

COMMUNICATIONS

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Comment on Donnie J. Self's "Inconsistent Presuppositions of Dewey's Pragmatism"***

The purpose of this brief response is to show that Self's analysis is an unacceptable one.

First, Self remarks that, for Dewey, "values are allowed no ontological or metaphysical status, i.e., values are not thought to exist in and of themselves independently of being experienced."¹ This is at best to say only that they have no reality — no ontological or metaphysical status — as the *antecedent realities of traditional idealisms and realisms*.² They do have a reality, an ontological status, however. As Dewey makes clear, there is value, the experience of value, and while one can refer to it as an "affective-conative state that one experiences or undergoes when in evaluative or emotive circumstances,"³ this (a) does not make it any the less real in a naturalistic account than are physical objects. Also, for Dewey, one has to say that an important thing is (b) investigation into just what circumstances give rise to valued and valuable affective-conative states. As Self perhaps unwittingly notes, there *are circumstances* for value experience. Dewey calls these circumstances "transactions" — a type of relation which harbors value and is no less real than that which is related.⁴

Second, to this point another needs to be added about Self's attendant and equally misguided charge of the "subjectivism" of the value experience. This charge is a *charge* only when one is assuming the old idealist and realistic perspectives which can conceive of the purely or merely subjective as the logical opposite of the purely objective. For Dewey's view, subjective experience is an objective fact, intersubjectively investigatable. This is not a paradoxical notion except on the older dualistic schemes. Now it is true that Dewey does not think that we have fully a "science" of these subjective states, but he sees nothing theoretically precluding our developing such.⁵

Third, there is Self's reference to "Dewey's elimination of the notion of intrinsic values and [his] replacement of it by only instrumental values."⁶ Two

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¹Self, Donnie J., "Inconsistent Presuppositions of Dewey's Pragmatism," *The Journal of Educational Thought*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (August, 1976), p. 102.

²Dewey's most savage attack on the doctrines of "antecedent reality" is found in *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1929). See the first three chapters, in particular.

³Self, *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴Dewey, John, "The Field of 'Value,'" in Ray Lepley (Ed.), *Value: A Cooperative Inquiry*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949). Pp. 68-69.

⁵Cf. *ibid.*, p. 77; "Theory of Valuation," *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, II, No. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939). Pp. 57-66.

⁶Self, *ibid.*, p. 102.

observations are in order here. Self totally ignores Dewey's discussions of consummatory acts, experiences, and prizings/values.⁷ The other observation is that Self is rather obviously unaware of Dewey's and others' attempts to come to grips with a certain intelligible sense that "intrinsic" can and should have in a naturalistic theory. I take the following to be worthy for showing (a) Dewey's concern with this and (b) Dewey's whole-hearted rejection of Self's contention about there being only instrumental values. The quotation begins with a criticism of the position Self seems to be adopting.

The practical consequences of theories which separate means and ends with respect to the value they possess are two-edged. On one side, their import is to render so-called "ends," in the degree of their ultimacy, "ideal" in the most utopian, sentimental, empty and important sense of that word. They are not only so "ultimate" as to be unattainable, but they lack directive power. I have yet to see an answer even proposed to the question: "Of what good is a 'final' value unless it *also* has 'instrumental' value?" The other edge concerns the implication that things which are means have no value of their own; no "intrinsic" value in the intelligible sense of that word.⁸

Fourth, Self's *modus tollens* argument⁹ is irrelevant since, as is evident, there is not an exclusively instrumental theory of value endorsed by Dewey.

Fifth, Self erred in confining his analysis largely to *Theory of Valuation*. Analysis of Dewey's treatment of utilitarianism in, say, the *Ethics*,¹⁰ would have shown the folly of Self's equation of the "good" and the "useful." Dewey also wrote a number of articles subsequent to *Theory of Valuation* which developed certain central themes of that work,¹¹ and there are several works in which other philosophers seek to extend/refine his theory of valuation.¹²

⁷Cf., for instance, his discussions of the consummatory nature of ends in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1938). Note especially the discussion on pp. 176-180, during the course of which Dewey remarks (p. 177) that "Good, true, beautiful, are, in other words, abstract nouns designating characters which belong to three kinds of actually attained ends in their consummatory capacity."

⁸Dewey, "The Field of 'Value,'" *ibid.*, p. 70.

⁹Self, *ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

¹⁰New York: Henry Holt, 1932. Note especially the discussion of Mill and Bentham in the fourth chapter of Part II.

¹¹These are listed at the end of an excellent exposition and discussion of Dewey's theory of valuation by S. Morris Eames, "Dewey's Theory of Valuation," in Jo Ann Boydston (Ed.), *Guide to the Works of John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970). The listing is on p. 199. Eames notes several problems with Dewey's theory of valuation, including the problem some have with his treatment of intrinsic value.

¹²Two volumes in particular are addressed to this task. See Ray Lepley (Ed.), *ibid.*, and also Ray Lepley, (Ed.), *The Language of Value* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).