

1 Notes: Central Ideas of John Dewey: The best test of the value of philosophy is to ask, "Does it end in conclusions, which, when refer back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us and make our dealings with them more fruitful."

A. Spectator vs. Experience:

1. Empiricists: assumption that thinking refers to fixed things in nature; for every idea there is a corresponding something in reality.
2. Rationalists: The mind is viewed as instrument for considering what is fixed & certain nature. Too fixed, too mechanical.
3. Humanity as a biological organism best understood in relation to environment. Struggle for survival (crude);
4. humanity enmeshed in a dialectical process with natural environment.
5. Dewey's starting point is experience: connecting humanity as a dynamic biological entity with its precarious environment.
6. If humanity & environment a dynamic, spectator-type theory of knowledge will not work.
7. Mind is not a fixed substance nor is knowledge a static set of concepts. Rather,
8. Intelligence is the power one possesses to cope with one's environment.
9. Philosophizing is a mode of human behavior; it arises in certain contexts than others; and it should be judged in terms of its capacity to meet the challenge of the very conditions which give rise to it.
10. Rationalism & Empiricism separate thinking from doing whereas instrumentalism holds that reflective thought is always involved in transforming a practical situation.
11. Dewey replaced problem of truth with problem of value. He replaced the question, "What is true?" with, "what conclusion, considering the conditions of the problem which gives rise to our thinking at all, is the one which we ought to come out with?"

A. Spectator vs. Experience. Earlier philosophy confused true nature & function of knowledge.

1. Empiricists had assumed that thinking refers to fixed things in nature, that for each idea there is a corresponding something in reality. It is as though knowing is modeled after what is supposed to happen when we look at something. This is called "*spectator theory of knowledge*." Thus, to see something is to have an idea of it.
2. Rationalists argues that the object of thought exists in reality. In either case, the mind was viewed as an instrument 4 considering what is fixed & certain in nature. Nature is one thing & mind another, & knowing is the relatively simple activity of looking, as a spectator does, @ what is there. Critique: (a) Too static (fixed); (b) Too mechanical.
3. Dewey looked upon humanity as a biological organism [influenced by Darwin] As such humans can best be understood in relation to their environment: (a) Struggle for Survival; b. Humanity as enmeshed in a dialectic process (He gave up his early Hegelian orientation), not Hegel's conflict of ideas, but a conflict in the material or natural environment; (c) Philosophizing is a mode of human behavior; it arises in contexts rather than others & it should be judged in terms of its capacity to meet the challenge of the very conditions which give rise to it.
4. Dewey's starting point is experience, a concept he employed for connecting humanity as a dynamic biological entity with its precarious environment. If both humanity & its environment are dynamic, it is clear that a simple spectator-type theory of knowledge will not work. *Dewey replaced problem of truth with problem of value.* **(a). He rejected metaphysics because it really makes no difference at all so far as progress of man's intelligent control of nature is concerned; (b) metaphysical thinking makes a very great deal of difference-for the worse since it blocks inquiry, makes philosophy dogmatic & stagnant, & close's minds to possibilities inherent in natural science.**
5. The mind (specifically intelligence) is not a fixed substance & knowledge is not a static set of concepts. Rather, intelligence is the power one possesses to cope with one's environment.
6. Thinking is not an individual act carried on in private, in isolation from practical problems. Thinking, or active intelligences, arises in "*problem situations*"; thinking and doing are intimately related.
7. All thinking has 2 aspects: **"A perplexed, trouble or confused situation at the beginning [tension] and a cleared up, unified, resolved situation at the close [consummation that leads to a release]."** Thinking is the act of trying to achieve an adjustment between man & environment; it is not a quest for truth as if truth were a static & eternal quality in things.
8. His theory is Instrumentalism: *(a) Emphasizes our thinking is always instrumental in solving problems; (b) Mind doesn't know simply individual things; (c) Mind functions as a mediator between humanity as an organism, as a participant, and its environment; (d) The mind spreads itself over a range of things as these bear upon the person's desires, doubts, & dangers.* Knowing may very well consists of a "*cognitive act*", of an activity in the mind, but the full description of knowing must include the environmental origin of the problem or situation that calls for the cognitive act. In this way, instrumentalism differs from empiricism & rationalism. Whereas the latter 2 theories separate thinking & doing, instrumentalism holds that reflective thought is always involved in transforming a practical situation.
9. Dewey had no respect for those who approached problems "*from the top down.*" Philosophy had far too long sought justifications, esp. political philosophy, in elaborate metaphysical doctrines. No. Thinking (or intellection), for him, is a form of activity engaged in a by a human biological organism whenever habitual patterns of action are disrupted.