Some Problems in John Dewey
On the Fact/Value Distinction

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I

John Dewey was a resolute opponent of dualisms. The existence/value, fact/value, is/ought distinction was no exception. In *The Quest for Certainty*, there occur some canonical arguments against these hallowed distinctions—or more accurately put, the making of them into distinctions such that they are also dichotomies such that there could be no derivation of values from facts. The non-derivability of value from fact was even a hallowed distinction of such fellow naturalists as David Hume and Axel Hägerström. I shall start by offering some attention to how Dewey conducts his case there (the place, and rightly, which has taken the most critical examination from critics of his ethical theory). I shall then turn to two criticisms of it made by Morton White, both in 1949, and then to a detailed response to White made by Sidney Hook from a Deweyian perspective (and assented to by Dewey himself), followed by a consideration of a response (1950) made by Dewey himself when he was 90 and only discovered by White when Dewey's posthumous work was published. After that I will briefly consider a response made some forty years later, after White had finally learned of the reply to White Dewey. Together we will have marshalled here key arguments around Dewey's work on fact and value—on his attempt to break Hume's fork.

After getting the core of the matter here before us, I shall (a) assess the soundness of Dewey's view and (b) try to say something about what should be said concerning the is and the ought, about the relation between the desired and the desirable, the enjoyed and the enjoyable, and what is taken to have worth and what is worthwhile—all within the limits of naturalism alone.

Values, for Dewey, are whatever is taken to have rightful authority in the direction of conduct (Dewey 1981, 578). Traditional empiricist theories of value—theories that Dewey will both build on and oppose—take it that values "are constituted by liking and enjoyment; to be enjoyed and to be a value are two names for one and the same fact" (Dewey 1981, 578). This, of course, is a version of ethics in the naturalistic spirit and Dewey, trying to articulate a systematic naturalistic theory, remarks that he shall "not object to this empirical theory as far as it connects the theory of values with the concrete experience of desire and satisfaction" (Dewey 1981, 579). What he objects to in traditional empiricism is not its naturalism and empiricism; rather, his objection is that such theories hold down value to what is

> *. . . antecedently* enjoyed, apart from reference to the methods by which they [enjoyments, likings, approvings, etc.] come into existence; it takes enjoyments which are casual because unregulated by intelligent operations to be values in and of themselves. Operational thinking needs to be applied to the judgement of values, just as it has now finally been applied in conceptions of physical objects (Dewey 1981, 579).

We need, that is, an experimental naturalism or empiricism in the domain of good and bad as we have it in the natural and biological sciences.

In a section of his *The Quest for Certainty,* Dewey makes a distinction between fact and value and norm, while still making it plain that he is operating with an experimental naturalism or empiricism that is thoroughly empirically oriented (Dewey 1981, 579-85). Consider here some crucial passages in which he makes it perfectly clear he is not blurring the distinction between fact and value, the is and the ought, the *de facto* and the *de jure*. Dewey remarks that there is a

> . . . difference between the enjoyed and the enjoyable, the desired and the desirable, the satis*fying* and the satis*factory*. To say that something is enjoyed is to make a statement about a fact, something already in existence; it is not to judge the value of that fact. There is no difference between such a proposition and one which says that something is sweet or sour, red or black. It is just correct or incorrect and that is the end of the matter. But to call an object a value is to

assert that it satisfies or fulfills certain conditions. Function and status in meeting conditions is a different matter from bare existence. The fact that something is desired only raises the *question* of its desirability; it does not settle it. Only a child in the degree of his immaturity thinks to settle the question of desirability of reiterated proclamation: "I want it, I want it, I want it." What is objected to in the current empirical theory of values is not connection of them with desire and enjoyment but failure to distinguish between enjoyments of radically different sorts. There are many common expressions in which the difference of the two kinds is clearly recognized. Take, for example, the difference between the ideas of "satisfying" and "satisfactory". To say that something satisfies is to report something as an isolated finality. To assert that it is satis*factory* is to define it in its connections and interactions. The fact that it pleases or is immediately congenial poses a problem to judgment. How shall the satisfaction be rated? Is it a value or is to not? Is it something to be prized and cherished, *to be* enjoyed? Not stern moralists alone but everyday experience informs us that finding satisfaction in a thing may be a warning, a summons to be on the lookout for consequences. To declare something satis*factory* is to assert that it meets specifiable conditions. It is, in effect, a judgment that the thing "will do". It involves a prediction; it contemplates a future in which the thing will continue to serve; it *will* do. It asserts a consequence the thing will actively institute; it will *do*. That it is satisfying is the content of a proposition of fact; that it is satisfactory is a judgment, an estimate, an appraisal. It denotes an attitude *to be* taken, that of striving to perpetuate and to make secure (Dewey 1981, 50).

And note now two closely following passages.

Noted and notable, noteworthy; remarked and remarkable; advised and advisable; wondered at and wonderful; pleasing and beautiful; loved and loveable; blamed and blameable, blameworthy; objected to and objectionable; esteemed and estimable; admired and admirable; shamed and shameful; honored and honorable; approved and approvable, worthy of approbation, etc. The multiplication of words adds nothing to the force of the distinction. But it aids in conveying a sense of the fundamental character of the distinction of; of the difference between mere report of an already existent fact and judgment as to the importance and need of bringing a fact into existence; or, if it is already there, of sustaining it in existence. The latter is a genuine practical judgment, and marks the only type of judgment that has to do with the direction of action. Whether or not we reserve the term "value" for the latter (as seems to me proper) is a minor matter; that the distinction be acknowledged as the key to understanding the relation of values to do direction of conduct is the important thing (Dewey 1981, 59-60).

Note also:

> Relatively immediate judgments, which we call fact or to which we give the name of intuition, do not precede reflective inquiry, but are the funded products of much thought experience. Expertness of taste is at once the result and the reward of constant exercise of thinking. Instead of there being no disputing about tastes, they are the one thing worthy disputing about, if by "dispute' is signified discussion involving reflective inquiry. Taste, if we use the word in its best sense, is the outcome of experience brought cumulatively to bear on the intelligent appreciation of the real worth of likings and enjoyments. There is nothing in which a person so completely reveals as in the things which he judges enjoyable and desirable. Such judgments are the sole alternative to the domination of belief by impulse, chance, blind habit and self-interest. The formation of a cultivated and effectively operative good judgment or taste with respect to what is esthetically admirable, intellectually acceptable and morally approvable is the supreme task set to human beings by the incidents of experience.
>
> Propositions about what is or has been liked are of instrumental value in reaching judgments of value, in as far as the conditions and consequences of the thing liked are thought about. In themselves they make no claims; they put forth no demand upon subsequent attitudes and acts; they profess no authority to direct. If one likes a thing he likes it; that *is* a point about which there can be no dispute—although it is not so easy to state just *what* is liked as is frequently assumed. A judgment about what is *to be* desired and enjoyed is, on the other hand, a claim on future action; it possesses *de jure* and not merely *de facto* quality (Dewey 1981, 581-82).

There is a goldmine of things in these passages as well as in the intervening passages between the last two quotations. Together, these passages convey elements that are very central to Dewey's thinking concerning morality. But I want here to call attention to some sentences in these passages which highlight the importance Dewey attached to the distinction between fact and value: the normative and the reportive; the evaluative and the descriptive. In these passages he clearly *distinguishes a statement of fact from a judgment concerning the value of that fact.* Consider the following sentences from these passages.

1) To say that "something satisfies is to *report* something in isolated finality. To assert that it is *satisfactory* is to define it in its connections and interactions" (first italics added).

2) We ask not only is something enjoyed, but we ask is it *to be* enjoyed. Is what is enjoyed *to be* prized and cherished?

3) "That it is satisfying is the content of a proposition of fact; that it is satisfactory is a judgment, an estimate, an appraisal. It denotes an attitude *to be* taken" (italics added).

4) Between being approved and being approvable (being worthy of approbation) there is "the difference between mere report of an already existent fact and judgment as to the importance and need of bringing a fact into existence; or if it is already there, of sustaining it in existence. The latter is a genuine *practical* judgment and marks the only type of judgment that has to do with the *direction of action* (italics added).

These passages, as clearly can be, show that Dewey distinguishes between factual judgments and value judgments; between reports of what is the case and appraisals of what is the case and judgments of what to make the case; of what is enjoyed or desired (a plain matter of fact) and what is *to be* enjoyed or desired—something which has a different logical status than that of a report. 'That *x* is enjoyed' can in many circumstances be unproblematically confirmed (verified) or disconfirmed; it is plainly an empirically verifiable proposition and in determinate circumstances we can without any difficult state its truth-conditions or assertability-conditions. It fits well with the pragmatic maxim. In contrast, 'That *x* is *to be* enjoyed' or 'That *x* is *to be* desired' are anomalous with respect to verification. We usually know what we have to observe or experience to know whether '*x* is enjoyed' or '*x* is desired' is true or false or probably true or false. We do not know that for '*x* is *to be* enjoyed' or '*x* is *to be* desired'. Nor is it the case that '*x* is to be enjoyed' or '*x* is to be desired', while not being a report, is *indirectly* verifiable. Contrast: As I walk along the road I see smoke down the valley, but it is too far and too much behind a hill for me to see the fire. But I inductively infer that since there is smoke there must be or have recently been a fire. But I know, directly verify, what I now indirectly verify, when I get down into the valley. But I go to a bullfight and see a lot of people enjoying it. This does not enable me to indirectly verify or in any way verify that it is *to be* enjoyed. It is evident—to my horror—that people are enjoying the fight. But that does not at all settle the question whether it is *to be* enjoyed, whether enjoying it is a good thing. Moreover, however that is decided, it is never just a matter of looking and seeing or hearing or anything that is plainly and uncontroversially

verifiable. Their being verifiable, if they are, enables us to ascertain their truth or their falsity in a scientific manner. But for judgments concerning what is *to be* prized, approved, desired, enjoyed, that does not appear to be possible.

This being so, then, for a Deweyian ethical naturalist proceeding in a non-reductive way and preserving a distinction between the factual and the normative, between the is and the ought, between the *de facto* and the *de jure*, *there must be some way of deriving the desirable from the desired* without identifying them. How else can we preserve a naturalism that would allow for the confirmability and disconfirmability of moral utterances and, through that, enable us in a way compatible with naturalism to establish which moral claims are true or warrantedly assertable and which are not.

II

Morton White states a key part of Dewey's account here in the following way: "Whereas the statement '*a* is a desired now' is merely a statement of fact, the statement '*a* is desirable' is a factual statement which also has a *de jure* quality" (White 1949, 333). Dewey is claiming, that is, that there is a subclass of *de facto* statements which are also *de jure*. They are somehow both empirical and normative propositions. The judgments made with them are both factual and normative. "The problem," as White sees it, "is to give an analysis of '*a* is desirable' when it is construed as meaning *a* ought to be desired, which will render it an empirical statement, a statement which conveys empirical knowledge" (White 1949, 333).

What does he take to be Dewey's argument for this claim, a claim that would break Hume's fork? What is Dewey's case for the claim that there are moral judgments that, along with being *de jure*, are also empirical knowledge claims? What Dewey does, according to White, is "to define the *desirable* (as distinct from the desired) in a way that would, if justified, demonstrate the empirical, scientific character of judgments of desirability" (White 1957, 212). Dewey sets out, as a good ethical

naturalist, to establish that "judgments of what ought to be desired can be verified by reference to empirical considerations alone" (White 1957, 212). Dewey takes desirability to be a dispositional property, but he does not take it to be a dispositional property like visibility, audibility or solubility. He does not make what many, including G. E. Moore, take to be Mill's mistake (Moore 1903; Hall 1964, 106-32). In saying, for example, that something is visible, we mean that it can be seen and it follows logically that if it is seen that then it is visible. 'Whatever is seen is visible' is a logical truth. Similar things obtain for audible and soluble. But this is not so for desirable. 'Desirability' does not mean 'can be desired' but rather 'ought to be desired' and it does not follow that if something is desired that it is therefore desirable. And 'Whatever is desired is desirable' is not a logical or analytic truth. Instead, it is at best false (and not logically false either).

Rather than compare desirability with solubility and the like, Dewey takes the property desirability to be analogous to the dispositional property objectively red. Science, Dewey stresses, will not assign objective properties to things unless certain test conditions are met.

> Before saying that something is objectively red rather than that it merely appears red now, we must make sure the light is correct, that our vision is normal and so on. We select certain standard conditions of vision and say that the object is really red just if it appears red to us under these circumstances (White 1957, 213).

But if the light under which we are viewing the object is abnormal—say, it is not clear or our vision is abnormal or affected by a disease or a drug—we are not justified in asserting that the object is red just because it appears red. The claim is, as White puts it in his "Value and Obligation in Dewey and Lewis", "'*a* is really red' is equivalent to 'For every normal person *y*, if *y* looks at *a* under normal conditions then *a* looks red to *y*'" (White 1949, 159). So we legitimately go from '*a* looks red to me now' to '*a* is really red' if *a* looks red to any normal person *y* if they look at *a* under normal conditions and *a* looks red to them. In this way we build a logical bridge from something looks red to me now to

that something is really red. It is a matter of determining that certain standard test conditions are satisfied.

Dewey, White has it, wants to build a similar bridge from desired by me now (whoever that me is) to being desirable in the appropriate sense of 'desirable', namely that of being something that ought to be desired. So, arguing in a parallel manner, we say that if *a* is desired by me now, then *a* is desirable when, for every normal person *y, y* looks at *a* under normal conditions, then *a* is desired by *y*. So here we have in good naturalistic spirit value—desirability—tied down to the world. We have, that is, shown that at least some value judgments are empirically verifiable. But this will only hold if desirability is a dispositional property like objectively red and Dewey's claimed equivalence holds between '*a* is desirable' and 'For every normal person *y,* if *y* looks at *a* under normal conditions, then *a* is desired by *y*'. But do we have either an *intentional* equivalence or a *material* equivalence here? Is this, that is, either what we mean or what we are asserting when we say something is desirable?

White makes it clear what is at stake here, namely that Dewey is making a claim that we can have a scientific ethics: that fixing moral beliefs can have the same kind of empirically and rational status that obtains for scientific beliefs; that we can fix beliefs in morality in the same way we fix beliefs over plain matters of fact; and that the *de jure* is established in the same way that the *de facto* is established. Dewey's claim, as White puts it, is "A thing is desirable if and only if it is desired under conditions which play the same role in the moral life as twenty-twenty vision and good light play in the visual life" (White 1957, 213). This gives us, White has it that Dewey has it, real objectivity and truth in ethics. "The important point," White maintains, "is that Dewey thinks that judgments of *desirability* are simply judgments that something is desired under conditions which have been thoroughly investigated in the way that the scientist checks his test conditions" (White 1957, 213). Just as something need not be red which appears red under abnormal conditions, so something need not be desirable when desired under abnormal conditions. But Dewey's claim is that it is desirable if it is desired by normal people under normal conditions. But is this so? And let me return to my

unanswered questions at the end of the last paragraph. Do Dewey's crucial claimed equivalences hold?

White thinks not. He believes that there are fundamental difficulties with Dewey's view here (White 1957, 214). They stem from an important difference between the property of being desirable and the property of being objectively real. To quote White: "To say that something is desirable, i.e. desired under test conditions, is to make what he calls a *de facto* statement which is at the same time *de jure.* It not only tells us that something is true of human beings but it also imposes an obligation on them" (White 1957, 214). Nothing like this obtains for something's being objectively red. Statements that something is objectively red are not statements which are both *de facto* and *de jure.* To say 'The walls in their living room are painted red' is a *de facto* but not a *de jure* statement. It says nothing normative: it makes no claim, it just reports a fact. To say 'Those red walls are horrible' is very different. It is *de jure* but may also be *de facto*, though it need not be. Similarly, to say 'Jones exercises every day' is to say nothing normative. To say 'Exercising every day is desirable' does say something, or so Dewey has it, that is both factual and normative. But we could not plausible say that of 'Jones exercises every day'. It is just reportive and descriptive. Moreover it is not necessarily what Hilary Putnam calls a *thick* description. It may just be an expression of emotion or an expression of an attitude. But it is also true in certain contexts that it could be both descriptive and evaluative. But it could never just be evaluative.

White generalizes and makes his most crucial objection to Dewey as follows. It is a key passage and I shall quote it *in extenso.*

> To say that something is desirable, i.e., desired under test conditions, is to make what he [Dewey] calls a de facto statement which is at the same time de jure. It not only tells us that something is true of human beings but it also imposes an obligation on them. This distinguishes it from the statement that something is desired now, from the statement that something looks red now, and most important, from the statement that something is objectively red. None of these last three statements has a "de jure" quality for Dewey; none of them states a claim. They are all merely de facto, whereas the judgment that

something is desirable is *both* de facto and de jure. Here the cake is had and eaten! Here we have generated a normative or de jure proposition by performing a suitable operation on merely de facto propositions. But if the operation will generate a norm in this case, it should generate one in all cases. In other words, if "desirable" is synonymous with "desired under test conditions" just as "objectively red" is synonymous with "appears red under test conditions", why shouldn't judgments about things being objectively red be "de jure"? But obviously they aren't. Saying that something is objectively red does not impose an obligation on anyone, but it should if Dewey is right in his analysis. The relation between "is objectively red" and "appears red" is precisely the same as the relation between "is desirable" and "is desired" for him. But since "desirable" means "ought to be desired," "objectively red" should mean "ought to appear red", which is absurd. The ladder by which Dewey rises from the reports of sense to objective physical properties is the same as that by which he rises from the desired to the desirable. But clearly this ladder does not lead us from the description to the normative in the first case, and therefore it cannot lead us from the descriptive to the normative in the second (White 1957, 214-15).

White's argument against Dewey cited above proceeds by a *reduction ad absurdum.* These arguments are often effective and well-taken, but there always remains the possibility that someone will bite the bullet and accept the conclusion but deny that it is absurd. Suppose, biting the bullet, it is contended that "all true scientific statements impose obligations, that all true scientific statements have a *de jure* quality" (White 1957, 215). White argues that this claim that "all objectively true statements are normative in character" is fairly plainly false. Take the statement that the table I am writing on now is brown. There is nothing—at least in normal contexts—normative about it. The statement "implies that any person with 'normal' vision will have the sensation commonly referred to as brown if he looks at my table in white light when he is reasonably close to it" (White 1957, 215). But, as White continues, "surely this imposes no *obligation* on anyone" (White 1957, 215). Colorblind people are not guilty for not being able to see it. Surely no obligation is imposed on anyone in such situations to see it. They either just see it or they don't with no blame or praise attached.

Moreover, if we take that turn in defending Dewey, we will have wiped out an important distinction that we have seen Dewey insists on. White spells this out as follows:

Furthermore, if *all* statements of science, including those of physics, turn out to be normative in the same sense in which statements of desirability are normative, we shall have destroyed a useful distinction. Dewey's task, so far as I can understand it, is to show that ethics is a part of science and not that it exhausts science. But if he persists in his views he will have wiped out the very distinction which, as a reformer, he wants to preserve: the distinction between what is and what out to be. For obviously now every true statement of science will say what ought to be, and all science will have become ethical in character (White 1957, 216).

Again we have a *reductio.*

White next considers another reading—another interpretation—of how to understand Dewey on the relation between the desired and the desirable: a reading which also has a basis, thought a less prominent basis, in Dewey's texts. Suppose we take Dewey to be saying, "A desired object becomes desirable just in case we know what causes us to desire it and what consequences ensue from the fact that we desire it" (White 1957, 216). Here, unlike on the first reading—the normal-conditions-and-normal-person-interpretation—"*any* condition in which we desire an object will suffice for concluding that it is desirable, provided that we know that condition and what happens as a consequence of our desiring the object" (White 1957, 216). In other words and in short, *a desirable desire is a fully informed desire.* Whatever we desire when we are fully informed is desirable *no matter what its content is.* Suppose I desire to take crack or to torture other people. If I know the causes of my having those desires and the consequences of acting on those desires and continue to have such desires, then, given such an account, what I so desire is desirable and my desires being desirable are reasonable. But here we have another *reductio.*

Suppose Dewey says it is the objective consequences that he is concerned with; not what consequences I happen to *desire* but what the consequences are apart from my desire. What makes taking crack undesirable for me or for anyone are the consequences—what happens to people over a long period of time when they take it. It harms them horribly and that is not desirable. But here we have staring us straight in the face a normative turn that has not been naturalistically explicated. We

have not rooted our moral claims in desires, however reflective, but have appealed to what is desirable where it has not been in any way derived from the desired. Dewey wants to have an ethical theory that is more objective than a traditional empiricism. But on this reading he, like traditional empiricists, ends up appealing to desires and enjoyments as his rock bottom appeal. He does not want to make such an appeal to what we just happen to desire and enjoy or dislike and avoid. But he ends up, if he is going to be consistently naturalistic, doing so anyway. As White puts it, "After all these efforts to get to a rock that is more substantial than mere desire, he has to appeal to it in the end" (White 1957, 217). He concludes that Dewey "has not demonstrated that ethics is part of empirical science"; he has not successfully articulated an ethical naturalism" (White 1957, 217). He has not shown us how we can have an ethical proposition or a moral judgment that is at one and the same time empirical and in that way factual *and* normative.

III

Sidney Hook finds little cogency in Morton White's critique of Dewey's account of ethics. Hook contends, rightly I think, that White underplays Dewey's *situationalism* (the position that moral problems arise only in problematic situations and normative claims are only made in such situations), his related *contextualism* (Dewey's distinction, with the stress he puts on it, between theoretical judgments and practical judgments—judgments of practice), and finally the importance for Dewey of having a clear conception of what practical judgments are to clear moral theorizing, thinking and good moral practice.

I think that Hook makes some legitimate points of considerable importance here. But I also think he fails in some crucial ways to meet the central arguments articulated by White. White's very central claims, I shall argue, Hook does not refute. I think that when the dust settles we should see (i) that Dewey has *not* made a sound case for ethical naturalism in the way that White construes it in the tradition of G. E. Moore and non-cognitivists in ethics, and (ii) that when we think through the

force of the contextualist and pragmatist arguments deployed by Dewey—arguments which Hook

forcefully brings out—that Dewey should not, perhaps no one should, be an ethical naturalist *in that*

standard sense and to acknowledge the failure of such a naturalism commits one neither to an appeal

to intuition with its claim to be aware of 'occult entities' (e.g., non-natural qualities) nor to any form

of non-cognitivism or error theory. Having a thorough naturalistic orientation, as we can see from

Hume, Hägerström, Stevenson and Williams, does not require ethical naturalism, at least not as

standardly understood.

Let us now turn to some of the detailed criticism of White made by Sidney Hook. Hook sees

White as claiming that Dewey in a mysterious and rationally unmotivated way thinks he has

generated a normative statement from a purely factual one. Hook writes,

> ". . . whereas statements like '*x* is desired', '*x* appears red', '*x* is
> objectively red' are all *de facto,* statements like '*x* is desirable', which
> are analogous to '*x* is objectively red', suddenly take on *de jure* status,
> too. By a kind of transubstantiation the factual becomes the
> normative. It is White's claim that we have created a mystery here in
> claiming "obscurely, to have generated a normative or *de jure*
> propositions by performing a suitable operation on merely *de facto*
> propositions (Hook 1961, 37).

Hook first points out, in defense of Dewey, that Dewey is drawing a formal analogy between

two kinds of qualities. "He nowhere actually says that '*x* is desirable' is synonymous with '*x* is desired

under normal conditions" (Hook 1961, 57). The "desirable [for Dewey] is that which is desired *after*

reflection upon relevant causes and consequences. What gives the desired desirability is that it is

reaffirmed in the light of its actual and possible connections. This means that it takes on a *new*

character, desirability, without losing the old one, being desired" (Hook 1961, 57). There is no

mystery here. Those desires that we continue to have and reflectively endorse, with knowledge of

their connections (their causes and consequences) are the desires that are desirable. Those that we

cannot reflectively endorse are desires which are not desirable. Values continue to be anchored in

the world. (Where else could they be anchored?) Is this well taken? It seems plausible; a necessary

but not a sufficient condition.

Hook then turns his attention to the importance of attending, in thinking about ethical

judgments, to the idea of a problematic situation and to practical judgments. Hook writes:

> The crucial difference . . . overlooked in Professor White's analysis of "desirable" and "objectively red" is that the problematic situation in which we seek to find what is really good or desirable is one that requires a "genuine practical judgment" in answer to the question: what should I do or choose? Whereas the analysis of "seeming red" and "objective red" has been conducted without reference to any practical problem of choice. Complete the analogy and introduce a situation in which it becomes *important* to distinguish between apparent and real color, and "*objectively red*" acquires a normative status that "apparently red" does not have. *Apparently* red is not good enough in matching draperies or in any other situation in which we want to know what color we are really choosing. Only the "objectively red" will do. Professor White believes that this is a *reductio ad absurdum* because it would follow that *all* true scientific statements would have a *de jure* quality.
> Not at all, unless he maintains that as scientific they all bear *per se* upon immediate practical problems of what should be done. But the propositions of science are theoretical until they are applied in some practical situation—a tautology which in this connection has significance because it marks a definite distinction in function. Dewey's contention is that every true proposition *in use* in a concrete situation provoking choice does have a normative status, because wherever relevant it determines in some degree what we should choose. But the great body of scientific propositions at any time are not in use (Hook 1961, 57-58).

White believes that Dewey is committed to saying that when I remark that the table on which

I am writing is brown, I must be making both a factual and a normative statement. He then asks

ironically in what sense it is normative. Hook answers appropriately, "In no sense, because he has

uttered a detached statement in the blue unrelated to any problem of choice" (Hook 1961, 58). It is

not uttered in a problematic situation where we must make a practical judgment. But suppose we say

to a companion walking along with us engrossed in conversation, "There is a car coming" as he is

about to step out into the street. There the factual statement gains normative force; it gets, that is, a

practical use and thus has a normative force. On the other hand, suppose I am sitting on the porch of my house in the country beside an infrequently traveled road. I say idly to my wife, "There is a car coming." Here my remark is just descriptive. It has no normative force. It is the *problematic situation* and the need to make a choice which determines whether a *de facto* statement is also *de jure.* Where I am thinking about what color of vase to put on my desk, 'My desk is brown' could come to have a normative function as well as a descriptive one. But that is because we have here a situation of choice—a practical problematic situation.

So far, or so it seems to me, Hook's criticisms (the remarks about reflectiveness perhaps apart) are on or at least near to the mark. In these respects Dewey has been successfully defended. Moreover, we can see some ways in which his account of morality is original and important and breaking new ground. But then Hook makes an additional and very crucial remark which, while right as it stands and importantly so, also has implications which make problems for Dewey's naturalism and his attacks on dualisms and dichotomies. Hook remarks:

> A disregard of the living context of the practical judgment—and all evaluative decisions are practical judgments—leaves us with the truism that for any set of matter of fact propositions, no conclusions about what should be done follow. If there is no "ought" or "should" in the premises of the "detached" argument, no "ought" or "should" is entailed in the conclusion (Hook 1961, 58-59).

But this, surprisingly on Hook's part, is just to accept the standard non-ethical naturalist claim—of no ought from an is—coming down from the cosmological naturalist Hume and reiterated by such diverse philosophers as Kant, Sidgwick, Moore and by such cosmological naturalists as Ayer, Stevenson, Hägerström and Mackie. If we read Dewey in that way, he is not an ethical naturalist as traditionally understood. We can no longer coherently claim that ethical statements are empirical statements verifiable by observation and in that they can in that way be established to be true or false. The truth-conditions or assertability-conditions of such utterances become problematical. Practical discourse is practical discourse and theoretical discourse is theoretical discourse and from

the premises of theoretical discourse—discourse which neither explicitly nor implicitly have no ought or should in it—we can derive no statements of practical discourse: statements containing, either explicitly or implicitly, an ought or should or a positive evaluation. As Hook acknowledges, "no aggregation of facts by themselves determines any policy. . . . Statements of facts by *themselves* without reference to the problem-situation and its conflict of ends, on which the facts bear, determine nothing" (Hook 1961, 59). And even here we need to disambiguate "reference to the problem-situation". If the reference to the problematic situation is just a detached sociological matter of fact description, that reference yields nothing normative. It is just a continued aggregation of facts. But if the reference to the problematic situation is by way of a practical judgment, we are already inside normative discourse and we have not derived an ought from an is. Again we have the truism, which when Hume's lessons and Moore's lessons are forgotten, becomes important, namely that practical discourse is practical discourse and theoretical discourse is theoretical discourse; they have different functions and cannot be reduced to each other. And they have no implicit relations.

Hook would resist some of this, claiming that what I am disregarding is the living context of practical discourse; there, he has it, we get norms from the urgencies of the situation. Hook makes his startling and, I shall argue, mistaken claim as follows:

> But within a context in which something must be *done*, the ought of the decision or conclusion is, so to speak, ultimately derivative from the urgencies of the problem, and supported or justified by the factual statements about the probable consequences of doing one thing or another to meet the situation. The normative element in the conclusion is in a sense provided by that which distinguishes the situation as a practical one from one that is purely logical or theoretical. The underlying premise is: that should be done which appropriately meets the needs and requirements of the situation, broadly conceived to include the demands and expectation of the community or tradition in which we find ourselves. Then, by ordinary scientific means, we discover that the probable consequences of *this* act meet these needs and requirements and conclude it should be done. The underlying premise of the argument is not an explicit statement at all, but the situation itself (Hook 1961, 59).

Note first the "so to speak" in Hook's sentence in "the conclusion is, so to speak, ultimately derivative from the urgencies of the problem." The "so to speak" gives the game away. Literally we can only devise conclusions from premises. We, in making derivation and deductions, move entirely within the realm of language: from one sentence or proposition we drive another sentence or proposition. Literally it makes no sense to speak of deriving conclusions from the urgencies of a problem. But why not respond, 'Well, it is a metaphor. Do not be so woodenly literal-minded.' But what is it a metaphor of? 'Derivative' here would in such a context seem to indicate a causal relation. The situation affecting us as it does *causes* us to say or believe certain normative things. But this is a very different thing than a logical relation or even an argumentative or discursive pattern as in giving *reasons* for something. Suppose we say the situation causes us to have certain beliefs and these we then give as factual reasons for our normative beliefs. That sounds plausible enough. But then we must be able to show that the situation causes us to have certain factual beliefs and it causing us to have any others would be mistaken. But do we have any assurance that this will be so? That is, that we will get such a determinateness there and that, if the situation causes us to have eccentric beliefs not matching with the beliefs more standardly held, on what basis are we justified in asserting the eccentric beliefs are mistaken? Are we going to take such matters as *vote matters*? Justifiability goes with the big battalions! Are moral issues vote issues? That is surely something Dewey would not say.

Again, Hook uses a tell-tale phrase that suggest all may not be well. "The normative conclusion is *in a sense* provided by that which distinguishes the situation as a practical one from one that is purely logical or theoretical" (italics added). But why "in a sense"? Why not leave that qualification out? Well, it is here to give us to understand that literally the normative conclusion is not provided by the practical situation or any situation. That is not the way we get conclusions. We get them from premises, not situations. To speak as Hook does is to commit what Gilbert Ryle called a category mistake.

However, we next read that there is after all an underlying premise, a premise which is plainly a moral one, namely "that should be done which appropriately meets the needs and requirements of the situation, broadly conceived to include the demands and expectations of the community or traditions in which we find ourselves." It is plain from this that that underlying premise is not itself a factual statement which is also normative. It is not a factual statement at all, but plainly a prescriptive normative one which tells us what to do. It has an imperatival not a factual force. And with the word 'appropriately' in it, it is not expressed entirely in terms that have undergone 'naturalistic cleansing'. Moreover, we can ask from what purely factual premises—from what is's— has it been deduced or derived? Hook gives us none and none seem at least to be at hand. It is just an underived—and most pertinently here a factually underived—premise which is also a fundamental moral and methodological principle. It is a reasonable one alright as long as one adds the qualification that the expectations of the community or tradition should *sometimes* be resisted— a qualification I am confident that Hook would accept. Accepting and fully endorsing such a premise so qualified is to be reasonable. But being reasonable, even fully reasonable, does not help the ethical naturalist program of deriving an ought from an is—of showing how moral judgments are themselves a subspecies of purely factual, empirical judgments. And it does not help to say (as Hook ends his paragraph in saying) the "underlying premise of the argument is not an explicit statement at all but the situation itself." Again we have the incoherence of saying a situation can be a premise. Only a proposition, statement, sentence, utterance or perhaps a belief can be a premise. But that aside, it is false that the underlying premise is not an explicit statement. Hook has just stated it explicitly when he introduced it earlier in his paragraph.

It is, I think, not unnatural to retort that in examining the argument of the above paragraph of Hook's that I have not at all used the principle of interpretative charity or acknowledged and taken to heart the fact that metaphors are inescapable in philosophy as they are in any non-formal discourse. (Think of how Quine's work is shot full of metaphors.) Put charitably, and with reduced

metaphor, we can restate Hook's argument as follows: theoretical discourse (discourse about what is or might be the case) and practical discourse (discourse about what we should do or be) are distinct and neither can be reduced to or derived from the other and they both have their distinctive and irreducible functions. We human beings—agents in the world utilizing and articulating both theoretical and practical discourse and making, repeatedly, practical judgments—face contexts in which there are problems of what to do and what to be and we sometimes, over distinct problems, find ourselves in conflict. We deliberate, discuss and argue not just in general but around distinctive problems that emerge from our interaction. We make decisions and come to moral and other normative conclusions. Where these conclusions are reasonable they are either derived from or otherwise based on statements that we have come to articulate in facing and reflecting on that problematic situation and on the probably consequences of doing one thing rather than another in response to that situation. We have, of course, in so concluding, a normative conclusion since we were in a context in which we were trying to decide what to do. Importantly in such a situation, there is often the normative background belief, often unarticulated and implicit, that that which should be done is that which appropriately meets the needs and requirements of the situation. Pressed about this we would, of course, if we were at all reasonable, say 'Yes, we were implicitly so reasoning' and that what we now express is a central underlying guiding principle in our reasoning about what to do and be. Operating in accordance with it, we, in particular problematic situations, use scientific or methodologically similar commonsense means to discover the probable consequences of acting in one way or another in response to particular problematic situations. We marshal the statements of these before us and conclude what to do, all the while being guided by our underlying principle which is always, being the principle that it is, a principle which is responsive to the various problematic situations in which we find ourselves. There we have Hook de-mythologized without any premises which are mysteriously—indeed incoherently—situations or conclusions which are derived from the urgencies of the problem. But we also have an account which does not counter White's claim that

Dewey has not shown how we can carry out an ethical naturalistic program and derive an ought from an is or an evaluative statement form a set of purely factual statements.

The above de-mythologizing gives us a reasonable (and I hope faithful to Hook's intent) account of some important things we do when we reason morally. But it is at least as compatible with a non-naturalistic or non-cognitive account as it is with an ethical naturalism. Indeed more so, for from it we do not see how we can show that moral statements are really a subspecies of empirical factual statements. That is to say it seems at least to be ethical naturalism—unfriendly, for it appears, as Hook seems to be doing, to accept Hume's fork about the is/ought. But then it becomes unclear how or even that we can have *a science of ethics* simply grounding oughtness, rightness, goodness and desirability on the empirical facts. To say that seems right, but isn't Hook also clearly on the mark (and is not indeed Dewey as well) when he remarks, "What we ought to do in any particularly situation is that which we choose to do *after* reflection upon the relevant consequences of proposals framed to meet the needs of the situation" (Hook 1961, 59). And is it not also true, again as Hook claims, that in trying to form policies about say genetically altered foods or debt relief for Third World countries or global trading policies we need among other things to appeal to evidential grounds? We need to get as clear as we can about the empirical facts. And what would this be, where at all adequate, but to appeal to "the aggregation of relevant facts from different fields" (Hook 1961, 59)? These latter claims of Hook's seem right, as do White's basic central arguments against Dewey's version of ethical naturalism. Indeed (though this is not White's intent), the thrust of White's argument would seem to give us reason to think that ethical naturalism more generally is very problematic, as ethical naturalism has been understood in the wake of G. E. Moore. There appear to be tensions here. That is why we can and not infrequently do have a group of claims that when held together seem at least to be paradoxical. We tend to feel something has to give. But appearances here can be deceiving. These things actually hold together in a consistent package. But that requires some extensive

recasting of the issues and ways of looking at things. This needs to be done and I hope I shall be able to return to it.

Finally, Hook, appealing to Dewey's contextualism, considers another of White's objections. White maintains, Hook has it, that "knowledge of the causes and consequences of our desire, and of what is desired, does not make the desired desirable unless among the consequences here are some other desirables" (Hook 1961, 60). We always end up, when we push our arguments, with some rock bottom desirable that is not derived from any statements of fact. Desires by themselves are never the last resort of appeal.

Hook remarks:

> Again, the failure appears to me to result from disregarding the facts of actual moral situations. Of course, there are other desirables that have to be taken into account in assessing the consequences of proposed modes of conduct in a problematic situation. These desirables are assumed or *postulated* as valid because they summarize previous experience. That is what it means to say that we no more start from scratch in ethical inquiry than any other kind of inquiry (Hook 1961, 60).

We, as Hook put it in an earlier passage, carry with us "a heavily funded memory of things previously discovered to be valuable, ends or goods to which we feel committed as *prima facie* validities" (Hook 1961, 52). We take health, friendship, security, knowledge, leisure, trust, kindness to be valuable. Similarly our stock of *prima facie* validities include thoughtfulness, honesty and truthfulness and the practices and rules which go with them—practices and rules "which are the conditions of any social life in which human values are systematically pursued and sufficiently enjoyed to make social peace preferable to civil war" (Hook 1961, 52). Pragmatists, as good critical commonsensists, go around with such a store of funded beliefs, including moral beliefs, that are all sometimes challengeable, though not all at once, and all are fallible and defeasible. There is no place where the buck stops, no Archimedean point, no absolute perspective where we just have some ultimate principles we must accept and can in no context question. But even without such ultimates we have a plentitude of

beliefs, including moral beliefs, which in most contexts stand fast and which we normally have no reason to doubt. Contexts can arise where *seriatim* we can doubt them, though for many beliefs this is just hypothetical. So, while we have no ultimate desirable—no *pace* MacIntyre and the other Thomists, First Philosophy ultimate—on which all the other desirables are grounded, still we are not adrift in a skeptical sea. Instead, we have a plurality of defeasible desirables which in most circumstances we have no reason at all to doubt or question. We do not escape contingency or need to, but we are not reduced to subjectivism or relativism either. Let alone nihilism. Here again Peirce's critique of Cartesian doubting, which Dewey and Hook as well have built into the web and woof of their thought, is to the point. "The knowledge that the desired has consequences which we have reasons to believe desirable, when added to relevant knowledge of the causes of our desire, makes what is desired desirable" (Hook 1961, 60). In making this judgment we rely on our stock of desirables—our background beliefs and convictions—in judging consequences to be desirable. But we always remain in a context here; we never jump out of our system of beliefs including our beliefs in what we take to be desirable. That would be like jumping out of our skins. An ethical naturalism for Dewey is a pragmatic naturalism and that means a resolute and inescapable contextualism.

> Suppose someone asks should he take a vacation or continue this piece of work? . . . Among the consequences is the discovery that if a vacation is not taken, he will probably have a nervous breakdown. This is assumed undesirable. But why is this undesirable? This is another problem entirely and, to be a genuine one, must be taken very concretely. In the course of settling it, he may discover other value-facts. Unless he preservers his health, his children suffer. This is bad. Why is it bad? Another problem, in the course of the solution of which he discovers that his children are so much a part of his life that it would be sadly altered if anything serious happened to them. One can keep on asking questions until the inevitable one is reached: "Is life itself worth living?" But must we really answer that question, too, and an indeterminate number of others, in order to be able to answer the question we started from? No one can seriously maintain this. Whether life is worth living *may* arise as a specific question and is answerable one way or the other. But it is not relevant to most of our ethical problems (Hook 1961, 60-61).

This defense of contextualism and fallibilism seems to me sound. To decide whether I should go to the dentist or pay for my grandson's education I do not have to decide whether life is worth living or happiness and happiness alone is the sole intrinsic good.

If, as Hook and White agree, neither Dewey nor anyone else is going to be able to escape to an ethical perch where, without some assumed desirables, she can determine what desires are desirable, where does this contextualism leave us? Hook would say, and I would as well, that it leaves us with a pragmatic critical commonsensism with its indeterminate cluster of defeasible desirables *sans* an Absolute skyhook. Some supreme desirable. Some, à la Alasdair MacIntyre, supreme desirable which grounds all of those moral specific desires as also being desirables. Neither I nor Hook nor White believe that there is or can be such a *super desirable* grounding of things. But there are a nest of specific ordinary desirables that are also desired. And they are sufficient to make sense of the moral life. This does not yield an ethical naturalism Moorean style where we either define unclearly the desirable in terms of what is knowledgably or reflectively desired or what is normally desired or, alternatively, where it is shown to be extensionally equivalent to what is so desired. But we do not need such a skyhook. Such conceptions are illusory. Pragmatism benignly just rolls along without need of such an illusory Absolutist perspective (Nielsen 2016).

IV

The first three sections of this paper were written in the 1990s but were unpublished. (I thought they needed more work.) I now return to it in 2016. I have gone over what precedes and modified it a bit but it remains substantially, though I hope not dogmatically, in its initial form. I still stick with what I wrote. But a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then and I want to consider some of that which is related to but expansive of what I have so far argued for here and which I hope advances matters a bit.

What is crucial to consider first is Hilary Putnam's arguments against the fact/value dichotomy (Putnam 2002). Putnam rightly follows Hume in believing there is an is/ought distinction. An ought can sometimes be derived from an is but sometimes not. *Perhaps* at the most fundamental level. However, there is no *dichotomy* between the is/ought dichotomy which would always block a derivation of fundamental moral or other normative judgments from factual judgments. A *distinction* between fact and value yes; a *dichotomy* no. Values are not always fact-insensitive but sometimes they are. Neither Dewey nor Hook would deny there are fact/value distinctions. Indeed, no sane person would. They would also agree that there are judgments that are both descriptive and evaluative, i.e., normative judgments that are single judgments inextricably combined with descriptive/evaluative uses where their normativity is in their descriptivity. In 'Human life is respect-worthy and must be morally respected', 'respect-worthy' is both a descriptive and normative term and there is no way of articulating something to be respect-worthy without being descriptive as well as normative. This just goes with the very use of the term 'respect-worthy' as it does of many other terms. They just inextricably go with each other. They are descriptive evaluative uses. There is no way of cancelling one sense without cancelling the other. We can make no sense of such a bifurcated use of these terms. They inextricably go together. We, *pace* R. M. Hare, cannot separate the two parts. This is true of 'torture is vile' and 'promises must be kept' as well of many other sentences.

We have nothing intelligible here in speaking of 'respect-worthy', 'vile' and 'kept' which could be understood *just* emotive or non-cognitive. When Thorsten Veblen spoke of 'the kept class', 'kept' had both, and inextricably, a descriptive and normative use. He was describing a class but naming it and evaluating it, too. 'Kept class' was not just a neutral description of class structure, any more than was his characterization of the leisure class. That was not something to be proud of or even approve of.

We have nothing intelligible neither here in speaking of 'respect-worthy', 'leisure', 'vile' and 'kept class' that could be understood just emotively or utterly non-cognitively. We have in them

inextricably blended both the normative and descriptive force of such sentences with such words in such sentences or indeed words like them. We cannot understand what they mean in that context without understanding that.

There are no fact-insensitive moral or otherwise normative utterances. (See my "Rescuing Political Theory from Fact-Insensitivity" online and in *Socialist Studies*, 2011.) It articulates a defense of fact-sensitivity of value judgments including a detailed critique of G. A. Cohen's astute and detailed defense of the alleged fact-insensitivity of moral and political endeavors, including Cohen's critique of John Rawls's defense of fact-sensitive ethical and political accounts. An account of Cohen's which, if correct, would not only counter Rawls in this respect but pragmatist accounts and, implicitly, what I have written in the first three sections of this article. I will assume here, though not, of course, dogmatically, what I have carefully and painstakingly argued in my "Recovering Political Theory from Fact Insensitivity" (Nielsen 2014).

I am very much indebted to Hilary Putnam's *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy.* This would support, though not in the standard manner and not conclusively establish, Dewey's ethical naturalism. There are other writings of Putnam's favorable to but alternatively of what Dewey argues that I shall later argue require a change in Dewey's account.

For a little more on the so-called fact/value dichotomy consider the following sentences.

1. She is *sensitive.*
2. He is *supercilious.*
3. They are *ridiculous.*
4. People tend to be *evasive.*
5. Trump is a *boastful bombastic vulgar populist.*
6. Nixon was a *liar.*
7. Obama is *articulate.*
8. Reagan was *stupid.*
9. Smoking is *dangerous* for your health.
10. The USA is a *plutocracy*, not a *democracy.*
11. Harper was a *reactionary.*
12. The Nazi Regime was a *dictatorial brutalitarianism.*
13. *Islamophobia* is *cruel*.
14. Religion tends to be in *decline* where citizens are *soberly* and *reasonably* educated.

Note the italicized words in the above fourteen sentences. Whether true or not or justified or not in one degree or another, with one force or another, they are both evaluative and descriptive sentences. The italicized words have a use that is both descriptive and normative. They all make factual (descriptive) as well as normative assertions. Some do so only implicitly. But the words italicized in the list are all both descriptive and normative in their use. And the normativity and descriptiveness are also inextricably blended. They cannot be broken up into their normative parts and descriptive parts. We cannot separately identify them as descriptively or normative but they have a use that is so blended that the different uses cannot be separately articulated. They are descriptive-normative inextricably linked together. And thus our talk and thought often generally go ethically or politically. These remarks are inextricably fact and value entangled. But none are fact-insensitive. All are both factual and normative.

We have nothing in the moral and political life like systems that start out with crucial sentences (propositions or statements, if you will) that are *purely* factual without any normative tone from which ethical sentences can be derived. Nor do we have any *purely* normative or logical sentences (propositions or statements, if you will) playing a role in moral and otherwise normative lives. There are no such bits of discourse that are distinctively normative or purely factual sentences (propositions or statements) in such discourses. We always, or almost always, have a mix. This is the way our moral and political uses and other social discourses standardly if not always go. And this is the way they must go to be coherent. Pragmatism veridically portrays them in this way. And this is the way our morally embedded factually entangled and not infrequently normative language-games are played.

V

Now back to pragmatism. One thing (really a cluster of things) are issues that have been raised or implicitly raised by Dewey's important work starting with actual problematic situations in

reflecting and reasoning about ethics and politics and more generally about social issues. And in utterly turning away from metaphysics and traditional philosophical artificial ethical puzzles and problems. The sort that Parfit utilizes. And in utterly abjuring transcendental endeavors. Something that Jürgen Habermas could not manage to set aside (Nielsen 2013; Nielsen 2011). Dewey does not ask questions like 'Why be moral?', 'Can the moral point of view be rational?' or 'Is there even something that counts as *the* moral point of view?' Or what, if anything, is or can be pure practical reason? Or are all imperatives hypothetical? Dewey turns his back on these and a host of other questions that philosophers have been traditionally concerned with. (Here he is followed by pragmatist philosophers as different as Sidney Hook and Richard Rorty.) For Dewey, the problems of philosophers should become instead the problems of human beings. Real human problems arising in the world (the worlds) we live in which, we should never forget, is a social communal world where humans are communal beings with various cultural endowments and attachments where Dewey, though surely not exclusively, would have us turn back to the ancient philosophical problems of how to live as well as some of their modern carryovers.

But Dewey, unlike the ancient philosophers, stoics and epicureans for example, takes it that for reasonable modern human beings a scientific fixing of beliefs is crucial. But he does not affirm *or* deny Bertrand Russell's belief that what science cannot tell us humankind cannot know. Dewey does not concern himself with such matters or with such complicated conceptions of making sense of our lives as have been articulated by Bernard Williams, Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty. These engagements agitate me but not John Dewey. He starts and stops with real situated problems arising in problematic situations that engage and sometimes traumatize plain as well as *some* not so plain persons concern themselves with how to react to them. How, for example, to react to the massive carnage in Syria and Yemen? How to react to how people are treated in Myanmar, Pakistan, and the Central Republic of Africa or some in New York City, Winnipeg and Baltimore, to get closer to home, and indeed in many other places. Think of the horrible treatment paid to unskilled workers and the

underclass not having even the luck to be exploited. These things go on almost all over the world, though in some places more than in others; in Bangladesh more so than in Australia, but Australia is not anything to cheer about. And racism and other ethnic prejudices that are rampant again all over most of the world. In many places, including the United States—as Hilary Clinton said, the *indispensable* nation or as is frequently propagandistically put, the greatest nation in the world—where the racism is brutal and frequent. It is not accident that some people have come to have to say, 'Black lives matter'.

The problems of philosophers, as Dewey stressed, should become the problems of human beings: their real-life urgent problems. But that is not how most philosophers see it. Dewey was radically breaking with the tradition. Dewey was not only verificationist but he was concerned to deploy that scientific tool to the problems of human beings, practical problems of how to order their lives and how society is to be ordered. Many philosophers during the time I was taking philosophy in universities in 1947, hardly thought that Dewey was doing philosophy at all. Contrast him with Thorsten Veblen as they did not. Veblen had an M.A. and a Ph.D. in philosophy but he turned to doing emancipatory sociology in a humanly perceptive and useful way. Dewey, by contrast, continue to do philosophy but in an altered emancipatory way, or so at least was his intent. But it was not as explicitly empirical as Veblen's was. But with Veblen we break with philosophy more than with Dewey. We should stop asking, *pace* MacIntyre in spite of what he knows, except in a Wittgensteinian therapeutic manner, whether contingency is inescapable or whether we can transcend history (escape historicism) or whether a transcendental point of view, whatever that is, is possible. Both Dewey and Veblen did that. They came down to earth. If they were around now they would, for example, ask whether pregnant women at least in their early stages of pregnancy who live in the Zika-infected areas and who have been bitten by a Zika mosquito should routinely abort. Pope Francis, in spite of his commendable commitment to humanity, particularly the poor, is expectedly off the mark here. That would be too much against an entrenched Catholic doctrine for him.

Hilary Putnam claims that pragmatism (including, of course, John Dewey) at its best "avoided both the illusions of metaphysics and the illusions of skepticism" (Putnam 1992, 180). For we human beings in our very nature are communal animals, are social public creatures though *sometimes* deeply enfeebled as are the mentally incapacitated. Even so, if the enfeeblement has not run too deep, we are capable of some modest measure of human flourishing in accordance with some measure of human capacity for intelligent direction to do that. All these activities must be social activities susceptible to intelligent direction. This applies to all social actions. If we are in tolerable shape they are often applied robustly. Among other things, we converse, sometimes even in various ways experiment. Not all human activities are by any means routine activities. Moreover, these activities are social activities. Socialization and enculturation are very pervasive and run very deep, often for good and indeed sometimes for evil. Even in some respects robustly for most of the fully enabled individuals. It has been said, and not without grounds, that particularly since 1900 we as a population, that is, we Westerners, have become more passive and this has been increasingly so due to the force of neoliberalism. Enlightenment ideals have much withered away. I do not know enough to know if it is true. But it certainly unfortunately seems reasonable. We, in a good pragmatist manner, should apply our intelligence and will to reverse this and overcome it to the extent that it actually obtains. We should fight to keep ourselves from being the modern equivalent of serfs. There is already some slavery. Fishing boats in Indonesia and car washers from Romania in the United Kingdom.

We are not generally so situated. Still we must not accept some conception of our station and its duties to a doing of the thing done articulated by our masters. In the struggle out of medieval life society was once, though over time, changed radically. Capitalist neoliberal rule is not written in the stars. We must struggle against such a thinly disguised enslavement. Sometimes accepting it believing that this is the best in some situations we humans can get. Even those of us, like me, who are reasonably well off must realize that this is not the norm in the world. Far from it. Intelligence

(here we are with Dewey) and *not* some philosophically proclaimed but never properly articulated reason is crucial in human life. Intelligence is something necessary for the creation and sustaining of democracy where the mass of people have control over their lives. And, if things go well, an intelligent control and direction of their lives. It is not something we will get in our class societies or indeed in any class society. Why say classes, particularly the classes we have now, are unavoidable? That it is just a matter of how the world must go? Must we always go around in effect being sold a bill of goods?

We must firmly keep in mind what many authors, sometimes being part of very different political orders and sometimes with very different interests within these orders, have said supporting the inevitability of class society. However, agreeing that if democracy is to obtain it must be deliberative and not just, as we have now in most places, a matter of casting a vote every few years. It should not be the farcical hoopla that in many places is now orchestrated by a dominant controlling elite. Usually, in one way or another, a conservative media is orchestrating the affair. Something for passive but not infrequently cheering and banner waving subjects. This is usually a plutocracy and never a genuinely democratic society. What we have instead in the society is people being propagandized and dumbed-down by the media. If you think I exaggerate, turn on your television or radio.

Such an intelligent and informed activity as a genuine democracy must have, if it is to be gained, as a precondition a wide application of the engagement of human intelligence by the community. It is not an esoteric matter but a humanly informed matter, applied to the solution of actual human problems in which we find ourselves not infrequently in deep and damaging problematic situations. It is not a matter of Parfit-like parables.

Take as such a key problem the student loan problem that the United States, Chile and Canada face. It is having a devastating impact on students. But in many places in Europe, most notably Scandinavia, it is not and these countries are anything but broke. How is such indebtedness to be brought to a reasonable and humanly acceptable resolution that is advantageous to students and to

the society at large? I think, as not a few do as well, the answer is to make university education tuition free. This would not only free students from a long term debt load but be economically advantageous to the society as well. A society benefits from an educated population. Whatever the merits of what should be done here is a matter calling for intelligent investigation. Dewey is right: we need to employ intelligence to our problematic situation, though usually intelligence applied to ascertaining the public good and not to the aggrandizement of a rich few for their added advantage and empowerment.

Student debt is mushrooming for the people of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and Chile. We are not in the dark here not knowing what is to be done. We have many extant well working models, particularly on the European continent, of public funded tuition-free university education. This works to the advantage of these societies and not just to students. The same obtains to a single payer publicly funded health care system. Every developed country except the United States has one, and at less public expense than the health care system is in the United States. It has been somewhat improved in the United States by what reactionaries call Obamacare but it remains inferior to the single payer health system.

A genuinely democratic society would not only be deliberative but also not be a passive society with just a lot of flag waving and cheering but it also must be a society which habitually in their political activity, its citizens reasoned and acted intelligently in their political activities. Then political activities would routinely reflect a deliberately intelligent design. It is crucial to democratic political activity—for its proposals and programs—that political agents so act. But this is hardly so in much of our political life. Too much of it as it goes is a bad joke. If its effects were not often so harmful we could just laugh it off. Some people find Trump amusing, with his often photographed facial expressions and vulgar arrogance and all. But he is indeed vicious and can perhaps be publicly disastrous. Just imagine what he would be and do as President of the United States.

What we badly need to have in a democracy is the wide application of the intelligence in political design and response. Something Dewey remained steadfastly committed to. Something that is now scarce on the ground. We need this in the resolve of political and other social problems arising in problematic situations where we come to have social practices which are crucial to our lives. They are necessary for gaining a grip on how to decently live together as societies or a community of societies in the world. Something that ethical matters are crucially about and what the moral life is about and what the core subject matter of ethics is (Putnam 2015, 325).

Here is something that is not scientific but certainly not anti-scientific and which broadly answers to what most pragmatists regard as being in accordance with scientific method. This is something that has a crucial and demanding rationale. I am not *scientistic* and I am not saying that all or even most questions about how to live are answerable by scientific method. I do not believe that what science cannot tell us humans cannot know or even understand. But some things indeed are answerable to scientific method and often very crucial ones.

This use of intelligence and scientific method is something that is often crucial and sometimes demanding with a *rationale* that is best achieved for us by applying scientific methods. Putnam remarks that Peirce and Dewey (and he could have added Ernest Nagel and Sidney Hook) do not try to reduce scientific method to an algorithm. That is not central to scientific *method*, or rather to its *methods* which are varied. But it is always the conduct of inquiry in general which relies on empirical evidence and often testing. As Peirce put it in his famous "The Fixation of Belief", we learn from experience (empirical, evidence) that what Peirce calls the method of authority, the method of tenacity and the method of what is agreeable to reason do not work but the method of experimental investigation, to wit scientific method, does. This in general is how to conduct intelligent inquiry and this applies to ethical inquiry as well (Putnam 1992, 186).

This will yield no 'absolute fact'. But, as Putnam points out, "the very notion of an 'absolute fact' is nonsensical" (Putnam 1992, 187). Nor is there any such thing as that which Bernard Williams

calls "the absolute conception of the world". That is utterly foreign to Dewey. (*If* this is historicism, so be it.) Putnam goes on to say that "the great contribution of Dewey was to insist that we neither have nor require a 'theory of everything' and to stress that what we need instead is insight into how human beings actually resolve problematic situations" (Putnam 1992, 187). And this requires empirical confirmation and disconfirmation of moral judgments—that is, testing. And this, as we saw in the first sections of this paper, often involves a derivation of an ought from an is. But it also involves sentences which are inextricably both descriptive and normative, such as Mitt Romney's (I am not a fan but Romney is far more to be preferred to Trump) characterization of Trump as a conman and a fraud. Romney's firm statement asserts something empirical and indeed arguably empirically true. And it at the same time asserts something very critical. Indeed strongly morally critical. 'Conman' and 'fraud' cannot be *just* descriptive and explanatory and cannot be *just* moral and normative either— what some positivists called merely emotive. It is, rather, at one and the same time both descriptive and evaluative, and inseparably so. There is no way of intelligibly saying what they purely neutrally and non-normatively are, as when we might say 'There is a path here' or 'We just came across a turtle' but not when we say 'Look out. I just came across a snake' or 'There is a tiger behind that bush'. Discourse and discursive practice are varied and used for variable matters. Moreover, it is better not to speak, as the classical pragmatists did, of *the* scientific method but of scientific methods. Physics and anthropology are very different even in method.

In Chapter 9 of his *Remembering Philosophy,* Putnam set out another distinctive notion that Dewey does not answer to, though another pragmatist (William James) indirectly did, namely that there are existential moral judgments. This is something that Dewey does not consider, though he could have by admitting an account of something that is not and cannot be answered by a scientific method or by another empirical *inquiry* or indeed by any inquiry. Indeed something that would go against the spirit of pragmatism, though it could, or course, accurately characterize it but not warrant it or vindicate it. However it could show that and why it sometimes occurs in our lives and how or

that its questions could be responded to in one way or another, though not scientifically. But these would not be questions which led to warranting or vindication of any kind, though they would not be irrational or a matter of asking pseudo questions either (Putnam 1992, 190-200). They are not scientific questions but they are not anti-scientific either. But they are questions that are just up for discussion.

We have something here that isn't a scientific accoutrement. Indeed, it is not one of its possible achievements. It instead concerns, as I have in effect noted, what Putnam calls existential choices or existential judgments. Putman writes, "Consider the famous example of an existential choice that Sartre employed in his *Existentialism and Humanism.* As the account goes, it is World War II and Pierre [a character in his account] has to make an agonizing choice between leaving his aged mother alone on her farm or staying on the farm and caring for her but then not joining the Resistance and helping to fight the enemy." There is no reasonable or rational answer to the question forced on Pierre here. No answer that will enable him or us to ascertain what to do. Consequentialist reasoning will not help or Kantian reasoning or any kind of philosophical, theological or scientific reasoning. We cannot make the standard pragmatist appeal to what they regard as *the* scientific method here. Nor *just* scientific method. Nor will he be helped by going to a priest, minister, rabbi or imam or any seer or witchdoctor. Nothing will answer Pierre's question or existential questions like his. Here he must just decide, if he decides at all or avoids decision, to let things go as they will without a decision, without a choice. Then he would be being evasive. But it is just a stark choice that confronts Pierre. No decisive good reasons obtain one way or another.

Not all or even most moral choices are like that but *some* are demanding ones, as is Pierre's choice. Nor is it like choosing between a chocolate or vanilla milkshake. With the Pierre case that Sartre trots out and Putnam considers we have a sheer human choice where no human cognizing will help us decide. This sometimes confronts human beings. Pragmatists, James aside, has evaded this. But they should not and need not.

Putnam recognizes, as I do as well, that Dewey's philosophy as well as all other consistently purely pragmatist philosophizing cannot help here. There its account is inadequate, indeed useless. We cannot reasonably just set aside or ignore existential choices and adequately face up to what is to be done. There is no philosophical or other reasonable answer to what is to be done in such existential situations. Faced with them, if we are reasonable, we will recognize that in such existential situations we cannot reason out an answer. Our situation is not at all like the fabricated counterexample situations that some analytic philosophers trot out. Instead we must, if we choose at all, choose without any vindication or rationale for our choice. Reason has no possible reign here, though this is not to say our choice without a rational ground is thereby irrational. It is just not based on a rational choice. It is a-rational, not necessarily or even usually irrational. Indeed it can be made after reflection and consideration but we will see there that reasoning cannot yield an answer. But reason need not, though it can, block choice either.

There are places in life, though not all places, where we must just choose or evasively fail to make any choice. We are in situations where one or another way of being is just forced no us. If we fail to act in a determinate way we still in effect act. It has been called sticking one's head in the sand.

Talk of either being reasonable or of making an irrational choice here is empty. There is in such situations no either rational or irrational or prudential way. And none of Peirce's methods or ways of fixing belief or the employment of intelligence here will help. But on Peirce's, Dewey's, Hook's or Nagel's sides these productive ways—ways that all of them articulated as ways of applying intelligence to moral, political or otherwise social situations—will sometimes clear the ground for us. But not in the cases of existential situations like Sartre's that Putnam trotted out. But we need to realize there are such situations, though not every day. But there are situations where we, unless we just go with the flow and couch-potato it out, where we just have to make a sheer choice; a choice where intelligence cannot settle things.

Still, that is clearly something that is not usually the case. In many cases a reasonably careful employment of our intellects will yield reasonable answers to most moral, political and otherwise social questions. We are not usually caught in existential situations but sometimes we are. But do not try to make a moral or political theory or any kind of philosophical theory or account out of such unusual situations. That is bad, though not as bad as using in such theorizing absurd counterfactuals in moral and political reasoning à la (for example) Parfit. Though, of course, existential situations should not be ignored but a whole theory should not be built around them.

I am not saying that taking the or a philosopher's *weg* will always be much ado about nothing or never help us gain toward a better world or help us in gaining a more adequate cognitive grip on what one would be like and perhaps could be attained. That is, help us much in coming to know how to live or how society is to be ordered or what is or can be a good life for human beings. To establish by argument that all human beings matter. We will have to just stress, as we do now, that black lives matter.

Sometimes philosophy can, under-laboring a bit, clear a bit of ground here. But not usually. There is little if any need for philosophy here or perhaps anywhere. That is something that Dewey and other pragmatists, including Putnam, need to face up to. Dewey, like many others, including Putnam, has too much confidence in philosophy, renewed or not. *Perhaps* the day for renewing is past.

However, this does not, or at least should not, lead to skepticism, except skepticism concerning philosophy—not to speak of nihilism here—or lead as it did Alasdair MacIntyre to a metaphysically oriented and religiously oriented philosophical perspective. Particularly a metaphysically oriented philosophy, as Putnam put it, that takes us back unwashed to the 12th and 13th centuries. Such a movement is certainly crippling. It is not just water that has flowed under the bridge but that a shift in philosophy or out of philosophy that may lead us to a *historicism* or so it *seemed* to be leading MacIntyre until he got the Thomist bug. Something that also included full-scale

Catholicism. MacIntyre went from what was for some, including me, a challenging philosophical way to something that crucifies the intellect but not deliberately as it did for Kierkegaard. There are indeed situations where we must just make a choice or hunker down to an intellectual and cultural numbing. MacIntyre did both (MacIntyre 2006; Nielsen 2016a in response).

Pragmatists do not numb down but turn to the plentitude of situations in which we can deploy our intellects. Our intellects are not always a frail reed. We can often delay it in problematic situations and their resolution, that is, to the many cases where the use of our intellects will yield, if applied carefully, answers to moral, political and religious questions. Remember Dewey's repeated claim that the problems of philosophers are the problems of human beings. That in many cases will require the attention to problematic situations that are plainly moral and political; situations where we order our lives. But, as I have already noted, it may lead to *historicism*. But that religion must be invoked here, *pace* MacIntyre, it meant for Dewey to be treated, if at all, as an a-theoretical religious regard, an a-rational, not necessarily rational, regard concerning religion but not religion full-stop. But a religious orientation need not be the case. Such religiosity seems to have become so for Putnam but not for me. Does reasonableness or human sensitivity point in either way here? I am inclined to think, perhaps mistakenly or at least inconclusively, that such a religion as MacIntyre's is a Holmes-less Watson. Even if we become a de-mythologized MacIntyre and take a Kierkegaardian turn, we do not, as Kierkegaard thought he did and willingly so, crucify our intellects to retain our religious belief if we indeed have one. I am not willing to crucify my intellect to take a religious turn. And I do not see how or why it is required or that now I need to. But that does not mean that I have to sink gently into religious belief or become a raving atheist or an Evangelical one, though atheist I am in a calm manner. Being aged does not soften me in that way or turn my resolve.

Moreover, philosophy, again *pace* MacIntyre, or so I think, will not and indeed cannot settle such existential matters or anything crucial if it is a crucial point to just as a matter of existential choice. But philosophical existential choices or being faced with them need not lead to nihilism or

even to nihilism knocking at the door. It does not even require skepticism. Like Sartre and Putnam and some others, I believe there are existential choices and that sometimes they are crucially important. But that does not require skepticism and I do not feel skeptical. But I do not believe that our non-evasive and determined use of our intellects, our reflective capacities and our other uses of our human sensibilities will yield answers to such existential questions. Nothing will. But we can choose or not choose here. We can, couch-potato like, just go with the flow. However, we can choose but if so then we must *just* choose in such situations. Even careful reflection will not yield a reasoned choice or a rationale choice. If we choose we *just* choose without a reason in existential situations for the choice we make. It is a groundless choice but it need not be irrational. Everything that is non-rational is not also irrationale.

In saying this I am also saying that reason or rationality loses it hegemony here, if it even ever had it. I am not saying in these situations of existential choice that it cannot be reasonably predicted what will be chosen. Which choices people will make can sometimes be ascertained if we know enough about them and their situations. If Pierre had an expert psychoanalyst who had been analyzing him for a long time, the analyst might very well have been able to predict quite accurately the choice Pierre would make vis-à-vis the Resistance and his aged mother. But that is not at all the matter of showing the choice was justified or was not. Reasons for choice are one thing; what *causes* the choice made is another. The point Putnam was making and I am making now is that in the case of what Putnam following Sartre calls existential choices there is no way of showing which choice is the justified choice, the right choice, the rational choice, the reasonable choice, the choice to be made or anything like that. When they make existential choices, people must just choose. Reason goes on holiday here and must do so if a choice is to be made. It is *not* that whatever choice is made is irrational. But it is not required by reason or determined by reason or in accordance with reason either. Not all moral or political issues can be resolved by the use of intelligence. *Sometimes* we must just choose, if we choose at all, what is to be done, though intelligence can decide what is doubtful

and whether choice is possible. If a situation is not doubtful no matter which way we go it plainly cannot not be a matter of choice, irrational or not, answering to reason or not. It is just a sheer choice. Sometimes a lot of life is like that.

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