

DONNIE J. SELF*

In Defense of Philosophical Analysis

In the August, 1976 issue of *The Journal of Educational Thought*, I gave a philosophical analysis of Dewey's pragmatist value theory as found in *Theory of Valuation*. I carefully defined the limits of the analysis and proceeded from within my own perspective — which logically I could not do otherwise since working from within one's philosophical perspective is necessarily unavoidable.

My respondent contends that the analysis is unacceptable to him. His many objections boil down to two issues — he disagrees with the limits I have chosen for the analysis and he disagrees with the perspective from within which I have done the analysis.

First, that he objects to the limits I have chosen for the analysis is obvious as he vaunts references to works by or about Dewey which were not under consideration in the analysis. Indeed, he says that "Self erred in confining his analysis largely to *Theory of Valuation*." Of course, this reflects his limited understanding of philosophical analysis. By analogy an analysis of the Nixon Doctrine does not require consideration of his prior election campaign and subsequent Watergate resignation, i.e., you do not have to consider where one began and ended in order to determine the adequacy of a specific item of interest and concern. I carefully stated that I was not attempting a general appraisal of the adequacy of pragmatism but rather only the pragmatist value theory found in Dewey's *Theory of Valuation*. My respondent contends that an "analysis of Dewey's treatment of utilitarianism in, say the *Ethics*" would have yielded different conclusions. Well, of course it would, but I was not analyzing Dewey's treatment of utilitarianism in the *Ethics*. I have not denied that "Dewey also wrote a number of articles subsequent to *Theory of Valuation*" in which he further developed his position. It is totally inappropriate for my respondent to contend that I simply chose the wrong topic for my analysis. He is free to analyze what he chooses and I should be likewise. Limiting one's philosophical analysis to a given work does not entail that one "ignores" or "is rather obviously unaware of" other works by the same author. At issue here is not how much I know or do not know about Dewey's total work but rather how little my respondent knows or does not know about doing philosophical analysis.

Secondly, my respondent disagrees with the perspective from within which I have done the analysis. He contends that my explication of the subjectivism of value experience in pragmatism results "only when one is assuming the old idealist and realistic perspectives" which he obviously does not accept. However, I do not find the notion that "subjective experience is an objective fact" to be "a paradoxical notion," nor do I think such paradoxicality is entailed by a realistic perspective. What I do find paradoxical is his misunderstanding of the realistic and naturalistic positions which give rise to his confusion and apparent equivocation of the term 'real.' The term 'real' has at least two senses — the strict philosophical sense meaning 'independent of experience' and the popular sense or common ordinary language sense meaning 'a part of our experience.' Using the popular sense of 'real' my respondent contends that values are real for we have "the experience of value" but goes on to say that they are not

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"any the less real in a naturalistic account than are physical objects." Of course the naturalistic account holds that physical objects are real in the strict philosophical sense of being independent of experience, not just a part of our experience. In this latter sense ghosts, unicorns, and mirages are real but not on a naturalistic account. Just being a part of our experience does not make something real in the strict philosophical sense. On this point my respondent is thoroughly confused. Of course Dewey allows for the experience of value, but he ultimately reduces it or explicates it in terms of factual experience. That is why the pragmatist position is objective with respect to value language but subjective with respect to value experience. It allows for values to be real in the popular sense but not in the strict philosophical sense.

In summary, my respondent's objections entirely miss the mark and are not substantive. In the first place he has misunderstood the nature of philosophical analysis, and in the second place he has misunderstood the philosophical perspectives which he wished to argue for and against.

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