewey's confidence. They suspected that the qualities of experience revealed in metaphysical inquiry may not really be the qualities of existence *in itself*, when experience turns away and goes elsewhere. There are too many variants of this worry in the literature about Dewey to cover here. Only the prime example can be discussed briefly, which revives the primary-secondary distinction to ask how Dewey can be sure that his "generic traits" really just aren't secondary qualities that exist only within experience. Let us call this problematic question the "generic equals secondary" (GES) question. By asking GES, these critics are willing to grant for the sake of argument that a field of experience is simultaneous a field of existence. Might that field of existence, when it also becomes a field of experience, display new (emergent? relational?) properties in that state of affairs? And what if among those new properties are the generic traits discerned by Dewey's metaphysical inquiries? If so, then it would be quite rash to assume that experienced things retain some of their generic traits when not experienced. NIME would be unsupportable by any empirical evidence and thus philosophically weak.

Dewey's response to this GES challenge to NIME is quite simple: who has the weight of empirical evidence in this matter? A distinction between primary and secondary qualities is useful only if there could be some positive conception of what those alleged primary qualities are. Perhaps they are similar to experienced qualities, or perhaps they are pure products of the rational imagination, etc. But without some positive conception, raising the notion of a primary quality would be a purely skeptical move of the most unsophisticated kind, amounting to little more than saying "Well, for all your inquiries, reality might be quite different!" So let us suppose that the advocate of the GES challenge is more sophisticated, by offering some positive conception of primary qualities. Modern science serves nicely, as it did for Descartes and Locke: the primary qualities were the most fundamental properties of reality as known by science. Or mathematics might be of service, or religious mysticism. Whatever the origin, such allegedly primary properties, if potentially capable of making lived experience more comprehensible and fruitful, would hardly be rejected by Dewey, since they would thereby have conceptual content and pragmatic significance. When Dewey laid down his postulate of immediate empiricism, "things are what they are experienced as," he did not intend to declare that things are *only* what they are experienced as. Rather, his protest was against any type of rationalism, which would instead say that "things are *only* what they are known to be." However, Dewey's pragmatism insisted that the meaning and

intellectual significance of such "primary" qualities must flow from their ability to enrich lived experience. Labeling such properties as "primary" just because they arise from science or mathematics, etc., now seems a quite dubious tactic. Pragmatically, it is lived experience which is primary if what matters is the ultimate source of conceptual significance.

Dewey's principle of continuity, one of the heirs to the spirit of his immediate empiricism, likewise was never wielded by Dewey to say that things are *only* as they are experienced to be. For Dewey, things really are *both* what they are experienced as *and* what they are known to be. Where the naïve experience of a thing and the known properties of a thing turn out to differ or contradict, Dewey's contextualism forestalls the rationalistic conclusion that such differences or contradictions could not possibly occur over the one and the same thing. Dewey's contextualism abandoned the effort to make known properties "more real" than other properties, and thus abandoned any effort to theorize how some combination or relation of the "more real" properties could account for the "less real" (or unreal) properties (for example, turning philosophy of mind away from reductivism). If a critic assumes that a distinction between more real and less real properties is valid, independently from pragmatic considerations, then understanding Dewey's philosophy is immediately obstructed.

With this in mind, we can next proceed to another crucial aspect of the principle of continuity: Dewey's conviction that experience is always a transformational process. Experience does not passively reproduce or copy its objects, and neither does that special type of experience of knowings. Dewey held that the object of knowledge is created by the process of inquiry and known in experience, instead of holding with many self-proclaimed realists that knowledge knows an independent object beyond experience. Some critics have supposed that this transformational standpoint dooms Dewey to reinvigorating the subjective-objective bifurcation, by simply asking the question of what exactly gets transformed in this process? Among these critics are most of the "metaphysics of existence" camp, who answer this question by pointing to the existence of something(s) that always exists apart and independent from experience, which possess some transcendent properties that are never displayed in experience. Again, to give positive conception to such something(s), some type of knowledge is nominated to take responsibility for yielding information about them. What intrigued (and dismayed) Dewey was the tendency in Western philosophy to prefer types of knowledge that ascribed transcendent properties completely opposite to those pervasive in ordinary lived experience. This Western "Quest for Certainty" preferred stability over change, actuality over potentiality, permanence over growth, and intrinsic properties over relational properties. This Quest was combined with a preference for "more real" properties, resulting in the severe problem of explaining the occurrence of experience (the realm of the less real) within existence (the realm of the more real).

This problem's severity is largely caused by the Quest's preference for

knowledge of permanent, non-relational, and intrinsic properties: what is always changing and organically interrelated (the events of experience) must be explained in terms of what is unable to change and only externally related (the stuff of existence). Of course, it is possible to attempt a portrayal of the mind as involving only private mental entities that have intrinsic, stable, and unchanging properties, capable of having only external relations. This tactic could bring the traits of experience in line with the traits of existence. Certain features of the psychologies of Hume, Mill, early Russell, late Santayana, and Quine, for example, come to mind. Dewey's early psychological investigations concluded that experience and mind is far better portrayed as an active, purposive, social, and organically integrated process. Following German psychologists like Wilhelm Wundt, Dewey talked about this organic "experience" in the sense of German-language counterparts, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. These are key terms as well for some German philosophers like Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans-Georg Gadamer who have also sought an anti-metaphysical and anti-scientistic alternative to Western philosophy. *Erlebnis* connotes a lived event, such as an episode or adventure, of some significance having its own unified quality as that particular event. *Erlebnis* is not privately subjective in the Cartesian sense, but it is individualized. *Erfahrung* connotes the communal experience of people participating in a tradition. More public than *Erlebnis*, *Erfahrung* is a distinctly social experience. Dewey's own use of "experience" combines central aspects of both terms: the adventurousness of a lived event with the sociality of an encultured participation. Dewey's use of "history" and "situation" are likewise indebted to aspects of these two terms. If his critics could have substituted the meaning of *Erlebnis* wherever they read "experience," (just as hearing the meaning of the German *Bildung* in Dewey's "education" would have helped), then many misapprehensions would have been prevented.

Having committed to an organic, active, and social view of experience, only two options remained for Dewey: Either be content with experience and existence having two quite opposed sets of fundamental traits (leading towards dualism's paradoxical impasses), or seek a naturalism in which existence possesses traits similar to those of experience. His choice of the second option is the essence of the principle of continuity. From this choice flows his doctrine of the "situation," his aesthetics, and his biological theory of inquiry. I am happy to recommend Thomas Alexander's superior work, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature*, to which I am much indebted, for pursuing the vital connections between these basic components of Dewey's philosophy.

Dewey's preference for a naturalism of active process, in which internal organic relations are just as real or more real as external relations, supplies his answer to critics who presuppose that transforming experience must transform independently existing entities. The presupposition is that any transformation must invariably distort or completely obscure the "real nature" of the participating transactors. But what if this notion of a "real nature," prior to and

independent from any of its relations, is de-emphasized? What if something's nature is revealed where it is in transactional transformation with other things? In brief, what if many of a thing's properties or qualities are internally relational properties, whose existence depends on those transactions? In Dewey's naturalism, the transformation of nature that is called experience brings forth equally real properties/qualities of existence (this is the more sensible type of emergent naturalism). From this transactional standpoint, there is no difficulty in viewing the experienced qualities of things as genuinely their qualities, although Dewey does not mean to say that those qualities are independently in things, either. For example, on Dewey's view, the seen color of a thing is neither in the object itself, the light itself, the light source itself, or the perceiver itself. Rather, the color's existence is in the entire situation of those transacting things. If science analyses the color situation to yield knowledge about properties of those things, for example, that the light has a certain frequency or the object has a certain type of spectral reflectance, then science has not discovered exactly where the color is, but instead only discovered what precise situation is needed to produce a certain seen color. Furthermore, for Dewey's naturalism, light frequency and spectral reflection are just further transactional properties (try to define light frequency without a measuring instrument).

Dewey well understood that we can pragmatically distinguish properties of things as revealed by transactions involving scientific measuring machines from properties revealed by transactions involving our unaided senses. What Dewey could not authorize was elevating the former over the latter, or vice-versa, in any final ontological or epistemological prioritization. After all, our senses are organic instruments too (the eye has a focusing lens, the ear has a vibrating drum, etc.). In the absence of any such illegitimate prioritization, it no longer makes sense to worry that human experience as a whole yields misleading information about nature. Our intelligence takes advantage of many different kinds of transactions, and the scientific task is to pragmatically evaluate and coordinate them, not to philosophically privilege some as true and others as false in any absolute ranking.

Three: Conclusion

Dewey's metaphysical methods are coordinate with, and not foundationally prior to, his preferences for continuity, radical empiricism, and transactional naturalism. Dewey never intended to lay down the unshakeable principles of some "naturalistic metaphysics" as if he were competing with his rationalist adversaries, realist and idealist, for the prize of having the best foundations.⁷ It is simply fruitless to ask how Dewey proves that he can know that his choice is superior. In Dewey's metaphysics of experience/existence, his "denotative method" is the humble and fallible request of asking people to suspend the Quest's metaphysical assumptions and simply notice experience in all its diversity as it is really lived. His choice was one of wisdom, not knowledge: be faithful to life, and do not pursue barren paradoxes. Above all, he advised, allow experience

to be absolute. This is not meant in the ontological sense of the idealists who wanted all existence to be within experience, but rather in the methodological sense that only experience ultimately supplies meaning to our intellectual pursuits, including metaphysics.

In summary, my interpretation of Dewey does not disdain experience-independent existence. It does reject the rationalistic transcendentalism that seeks a non-empirical way to know that existence, and also the scientific rationalism that holds that only science gets at existence. When joined with the continuity principle, Dewey's methodology yields empirical naturalism. My interpretation of Dewey rehabilitates the idealistic side of Dewey only to that extent of emphasizing the methodological priority of experience, joining with it a reminder that Dewey agreed with the idealistic tenet that mental activity transforms experience to create the object of knowledge. Dewey's metaphysics of experience is the democratization of philosophy, opening all of our inquiries to critical inspection and evaluation by any who would care to experience for themselves instead of through second-hand categories. In this sense, Dewey's metaphysics is pragmatic. If metaphysics can hold fast to lived experience, then not only can the worst of the Western philosophical tradition be left behind, but endless new possibilities await.

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NOTES

1. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. XL, (2004), pp. 711-730.
2. See Shook, "The Direct Contextual Realist Theory of Perception," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 17, (2003), pp. 245-258.
3. See Shook, "A Pragmatically Realistic Philosophy of Science," in *Pragmatic Naturalism and Realism*, John R. Shook (ed.), (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp. 323-344.
4. For my extended argument that Dewey's prioritization should prevail over Quine's, see "Dewey and Quine on the Logic of What There Is," in *Dewey's Logical Theory: New Studies and Interpretations*, Tom Burke, D. Micah Hester and Robert Talisse (eds.), (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), pp. 93-118.
5. LW 1: 10.
6. LW 1: 50.
7. Charlene Seigfried's wise advice against looking for a "naturalistic metaphysics" in Dewey, and her observations on Dewey's understanding of the role of experience in philosophy, are excellent reminders. See "Ghosts Walking Underground: Dewey's Vanishing Metaphysics," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 40 (2004), pp. 53-81.

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