

## Dewey and Ortega on the Starting Point

Bergson maintained that at the heart of every great philosophy there pulses a simple and unique intuition of the way things are, a single point which its author attempts, ultimately unsuccessfully, to articulate and communicate to others.

In this point is something simple, infinitely simple, so extraordinarily simple that the philosopher has never succeeded in saying it. And that is why he went on talking all his life. . . what he has accomplished, by a complication which provoked more complication, by developments heaped upon developments, has been to convey with an increasing approximation the simplicity of his original intuition. All the complexity of his doctrine, which would go on ad infinitum, is therefore only the incommensurability between his simple intuition and the means at his disposal for expressing it. (128)

I think there's something to this, though the purported incommensurability between intuition and articulation seems a bit strong. What I would like to say is this. If the philosopher has a coherent philosophical vision and the ability to write clearly and appositely, he will, I think, be able to point us towards a certain distinctive slant, a bed-rock starting point, which once grasped can serve as a key for unlocking our understanding of that vision. This distinctive starting point may or may not be identical to the simple intuition of which Bergson speaks, but if we read, intensively and with appropriate charity, what

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the philosopher has provided for us, we should be able to find it and to find it illuminating throughout the body of his work.

This is the approach which I wish to take to John Dewey and to José Ortega y Gasset. What I hope to show is that, in spite of the difference in the vocabulary which each invokes to point to the starting point of his philosophical investigations and in spite of the disparity in the detritus of their different philosophical backgrounds with which each is encumbered, their starting points are much the same. I want to show this for a reason. It seems to me that Bergson is right about two things at least: first, that what is at the root of a philosophical vision is something which, once we recognize it, we find to be surprisingly simple and, second, that so simple an item, perhaps because it lies at the root and must be depended upon and “viewed from” in order to understand that vision, is peculiarly resistant to being unearthed and unambiguously communicated to a philosophical audience. This is true of the starting point which I take Dewey and Ortega to share. And though I think that this starting point is adequately identified by each of these philosophers,<sup>1</sup> I have been dismayed to find that many other readers of their works have been deflected or diverted from its recognition and have consequently been misled in a basic way in their understanding of what Dewey and Ortega go on to say in their further discussions.<sup>2</sup> My reason, then, for rubbing Dewey and Ortega against each other is that one’s ability to surmount the apparent difficulty in grasping what is so simple and so bedrock in the one may be aided by bringing the other to bear. For the sake of simplicity I will center my discussion around Dewey and bring Ortega in at those points where I think his way of putting things might be helpful.

### I

Dewey’s term for the starting point is ‘experience’. In the second edition of *Experience and Nature* (*EN* hereafter) which includes his most extensive discussion of it and to which I shall largely refer, he introduces that term by referring to “the importance of ‘experience’ as a starting point and terminal point, as setting problems and

as testing proposed solutions” (14). On the very next page, however, he makes the following remark:

This consideration of method may suitably begin with the contrast between gross, macroscopic, crude subject-matters in primary experience and the refined, derived objects of reflection. (15)

Unfortunately, this introduction of the term ‘primary experience’ has led many of his readers to assume that it is not experience *per se* but only one sort of experience which can serve as the starting point. There is an apparent ambiguity here. But we should note that the distinction drawn in this passage is *not* between two sorts of experience, the primary and the derived, but between two sorts of subject-matter or, as he subsequently says, between two types of objects, and we should further note that the context for making the distinction (always a consideration of the greatest moment in reading Dewey) is a discussion of method, specifically, empirical method. Noting these facts allows us to see that the apparent ambiguity between treating the starting point merely as experience, on the one hand, and as primary experience, on the other, derives from his consideration of the role of experience in the carrying forward of inquiry, including all varieties of philosophical investigation. Experience at the starting point of an inquiry, in its initiating role of inquiry, is thus primary relative to that inquiry. The term ‘primary experience’ does not, therefore, indicate a distinct stratum or category of experience but a role which experience occupies in our consideration of method. This is not to deny, of course, that in order to serve that role experience must have certain unique features, but it is just a piece of experience for all that. Moreover, the functional distinction between primary experience and experience which accrues as reflective inquiry proceeds is functional in another sense, for the sort of experience which is found at the starting point of inquiry is of the same general sort found at its termination, given that terminal experience may well be the primary experience relative to some future reflective transforma-

tion. Now, these functional considerations would seem to indicate that, though that which is found at the starting point is simply experience (though, again, perhaps with certain unique features which fits it for that role), Dewey's use of the term 'primary experience' serves to refer to such experience *qua* being in that role.

In light of these considerations I would like to introduce the notion of *the bedrock* of a philosophical vision or system. In Dewey's philosophy the bedrock fact, the fact which we cannot go beneath or beyond, the root of all of his philosophy, so to speak, is simply experience. From an external point of view we may of course refer to such an item as the basic *assumption* of one's entire philosophy, but from within that philosophy it is not something which the philosopher merely assumes to be true; it is not something to be captured by a proposition which the philosopher could treat as either provisional or certainly true. For Dewey, for example, anything that can be said *about* that bedrock is open to reconsideration, but the bedrock itself is presupposed by any such reconsideration. It is, as Ortega found himself forced to say in *What Is Philosophy?* "the basic datum of the Universe" and therefore "philosophy's point of departure" (199). It follows, then, that all philosophical investigations, whether phenomenological, speculative, theoretical, epistemological, aesthetic, ethical, metaphysical, or whatever, rests upon and depends upon that bedrock. You can't squeeze your philosophical concern for reality, for example, out of anything else, as though there is another sort of fruit, another bedrock which can be introduced in the squeezing. It is for this reason that Dewey says in the first edition of *EN* that "we need the notion of experience to remind us that 'reality' includes whatever is denotatively found" (372). And Ortega remarks in *Some Lessons in Metaphysics* :

In fact, each of you now feel yourself here, listening to a lecture on metaphysics. Now this actual and indubitable fact belongs to a thing, or a reality, which is called your life. What is this— your life, our lives, the life of each one of us? It would appear to be something without importance, for science has never busied itself with this. Nevertheless, that re-

ality, so neglected scientifically, proves to have the formidable condition that it contains for each one of us, all the rest of the realities, including the reality called science and the one called religion, in that science and religion are only two of the innumerable things that man creates in his own lifetime. (34-5)

So what is bedrock for Ortega is, as he says in *Man and People*, the “radical reality,” which he says is “only the life of each person, is only *my life*.” He goes on to say why he calls it “radical reality.”

This inexorable genuineness of our life, the life, I repeat, of each one of us, this genuineness that is evident, indubitable, unquestionable to itself, is my first reason for calling our life “radical reality.”

But there is a second reason. Calling it “radical reality” does not mean that it is the only reality, nor even the highest, worthiest or most sublime, nor yet the supreme reality, but simply that it is the root of all other realities, in the sense that they—any of them—in order to be reality to us must in some way make themselves present, or at least announce themselves, within the shaken confines of our own life. Hence this radical reality—my life—is so little “egoistic,” so far from “solipsistic,” that in essence it is the open area, the waiting stage, on which any other reality may manifest itself and celebrate its Pentecost. (40)

Now, I have two points to make about what is bedrock for Dewey and Ortega. First, I want to say that the distinction which I have drawn between what is bedrock and what is to be found at the starting point for each of these philosophers is merely functional; what is referred to as the starting point is nothing more than what can also be referred to as bedrock, though it is referred to under a description which specifies its initiating and grounding role in inquiry and thus serves to pick out a specific presence of that which is bedrock and to

allow, therefore, our characterization of it as having certain role-providing features.<sup>3</sup> There is a point to using the term ‘starting point’ in certain contexts of discussing these philosophers, namely, when it is important to bring out the fact that all of their own philosophizing—and, indeed, on their view all philosophizing whatsoever—is initiated from and on this basis. And there is a point to using the term ‘bedrock’, namely, when it is important to emphasize the fact that there is nothing more basic or more radical in their philosophical visions or systems than this, nothing in their metaphysics, their political philosophy, their epistemology, their methodology, and so on.

The second point I want to make is this. What is bedrock and what is at the starting point for Ortega and Dewey is the same. What Dewey is designating as “experience” and “primary experience” is no different from what Ortega is designating as “my life” and “philosophy’s point of departure.” Of course, where Dewey takes us from this bedrock may turn out to be different from where Ortega takes us; certainly, what they focus upon and the language they use to present their conclusions will be different. Yet it is really quite remarkable how far they follow the same path and draw similar consequences. But these similarities and divergences are not the topic of my presentation. I am interested only in whether they designate the same bedrock item and I will restrain myself from following out their further characterizations and explanations except in those cases where it seems to me that they provide evidence of the sameness of the starting point.

## II

As an indication of how I shall limit my further discussion, let me distinguish three phases of discussion of the starting point which each of our philosophers might pursue.

(1) There is, to begin with, the *designation* of a certain subject-matter, i.e., the identification of what it is that is being referred to under the names ‘experience’ and ‘my life’. This phase will be my main concern and I will return to it in a moment.

(2) Beyond this, there is the provision of a general *characterization* of that designated subject-matter, a task which presupposes the

designation and involves both (a) a reflective moving away from and looking back upon that subject-matter and (b) the bringing of a putative characterization against it. Such characterization is, for Dewey, always provisional, though for Ortega it seems that usually, following his phenomenological bent, the first and most general characterizations are essential and unquestionable. For example, the catalogue of generic traits of experience, such as immediacy, interaction, and temporal quality, which are proposed by Dewey in *EN*— and which, by virtue of his general ontological hypothesis,<sup>4</sup> he also proposes as the generic traits of *existence*— is of this general characterizing sort. For Ortega the “decisive attributes” of my life, as he calls them in *Some Lessons in Metaphysics* (37-45) are such general characteristics as its immediate presence, my finding myself in the world and occupied with the things and beings of the world, and the temporality of having continually to decide what we are going to be and do.

When, however, we view our two philosophers’ claims about what is found at the starting point, we can arrange their characterizations between two poles. At the one pole, perhaps never securely occupied by any of their claims, would lie those characterizations which are thought to be so intimately tied to what is at the starting point as to be definitive and beyond argument, though perhaps provisional for all that. Towards the other and more distant pole are distributed those generalizations and proposals which are thought to require support. Dewey’s appeal, for example, to the contextual or environmental dimension of experience would lie fairly close to the first pole, whereas his claim of the generic traits of the precarious and the stable would seem to move us a bit closer to the second. Similarly, Ortega’s specification of the circumstantiality of my life would seem to rest squarely at the first pole, while his claim of the generic character of perplexity would perhaps find its place towards the second. Now, given this distinction of what we may call, respectively, the near and the far poles of characterization, it is clear that, in our attempt to get a handle on what Dewey and Ortega are referring to as experience and my life, appeal to characterizations will be more reliable and less suspiciously question-begging the closer those characterizations lie

towards the near pole. I will in a moment make such an appeal to two such items.

(3) A third phase of an investigation of the subject-matter is that of providing an *explanation* of it. This involves our providing the sort of framework or theory within which questions of its provenance and progeny may be answered. Any such theory is by its nature hypothetical. Now, since explanation presupposes both the designation of the subject-matter which it is about and a familiarity with that subject-matter which may be provided, at least partially, by its characterization, it is question-begging to appeal to such a theory in attempting to designate or identify for another what the subject-matter of that theory is or even to characterize it in a general way. This is clear from the fact that different theories may be offered of the same subject-matter. In the case of attempting to identify the starting point for Dewey, therefore, it is counterproductive and spoiling to employ his theory that it is brought about by a certain biological-environmental disequilibrium, just as it was presumptive and distracting of Peirce in characterizing doubt in "The Fixation of Belief" to impose his theory that it is initiated by the conflict of two beliefs in a situation where action is frustrated. Dewey is easily misread in this regard, for he often moves about among issues of designation, characterization, and explanation without clear warning to the reader. The reader is much less likely to be deflected from designation by theory in respect to Ortega, largely because he does not engage in much theorizing in discussing what he has in mind by using the phrase 'my life', being content with a more or less phenomenological description, but for this reason we must be on guard always against treating his characterizations as serving the function of designation.

But now let me return to the task of identifying the starting point for Dewey without assuming his characterization of it or any of his theories about it. The problem is that we can't do much but consider the range of terms he uses to refer to it. Actually, he does this in three ways.

First, he uses various adjectives and modifying phrases in order to bring home the fact of its simple and immediate familiarity. Thus,



he speaks in the second edition of *EN* of “crude, primary, experience” (15), “ordinary experience” (17), “ordinary life-experience” (18), “crude, everyday experience” (37), “first-hand experience” (40), “concrete experience” (41), “common experience” (41), “daily experience” (41), and “experience in unsophisticated forms” (47); and in the first edition he speaks of “coarse and vital experience” (367).

A second device which he uses is to enumerate the sorts of things found in experience. He refers in the second edition of *EN* to “the things of raw experience” (15) and of the fact that “stars, rocks, trees, and creeping things are the same material of experience” for both “the scientific man and the man in the street” (11); he asks us to “return to things of crude or macroscopic experience—the sun, earth, plants and animals of common, every-day life” (16); he celebrates the richness of primary experience by drawing our attention to “esthetic and moral traits” (13) which are simply found there and, most poignantly, to the simple presence of “the phenomena of magic, myth, politics, painting, and penitentiaries” (27). In the first edition he had spoken of “the gross and compulsory things of our doings, enjoyments and sufferings” (375). Of course, in enumerating such things, he is stepping to the border between designation and characterization, but his point in doing this is to direct our attention to what he has in mind by primary experience.

The third way he directs our attention to his starting point, and in many respects the most revealing, is by employing alternative phrases which he takes to point to the same subject-matter. Here his affinity with Ortega is most apparent, for his favored terms of reference are those having to do with life. Thus, in the second edition of *EN* he simply refers at one point to “daily life” (18) and in the first edition he points to “the primary facts of life” (366) and “the homely facts of daily existence.” Dewey rewrote the first chapter of *EN* for the second edition because he felt that the earlier chapter failed to make clear to his readers what he took his starting point to be. But I suggest that, once we have the benefit of Ortega’s own language, the clearest clues to the starting point can be found in a few lines in the earlier version. The lines I have in mind are these:

Too often, indeed, the professed empiricist only substitutes a dialectical development of some notion *about* experience for an analysis of *experience as it is humanly lived*. (367, my italics in the last phrase.)

The excuse for saying obvious things is that much that now passes for empiricism is but a dialectical elaboration of data taken from physiology, so that it is necessary for any one, who seriously sets out to philosophize empirically, to recall to attention that he is talking about the sort of thing that the unsophisticated man calls experience, *the life he has led and undergone in the world of persons and things*. Otherwise we get a stenciled stereotype in two dimensions and in black and white instead of the solid and many colored play of activities and sufferings which is the philosopher's real datum. (368-69, my italics)

The phrase "the life he has led and undergone in the world of persons and things" deserves special notice. In different respects it is both misleading and right on target. It is misleading insofar as it suggests that the real datum is the entire past life which I have led, for such a life, in its full extent, is neither present to me, as Ortega puts it, nor immediately had, as Dewey puts it. The starting point can only be my experience, my life, as I am having it, living through it, finding it present to me now. But the phrase is right on target in its reference to my life and to the fact that in my life, in my primary experience, I am there with others, other things and other persons. Both Dewey and Ortega refer to this as "being in the world." (And that is another infelicity, for though I am always in a situation, in a context or circumstance, it is gratuitous to call that surrounding a "world." At their best neither Dewey nor Ortega insist on this.)

### III

So far, I hope, so good. We have moved very close to seeing that the subject-matter which Dewey takes as the starting point is the same as that which Ortega takes to be so. I will now attempt to

support this conclusion by considering two characterizations of the starting point which are at or very close to the near pole and which are therefore taken by them to be definitive. This is, as I indicated earlier, a bit risky since no characterization can take the place of designation. But my object is and has been to make the case that the starting points for Dewey and Ortega are the same and the fact that both elicit the same sorts of characterizations at the very start would seem to shore up that case.

The first of these characterizations is that of circumstantiality or, as Dewey might put it, environing context. The following often-quoted passage from Ortega's first book, *Meditations on Quixote*, published in 1914, is telling:

My natural exit toward the universe is through the mountain passes of the Guadarrama or the plain of Ontígola. This sector of circumstantial reality forms the other half of my person; only through it can I integrate myself and be fully myself. . . . I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I cannot save myself. (45)

Two things need to be emphasized about what Ortega tells us. First, my starting point does not consist of myself in isolation from my circumstance. I begin, in my life which is present to me, within a context which is there in my experience and my life. To say this is therefore to make quite clear that my experience of my starting point is *from within*; strictly speaking, I do not view the starting point from without, from some external vantage point which allows the whole to be displayed as a panorama. And this means, among other things, that any view I might take from within the starting point is selective and limited. Ortega's phrase 'my life' captures this point more precisely than the term 'experience', for, whereas the traditional use of the term 'experience' as found, for example, in Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume is intended to indicate something which can be set out before my reflective gaze, I can only think of myself as standing within my life.

Second, this context includes others, even sometimes other human beings. At the starting point there is no problem of other minds or the existence of an external world; these things are there or, rather, they are there if they are found there. This is perhaps the toughest thing to catch on to in regard to Ortega and Dewey. Somehow, the tradition in philosophy has come to think of experience as subjective, as a sort of stuff or effluvia which is inside of me or somehow only *of* me. And somehow it seems quite obvious to the traditional philosopher that my life, being mine, is somehow private, impenetrable by the lives of others. But experience as Dewey is taking it is already experience with others. Whatever flights of reflective or speculative fancy you and I may engage in at this time in this room, we start by being together in this room, sitting, knocking about, thinking, and eventually leaving. Whether you like it or not, that is absolute bedrock. And, as Ortega is fond of saying, your being here, sitting, looking, scratching, blinking is exactly and precisely and perhaps insignificantly your life.

The second initial characterization of the starting point for Dewey and Ortega is that of the presence of two sorts of awareness of things which is found, inexorably, within experience and my life. Again, it is Ortega who makes the point most compellingly in *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*:

Therefore— and for whatever we say in this course, this is decisive— there are two ways of becoming aware of something, of having something exist for me: one in which I become aware of the thing as separate and distinct, in which (let us put it this way) I take it before me as man to man, make it a precise and limited end and purpose of my becoming aware; and the other way in which the thing exists for me without my reflecting on it.

Earlier, when I was carefully seeking precise words, I was not conscious of myself any more than of the bench or the armchair on which I sit; yet both I and the bench existed for me, were in some manner there in front of me. The proof of

this is that if anyone had moved the bench, I would have noticed that something in my situation had changed, that something was not the same as it had been a minute before. This shows that in some way I was aware of the bench and its position, that in some manner I was *relying on* the bench. Similarly, when we go down the stairs we have no precise consciousness of each step, but we rely on all of them.

. . . let us put this discovery which we have just made into two new technical terms— *reparar*, which is the same as what was traditionally called ‘being conscious of something’, and the simple *contar con* (count on, rely on, depend on), which expresses the effective presence, that existing for myself, which all the ingredients of my situation always possess. (48-9)

This distinction of *reparar* and *contar con* cuts across the distinction of me and my circumstance, for the me as well as various items in my circumstance may be present in my life only in the manner of *contar con*. Though Dewey relies upon this distinction, he tends to present it in two different contexts, namely, in discussing the focal awareness of selective emphasis and in discussing the distinction of focus and context. But that he assumes the distinction can hardly be doubted, as is clear from this passage in the Introduction to his *Essays in Experimental Logic*, which was published in 1916.

Another trait of every *res* is that it has focus and context: brilliancy and obscurity, conspicuousness or apparency, and concealment or reserve, with a constant movement of redistribution. Movement about this axis persists, but what is in focus constantly changes. “Consciousness,” in other words, is only a very small and shifting portion of experience. The scope and content of the focused apparency have immediate dynamic connections with portions of experience not at the time obvious. The word which I have just written is momentarily focal; around it there shade off into vagueness my typewriter, the desk, the room, the building, the campus,

the town, and so on. *In* the experience, and in it in such a way as to *qualify* even what is shiningly apparent, are all the physical features of the environment extending out into space no one can say how far, and all the habits and interests extending backward and forward in time, of the organism which uses the typewriter and which notes the written form of the word only as temporary focus in a vast and changing scene. (323)

Now it is my contention that both Ortega and Dewey conceive of their starting points as containing both the dimensions of circumstance or environing context, on the one hand, and the dimensions of nonfocal awareness or *contar con*, on the other. That Dewey did not extricate these different dimensions so clearly from each other, as Ortega did, merely supports my claim that rubbing Ortega up against Dewey can help us to understand what the latter is taking to be the starting point.

#### IV

Let me now close my discussion by attempting to identify various ways in which, it seems to me, readers of Dewey have been diverted from recognition of his starting point. (I am, as I announced earlier, concentrating on Dewey, but these remarks apply as well, and sometimes more clearly, to Ortega.) In general, these false or distracting moves tend to fall into the three sorts of reflectively objectifying, purifying, and theoretically regimenting and reinterpreting the subject-matter which Dewey refers to under the titles 'experience', 'primary experience', and 'the starting point'. All of them derive from the bringing to bear upon this subject-matter some presupposition of how experience must be or some supposition of what Dewey must be talking about if we are to make sense of what he says. None of them takes Dewey at his word.

(1) There is, most commonly perhaps, the deflection of taking the only genuine starting point of philosophy and therefore of Dewey's philosophy to be what is revealed by a distancing reflection upon and from outside our everyday experience. This is the Cartesian or phenomenological device of objectification, of beginning our philoso-

phizing only after the *epoché* has been performed. But of course such a move can take place only *within* experience as Dewey understands it and therefore only upon experience which is past and no longer immediately had. Within experience as it is lived, reflection can take place only as a manner of selective emphasis within a broader domain of experience, my life, and, however consuming such emphasis may appear to be, it serves only to bring into reflective focus, into awareness in the way of *reparar*, a limited portion of a larger and ongoing context of experience. The most obvious consequence of reflective objectification in the wholesale Cartesian fashion is that such a “bracketing out” of my primary and first-hand experience deprives it of its life, its being lived, and, especially, its being present and immediate to me in the manner of *contar con*. A less obvious consequence, perhaps, is that such objectification *transforms* the subject-matter into a field of objective data within which the agent and, indeed, the reflecting subject do not and cannot appear. What results is that two dimensional, black and white “stenciled stereotype” of experience which Dewey warns us against. Of course, it is obvious to Dewey that even Descartes does not in fact start his philosophizing at that point; he starts in a situation which involves sitting in a chair, putting aside his cigar and coffee, telling his friends not to bother him for an hour or so, banking the fire, and so on.

(2) Another manner of being diverted from the starting point for Dewey is that of mistaking him to be attempting a purification of our raw, everyday experience, to be attempting to get at some sort of “pure” or “primitive” experience which can be taken to underlie or be presupposed by our theory-laden or bias-infected perceptual judgments. But for Dewey we begin, as Peirce once pointed out, exactly where we are with the paraphernalia of rocks, books, automobiles, prejudices, and people already present. It may well be said of Bergson and of James that they were concerned, at least sometimes, to get at something earlier, more primitive, purer than ordinary experience, but this is not Dewey. The genetic story James tells of the infant’s experience of a great, blooming, buzzing confusion can be distracting in this way. Perhaps there was at some point in one’s develop-

ment such an inchoate mess, but the point is that we, you and I, simply don't begin in any such situation. However we got to where we are, we now have in our experience the everyday things in the relationships and shapes which we experience them to stand in.

Let me dwell on James a moment. It might be thought that an illuminating path towards understanding what Dewey has in mind as the starting point would be to begin with James' lengthy discussion of "the stream of thought" in *The Principles of Psychology*. And this is an approach not without merit. But it is dangerously misleading in two ways. I have already mentioned the first of these, namely, that invocation by James of an underlying stratum or foundation of our everyday experience which can only be seen as an attempt at a "purer" form of experience. But this "purification" move is at least partially motivated by a second and more subtle move which is, though perhaps thoroughly Jamesian, quite unDeweyan. The move is that of the "dethingification" of first-hand experience. In such experience as we have in our day to day lives we typically find, according to Dewey, that we move among and depend upon things which, as one might say, simply stand there, holding their own against us and our efforts. To put this matter bluntly, we experience such things as eggs, sidewalks, cardboard boxes, and waiters *as* persisting, *as* coming into our present and continuing through it. There is no issue here regarding whether such things really do persist or what account one can give of persistence or how one might explain why certain things appear to us as persisting. All that matters in experience as bedrock is that such things do make their appearance. In our experience we have such things in their being persistent *contar con*. Ortega's celebration in *Meditations on Quixote* of this autonomy of the "thing" in one's life is eloquent.

It often happens in the pictures of Rembrandt that a humble white or gray cloth, a coarse household utensil is found wrapped in a luminous and radiant atmosphere, with which other painters surround only the heads of saints. It is as if he said to us in gentle admonition: "Blessed be things! Love



them, love them!” Each thing is a fairy whose inner treasures are concealed beneath poor commonplace garments, a virgin who has to be loved to become fruitful. (32)

To ignore the fact that each thing has a character of its own and not what we wish to demand of it, is in my opinion the real capital sin, which I call a sin of the heart because it derives its nature from lack of love. (62)

Now, what we definitely do not find in our experience at the starting point is a succession of thing-stages which we somehow, perhaps by some subcutaneous process or algorithm, come to believe to constitute or add up to a genuine thing. One is free, of course, to propose such a *theory* of how we come to have the experience of things which we do, but no such theory is either found to accompany our experiences of things or to be presupposed by those experiences or our having of them. James says, however, that no thing stands there, persists, through the changing experience which constitutes my present; he maintains that, though I do indeed *believe* that such things appear, persist, and reappear, it is only the “object” of our sensation which can be “got twice” (225). “No state,” he says, “once gone can recur and be identical with what it was before” (224). We need not doubt this. But the point is that, in order to come to that conclusion, we must take the “psychologist’s point of view,” as James calls it, and view the passing show as a panorama within which its succeeding “states” can be compared. In taking this approach James is not merely moving towards the identification of a purer, inchoate stream of consciousness than we seem to find in everyday experience, but he is assuming as well an objectifying and distancing vantage point. My life as I live it among things which stand over against me and appear as being there in their own persisting right is thereby placed to the side. This is not to say that James did not recognize the danger. He did.<sup>5</sup> But he did not overcome it in his discussion of the stream of thought.

(3) This attempt at purifying Dewey’s notion of experience in order to divest it of its alien influences and built-in biases has its antinomy in the view that such influences and biases are precisely

what constitutes the starting point. I would call this the historicocultural boondoggle. The idea is that Dewey, who is clearly alert to such a context, must mean that we begin in a historical and cultural setting which itself provides the starting point. But this is, first of all, a theory, perhaps even a good theory, but one by appeal to which we attempt to *explain why* we experience things as we do. We do not start, according to Dewey, by identifying our position in a cultural matrix, as though somehow that matrix is bedrock; rather, we start where we are, in the midst of our lives, and, when we find in our lives that it is expedient to consider why we have the experience of certain things as we do or have the beliefs that we do, we may build a picture of cultural, historical, family, and other contextual influences. Of course, it is conceivable that as a result of our acceptance of any such theory we may come to experience things as having characteristics which we, without much reflection, see to be the result of “cultural funding.” Well, if we do, we do. And if we do experience things so, then that is where we begin. But to experience things that way and to start from that point is not to start from an assumed cultural or social position; it is to start from experience which, for whatever reason, is found to contain that assumption. Ortega makes the point. Radical reality is radical because it is only *within it* that such assumptions, theories, biases, or whatever arise.

(4) A variation on this theoretical reinterpretation of the starting point, which if not for its puzzling prevalence would hardly be worth mentioning, is the proposal that we begin, not with experience, but with language. I would suggest that this proposal makes no sense. But the point I want to make is that Dewey cannot be saddled with any such view, for he would maintain that language, in any understanding of it, arises only within experience. ‘Experience’ is just the appropriate word here, for it is encompassing and inclusive of language, culture, theory, biology, physiology, art, science, philosophy, and so on. Oddly enough, certain philosophers have actually maintained that, in using the term ‘experience’, Dewey could only responsibly have meant to indicate one’s language or (to broaden the notion of language to a point of vacuity) culture. Dewey himself

in later years, perplexed and frustrated by the continuing misunderstanding of his use of the term 'experience', asserted that he would, if he were to write *EN* again, retitle it *Culture and Nature* and make the appropriate substitution of 'culture' for 'experience' throughout. Dewey's frustration is understandable, but one can only imagine what amazing misunderstandings would have accrued had he used the term 'culture' instead of 'experience'. We can thank whatever gods there be that Dewey's old age saved him from that infelicity.

(5) The above ways of being distracted from the recognition of the Deweyan starting point exhibit a certain ingrained bias about what is at issue, as though Dewey did not quite understand what he was about. And they are easily identified and dismissed. A more subtle distraction derives from an explicit opposition to the naiveté of both the purification approach and the substitution of a theory for the starting point. The proposal is that of taking experience to be something which is theory-laden from the bottom up. This is a distraction because it wants to construe experience, not as what we simply have or live through willy-nilly, but as something which from the start we must *already* understand to be theoretically constituted. The view is often put like this: we can neither prize theory off of our experience so as to leave us with a pure experiential given nor prize experience off of theory so as to leave us with pure theory (though it must be said that the latter point is seldom stressed). But, unfortunately, the view that experience is theory-laden is itself a theory. It is a theory about a certain subject-matter and it is tested by its return to that subject-matter. The insistent problem revealed here is that which is common to any attempt to begin with a theoretical picture; it is the mistake of trying to transform the starting point into *a picture* of the starting point.

(6) A still more subtle distraction is to maintain that, even though it is a mistake to identify the starting point with the theoretical picture of it as theory-laden, it nonetheless remains true that the starting point *contains* theories, judgments, beliefs, and other such elements which, in the context of the experience as a whole, serve to affect its overall texture or quality. But the point to remember is that one's experience at the starting point contains only that which is ex-

perienced as being there. If such items are not experienced as being there, either in the manner of *reparar* or *contar con*, then they simply are not there. This is not to say, of course, that in order for a theory, say, to be there in experience it must be experienced *as* a theory, i.e., as something which falls under the title “theory.” There is nothing necessarily spoiling in a describer’s labeling some item of experience as an X which from *within that experience* is perceived as being a Y; there may well be a point to that use of language in the description offered. What is spoiling is to insist that something X must be there when there is no Y in the experience which can be identified by a describer who stands outside of that experience as an X.

It is instructive to bring Peirce into the discussion at this point, for though he anticipated Dewey’s starting point in many respects, there always remains in his presentation of it a feature which tended, I am inclined to think, to distract, not only later readers of Peirce, but Peirce himself from the bedrock at which he appears to be pointing. Here is one of his most famous comments on the starting point.

Philosophers of very diverse stripes propose that philosophy shall take its start from one or another state of mind in which no man, least of all the beginner in philosophy, actually is . . . But in truth, there is but one state of mind from which you can “set out,” namely, the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do “set out”—a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed, of which you cannot divest yourself if you would . . . (416)

The distracting feature here is Peirce’s inclusion in the starting point of “an immense mass of cognition already formed.” On one interpretation the remark is benign; it merely serves to point out that the beliefs, judgments, assumptions, or whatever of such cognitive stripe which we carry into our experience of doubt at the starting point of inquiry are incorrigibly there, a part of the experience itself. On another interpretation, however, the remark is theoretically spoiling in the by now all-too-familiar manner. However much our past cog-

nitions may condition or influence our states of doubt, our starting points of inquiry, they are a part of our experience at that point only if they are experienced as being there, whatever might be the title or description they so appear under. What tends to deflect us from a proper appreciation of the starting point is the notion that they are always to be found there, as though we haven't quite got the hang of the starting point unless we accept that assumption.

(7) Finally, let me bring up a distraction which, though hardly the final sort which could be mentioned, has been popular in published criticisms of *EN*. One says this: "But Dewey, we can't begin with experience, for it may be misleading, illusory, distorting of what is really in the world. There is only one place we can begin with confidence and honesty, and that is in the world itself." Now it is hard to make real good sense of this objection. But it does seem to rest upon some notion that experience, even as Dewey uses the term, can only be the effect in us of or the response by us to the world of real things out there. And I suppose that the real world out there is taken to be something apart from or distinct from the things which are there in experience. Often the Cartesian bifurcation of mind and matter, or some such, and its consequent hypostatization of mind as a receptacle is invoked to make this view seem respectable. It seems to me that this is not a very good theory and Dewey would agree, but, whether it is or not, it doesn't speak to the issue. The issue is: What is the proper starting point for philosophical investigation? And the point is that, wherever one thinks we *should* start, we *can't* start with the world. We can't start with the world and we can't test our theories by testing them against the world. Whatever we take to *indicate* or to provide *evidence* of a "real" world apart from experience must be found, can only be found, in experience. It must be found in the glass of Barrilito, the aroma of a good cigar, conversation among friends, hotel hallways, cats, thunderstorms, oak trees and all of the brazen and all of the unpretentious things which we encounter and live among in our day to day lives.

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## NOTES

1. Dewey makes the shift from the traditional to his own starting point, fully at least, in his writings at the turn of the century. Reading *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903) today, we can recognize it. But not many of his readers saw it then. They saw that *something* was going on, but they could not quite grasp what it was. It becomes more and more obvious in the succeeding years and by 1916 in his introduction to *Essays in Experimental Logic* it is patent. Its definitive presentation is found in his writings from 1925 to 1930, from *Experience and Nature* to “Qualitative Thought.” With Ortega, the shift is apparent to us now on rereading *Meditations on Quixote*, which was published in 1914. Still, the new starting point lies pretty much behind the scenes, though informing his writings during the interim, until 1929, when in the lectures translated as *What Is Philosophy?* it is made explicit. It was further elaborated in 1932-33 in the lectures translated much later under the title *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*.

2. In spite of this, recognition of this starting point, however novel it may be, should not be considered as something complicated or as requiring some arcane or mysterious source of illumination. It is incredibly simple, indeed so simple and so commonplace as to be grasped immediately without any theoretical or explanatory underpinnings. Why, then, has it been so elusive to the traditional philosopher? Well, seeing it involves something like a “gestalt shift.” Consider the simple example of the duck-rabbit shift made famous by Wittgenstein. One who sees the markings on the blackboard as a duck and is told that it is the picture of a rabbit may not at first be successful in seeing it so. One may even learn to *describe* the markings as a picture of a rabbit by identifying the duck’s bill as the ears of the rabbit, etc., and yet not *see* it as such. This is to say that *language* may be used to indicate and describe without there being any *experiential* shift. In fact, reliance upon the language may serve to hinder one’s seeing. It may make one think that, if he makes the effort and has the proper tools of description and reference, he can come to see it. Or he may come to think that there is nothing to *see* after all, that there is merely an alternative use of language at issue. Effort, especially linguistic effort, may be counterproductive. In the end, what one needs to do in order to see the rabbit is just look and then look again. But, now, if one does come to see it, then he simply sees it. Aha!! We can try to explain his earlier failure in this way: he was

locked into recognizing a duck and that way of recognition kept interfering with the shift. Now something like this is, I think, the case with the shift from the traditional starting point to the Dewey-Ortega one, except at a much more radical level. When we do make the shift, there is nothing in doing so which is tricky or mystical; we simply see it. Aha! But the traditional approach is so insidious in its rootedness, so taken-for-granted, and so deeply tied up with reliance upon linguistic formulation that it continually deflects many philosophers from simply seeing what is so simple and straightforward.

3. There is a further complication which deserves mention. As a bedrock term 'experience', as well as 'my life', is a mass term as opposed to the count use of the term 'starting point'. The count use is indicated by the fact that for each case of philosophical investigation or inquiry there is a starting point which is different from that of another case. We may then speak of starting points in the plural. Dewey is very insistent on this multiplicity of starting points, though he doesn't adopt that term in the count sense. The point which I think he would like to make is that, though each inquiry begins from a different place in our experience, the starting point is what we have in experience as we find it and that experience in its generic sense divides itself up into those situations of experience in which we find ourselves. The point then is that the content of experience or my life is constantly changing but that one can never escape the experience which one is having and living through. Similarly, the water which I have now, this parcel, is nonetheless water.

4. Dewey states this hypothesis very clearly in *Experience and Nature*:

Suppose however that we start with no presuppositions save that what is experienced, since it is a manifestation of nature, may, and indeed, must be used as testimony of the characteristics of natural events. (27)

5. In *The Principles of Psychology* James remarks on this danger.

The great snare of the psychologist is the *confusion of his own standpoint with that of the mental fact* about which he is making his report. . . . The psychologist . . . stands outside of the mental state he speaks of. Both itself and its object are objects for him. (195)

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