The “What” of Moral Experience

One of the broadest functional distinctions that can be made about lived experience is that the subject matter experienced can be distinguished from the experiencing of it, in other words, "what" is experienced from "how" it is experienced. "What" we find in a morally problematic situation has as one of its conditions the "way" ("how") we participate in them. In the next chapter, I will consider the function of habits and character in moral experience (i.e., the “how”). In other words, I will distinguish our moral attitudes and dispositions from the moral situations in which they are operative. But lets first consider "what" occurs in evolving morally problematic situations. What are the generic traits and phases of these kinds of processes?

For Dewey, life is neither an homogeneous flux nor a succession of disconnected (atomistic) moments. It is “a thing of histories, each with its own plot, its own inception and movement towards its close” (LW 10:43). Each of these “histories” is a situation that begins with a disruption from the fluidity provided by our habits. From this initial phase we usually move to an intermediate phase of trying to transform the experienced unsettledness. In this second phase we might engage in inquiry as a series of "doings" and "under goings" with our environment. If successful we arrive at a final phase of consummation where we establish a new equilibrium and a situation that is experienced as settled-determinate.

This general rhythm and pattern of experience adequately fits moral life. The life of a moral agent is one of being recurrently faced with deciding between conflicting moral forces or demands. These "breaks" in the "flow" are situations that have the
pervasive quality of being morally unsettled, confused, indeterminate. The agent finds herself in a morally problematic situation that provokes the agent to engage in a process of moral deliberation, until she arrives at a judgment that results in a choice. It is in light of this process that Dewey provided novel and provocative reconstructions of the traditional notions of moral deliberation, value judgments, principles, and moral problems. To each one of these matters I now turn.

1. The Nature of Moral Problems

According to the methodological commitments outlined in Part I, a radical empiricist approach to the nature of moral problems seeks a hypothetical-general but faithful pre-theoretical description of what moral problems are experienced as rather than seeking an essence or a definition (in the sense of necessary and sufficient conditions). We do not experience moral problems at large or in general. The "problem of abortion," for example, can only be an abstract way of making reference to all the situations where a moral agent has to make a certain kind of moral decision. If, in spite of their uniqueness, moral problems are experienced as having traits in common (generic traits), then one can proceed to specify what they are.

Dewey thought that standard moral theories, regardless of their differences, usually shared a view of moral problems which was far from how they are immediately experienced. The root of the problem is that traditional notions about moral problems rest on mistaken theoretical assumptions about experience in general (and as a result of the philosophical fallacies already outlined). Let’s critically consider some of the most common traditional assumptions about moral problems and how Dewey's empiricism led
him to propose a more adequate and rich conception of the actual experiences that initiate moral deliberation.

**Are Moral Problems Problems of Knowledge?**

When I am experiencing a moral problem it is more accurate to say that I am “suffering” a moral problem, than to say that, I “know” I am having a moral problem. This is not merely a verbal distinction; it points to different kinds of experiences.³ It is the philosophical prejudice that tries to reduce all experiences to knowledge experiences (i.e., intellectualism) that lead to such confusions.

A moral problem is something "had or experienced before it can be stated or set forth; but it is had as an immediate quality of the whole situation" (LW 5:249). Even if, in a moral problem, there is a point at which one wants to know what is right, that question occurs in a context that is initially experienced as immediately indeterminate as to what should be done. There is a temporary "blockage" of fluid activity that is experienced as a unique ambiguity, confusion, disharmony, conflict, or pain that pervades one's situation. This "indeterminate situation" is a precondition for the subsequent more reflective phases where one discursively inquires about the problem and figures out "what sort of action the situation demands in order that it may receive a satisfactory objective reconstruction" (LW 12:163).

Consider how different this account is from standard ones in moral theory. The most common account of moral problems begins with the assumption that they arise out of a conflict between objects of knowledge. That is, moral problems are about beliefs, propositions, rules, principles, values, or units of utility. Even if a hindsight-reflective analysis of a moral problem is done using these terms, can one honestly claim that what
is directly experienced during the inception of a moral problem is a conflict among these refined abstractions? Just as when I experience a chair, I do not experience a collection of sense data, when I experience a moral problem I do not experience a conflict of units of utility or a conflict of propositions.

When in philosophy moral problems are reduced to knowledge-problems, moral deliberation is conceived in terms of the standard philosophical models of epistemic knowledge or reasoning. If, for example, I am trying to decide if I should keep my promise, is this simply a matter of examining logical relations between factual beliefs and moral principles within my belief system? If moral problems arise out of indeterminate situations as non-cognitive experiences, then this has methodological implications about how to solve such problems. To be an empiricist in solving them requires that one be guided by the "irreducible, concrete quale" of the indeterminate situation that is suffered and that initiated inquiry. To take as data for moral deliberation only knowledge-facts or rules and disregard everything else as subjective and therefore irrelevant to a moral problem is not to adopt an empirical attitude. How a moral problem is experienced, how it is felt, is an essential part of the empirical data we have for its own transformation or rectification. For example, how torn do I feel when I have to decide between keeping my promise to a friend and helping a stranger in need is not only relevant but helps me determine what is relevant in reaching my decision. Moreover, the best qualitative indications that a problem has been resolved is when it is no longer suffered--not when we have acquired a certain knowledge or have met some antecedent formal criteria.

Are Moral Problems Subjective?
The modern fallacy in philosophy which reduces experience to experiencing (set against an antecedent reality) is responsible for the view that moral problems are nothing more than the mind-state of a confused subject who is simply ignorant about the right thing to do. Meanwhile, moral reality remains stable and unproblematic, waiting to be discovered. Successful moral inquiry moves from a confused-subjective state to one that corresponds to the way things really are. According to this view,

there is no situation which is problematic. There is only a person who is in a state of subjective moral uncertainty or ignorance. His business, in that case, is not to judge the objective situation in order to determine what course of action is required in order that it may be transformed into one that is morally satisfactory and right, but simply to come into intellectual possession of a predetermined end-in-itself. (LW 12:169-170)

Imagine a situation in which I am first frightened by a noise at the window and then after further investigation I find out that the cause of the noise is the tapping of the shade against the window. A traditional view of experience would describe this situation as one where we move from the original fright as an imperfect-illusory-subjective cognitive state to one where we are face-to-face with reality. Dewey claimed that this is a distorted description of what we actually experience. The frightening noise was, when experienced, as real as the eventual knowledge-experience of the cause of the real noise. "Empirically that noise is fearsome, it really is, not merely phenomenally or subjectively so. That is what it is experienced as being" (MW 3:160). In so far as the eventual experience is not misleading it is "truer," but this does not make it more real. Similarly, moral problems are not experienced as "internal" or subjective. In so far as a
situation is experienced as morally problematic then it really is problematic. This situation might be transformed into one where there is no longer a problem, but this second one is no more real than the first one. My initial experience of obligation to help a stranger is no less real than my realization afterwards that she does not need my help.

It does make a difference what view one takes on this issue. If moral problems are subjective-knowing problems, then resolving them requires that we find out what is wrong with the subject, i.e., what is the source of the confusion and ignorance. For according to this view, moral problems are only indicative of our limitations as knowers (as subjects). There is some comfort in the idea that moral problems are only "our" problems and are not constitutive of moral reality. Many want to believe that there is a right answer to moral dilemmas. In other words, that moral reality is uniform, stable, or in perpetual harmony, and that mistakes in moral decisions are “due merely to a personal failure to reduce the present case to the proper combination of old ones” (MW 13:12). For Dewey this is a false sense of comfort.

If we find moral problems that are experienced as irresolvable and in that respect tragic, then they are tragic and do not merely seem so. Their resolution requires scrutiny and transformation of all the "objective" factors (including ourselves) that are present in the transaction that constitute a situation. We cannot always transform a morally "suffered" problematic situation into one completely determinate-unproblematic. But this is not just our human-subjective-finite problem, this is the way things really are. For Dewey it is better to accept that there are tragedies than to flee from them by postulating an antecedent and conflict-free moral reality. In moral life we are in the midst of real moral conflicts and not in a phenomenal or subjective world. The moments when we are
torn between irreconcilable obligations are as revealing of moral reality as the times when the "right thing to do" is obvious and unquestionable.

2. The Pluralistic Character of Moral Experience

In "Three Independent Factors in Morals" (LW 5:279-288) Dewey criticized the tendency in moral theory to conceive moral problems as a conflict between a few commensurable factors or variables. This oversimplification derives from a "self-serving" characterization of moral experience by moral theorists (an instance of the fallacy of selective emphasis). The casuistic power (i.e., its ability to provide rules for decision-making) of a theory depends upon its ability to reduce moral problems to a few commensurable elements. But moral philosophy will remain abstract and detached from moral life if it is not critical of this theoretical wish.

Dewey argued that the history of moral philosophy is characterized by one-sidedness because philosophers have abstracted one factor or feature of situations that are experienced as morally problematic, and then they have made that factor supreme or exclusive. "Whatever may be the differences which separate moral theories," he wrote, "all [philosophers] postulate one single principle as an explanation of moral life" (LW 5:280). Hence, moral theories have been classified according to whether they take good (teleological-consequentialist theories), virtue (virtue ethics), or duty (deontological theories) as their central category or source of moral justification. But according to Dewey “each of these variables has a sound basis, but because each has a different origin and mode of operation, they can be at cross purposes and exercise divergent forces in the formation of judgment” (LW 5:280). The category of `good' points to that part of our moral life that has to with our desires, wants, fulfillment and satisfactions; `duty' with the
demands that are part of associated living; and ‘virtue’ with the approval of conduct and character by others.

Good, virtue, and duty are all irreducible factors or forces found intertwined and in conflict in moral situations. Hence, moral problems are very acute problems that can be said to border on the side of being tragic. Dewey explains that "the essence of the situation is an internal and intrinsic conflict; the necessity for judgment and for choice come from the fact that one has to manage forces with no common denominator" (LW 5:280). We often associate moral struggle with situations where there is a conflict "between a good which is clear to him and something else which attracts him but he knows to be wrong" (LW 7:165). For instance, “the employee of a bank who is tempted to embezzle funds” (LW 7:164). But this is a very different kind of struggle than the ones that Dewey takes as paradigmatic of moral problems.

In moral problems the struggle that is had is often "between values each of which is an undoubted good in its place but which now get in each other's way"(LW 7:165). For instance, should I support my country in a war that could benefit many but seems unjust? The element of uncertainty and conflict between these two kinds of moral struggles is different. In the first kind of situation the problem is "how can I get myself to do what is morally right?" or "what means should we employ to minimize this evil and make that good prevail?" But it is assumed that what is the morally right thing to do in that situation has been settled, that it is not problematic. This is a question about the best means to an antecedent non-problematic end. But in the second kind of case there is a genuine uncertainty and conflict about what is the morally correct thing to do because incompatible courses of action are experienced initially as morally justified or as making
a forceful claim upon the agent. Furthermore, each of these claims may belong to a totally different aspect of morality. My duty, my desire for good consequences, and my regard for virtue are each distinct and irreducible to the other even though one of them may end up becoming more pressing in the particular situation. Once moral inquiry is initiated the experienced "moral tension" might be eased but then, again, it might not.

Dewey's article "Three Independent Factors in Morals" is a centerpiece of his moral thought. Dewey, in a letter to Professor Horace S. Fries, acknowledges that in his early works “I followed the tradition in making ends, the good, the basic ideal” but that by 1930 it became clear to him that he had changed his view. Its tripartite division of moral experience of this essay prefigures, among other things, Dewey’s 1932 Ethics, where he placed good, duty, and virtue in separate chapters. It is clear in this essay, how radical the situational and pluralistic thrust of his moral philosophy is. His situational ethics is based on the view that each moral problem is unique and is usually constituted by an irreconcilable complexity. All three of the factors (good, duty, and virtue) have something to contribute, but their respective adherents in ethical theory have all latched on to one aspect of our moral experience. Dewey was concerned that this singularity does not encourage a generous survey of our moral problems. A narrow view of moral problems is responsible for the tendency in normative ethics to propose a single right way to reason in ethics. For Dewey an appreciation of the nature of the conflicts that are the basis for moral theory and deliberation protects us from false pretensions about the power of these to resolve them. Dewey’s faith in the instrumentalities of experience was tempered by the honest realization that the most intense moments of our moral life are tragic.
3. Moral Deliberation

Moral deliberation is not something that happens in between ones ears, i.e., in “the mind.” It is experienced as an intermediate phase in the process of transforming a morally problematic situation into one that is determinate. This does not mean that it is a discrete and independent phase. In moral inquiry the disruption that is felt as the engrossing whole that provoked it persists and evolves in the background, that is, we are still "suffering" the problem even if the foreground or focus of attention is concerned with such questions as: what is the problem? What resources do I have at my disposal to settle this? how can I gather more evidence? To set up a problem that is not guided by some genuinely felt doubt or perplexity “is to start on a course of dead work” (LW 12:112). The overarching and final aim is to determine what I ought to do among alternative courses of action. In other words, the aim is choice as "the emergence of a unified preference out of competing preferences"(MW 14:134).

Moral deliberation is in this respect not any different than any other inquiry that begins with “a forked-road situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives” (MW 6:189). Dewey gives the example of a man traveling in an unfamiliar region and trying to decide which road to take.

Having no sure knowledge to fall back upon, he is brought to a standstill of hesitation and suspense. Which road is right? And how shall perplexity be resolved? There are but two alternatives: he must either blindly and arbitrarily take his course, trusting to luck for the outcome, or he must discover grounds for the conclusion that a given road is right. (MW 6:189)
The moral problems that initiate moral deliberation are, of course, qualitatively different and more complex than the situation of the perplexed traveler. In a morally problematic situation we find ourselves with two or more actions that exert a different moral force or demand upon us. The gradual specification of the moral perplexity that has been felt is key to finding out what is the best possible solution. Figuring out what the problem is requires that we get clear about what is in conflict or tension. We can easily get this wrong. We start with some immediate value judgment (valuing) about each of our conflicting options but we may have to change our judgment after reflection (valuation) and a more careful survey of the situation. (We will consider later, in more detail, the important relation between valuing and valuation). For example, what may first be experienced as a conflict between two duties may later be found upon reflection to be a conflict between a duty and what is good.

We do not, however, wait until we have a clear and definite formulation of the problem to entertain and examine possible solutions. In the midst of the ambiguity and uncertainty about what to do, we usually start with vague suggestions about the right action even though we are suspending a final judgment and are willing to revise this overall judgment (hypothesis) as inquiry proceeds. The intellectual task is to discover grounds for choosing one action over another one in light of the present situation. How do we do this? We rely on whatever stable elements we can find.

In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the facts stand related to one another. (MW 6:189)
The perplexed traveler relies on funded knowledge about similar situations but must carefully scrutinize what is before him to find evidence that would help him test a hypothesis and that ultimately will help her decide between roads. She utilizes reasoning to figure out the implications of some of her hypotheses but her survey is also imaginative and emotionally laden. In any case, her final judgment is not merely a deductive derivation from some rule about what makes a road the best road.

If Dewey is right about the level of uncertainty and incommensurability that characterizes morally problematic situations the moral agent seems to face a more difficult task than the case of the perplexed traveler. If, for example, an agent is torn between a “good” brought by her breaking her promise and a “duty” to keep her promise, then how can she weigh these incommensurable and forceful claims and reach a reasonable context-sensitive judgment? Where does she begin? What possible stable resources are available to an agent in a morally problematic situation?

First of all, we must avoid assuming the abstraction of a moral agent that comes to a situation morally “neutral” or “impartial” with respect to all her options. When one is in a problematic situation, it is not the case that all logically possible solutions are considered or stand on an equal level. Dewey explains that in most situations initial suggestions just “pop into our heads” but there is nothing mysterious or arbitrary about this. It is what happens to an organism with habits funded by previous experience. “We do not approach any problem with a wholly naive or virgin mind; we approach it with certain acquired habitual modes of understanding, with a certain store of previously evolved meanings or at least of experiences from which meanings may be educed” (LW 8:214-215). The initial suggestions that “pop in the head” of a mature moral agent or of
those that have encountered similar situations are probably a better starting point than those of the immature and inexperienced. But the origin of the suggestions that arise in deliberation is not as important as being able to test their pertinence to the problem at hand. Initial suggestions must also be developed into hypotheses that lead to further judgments. Let’s consider what particular operations a moral agent can rely on in order to examine, criticize, improve, modify, her moral judgments.

In any process of inquiry we can make a functional distinction between phases of doing and undergoing as well as phases of analysis and synthesis. How these phases affect each other is key to understanding how inquiry can be a cumulative undertaking that can guide itself to some final judgment. Analysis is what we do when inquiry is centered on making some finer discriminations of the parts that make up our problematic situation. Synthesis takes place when we are concerned with weighing how the parts contribute to the making of overall judgments. These are mutually dependant phases throughout the different stages of moral inquiry. Reaching a hypothesis about what the conflict is, is an act of synthesis from the more particular analysis of what the competing moral demands are in a situation and what particular features of the situation contribute to their “rightness”. Any tentative proposal about what the problem is provokes in turn an examination (analysis) of possible solutions that issues in a tentative overall judgment (synthesis) about the best solution, which may lead to guide a further analysis and survey of new aspects of the situation. The final judgment about what we ought to do is a synthesis that results from the analysis of the situation as a whole but it is only the final step in a series of tentative overall judgments that have occurred throughout the entire process of deliberation.
This same process can be also described in terms of the phases of doing and undergoing of an experimental learning process. The consequences of different operations in the situation are perceived (appreciated) in order to guide subsequent ones. What we take to be the right course of action at any point in inquiry guides our survey of what we take to be settled or the “facts of the case” (through observation or recollection of similar cases), which may in turn generate new suggestions and revision of our judgment, which may in turn lead us to further survey of different aspects of the situation. In this process principles and habits have the function of bringing to bear previous experience. Reasoning provides us with the inferences needed to go beyond what we have or it helps us elaborate our suppositions in light of other beliefs. Imagination in the form of a “dramatic rehearsal” helps us survey and test our options. Let’s consider in some more detail some of these complex and interdependent operations and resources.

In a previous chapter we explained the function of principles. In reaching judgments, in the arts, cooking, or morals we often rely on principles and habits that are informed by previous experience. They may even help us with the task of deciding which facts are relevant in coming to a decision, but even in these cases one has to ultimately rely on the guidance provided by the particular context of inquiry. For Dewey even in the case of judgments reached in a court of law, where there is an explicit reliance on rules, “the quality of the problematic situation determines which rules of the total system are selected” (LW 12:124, my emphasis).

Judgment is required in deciding what principles apply. “There is no label, on any given idea or principle, that says automatically, "Use me in this situation" - (LW 8:215). Judgment is required to find out what features of an action are morally relevant and
which ones are distracting. Principles can help but they are no substitute for the direct tact and discernment of a good judge. No rules can replace the power to seize the significant factors in a situation and the sensitivity to the quality of the problematic situation that is being transformed.

Moral deliberation can also rely on “reasoning” (LW 12:115), as the examination of the implications of a proposed solution in light of its logical relations with other beliefs or meanings. This can be useful in developing and revising suggestions and considerations in such a way that they can be more easily tested. Moral deliberation is not, however, a deductive process. It is experimental in so far as the results of its operations are tentative and subject to receive confirmation or frustration as inquiry proceeds. Experimental thinking is not the exclusive domain of the sciences. The notion that empirical “testing” is the confrontation of ideas and hypotheses to the direct observation by the senses is a narrow form of empiricism. In moral life, many times it is only after one acts upon a choice (and judgment) that one can obtain the necessary confirmation or disconfirmation for one’s choice. In fact, a judgment reached in a morally problematic situation is not final for it is a "doing" that might provoke further "under goings." Reaching a judgment as to what to do is usually followed by experiences that either offer no resistance (a type of confirmation) or generate a new problematic situation, depending on what the concrete consequences are that begin to emerge after choice.

There is, however, no reason why “testing” needs to take the form of an overt experiment. For Dewey the imagination plays a crucial role in the exploration and testing or our options in a situation. This provides an opportunity to have a preliminary test
(trial) of our options in a morally problematic situation without suffering the consequences of acting upon them. In deliberation the competing possible lines of action that are present in a morally problematic situation are tried out in an imaginative "drama" in terms of agents involved, possible consequences, and implications. Thus, Dewey often referred to moral deliberation as "a dramatic rehearsal" (MW 14:132). This is why he claimed that what goes on in moral deliberation is closer to "an actor engaged in drama" than to a "clerk recording debit and credit items" (MW 14:139). Just as an actor engaged in a drama, moral deliberation may require imaginary role-taking and taking serious the standpoint or possible reaction of others. For example, my imagination may be provoked by the following questions: What are possible scenarios (or stories) if I support the war? How do they compare with the one of not supporting it and with regard to my duties? What would an impartial moral judge think? What good would be preserved or enhanced? How does the best case scenario (in terms of consequences to us) look from the standpoint of someone that cares about virtue? Notice how in this imaginative exploration each of the “independent factors in morals” (i.e., good, duty, and virtue) can play a role.

The fact that deliberation includes the actual or the imaginary judgments of others and the principles we have inherited means that it is social and not a solipsistic process. That there are individuals that can deliberate without engaging in an actual dialogue with particular others hardly counts as evidence against this claim. For Dewey and George H. Mead thinking is an “internalization” of communal dialogue.

In language and imagination we rehearse the responses of others just as we dramatically enact other consequences. We foreknow how others will act,
and the foreknowledge is the beginning of judgment passed on action. We know with them; there is conscience. An assembly is formed within our breast which discusses and appraises proposed and performed acts. The community without becomes a forum and tribunal within, a judgment-seat of charges, assessments and exculpations. Our thoughts of our own actions are saturated with the ideas that others entertain about them, ideas which have been expressed not only in explicit instruction but still more effectively in reaction to our acts. (MW14:217, my emphasis)

If, in moral deliberation, imagination provides the "dramas," then what provides the standard by which the possible courses of action are evaluated and tested? There is no "perfect drama" (i.e., absolute standard) by which all imaginative dramas are judged, or a set of intellectual criteria or rules (like in Utilitarianism) by which one can choose one drama over another. For Dewey the view that evaluation is reached by applying some set criteria of right or wrong (as the major premise in a practical syllogism) is a theoretical-abstract explanation that we may devise after we make actual judgments and decisions. They are not how the most competent moral agents experience these situations. This is the case not only in morals but also in other areas of our practical lives where judgment is required. Good trumpet players and cooks may formulate in a set of rules or criteria the basis of their activities and decisions but this is done for the purposes of the novice, it does not come into their experience.

It is worth comparing the above account of moral deliberation with traditional ones in ethical theory. Dewey often contrasted his view of moral deliberation with two other views on the matter. The rationalist-intuitionist view identified moral deliberation
with a "separate non-natural faculty of moral knowledge" (MW 14:131). The undesirable implication of this view is a conception of morality as a separate and independent domain from our everyday life. Moral deliberation is conceived as a means by which we can have access to a moral reality behind experience. According to this view, the function of reflection is not creative or prospective. Instead, its task is merely to copy, reproduce, and apply antecedent-fixed moral values or knowledge.

On the other hand, there are "empirical" views that claim moral deliberation is a mode of enlightened self interested calculation, i.e., "calculating what is expedient" (MW 14:132). The disagreements Dewey had with these views, exemplified by Utilitarianism, were many. The notion that the function of deliberation is the calculation of future pleasures and pains is not based on what agents usually do, or even on what we can reasonably be expected of them. Dewey suspects that Utilitarians confused the agreeable and disagreeable reactions to foreseen events that are presently presented in imagination with the calculation of future pleasures and pains. The former reactions are part of the agent’s present situations but future pleasure and pains are not. Therefore, Utilitarianism asks us to predict what is dependent on a complex set of contingent variables that are usually not subject to our control.

For Dewey the function of deliberation is present rectification; it is not about a distant future or about figuring out "where the most advantage is to be procured. It is to resolve entanglements in existing activity . . ." (MW 14:139). Foresight of consequences is important in moral deliberation but it is used "to appraise present proposed actions" (MW 14:143, my emphasis). Even though occasionally we do dwell upon the effects of an action upon our future feelings, to make this the paradigm of all moral deliberation is to
make "an abnormal case the standard one" (MW 14:141). This is one of many reasons why to classify Dewey as a consequentialist is a grave mistake. Dewey did emphasize on consequences as a way to draw our attention away from notions of deliberation that appeal to a priori standards but this has been misinterpreted as presenting a view that centers on maximizing good consequences as the goal or the standard. Later in life Dewey became aware of this misunderstanding. Consequences, he says, are important not as such or by themselves but in their function as tests of ideas, principles, theories. It is possible that at times, in opposition to ipse dixit "intuitions" and dogmatic assertion of absolute standards, I have emphasized the importance of consequences so as to seem to make them supreme in and of themselves. If so, I have departed from my proper view, that of their use as tests of proposed ends and ideals. (LW 14:74)

Utilitarianism was the prime example of an intellectual movement affected by the current money-business culture. "Its general spirit of subordinating productive activity to the bare product was indirectly favorable to the cause of an unadorned commercialism" (MW 12:184) It modeled moral deliberation on the calculation of future profit and loss in economic activity. This calculative model represents a narrow and limited use of our deliberative capacities. Furthermore, their instrumental view of reasoning does not allow for the evaluation of ends, which is an important part of morality. Utilitarians should be praised for insisting "upon getting away from vague generalities, and down to the specific and concrete,"(MW 12:183), but they never questioned the idea that moral judgments must be based on some fixed criteria or final end. There is no genuine moral doubt ("no real and significant conflict," MW 14:149) about what to do when we know the end but
are only puzzled about the best means. Moral deliberation is experienced as a genuine search and discovery and it "is not an attempt to do away with this opposition of quality by reducing it to one of amount". (MW 14:150)

Because of the intellectualist fallacy and the recent linguistic "turn" in philosophy, moral judgments in ethical theory are often treated as, or simply equated with, propositions that are the result of other propositions. This process is conceived as one very similar to the linear process that occurs when we read a text or as when we read statements in an argument written in a logic textbook. But for Dewey, a judgment is not a proposition, a judgment is a practical "act", "affirmation", "assertion" that "in distinction from propositions which are singular, plural, generic and universal, is individual, since it is concerned with unique qualitative situations (LW 12: 283, my emphasis). As I have already mentioned and will continue to elaborate, for Dewey judgment and thought is qualitative. In his contextualism the control and guidance provided in inquiry by context is provided by the underlying and pervasive quality of a situation that is being transformed. It is not surprising then that for Dewey art, far from being problematic, is in fact the paradigm of all thinking. "Artistic thought is not however unique in this respect but only shows an intensification of a characteristic of all thought" (LW 5:251-252). What is presented in imagination in art and morality is judged by the same means that we judged overt experiments: by our direct qualitative experience. "In imagination as in fact we know a road only by what we see as we travel on it. . . .in thought as well as in overt action, the objects experienced in following a course of action attract, repel, satisfy, annoy, promote and retard" (MW 14:134).
Dewey used science and art as metaphors to understand moral deliberation. This served the purpose of highlighting the continuity between morality and other modes of experience as well as providing a description of moral deliberation as an experimental, emotional, and imaginative process. Dewey's early concerns to reconcile ethics with experimental science led him to investigate the ways in which scientific inquiry and moral inquiry can share a way of forming and justifying judgments (i.e., a general method). In his later works he came to rely more on an aesthetic model. This is most evident in his description of moral deliberation as a transformation into a unified consummatory experience and in his emphasis on the importance of the imagination and the emotions in this process. This is the aspect of Dewey’s view on moral deliberation that seems most radical, considering the predominance of sterile rationalistic accounts of moral deliberation in the history of moral philosophy. It is also the most promising, considering the recent developments in cognitive science on the role of metaphor, imagination, and emotion.  

For Dewey moral deliberation is not an intermediate phase where one moves from a conflict of qualitative material to a process of "cold reasoning" where qualities are transformed into quantities and propositions. Deliberation is not an intermediate phase where we close or suspend our access to the qualitative world. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to widen and enrich our qualitative experience. The access to the qualitative-richness of a situation is not limited to sense perception or observation. The function of imagination is to amplify perception, to open up the situation in ways that could assist us in coming to a judgment. Imagination “elicits the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual”(LW 10:348). It "puts before us objects which are not directly or
sensibly present, so that we then may react directly to these objects” (MW 14:139). The capacity to deliberate signifies the ability to take an experienced conflict of possible actions and place them in an imaginative field so that they can be judged in light of what is qualitatively revealed in that field. Deliberation "is an attempt to uncover the conflict in its full scope and bearing. …to reveal qualitative incompatibilities by detecting the different courses to which they commit us" (MW 14:150). Neither is deliberation a phase of cool-detached inactivity or indifference. If there is no unified extrovert response while we deliberate it is only because, to speak crudely, different things in the situation are pushing us in different directions. Since these tendencies towards action are present, though inhibited, during deliberation, the resulting choice "is not the emergence of preference out of indifference" (MW 14:134). Hence, in Dewey there is no need to postulate the "will" as a separate faculty which pushes the agent in the direction dictated by deliberation.

It is also worth noticing how Dewey’s account of how judgments are reached reverses the order assumed by many ethical theories. In these theories the final verdict about our “actual duty” (to use W.D. Ross’s term) in a situation is something that is derived after we have first analyzed and evaluated what are the competing prima facie principles in the situation. For Dewey there is a final verdict, but like the conclusion of any inquiry, it is something that gradually emerges and is prior to its premises. Dewey explains how formal conceptions of logic often fail to give the wrong impression about how we actually think.

We say of an experience of thinking that we reach or draw a conclusion.

Theoretical formulation of the process is often made in such terms as to
conceal effectually the similarity of "conclusion" to the consummating phase of every developing integral experience. These formulations apparently take their cue from the separate propositions that are premisses and the proposition that is the conclusion as they appear on the printed page. The impression is derived that there are first two independent and ready-made entities that are then manipulated so as to give rise to a third. In fact, in an experience of thinking, premisses emerge only as a conclusion becomes manifest. (LW 10:45)

When we are in a morally problematic situation we start with some immediate unreflective judgment about what is right. There is a direct qualitative judgment that precedes the more definite recognition of what particular features of the action contributes to its rightness. We engage in analysis, survey, and reasoning in order to examine (test) or revise this preliminary reaction. The overwhelming first impression comes first, it changes as inquiry proceeds, and it serves to guide the subsequent phases of analysis and discrimination. Dewey explains how all inquiry starts with a “hunch” or “impression” but this is not something psychical or psychological. It is the presence of a dominant quality in a situation as a whole.

To say I have a feeling or impression that so and so is the case is to note that the quality in question is not yet resolved into determinate terms and relations; it marks a conclusion without statement of the reasons for it, the grounds upon which it rests. It is the first stage in the development of explicit distinctions. All thought in every subject begins with just such an unanalyzed whole. (LW 5:248-249)
In moral deliberation the search for the reasons that grounds our overall impression about what is right must be a sincere survey of how the relevant features that make up a situation are related and it may lead to assertions about what makes a particular action right or wrong. Articulating in propositional form what traits or features of a situation sustain one’s moral judgment is key tojustifying ourselves to others and to invite them to consider for themselves the situation. In other words, it facilitates a more communal inquiry. More importantly, the phase of reflective analysis in moral deliberation may lead to a change in the overall qualitative judgment of what is right as inquiry proceeds.

In sum, deliberation is a process constituted by the same mutually dependent phases of doing and undergoing of any experimental and artistic process. The "doing" might be acting to gather more evidence or the active operations of recollection and exploration. There is “undergoing” in the form of a constant receptivity to what is revealed by our "doings" or the reactions of others engaged in the process. Receptivity to the underlying and pervasive quality of the situation as it is being transformed is what guides the direction of inquiry. This is, however, a very generic description of the process. Moral deliberation is said to be specifically about moral values. Let’s describe in more detail what goes on in moral deliberation in terms of judgments of value.

4. Valuing and Valuation

Moral deliberation results in a moral judgment -- a decision to act in one way or another. But judgments are not static. They continue throughout the entire deliberative process, and they are transformed as deliberation proceeds. Within this process, Dewey
distinguished between the direct judgments of value ("valuing") and the reflective judgments ("valuations").

The distinctions between valuing and valuation, between appreciation and criticism, and between play and work have as their basis two of the basic traits that appear in Experience and Nature: nature in its finalities (or consummations) and in its relations. Natural existences in their immediacy or qualitative existence have terminal qualities that are unduplicable, unrelated, and final. Immediate and terminal quality is something had and that can be pointed to, rather than known or captured in a description. An object, event, or person either has the immediate and terminal quality it has or it doesn't; there is not much else that can be said about that, qua having immediate quality. However, relations are also part of experience, so that any quality "may be referred to other things, it may be treated as an effect or as a sign" (LW 1:82). The significance of these distinct traits for inquiry is that there are two ways in which one can judge or apprehend anything in experience: in its immediacy (valuing) or in its relations to other things in experience (valuation). Valuing is the direct, spontaneous, and precognitive operation where we appreciate something by its immediate quality before it is subject to reflection. But once the value of something is reflectively considered it is being considered in light of its relations, i.e., in its connections as a means or as a sign. To think "is to look at a thing in its relations with other things" (LW 7:265). Reflection is comparative and attentive to conditions, relations of means and ends, consequences, implications and inferences. The reflective process of arriving at this kind of judgment of value is called valuation.
About “valuing”, Dewey could have said that things have "intrinsic" qualities and that some of these qualities are moral. But he was aware that in philosophy "intrinsic" is usually associated with what is necessary, permanent, or universally belonging to a thing in virtue of its essence. But when Dewey says a quality is "intrinsic" he means that the quality is experienced as belonging to a thing as a "brute matter of space-time existence" (LW 15:43). In this sense, he said, "all qualities whatever are ‘intrinsic’ to the things they qualify at the time and place of the occurrence of the latter-provided only the things in question do genuinely ‘have’ them." (LW 15:43) Hence, to claim that a particular promise-keeping act is "intrinsically" good or obligatory is just to say that it is experienced as having that quality at that specific time and place. In this sense, any experienced non-problematic good is, as it were, an "end in itself" until the occasion arises where a choice has to be made. Value comparisons and the notion of "better" or “worse” acquire their meaning in the context of a particular situation where a choice needs to be made. "In the abstract or at large, apart from the needs of a particular situation in which choice has to be made, there is no such thing as degrees or order of value" (MW 9:248).

Since anything in experience exists in relation with some other thing, it can always in principle be compared, used, and valued as a means to something else. This is why there are no mere or "essential" ends-in-themselves. This is the basis for Dewey's criticism of the dualism of fixed separation of means and ends in philosophy. Anything can be valuable both as a means and as an end and there is a significant loss when we can only appreciate something as a mere means. This is an important antidote to misconceptions of Dewey as a narrow instrumentalist. Dewey held that the instrumental
capacity of something will be enhanced if it is (or has been) previously appreciated on its own account. He explained that

If it is not, then when the time and place comes for it to be used as a means or instrumentality, it will be just that much handicapped. Never having been realized or appreciated for itself, one will miss something of its capacity as resource for other ends (MW 9:249).

Valuation emerges from valuing but they do not always converge. For example, I might not immediately value recycling, although I come to reflectively judge that it is a good practice. However, most of the situations that Dewey has in mind when he makes the distinction between valuing and valuation are those in which one of these judgments of value emerges, transforms, and is organically related to the other. When the terminal or immediate quality of a thing is enhanced because a process of judging it in its relations precedes it, then it acquires consummatory value. For example, my effort to understand and explore the benefits of recycling may actually transform my immediate experience of it.

Let’s consider an example about a controversial moral value. There are people that claim to experience in an immediate way (valuing) homosexual acts and persons as immoral or at least with some negative moral value. Among these people there may be disagreement about the particular moral value. For instance, are homosexual acts and people experienced as a vice, as the violation of a duty, or as just bad? I am, however, someone that has yet to experience any kind of negative moral value about homosexuality.
I will admit that, perhaps because I am heterosexual, I sometimes find homosexual acts immediately repugnant but definitively not in a moral sense.\(^8\) I have yet to have a single experience where I experience homosexuality with the same kind of immediate negative moral value that I usually experience when witnessing acts of injustice or when people harm others for fun. This makes me wonder if, perhaps, those against homosexuality on moral grounds are just confusing what are clearly two different kinds of experiences. This gives me the hope that in conversation I can make them become aware that their negative valuing, though real and genuine, is not of the moral kind. This may not be easy. It is not as if I can defend, or present them with, some definite criteria about what is and what is not a moral valuing. The best one can do when faced with this sort of disagreement is to invite and assist the person in making a sincere survey of their lived experiences and hope they will realize on their own that there is a qualitative difference among their valuing experiences about homosexuality and those other valuing experiences they have had in their lives that are distinctively moral. This is no different from the challenge of trying to make someone see on their own that there is a qualitative difference between their negative aesthetic valuing of a movie and their negative moral valuing. We are all vulnerable to sometimes failing to make or become aware of more subtle but important discriminations about what we immediately experience, but as Dewey says “Moral decline is on a par with the loss of that ability to make delicate distinctions, with the blunting and hardening of the capacity of discrimination”(LW 5:280).

Since I am a contextualist, I am open to the possibility that in a particular situation the homosexuality of a person or of an act is experienced as either contributing to what is
morally wrong or as being of negative moral value. But contrary to some people I have yet to experience any recurrent or meaningful connection between homosexuality and negative moral value. Therefore, my disagreement with people who object to homosexuality on moral grounds is not just at the valuing level. As much as I have reflectively considered (i.e., engaged in valuation) the issue I have yet to be convinced that there is anything morally wrong with homosexuality. None of the arguments that I have read, offered by others, or consider on my own have any validity. It is possible that in some future reflective consideration of the issue I will change my mind. If so, then it is also probable that I will also change my valuing about homosexuality. A change in the contrary direction is also a possibility. I may come to have new valuing experiences that may affect significantly my valuation.

For Dewey our valuing should be subject to constant and even intense criticism but critical reflection (inquiry) is not a contextless and rationalistic process that can guide itself by just logic and facts. My critical reflections about homosexuality may end up changing my valuing but it takes place, starts, and is guided by whatever valuing experiences I happen to have. In other words, valuation is not an impartial and rational process that requires that the immediate valuings be bracketed or left behind, perhaps because they are considered mere appearance or subjective. These valuings are not objects of knowledge (e.g., propositions) but they function as initial data and are regulative as moral deliberation proceeds. More about this in the next section. Let’s also not forget that what is revealed from the valuing standpoint (from the practical engaged point of view) is moral reality and not our “inner” moral feelings towards actions. As Dewey says, “It is not experience which is experienced, but nature-- stones, plants,
animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on” (LW 1:12). My valuing experience of an act of injustice as wrong is about a value that I find in the same world where I also find plants and stones. To dismiss the importance of valuing in inquiry because it is merely “subjective” or a mere psychological reaction is to assume a dualism or to presuppose the supremacy of the theoretical standpoint in revealing what is real.

Dewey’s view on judgments of value has important implications about the nature of moral disagreements and what resources are available to deal with them. Suppose I am having a dialogue with those that oppose homosexuality on moral grounds. Let us assume (and this is not a small assumption) that we are all fairly committed but open-minded individuals infused with the Deweyan democratic spirit to genuinely learn from each other (more about what this requires in Part Three). Each of us thinks that she is right, but we are willing to be convinced otherwise about the moral value of homosexuality. My role in this communal inquiry would be to try to convince others but, if Dewey is right, the challenge takes a lot more than argumentation. I must, of course, engage others as much as I can in some serious reflective examination of the issue. We should try to examine together possible arguments in favor of or against homosexuality in light of their logical validity. We have seen, however, that for Dewey, there is a lot more to deliberation than reasoning. We could imaginatively consider a variety of actual and possible cases (i.e., a “dramatic rehearsal”). There may also be a legitimate role for the use of stories, metaphors, and emotional appeals. Dewey is not naïve to think that even in the best of circumstances we will reach total agreement in our judgments. I am not even sure that one can actually change someone else’s moral stand on moral issues so easily. But unless the situation is one where an immediate consensus must be reached there is no
good reason to put so much emphasis on consensus as the outcome. It would be significant enough if at the end of the communal inquiry both parties recognize some of the weakness in their arguments. It would be even better if both sides have at least learned about some significant considerations that they had overlooked in reaching their judgments. Learning is at least happening. Outcome does matter, we do wish to convince others but, let’s face it, many times people do not change their minds about moral matters from one day to the next. It requires a longer process of gestation where the objections listened to or the new considerations learned in a conversation may gradually tend to erode how convinced one is about some moral issue. In any case, if Dewey is right, valuation is not enough. To significantly effect or change the stand of someone on some moral issue requires more than changing “their minds” (i.e., valuation). What good is it to have convinced some one intellectually that there is no good argument against homosexuality if in their everyday moral engagement they continue to immediately experience it as always wrong (i.e. valuing)?

For Dewey learning and deepening our appreciation of values requires that there be a mutually affecting and beneficial relation between valuing and valuation. This presupposes that one has the sort of character that allows this to happen. There may be people whose valuings are usually at odds or unaffected by their more reflective valuations, in other words, are unable to learn and improve their value experiences. In Chapter 11 I will be concerned with what it takes to have the ideal sort of character. But was Dewey naïve about the actual power of valuation in affecting valuing? We all know that emotional or unconscious prejudices sometimes run so deep that no amount or quality of reflection may make any difference. Dewey can accept this possibility, but it is
also important to mention that he did not think the only way to change valuing is through valuation. As much faith as he had in reflection he recognized the power of changes in one’s environment (e.g. in the tools we use or our communal rituals) to change valuing. These changes must still be subject to criticism and reflection to be justified but this opens the doors to more effective ways of effecting moral change in our society than just dialogue or reflection. Women have come to be experienced as the moral equals of men (valuing), not just as a result of philosophical arguments that prove their moral equality (valuation), but as an indirect result of a change in actual social and economical conditions. The development of new technologies (such as birth control) has contributed to putting women in social roles that have affected how men experience them (i.e., their valuing). Sometimes changes in environmental conditions are more effective than the best well argued objections to provoke the sort of criticism that is needed to change peoples valuing. It could be argued, for example, that it was not until Louis Braille worked out his basic 6-dot system for the blind (to communicate, read, and participate more fully in society) that many people reconsider the immediate valuing of the blind as idiots (or as not deserving of the respect and dignity as other humans).  

In estimating the power of valuation over valuing in changing moral judgments it makes a difference how one conceives the role of reasons and arguments in moral deliberation. In the process of reflectively considering the moral value of homosexuality we can exchange arguments but is the goal and hope of such an exchange that others will reach our conclusion by making a logical inference from certain premises? We do not change people’s judgments by this sort of process because this is just not how reflective judgments are reached. The way we can contribute and affect someone’s else’s reflective
judgments of value is not by reasoning alone but by bringing up considerations (reasons) that they may not have considered. Reasons are suggested as considerations “to look for” in the survey of one’s situation and not as simply premises in an argument. Arguments are important but they are just one of the resources available to make others re-examine on their own the subject matter to be judged. It is part of the method proposed by Dewey to extend an invitation to others and provide the conditions by which they can have the experiences that confirm or reject our assertions. You may also contribute to someone’s “dramatic rehearsal” by provoking him or her to consider similar cases or perhaps even adopt an imaginary impartial standpoint. None of these resources may in the end be effective in a particular communal inquiry but Dewey’s view of what it takes to be reflective about value is more heterogeneous and resourceful than the anemic rationalistic conceptions of moral deliberation and intelligence that predominate in ethical theory.

Dewey held that an organic relation between valuing and valuation can lead to the kind of integration of means and ends present in artistic activity. This is an ideal of human conduct that I will have the opportunity to explore later. For now, it is important to appreciate that it is the possibility of a dynamic and integrative relation between valuing and valuation which explains why for Dewey moral life is a process of creating or transforming value, and not merely of accepting and living by given or former values. The process by which valuing are subject to reflection (valuation) has as its end an enhanced valuing or appreciation. In valuation "former goods are subjected to judgment" but "the end of judgment is to reinstate some immediate value" (MW 13:6). Here is how Dewey explains this transformative process,
The new value, dependent upon judgment, is, when it comes, as immediate a good or bad as anything can be. But it is also an immediate value of a plus sort. The prior judgment has affected the new good not merely as its causal condition but by entering into its quality. The new good has an added dimension of value. (MW 13:6)

Dewey emphasized the importance of valuation because in a precarious world the relations of events in experience are primary to our interest in control. Moreover, to acknowledge valuation is to recognize that moral values can be subject to reflective-intelligent criticism and are not subjective or arbitrary. However, one must not underestimate the importance for Dewey of value that is immediately had and non-reflective. Valuing is important because after all, "the realm of immediate qualities contains everything of worth and significance" (LW 1:94).

Criticism and reflection depend for their material resources upon the problematic context that is immediately had, and upon prior direct appreciations; but their ultimate function is a qualitative transformation. "Appreciation, or taste, must supply the material for criticism, while the worth of criticism is tested by its power to function in a new appreciation which has enhancement, new depth, and range of meaning because of the criticism"(MW 13:7, my emphasis). Criticism and reflection ("an examined life") are important constituents of moral life because they are capable of enriching its immediate quality and not because they lead us to the Truth or to actualize some essence. This will be important to understand his normative moral vision.
Before I consider in more detail the function of valuing and valuation in the context of moral inquiry I must make some very general but important qualifications.\textsuperscript{10} Empiricism commits one to begin with "situations having value-quality"(LW 2:73) and not with "value" as something independent. Moreover, strictly speaking what we find in experience are not values as such. He said pointedly that,

Speaking literally, there are no such things as values. ... There are things, all sorts of things, having the unique, the experienced, but indefinable, quality of value. Values in the plural, or a value in the singular, is merely a convenient abbreviation for an object, event, situation, res, possessing the quality. (MW 15:20)

"Value" is an abstract and vague term that can be used to refer to qualities beyond those that are moral (e.g., aesthetic and prudential value), and even within the “moral” ones one can make some finer discriminations. Dewey often adopted this manner of speaking because it provided him the level of generality that he needed to assume in such works as Experience and Nature and the Logic. It also served the purpose of criticizing the theories of values that were current.\textsuperscript{11} However, to take Dewey’s theory of value, as it appears in such places as Theory of Valuation (LW 13:189-254) and the chapter “The Construction of the Good” in The Quest for Certainty (LW 4) as central or as good summaries of Dewey’s mature moral thought is a mistake. These general and abstract discussions about value leave out or do not do justice to what is explicitly recognized in his 1930 essay “Three Independent Factors in Morals”: that there are at least three distinct and incommensurable qualities designated by “moral value.” This pluralistic view of moral values will be taken for granted as we proceed to consider the function of
valuing and valuation in moral deliberation and the nature of the resolution of this process.

5. The Function of Valuing and Valuation in Moral Deliberation

The distinction between valuing and valuation has to be understood in terms of their function in the process of moral inquiry. Valuing and valuation correspond to undergoing and doing phases that hold a mutually supporting and effective relation in the process of transforming a morally problematic situation.

Valuation arises because valuing turns problematic, that is, "experience raises the question whether the object in question is what our esteem or disesteem took it to be" (LW 7:264). Therefore, it is not always the case that "qualitative immediacy is subject to judgment" (LW 15:80). But once some doubt arises valuing judgments provide the initial material for deliberation. Although they are immediate and precede the more reflective operations of inquiry we cannot assume "that they are always superficial and immature" (LW 5:250). For when they proceed from a well developed character they are judgments funded by previous experience. Dewey explains that "they may also sum up and integrate prolonged previous experience and training, and bring to a unified head the results of severe and consecutive reflection" (LW 5:250). It is important to understand that in making the distinction between valuing and valuation we are discriminating between phases of a continuous process.

If there is in direct valuing an element of recognition of the properties of the thing or person valued as ground for prizing, esteeming, desiring, liking, etc., then the difference between it and explicit evaluation is one of emphasis and degree, not of fixed kinds. Ap-praising then represents a
more or less systematized development of what is already present in prizing" (LW 15:105).

The move towards a more reflective judgment and phase of an inquiry is not a jump to a separated objective domain or to receiving the guidance of a reality independent of experience. Instead, “when it is said that a thing cognized is different from an earlier non-cognitionally experienced thing, the saying no more implies lack of continuity between the things, than the obvious remark that a seed is different than a flower” (MW 3:166). Valuation (the “flower”) emerges from within the same initial valuing situation (the “seed”) that provoked it. An initial conflicting or disturbed valuing experience evokes reflection (valuation) and guides the possible solutions to be tried out. Any eventual correction or improvement of a present experience comes from the same experience in need of reconstruction. Dewey’s empiricism is committed to the view that “whatever gain in clearness, in fullness, in trueness of context is experienced must grow out of some element in the experience of this experienced as what it is” (MW 3:164). This became the basis of Dewey’s faith in experience. We need to trust the potential of any present experience to carry the seed of its own transformation. We detect and correct illusoriness “because the thing experienced is real, having within its experienced reality elements whose own mutual tension effects its reconstruction” (MW 3:164). If a moral problem has a solution, it must emerge from guiding our inquiry by its initial direct and unique problematic character. It is not true that without some external criteria of right and wrong we are lost and cannot transform the situation.

This early insight was later refined and elaborated as Dewey became more interested in the logic of artistic construction and appreciation. The initial immediate
experience of a work of art as, for example, “good” is “relatively dumb and inarticulate yet penetrating” (LW 5:249). It is neither knowledge nor a mere state of a personal feeling, but it is an initial valuing that serves as the reliable basis (“the seed”) to any subsequent reflective analysis that may or may not result in confirming, rejecting, or enhancing the original valuing experience. In this process we examine and sometimes even make some subtle discriminations about what makes that particular thing aesthetically good, but to then take these reflective discriminations as criteria or determinant of its quality is to commit the philosophical fallacy. Granted, analysis of why things are good may help me enhance my immediate experience of their goodness but what is primary and the ultimate test of value is their immediate qualitative value. Dewey makes this clear in art,

Upon subsequent analysis, we term the properties of a work of art by such names as symmetry, harmony, rhythm, measure, and proportion. These may, in some cases at least, be formulated mathematically. But the apprehension of these formal relationships is not primary for either the artist or the appreciative spectator. The subject-matter formulated by these terms is primarily qualitative, and is apprehended qualitatively. Without an independent qualitative apprehension, the characteristics of a work of art can be translated into explicit harmonies, symmetries, etc., only in a way which substitutes mechanical formulae for esthetic quality. (LW 5:251)

We have examined the nature of the transition between valuing and valuation in moral inquiry but what brings about the resolution? How do we know we have arrived at
a final judgment? It is no different than in the process of artistic production. In both moral and artistic activities the agent is engaged in a process of continually shaping and reshaping (doing and undergoing) until she qualitatively appreciates that the present product (a course of action or a work of art) meets the demands presented by the developing situation that has been explored. When this happens, the experienced relation between one=s product and the context can be described as one of "fittingness," "appropriateness," to the situation. In other words, the final judgment that "I ought to do X" is the qualitative appreciation and assertion that, in light of the terrain imaginatively explored, this is the act that is morally called for by the situation, and not the deduction from propositions or from a universal criterion. To acquire the habits capable of making these kinds of context-sensitive judgments is to have practical wisdom (moral intelligence).

Notice what this entails. The qualitative instructions telling whether one has come close to fulfillment in aesthetic and moral activity are not to be found outside of the particular unique qualitative situation that is experienced as needing transformation. "The making comes to an end when its result is experienced as good--and that experience comes not by mere intellectual and outside judgment but in direct perception"(LW 10:56). In a morally problematic situation, there is no preestablished formula, indicator, or criteria that we can rely on to discriminate which act "is called for" by a particular situation or whether our inquiry is headed in the wrong direction. The traditional quest in ethics and aesthetics for some ultimate criteria of “right” and “good” neglects that the situation itself can give the agent a pervading qualitative sense of relevance and satisfactory closure during the process of reconstruction.
Let’s consider next a philosophical debate about value that is usually based on neglecting the situational context that guides our judgments.

6. Value and the Objectivist-Subjectivist Debate

Are moral “values” objective? This issue is important because it seems that a negative answer would commit us to the view that morality is not something to be taken as serious, or at least as valid as other areas of experience. Dewey was committed to defend the metaphysical and logical objectivity of morality on empirical grounds, but he was opposed to the sort of metaphysical realism “that locates ‘objectivity’ of value in ‘objects’ that are so-called because of lack of any connection whatever with human behavior” (LW 15:63). On the other hand, he affirmed his “opposition to those views which admit a human factor in values, but which interpret it in such a way that the result is skeptical denial of the possibility of any genuine judgments about them” (LW 15:63).

In the metaphysical or ontological understanding of the issue of objectivity, “objective” is equated with what is real. But this presupposes the same dualism that underlies the realism versus non-realist debates. Moral values are either “out there” in the “objective” world, understood as an antecedent independent reality that we do not affect, or they are in “our heads,” understood either as in a person or in their culture or society. We do not get caught up in this issue if, as Dewey, we start with the primacy of lived situational experience and not with this inner/outer picture.

Objectivity about moral values seems impossible if it requires that there be a self outside the course of events that does not affect anything. The self as an organism is one among other things in transaction in a situation, it therefore makes a difference as to what qualities emerge in experience but that does not mean that qualities “inhere exclusively in
the subject; or as posing the problem of a distortion of the real object by a knower set over against the world” (MW 10:26). Discriminating our contribution to having certain experiences is something we can do in the efforts to study the conditions of having them. “The ‘subjective’ factor (using the word to designate the operations of an acculturated organism) is, like ‘objective’ physical subject-matter a condition of experience” (LW 14:199). That, for example, one’s character is usually one of the conditions of what is qualitatively had in valuing experiences does not warrant concluding that values are subjective. To make this mistake is to commit the philosophical fallacy, it is the "conversion of a condition of an event into an inherent property of the event itself" (LW 15:75).

Of course, Dewey cannot hold the view that there can be universal agreement about a fixed set of values regardless of who we are or what characters we bring to situations. But this does not make him a subjectivist, though perhaps a kind of relativist: relativism to situations and to the factors that come to constitute it. However, this is an "objective" relativism in the sense that things do have the value-qualities we experience them to have. According to the postulate of immediate empiricism things are what they are experienced as. Valuing "judgments" are experienced as qualities found in a particular situation (as manifestations of nature) and not "subjective" projections, the content of ones consciousness, or the manifestation of the culture one belongs to. If I experience x as morally repugnant in a particular context, then it is morally repugnant even if later I come up with the hypothesis that I would have experienced it differently had other attitudes been present or had I been some other person. Perhaps humans would not experience acts of cruelty as wrong if they were not brought up in a certain way, but this
does not make these acts less wrong when they are experienced as such. It is puzzling why anyone would find this sort of relativism objectionable in morals but not in regard to other non-moral qualities. For example, colors are also "relative" in the sense we would not experience them if we did not bring into a perceptual situation certain optical organs and perhaps the learning of a particular language. But this is not usually considered problematic, and we all admit that there can be genuine disagreement about the color of things.

The reality of moral values has been considered problematic on other grounds. John Mackie, for example, held that moral values couldn’t be objective, i.e., “part of the fabric of the world” because if they were they would have to be very strange things. If one starts with the assumption of a value-less world, then moral values as qualities would indeed seem “queer” sort of entities. From this metaphysical outlook all judgments of values are suspect and in need of an explanation. Mackie explains it in terms of how humans project values onto the world and learn to live with the deception that they are objective. Other philosophers have accounted for value judgments in terms of how a subject applies some criterion upon the more “natural” traits of things. In other words, value qualities and judgments must supervene or be derived from the more “objective” traits of the world, otherwise the alternative seems to be the sort of emotivism that makes value judgments mere expressions of our subjective preferences.

For Dewey, of course, there is no need for an explanation. The only thing “queer” about value is how anyone could question their existence. For, in so far as value is a term that points to what is directly and immediately qualitative, everything is value-laden. In particular, moral judgments are as “natural” and as descriptive of the “objective” world as
any other judgment. Moral qualities are not experienced as things added to a world that is morally neutral. This is, at best, a theory. To be sure, the fact that we find ourselves in a moral-value-qualitative world does not mean that, as implied by some forms of objectivism, we can only copy what we find. As said earlier, inquiry does have the power to change what we directly perceive (judge) as valuable, but what has been transformed is the same objective world of tables and chairs.

In general it is a favoritism towards objects of knowledge that have discredited the objectivity and reality of moral experience. Contributing to this is a particularly narrow conception of knowledge where science and math are the models of “objective” discourse. This reflects deep seated dualisms where science and art are at the extreme end of each of the poles. On this view art is clearly subjective since it is concerned with expression and creation of values, whereas science is the discovery of what is the case independently of human values. Dewey explains how this picture makes moral values especially problematic and provides the basis of the subjectivism versus objectivism debate.

Between these two realms, one of intellectual objects without value and the other of value-objects without intellect, there is an equivocal mid-country in which moral objects are placed, with rival claimants striving to annex them either to the region of purely immediate goods…or to that of purely rational objects. (LW 1:304)

This general picture is based on misconceptions about science and art, as well as of the general activities of discovery and creativity. It assumes that we either discover the world as a pure passive spectator of an antecedent reality or we construct it in the sense
of inventing or making it out of nothing. But discovering and creating are two mutually
dependent phases of any inquiry and are not such pure things. Artistic activity requires
receptivity, paying close attention to “the grain of things”, discovering the qualities of the
raw materials to be transformed. On the other hand, discovery requires selective
searching and plenty of creative ingenuity. Dewey’s view of scientific inquiry is one in
which not even “facts” are given in the sense of being antecedent to human interest or
contextual purposes. Similarly, in morality there is both discovery and creation of value;
this was implicit in how I explained the dynamic relation between valuing and valuation
in moral inquiry.

There is also a more epistemological or logical aspect to the issue of objectivity.
The objectivity of moral values has been questioned on the basis of their validity or
genuineness as judgments. How can moral values be “objective” if there is so much
disagreement about them and there is no objective (“Archemedian standpoint”) means to
settle them?

Is there really more disagreement about moral values than there is about other
qualities in experience? This is an empirical issue. It is true that the conditions for
aesthetic and moral qualities, in comparison with other qualities, are less stable and
uniform, and that their apprehension depends heavily on how the agent participates (i.e.,
as one of its conditions). Dewey admitted this. "In the case of aesthetic and moral goods,
the causal conditions which reflection reveals as determinants of the good object are
found to lie within organic constitution in greater degree than is the case with object of
belief” (LW 1:320). It is also true that moral and aesthetic qualities cannot be measured,
quantified, or subject to predictive control. But this cannot be taken as evidence of the
subjectivism and arbitrary character of these dimensions of our experience. From Dewey's point of view, that disagreement and change is more common in moral and aesthetic matters is something to be expected. But this was not for him a fall from grace, because he did not believe that only if moral values are universal and absolute should morality be taken seriously. On the contrary, the complexity of our moral and aesthetic experiences is a reason why we must be more sensitive, careful, and thoughtful in our judgments and why we must study their conditions.

More than the purported fact of disagreement, what seems to raise doubts about the objectivity of morals is presumably the lack of any “objective” means to resolve them. As Sydney Hook observed, “The most common objection to naturalistic humanism is not that it has no place for moral experience but that it has no place for an authoritative moral experience.”16 If there is no authoritative “Archimedean standpoint” and no criteria-based procedure to settle disagreements about morals, then moral values are subjective. For Dewey this is a false dilemma. Disagreement in morals (when they are in the need to be resolved) can only be handled in the same way as other disagreements in everyday experience. We can engage in a common inquiry that appeals to experience, i.e., that guides itself by the same problematic situation in which the disagreement is embedded. This, of course, assumes that the people involved have some of the virtues (habits) needed for this task. (We will have more to say about these virtues later). In experimental inquiry in science, art, and morals the general method is the same: we try to change each other judgments (and are open to modify our own) by consulting “objective” features of our situation. Closer attention to the situation and use of our shared present resources rather than trying somehow to step outside of it is the key to guidance.
Reaching some agreement about some general rules (e.g., about what usually makes actions right) may help carry inquiry along in some cases, but they are not to replace judgment, which, as already explained, is unique and qualitative. Even if in science there is usually more quantifiable means to test hypotheses and resolve disagreements than in morals, that does not make scientific thought less qualitative and morality subjective. In science, art, and morals we can guide others towards having experiences in a situation but outside of discourse that can confirm or reject out hypotheses.

The opposition between objectivism and subjectivism in value theory was one more instance of the "common occurrence in the histories of theories that an error at one extreme calls out a complementary error at the other extreme" (LW 13:240). The subjectivist starts with the assumption of isolated desires as sources of valuation. Therefore, there is nothing to test values, no possibility of intellectual control; they are rendered arbitrary. This evokes a contrary theory, one in which values are "ends-in-themselves" or outside of experience. "This theory, in its endeavor to escape from the frying pan of disordered valuations, jumps into the fire of absolutism"(LW 3:241). From Dewey's standpoint, in spite of the opposition, the error is the same: both assume the "same fundamental postulate of the isolation of valuation from concrete empirical situations"(LW 13:241). Without the qualitative context of a situation there is no basis in experience for control, guidance, and experimentation in regard to values; we must either go outside of experience for a standard or make values subjective. Subjectivism troubled Dewey because it made criticism, appreciation, and cultivation in matters of value arbitrary or absurd. But for Dewey "educated interest or taste is, ultimately supreme, the
unum necessarium, in morals"(LW 2:76). And "The saying ‘De gustibus, non disputandum’ . . .is either just a maxim of politeness or a stupid saying"(LW 2:95).

Subjectivist views take value as identical with being enjoyed or desired. But as we have already stressed valuings are about things in the world and not mere reports of our "internal" emotional state. Valuing judgments can turn problematic, and then become subject to "objective" criticism (i.e., valuation) without having to appeal to anything outside of experience. Inquiry into relations and conditions is applicable to valuings as it is to scientific subject matter. To be sure, value judgments differ from other judgments in their subject matter and in the usual importance they have in directing conduct, but there is nothing inherent in the nature of values that precludes them from the general method of inquiry. Hence, intelligent-objective criticism of existing values is possible even if it is always relative to what is available in the particular situation and not from a "God's eye point of view."

Today, one could argue that any proposal for an “objective” means to resolve moral disagreements is seriously challenged by the growing awareness of how radical is the disagreement at a global level. The “in eliminable diversity of moral convictions among the people’s of the earth”17 seems to support a cultural moral relativism. Cultural relativism is in a better position than the subjectivist to propose something to settle disagreements. According to this view, moral judgments are not mere expressions of our subjective preferences but neither are they representations of an antecedent reality. Instead, moral judgments are ultimately grounded in the present standards of a community. The existence of these standards provides a stable enough basis to at least settle intra-cultural disagreements, so moral judgments are not totally arbitrary. It is
another matter whether moral relativism has much to offer when it comes to moral disagreement across cultures or societies, especially when their view is predicated on the assumption that moral incompatibilities among group of humans are radical in the sense of incommensurable. Some moral relativists, aware of this challenge, have proposed ways to settle conflict that are coherent with their views. One tactic, is to suggest an “objective” way to deal with cross-cultural conflict that is based on prudential reasons that the conflicting parties can accept. According to Joseph Margolis, the best we can hope for is “to find whatever viable forms of practical tolerance may help us avoid the worst imagined disasters.”18 The quest for “neutral” non-moral grounds to resolve irresolvable moral conflict among a plurality of moral traditions is common in the history of political liberalism. One could question the moral “neutrality” of such proposals and the underlying assumption that humans agree more on prudential than on moral grounds.

Is Dewey in a better position than the moral relativist in proposing something positive or promising that could settle radical moral disagreements without presupposing cognitive privilege (as in traditional forms of objectivism)? One could argue that because of the way Dewey conceives moral disagreement, he has more resources to offer. Many philosophers (including objectivists and relativist) assume that moral disagreement is an opposition or conflict between moral convictions or judgments as norms or propositions that are either true or false. This starting point determines the range of options available in order to ameliorate moral disagreement. The inquiry centers on the plausibility of possible ways to adjudicate between conflicting propositions or belief systems. Is there something that makes moral propositions true or false outside of ones culturally inherited moral norms?
Since Dewey has an entirely different starting point, moral disagreement happens in a situation, so that even if people in moral disagreement do not share beliefs, they share the situation of unique and particular disagreement (something that is outside of discourse and any propositional content). If we start with moral conflict as a situation that is experienced by participants as having the quality of radical disagreement (a quality that is unique to every such conflict), then that starting point opens the possibility of more shared present resources for amelioration. We thus start with more that we can rely on than our moral beliefs and languages. Even if one cannot convince others by arguments, or test their convictions by reasoning, one could guide others outside of the discourse to have certain experiences. This is not a sure thing. Our experiences may still be very different, but there is also the possibility of guiding a dialogue by the unique unsettlingly quality of the situation of disagreement. For Dewey, if there is any hope to ameliorate the situation, it most come “from within” the same indeterminate situation.

It is not my purpose here to demonstrate the superiority of Dewey’s view over relativism or objectivism. Instead, my goal has been to show why any full consideration of Dewey in the on-going debates in ethics must confront the most basic assumptions about the nature of moral disagreements, judgments and the starting point of philosophical inquiry. As much as Dewey shares with moral relativists, for him moral judgments are not derivations from general norms of warrant, generated in the context of intersubjective discourse. This would leave out situations, the concrete non-cognitive and non-linguistic context in which these norms and discourse are found and can be tested. “Any one who refuses to go outside the universe of discourse…has of course shut himself off from understanding what a “situation,” as directly experienced subject-
matter is.” (LW 14:30-31). This is why Dewey would be suspicious of the preoccupation of some Neopragmatists with the norms of warrant within conceptual schemes. As David Hildebrand has recently argued, they share a “theoretical approach that makes “language games” or “conceptual schemes” more basic to inquiry than life or “situations.” For Dewey, if there are “norms of warrant,” then experienced situations are their ultimate measure, and such situations always overflow present formulas. Our present formulas are constrained, facilitated, and guided in unpredictable ways by a qualitative world that never appears as such within discourse or inquiry. Inquiry and judgment of better or worse are controlled by reference to a situation.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. See (MW 9:172-4). This is what James referred to as the "double barreled" aspect of experience. Double-barreled in that "it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality" (LW 1:18).

2. For a recent skeptic that there can be a pre-theoretical designation of moral problems see Alasdair McIntyre, "Moral Dilemmas" Philosophical Phenomenological Research 50 (1990), 382.

3. Dewey makes this same point, though using a different example in "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism"(MW 3:158-167). Contrast this with, for example, R.M. Hare, in Moral Thinking he claims “If I am suffering, I know that I am suffering”, 92.

4. This example is in "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism" (MW 3:158-167).
5. This pluralism is not evident in Dewey’s discussions about value in general, like for example, in his “Theory of Valuation” (LW 13:189-254).

6. For more on this important tenet of Dewey see Tom Burke, *Dewey’s New Logic: A Reply to Russell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).


8. There are some interesting questions that I cannot address here about the nature of my own or anyone else’s non-moral negative valuing of homosexual acts. Do I really find homosexual acts repugnant? Or is it that I find the thought of my engaging in such acts as repugnant? Is it really a “repugnance” or merely an “aversion” to my engaging in a homosexual relationship, just like homosexuals experience an aversion to a heterosexual relationship? In any case, the important point is that none of these possibilities have anything to do with immediate moral disvalue.


10. Just as with ‘experience’, Dewey wrestled with the ambiguities and associations of ‘value’ as a philosophical term. See for example "The Meaning of Value" (LW 2:69-77). In *The Quest For Certainty* (LW 4:207) he restricted the term ‘value’ to what results from valuation, perhaps hoping to avoid misunderstanding of his view for subjectivism: the identification of enjoyment with value. The same thing happened with his use of “judgment”. In some of his writings “judgment” was a term he used only for “valuation” and not “valuing.”
11. In *Theory of Valuation* and *Quest for Certainty* Dewey is able to attack subjectivistic (emotivism) and transcendental-objective views of morality and art in one same stroke.

12. Dewey claims that “To grasp this aspect of empiricism is to see what the empiricist means by objectivity” (MW 3:163).

13. For a recent article defending this Deweyan naturalism and distinguishing from other contemporary versions see John Teehan, "In Defense of a Naturalism" *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 10 (2) (1996), 79-89.


15. For example, see Gilbert Harman's *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).


20. Hildebrand *Beyond Realism & Anti-Realism*, 154.