Philosophy Americana
Douglas Anderson

Published by Fordham University Press

Anderson, Douglas.
Philosophy Americana: Making Philosophy at Home in American Culture.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/13297

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=402024
How are we, then, to get around in an everyday sort of wilderness? My aim in this chapter is to work toward a middle ground where American idealism and pragmatism share an answer to this question. The first part is not exactly about W. E. Hocking or Gabriel Marcel or Henry Bugbee, but it is an attempt to work within the philosophical spirit that they have bequeathed to us. I think of this spirit in part as having grown out of the philosophical space Hocking cultivated for himself between the range and vision of Royce’s idealism and the attention to the local and the ordinary in James’s pragmatism. Marcel subsequently drew on Hocking’s thought and conversation to keep the meaning of faith and God alive in the Continental philosophical tradition that emerged in mid-century. Bugbee, whose *The Inward Morning*, as we noted earlier, was inspired by Marcel’s *Being and Having*, explored with an American temper the ground cleared by Hocking and Marcel. All three were among those who carried forward into the twentieth century non-
absolutist versions of idealism; other contributors to this somewhat hidden strand of idealism include Benedetto Croce, R. G. Collingwood, José Ortega y Gasset, and John William Miller. I also choose these three specifically because each points to a moment of direct encounter in the creating of “working certainty”: a “disclosed a priori,” a “faith,” or an “animating base.”

The spirit of this neoidealistic lineage found Dewey’s pragmatism at once both akin and estranged. Dewey brought philosophy down to earth through his instrumentalism, but in doing so, he appeared to abandon much of the importance philosophy holds for human lives. The first half of the chapter speaks to one dimension of this apparent abandonment; the second half explores the ways in which Dewey’s sense of wisdom resists such abandonment. The upshot is that an ambiguity runs through Dewey’s thought and is in need of attention. This ambiguity leads to the very different readings of Dewey expressed in the work of Victor Kestenbaum and Larry Hickman. Whereas Kestenbaum, who argues that Dewey never fully abandoned idealism, sees in Dewey’s work an attention to our self-transcendence in experience, Hickman sees something more like a tool kit for social reconstruction. Though I lean toward Kestenbaum’s emphasis, the ambiguity remains, and marks an important temperamental divide within the history of pragmatism. Even so, there is sufficient content in Dewey’s account of practical wisdom for it to meet the idealists halfway in working out a way to live in an experiential wilderness—such a wilderness as I encountered in youth.

Roaring Brook runs down from the hills behind Richmond, New Hampshire, toward the town of Winchester and the Ashuelot River. For a stretch it parallels state route 119, hidden down behind the hemlocks and maples. Just above where it turns to run beside the road is an old mill whose crumbling remnants have created pools both up- and downriver. Here I used to spend time snagging small native trout with little spinners. But I seldom stayed there. Up- and downstream I walked the smoothed, rounded, occasionally moss-covered pieces of granite left there by glaciers, time, and history. In the midst of fishing, almost without knowing it, I learned to walk the brook; sometimes
the walking itself moved from the fringe to the focus of my experience. I practiced the art of walking in the instabilities of the brook. Walking the rocks—a little bit of risk and a dose of bodily intuition. What began as fun, later developed into a practice, an act of self-control. Over the years I built an assuredness, a kind of certainty in my walking. It came to be something I could rely on.

Philosophers—especially those of us who tend to pro-fess more than we con-fess—however liberally minded, have in my experience tended toward dogmatism. Not that professional philosophers won’t argue; they will. But the argumentation often veils a granitelike foundation to which they seem almost organically attached, like lichen. When John Dewey wrote *The Quest for Certainty*, it was to this dogmatic tendency that he addressed his arguments. His primary targets were philosophies based on religious dogma and philosophies derived deductively from some single set of axioms. Dewey’s worry was that these types of systematic thought had come to dominate the history of philosophy and had led philosophers away from thinking that might assist in the conduct of life. In Dewey’s language, philosophy had come to deal only with the “problems of philosophers” and not with the “problems of men.”

After Dewey’s book, many came to argue that any quest for certainty had to be outlawed because such quests were the bases of all totalitarian activity. Certainty was not to be sought. The most radical extension of Dewey’s thought involved the rejection of philosophy itself in favor of the thinly lived, aesthetic existence offered by various thinkers of the postmodern turn. My sense is that this is an overreaction based on a somewhat narrow consideration of what the history of philosophy has been about. I think also that Hocking, Marcel, and Bugbee are agreed on this. For them, philosophy does involve the need for at least a working certainty, and I believe their work provides a basis for understanding philosophy as a quest for certainty once the notion of certainty itself is revised and reoriented. But theirs is a philosophy without dogma.

I begin my revision by turning to the relationship between certainty and action. After all, my experience of walking the instabilities
in Roaring Brook can be only poorly described without some appeal to a working certainty. My walking seems first to require some sort of certainty to initiate it. My instinctive or abductive guesses about where and how to plant my feet seem guided, even if only in a minimal way. Moreover, as a practice, the walking of the rocks seems to generate another kind of certainty in the confidence it produces. I come to rely on my ability to negotiate the trip down the brook. If any quest for certainty makes sense, these experiences seem to offer a reasonable place to look.

In his essay “Action and Certainty,” W. E. Hocking brings together Dewey’s focus on human action and his questioning of the quest for certainty, and he notes a tension that arises. Hocking asks that we reflect on our experiences of acting in the world and ask ourselves to what extent we can be autonomous agents without some sense of certainty in our lives. It is important to note that his argument begins with a reflection on experience; he is not engaged in the sort of abstract, transcendental deduction that is central to Dewey’s concern. Hocking’s method is much more akin to James’s radical empiricism. Hocking brings to our attention two examples that highlight the presence of certainty as the basis for human action. In the first, he reminds us that “children cut corners long before they can announce that the straight line is the shortest distance.” In the second instance he suggests that at least some of our feelings of guilt or remorse rest on an initial awareness of a distinction between right and wrong. The aim of these examples is more general: “It is not the scorn of action, it is the love of it, which prompts the quest for certainty, such as one can have before action begins.”

The irony of Dewey’s rejection of certainty, as Hocking sees it, is that Dewey turns to scientific method and experimentalism to replace the deductivist claims of earlier philosophers. Hocking does not quarrel with the shift, but asks that we examine what happens in the act of experimenting—a human action. Can all claims for certainty be abandoned if we turn to rely on science? Hocking thinks not, since when we examine our actions, we see that there is something in them that we can “count on.” The need for this stability or working cer-
tainty “lies in the nature of all action. For all action intends to change something in particular: and in order to effect just this alteration in the world, the frame of the action must hold still.”

Scientific inquiry—experimentation—is one particular kind of action. And despite the deductive sense of the Quine–Duhem thesis—that when hypothesis and background knowledge come into conflict, we may reject one or the other—it is not a guide to the practice of scientific inquiry. Experiments in science always rely both on some instinctive commitments and on some established beliefs. We may grant the revisability of both the instinctive or intuitive judgments and the established beliefs, and yet not give up the notion that working certainties provide the possibility of experimentation. This is precisely the point of Charles Peirce’s emphasis on strands of belief in his theory of inquiry: philosophy’s “reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibres may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected” (W, 2:213). Particular strands may break, but the cable remains. Hocking responds to Dewey’s shift in this manner: “For unless experiment can establish something and unless something of what we suppose ‘established’ stays established, endures, accumulates, the whole experimental business becomes a fool’s paradise.”

The simple force of Hocking’s comments on what Dewey does retain in terms of human action, including experimentation, is that it does require elements of stability or working certainty. For Hocking, these elements are of two sorts: what he calls the “disclosed a priori” and that which is “established” in inquiry. I prefer to think of these disclosed a prioris as intuitive or instinctive beliefs that are already at work in our human practices. The “established” certainties I think of as our inheritance—the features of a world frame in which we operate. Now, the difficulty Hocking, or anyone else, faces in trying to introduce these working certainties is that the deductivist will immediately reply that none of them is “absolutely certain.” For deduction the case is always either/or—the absolute certainty of a god’s knowledge or the thorough relativism of the failure to be certain. But
Plato—and even Parmenides—made it abundantly clear that this is not where we live. We live in a precarious world in an adventurous attitude, seeking stability amid risk. Dewey noted this in *The Quest for Certainty* and later made it central in the early chapters of *Experience and Nature*. Still, I have to think that his reading of the history of philosophy is much too strong when he says:

> The quest for certainty is a quest for a peace which is assured, an object which is unqualified by risk and the shadow of fear which action casts. For it is not uncertainty *per se* which men dislike, but the fact that uncertainty involves us in a peril of evils. (LW, 4:7)

Plato has never struck me as a coward of this sort; his description of human life is much too nuanced for such a reductive reading. We might grant that some philosophers have quested for certainty in this way—for example, the late-nineteenth-century British idealists such as Green, Taylor, and Bradley, with whom Dewey was familiar. But it doesn’t follow that Hocking’s midworld view is guilty of the same. Hocking does not search for a fully preconceived dogmatic order with which to box up the universe, but for those working stabilities which are the precipitates of human history and which sustain “a laboring philosophy, arising out of and pertinent to existing crises, not to ancient ones.” Philosophy may seek to disclose the intuitions and inheritances embedded in human experience.

Intuitions and inheritances appear in a world of risk. And, philosophically speaking, the greatest risk for them is that they may turn out to be false, nonworking, inadequate, or simply incomplete. As Hocking repeatedly notes, it may take an eternity to explore the variety of ways in which an idea is adequate or inadequate. Gabriel Marcel addresses the possibility of the deepest risk for any working certainty—what Peirce called “throwing over the whole cartload of our beliefs.” In a long discussion of the faith one might maintain in persons or in God, Marcel notes that faith bears its own fragility: “It emerges that I can myself be cut off from my own faith and no longer see it; it can even happen that I may come to look on it as an opinion which I have picked up blindly and adopted.” This truth forces us to
focus on the humanness of both faith and working certainty—they are living conditions of human action. A god’s certainty, were it available to us, would not require faith; a god could afford to be dogmatic, because he or she would be right. But the situation of a finite person is quite different. It is precisely because of the precariousness of our situation that we require faith and working certainties to act, to live—faith is an act of commitment and hope, not of dogma. To “count on,” to “rely on,” to “be certain about,” are quite distinct from “knowing,” especially if one means by knowing “deductive necessity.” But they are nevertheless meaningful and provide a purchase for our acting. If I had a final assurance about walking the river, intuitions of how to step and inheritances about the stabilities of the physical environment wouldn’t be necessary—like a god, I could live dogmatically. If I had no intuitions or inheritances—and no dogma—I couldn’t walk the river at all; I would be an actual skeptic, not merely a professed one. What Hocking and Marcel lead me to think is that dogmatism and skepticism are philosophies of the dead, of the impersonal—they are not the philosophies of living agents who act.

If intuition and inheritance, as Hocking and Marcel suggest, can function as the bases—what Bugbee calls the “animating bases”—of action, they lead directly to another quest for certainty: the quest to create it. Hocking’s allusion to what is “established” in scientific inquiry and experiment points to one instance of such creation. Moreover, if my walking of the river rocks involves an abductive, intuitive bodily grasp of my movement as well as an inherited understanding of some stabilities in my environment, I also begin to develop a confidence in my ability to walk. The practice of walking establishes something I can count on in my own experiences—a general feature of my own being. But I think the quest for the creation of certainty is much more pervasive in human experience. Responding to Dewey’s conception of certainty as the aim of inquiry, Henry Bugbee makes a similar claim:

But I don’t recall that it occurred to him [Dewey] to consider certainty, not as something to be quested for, like a pot of gold for
which longing search is undertaken, and not as something that hangs on the fate of isolated truth-claims or of structures of hypotheses, and not as a very strong conviction, but rather as pertaining to that animating base on which human enterprise becomes sound. I would like to say that certainty lies at the root of action that makes sense. It is connected with the ultimate purport of our lives.\(^8\)

Bugbee sees this sort of certainty as akin to Marcel’s descriptions of hope and faith, and it seems reasonable to extend this kinship to trust and reliance as well. Created certainties that are the results of our actions and practices themselves become conditions for further action. The quest to establish such working certainties not only pervades our experience but also is a trait that marks our experience as human. It is a human practice of the sort Thoreau identified in *Walden*:

> Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and the slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through church and state, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality.\(^9\)

We seek some purchase from which to live our lives. What Bugbee suggests, following both Marcel and Thoreau, is that creating certainties is not only pervasive but also integrated in our experience. Our working certainties establish an outlook and a world in the wilderness through and in which we can act and dwell. This outlook and world become the basis of my action, my hope, my self-maintenance, and my self-revision.

Hocking marked Dewey’s own unarticulated version of Bugbee’s point when he identified Dewey’s faith in the value of “trying to realize value.”\(^10\) Two human practices come to mind as illustrating what Bugbee has in mind: the development of friendship and the cultivation of love. Friendship and love are not merely *had* relationships; they are created, nurtured, and developed. Both involve the establish-
ment of working certainties very much like what Marcel calls faith. As friends develop a relationship, they come to be able to “count on” one another, to trust and have faith in one another. We often measure the depth of a friendship not as a social scientist would, but simply by our felt willingness to count on another and our own felt willingness to be counted on. The unspoken affinity between Jim and Huck Finn comes to mind. And the bond between boy and dog in Where the Red Fern Grows. The friendship is worked for, but it is not a simple teleological process. The certainty of the friendship is not a clear and concretely marked goal; it certainly is not a goal of “inquiry” in a narrow sense. Rather, it is revealed to and clarified for the friends as they live through it, not unlike Hocking’s “disclosed a priori.”

For love to flourish, nothing short of fidelity will suffice. What is compelling about Romeo and Juliet is that each, in the end, demonstrates a willingness to die for the other. No existential doubts linger. But I think also of my own grandmother who, at age ninety-five, died just a few weeks after her husband, with no clear presence of ill health. The certainties of love are neither deductively attained nor susceptible of articulate definition. Rather, they are created in the transaction between persons; they are felt; and they are disclosed—to the extent they may be—in the ways a life is lived. This is not to overlook the precarious nature of such relationships and the demonic features of persons that may undermine their possibility. It is, in part, their difficulty that makes the certainties we create in and through friendship and love so precious. They are neither self-creating nor self-sustaining; they are certainties worked for that in turn work for us.

A similar proposal for the creation of a working certainty can be found in Dewey’s essay “Creative Democracy.” There he declares that democracy is neither a formal institution nor an articulate doctrine, but a way of life whose establishment creates an environment in which we can act freely and with the hope of ameliorating our existence. “For what is the faith of democracy in the role of consultation, of conference, of persuasion, of discussion, in formation of public opinion, which in the long run is self-corrective,” Dewey asked, “ex-
cept faith in the capacity of the intelligence of the common man to respond with common sense to the free play of facts and ideas which are secured by effective guarantees of free inquiry, free assembly, and free communication?” (LW, 14:227). This is precisely the sort of thinking that led Hocking to see irony in Dewey’s rejection of any quest for certainty. For democracy to achieve the sort of instrumental success Dewey envisions, it must arise out of a faith that persons have in it; thus, John E. Smith’s suggestion that Dewey’s common faith was his faith in democracy seems apt.

To speak more generally, Hocking and Bugbee openly challenge Dewey’s apparent divorce of philosophy from certainty. They agree with Dewey that we should take philosophy back from the deductivists, the “lovers of clarity” who in “working within premises and procedural rules that are explicit and not in question” can be sure of what they are saying. But both argue that we must also retrieve certainty from the same realm. Philosophy does deal with certainty, at least in the ways I have suggested: intuition, inheritance, and creation. If philosophy, as Dewey wishes, is to be more than an intellectual game or mental exercise, it must pursue the bases of human action. Philosophy is a quest for the ongoing development of working certainties, the quest for a meaning we can count on, although, as Marcel and Bugbee remind us, not a final, finished, and fully articulate meaning. Just as such certainties guide our attempt to walk the instabilities of a river, so philosophy as a quest for meaning we can count on seeks to guide our attempts to negotiate the precariousness of our existence. Let us revisit Bugbee’s account of philosophy: “Such a philosophy will not be set up like the solution of a puzzle, worked out with all the pieces lying there before the eye. It will be more like the clarification of what we know in our bones.” Moreover, such a philosophy has concrete aims:

We sometimes run into questions about the practical importance of art and philosophy. I want to set down one possible answer to this kind of question, and it seems to me an answer to be confirmed again and again from experience. In so far as art and philosophy are consummated in contemplation, they are kindred
ways in which reality nurtures in us the soul of generosity; and it is from this that we are enabled to act truly.\textsuperscript{13}

Bugbee’s description of philosophy here seems grounded in Hocking’s image of the disclosed a priori, but pushes a bit farther. “Clarification” has, as we noted in chapter 2, at least two senses: that of conceptually straightening out what one means (linguistic analysis) and that of purifying, as in the clarifying of a liquid. Both Hocking and Bugbee grant the import of the first sense in a limited fashion—philosophy may use linguistic analysis as an edge tool in its speech. But both also see philosophy as more importantly tied to the second sense. The working certainties for which philosophy quests are not to be gained simply by an analysis divorced from experience; as Bugbee suggests, the “conclusive meaning immanent in experience . . . does not seem necessarily connected with discursive articulateness.”\textsuperscript{14}

Dewey was right to point out that such an approach leaves us perpetually skating on the surfaces. Philosophy must also clarify experience as it is lived, disclosing our working certainties to us—those we find and those we create. Philosophy is thus an act of purifying, a quest for certainty that is fully engaged with the conduct of life and not merely with the problems of philosophers. Such purification is not an unusual or esoteric task; it is an exploration of the bases of ordinary action—the discovery we each make of the workings of geometry, the establishment and maintenance of friendships, the practice of walking a river, molding a piece of clay, or teaching a child. “Certainty,” says Bugbee, “is profoundly resolute, but I would mark it out in diametrical contrast with complacency or being of a closed mind. It bespeaks a basis for action rather than arrival at a terminus of endeavor” (IM, p. 37).

\textit{Dewey’s Phronesis}

As I said at the outset, an ambivalence appears in Dewey’s writings regarding his attitude toward certainty and action. His instrumentalism seeks to effect stability but at the same time rejects any claims to theoretical certainty. It is an ambivalence—or ambiguity—that occa-
sionally leads his interpreters in different directions. Thus, his instrumentalism, his specific concern with certainty, and his occasional tendency to describe philosophy as broker for the social sciences open the door to the sorts of experiential worries that are raised by Hocking and Bugbee. However, as we have noted, Dewey often wrote to specific audiences, and to capture the fullness of his thought, we must move beyond reading him in one direction only. Making the quest for stability and security, as Dewey often does, an aim of inquiry has the effect, for better or worse, of scientizing this aim, and leads away from the sort of existential “animating base” to which Hocking, Marcel, and Bugbee allude. What Dewey has to say about “wisdom,” however, seems to align much more closely with this idealistic strand in twentieth-century thought. Therefore, I turn here to a consideration of his sense of wisdom, for in this consideration we find another dimension of John Dewey, one I think more attuned to the work of Hocking, Marcel, and Bugbee. If Dewey did not offer the experiential depth of Bugbee, he had a much clearer sense of the practical needs of a functioning democracy.

Dewey did not blink when he said that philosophy and science were instrumental to art. He had something quite reasonable in mind. What this world wants is people acting as wisely as possible in whatever historical situations they find themselves. Achieving this effective wisdom requires the best thinking human beings can achieve: the best thinking is to be found in science and philosophy. Thus, as Dewey saw it, science and philosophy must be instrumental to artful living; and artful living is wisdom brought to life. This is Dewey’s Americanized version of phronesis.

In 1932, in a work written with James Hayden Tufts, Dewey identified wisdom with prudence; more specifically, in discussing the aim of moral education, Tufts and Dewey suggested “wisdom or prudence” could be understood “as judgment of ends which are expedient or that mark ‘good policy’” (LW, 7:209). Earlier, in Experience and Nature, Dewey had suggested the equation of wisdom with artful living: “Upon the side of wisdom, as human beings interested in good and bad things in their connection with human conduct, thinkers are
concerned to mitigate the instability of life, to introduce moderation, temper, and economy, and when worst comes to worst to suggest consolations and compensations” (LW, 1:51). Such characterizations of wisdom in Dewey’s work have led to repeated questions about his thinking, for as Emerson pointed out in his essay “Prudence,” there are two kinds of prudence: a “spurious prudence” that “makes the senses final” and that is exemplified by egoistic expedience in bringing about what one desires, and a virtuous prudence that works toward higher and broader ends. The specific question, then, is where does Dewey’s wisdom as prudence reside?

In being identified as a successor to William James, Dewey was, and is, often accused of defending expediency. However, despite ambiguities in his thought, there can be little doubt that he intended to equate wisdom with virtuous prudence. “It is folly rather than wisdom,” he said, “to include in the concept of success only tangible material goods and to exclude those of culture, art, science, sympathetic relations with others” (LW, 2:209). Moreover, for Dewey, wisdom meant judgment about what was good not only for oneself but also for the community at large. As Aristotle said of Pericles and others who manifested practical wisdom, “They can see what is good for themselves and what is good for men in general” (Nichomachean Ethics, 1140b, 8–10). Thus, while Dewey seemed occasionally on the verge of reducing wisdom and philosophy to self-interested practice, it was his intent to make practice itself wise and philosophical.

It remains true, however, that for Dewey wisdom was a matter of practice. As we have already noted, there was no room for a detached and final sophia in Dewey’s thinking, because sophia required fixed and final truths as objects of contemplation, and Dewey argued that there were no such independent realities; the objects of sophia were, as Dewey saw it, at most historical, humanly projected ideals. Thus, Dewey’s principal quarrel with the working idealism of Hocking and Bugbee was not about whether ideals were real, but about whether they had any independence. Throughout his career he distinguished wisdom from knowledge and associated wisdom with action: “For wisdom differs from knowledge in being the application of what is
known to intelligent conduct of the affairs of human life” (LW, 15:157). Wisdom, then, amounts to good judgment in action, an idea that closely links Dewey to Bugbee’s and Hocking’s conception of working certainty. As a pragmatist, Dewey took wisdom’s action to be important insofar as any belief that yields no effect is not a belief proper. In other words, to claim to be wise but fail to act on the judgment of wisdom would be to display a lack of wisdom. But this pragmatic emphasis also made it essential for Dewey to say how one comes by such practical wisdom. Indeed, one might say that insofar as Dewey made artful action and practice the goal of his thinking, his entire philosophy is a discussion of the nature and possibility of practical wisdom. It is clear that Dewey took both science and philosophy to be instrumental to the exercise of wisdom. It is important to show generally how this is so. More specifically, however, we need to ask whether philosophy’s way to wisdom is sufficient to the task Dewey set for it.

Science, according to Dewey, was not a static body of eternal truths. Rather, as did Peirce, he considered it an ongoing process of inquiry that effected an ever-changing set of interrelated hypotheses or “truths.” As such, Dewey argued, science was instrumental to wisdom in two ways. First, as a model of method of inquiry, it suggested that in other human practices, including moral practice, we must look to consequences to understand the meaning of present ideas and actions; we must proceed experimentally. Second, science provided a body of “knowledge” or “truths” that could be employed in any practical decision to keep us informed. Again, the notion of working certainties as inheritances comes to mind. “Science,” Dewey maintained in *Experience and Nature*, “is an instrumentality of and for art because it is the intelligent factor in art” (LW, 1:276). Thus, science provided an understanding of means and the meanings of some ends in human practices; it was a source of “information” for philosophy and its move to wisdom. As Dewey put it in the *Ethics*: “Probably the great need of the present time is that traditional barriers between scientific and moral knowledge be broken down, so that there will
be organized and consecutive endeavor to use all available scientific knowledge for humane and social ends” (LW, 7:283; see also LW, 1:3).

Dewey’s conception of philosophy is Socratic at heart. It is the criticism of human values, ends, and goods. As such, it is intellectual though never merely so; criticism of values is instrumental to practice and, therefore, to the possibility of wisdom. As is science, philosophy is for Dewey an art: “Criticism is not a matter of formal treatises, or taking up important matters for consideration in a serious way. It occurs whenever a moment is devoted to looking to see what sort of value is present; whenever instead of accepting a value-object wholeheartedly, being rapt by it, we raise even a shadow of a question about its worth, or modify our sense of it by even a passing estimate of its probable future” (LW, 1:299). Philosophy’s task is to assess the likelihood of a way of thinking’s ability to bring about stability or to engender a precarious and unstable future. Taken together, then, science and philosophy work together to bring us to the point of wisdom. In 1946, in his introduction to *The Problems of Men*, Dewey put it as follows:

> The purpose and business of philosophy is wholly with that part of the historic tradition called a search for wisdom:—Namely, search for ends and values that give direction to our collective human activities. It holds that not grasp of eternal and universal Reality but use of methods and conclusions of our best knowledge, that called scientific, provides the means for conducting this search. (LW, 15:161)

As I read Dewey, most of his philosophy is a discussion of how philosophy carries on its critical task. As we look broadly over his writings, we find a kind of experiential categoriology of Socratic examination—of the ways philosophy leads toward wisdom in criticizing, evaluating, and perhaps creating ends and goods in particular historical situations. For this much alone, I believe Dewey’s work is worth reading. However, a question remains concerning whether this categoriology is adequate to the goal of wisdom. Let me in what follows outline some important features of Dewey’s categoriology,
drawing from a variety of his later writings, and then try to mark off where I believe he moves closest to Hocking and Bugbee.

Insofar as wisdom is good judgment about ends and “policies” to achieve ends, some measure of ends must be provided by Dewey’s philosophy. But even before we have a measure, we must have some understanding of the meanings of the ends-in-view with which we must deal in any given situation. Therefore, philosophy must first critically assess meaning. One condition of such assessment, Dewey suggests, is funded or lived experience. Dewey wants to resurrect “primary” experience from its depreciated status in much modern and Enlightenment thinking. Insofar as philosophy is to criticize values, it must have acquaintance with how values have worked in the richness and complexity of lived experience. I think it is important to point out here that Dewey emphasizes acquaintance or livedness; both the veiled “experience” of traditional British empiricism and the mathematized “experience” of sociological studies are insufficient to uncover the lived meaning of human valuations. Rather, our judgments become more balanced—more critical—to the extent that they are “the result of past experience funded into direct outlook upon the scene of life” (LW, 7:266). In this much, Dewey’s thought on wisdom moves into the vicinity of the “animating base” of living expressed by Bugbee, Marcel, and Hocking.

However important Dewey’s resurrection of experience is, it provides little account of the measuring of values or goods; it is only an entry into their meanings. The second category of examination that Dewey provides is the pragmatic requirement of examining consequences. This requirement addresses not only means but also the ends-in-view with which wisdom is concerned, for any ends achieved will have further consequences, and these constitute a part of what the ends in question mean. The extent to which ends engender the possibility of further goods is a trademark of a Deweyan “good end” under his concept of growth. Indeed, at one point in the Ethics Dewey describes wisdom in these terms: “Wisdom, or as it is called on the ordinary plane, prudence, sound judgment, is the ability to foresee
consequences in such a way that we form ends which grow into one
another and reenforce one another” (LW, 7:210).

The efficacy of the investigation of consequences to discover the
wider meaning of ends-in-view, for Dewey, hinges on one’s capacity
for imagination. We need to be able to project the consequences of
ends creatively and imaginatively, if we are to understand their scope.
Such an emphasis on imagination is of course not original with
Dewey, but the integration of imagination with the other categories
of examination and the appeal to a rich, not formal, imagination per-
haps are. As Thomas Alexander puts it: “As projected completion of
action, imagination seeks to understand the actual in light of the pos-
sible in a dramatic or experiential way.”15

Funded experience and imaginative projection of consequences do
not, however, exhaust the categories of examination. Dewey also be-
lieved that criticizing the meaning of ends-in-view involved felt con-
straints. In the Ethics he maintained that the judgment of ends
requires a sensitivity to the situation at hand. To know the environ-
ment of a given situation, one must be sensitive to it. “Nothing,” says
Dewey, “can make up for the absence of immediate sensitiveness”
(LW, 7:268). At first glance, this sensitiveness appears to represent a
possible measure of the value of ends. However, its role is once again
instrumental. What Dewey has in mind is that the sensitiveness pro-
vides us with a “sense” of how things might go under the direction
of certain ends. It is a requirement for wisdom, but cannot alone gen-
erate wisdom. The same is true for a second emotive element in criti-
cism, sympathy.

Sympathy plays a role comparable to that of sensitiveness with re-
spect to an end’s consequences for other persons. But again sympathy
does not play the straightforward role of a conscience that itself mea-
sures goods and values. Rather, it is instrumental to the communitar-
ian element Dewey believes to be a part of wisdom. The employment
of sympathy is for Dewey a way of effectively objectifying ends in
imagination:

Sympathy is the animating mold of moral judgment not because
its dictates take precedence in action over those other impulses
In sensitiveness and sympathy Dewey further qualifies the requirements for examining ends and goods that can put us in a position to act wisely. Yet, neither stands as a measure of ends; they are, rather, more instruments to get at the meaning of ends so that measurement and judgment can occur.

It seems to me, then, that Dewey’s philosophy provides the way to wisdom, but pulls up just short of asserting any mode of measuring the ends whose meanings it is philosophy’s critical task to uncover. We might look to Dewey’s *Art as Experience* for a remedy. His description of the felt unity of aesthetic experience might provide a lived measure that would enable judgments about ends-in-view, such that one might appeal to the aesthetic rightness of an end or ends. This would seem to be consistent with Dewey’s linking of art and philosophy in *Experience and Nature*. However, in his well-known quarrel with Benedetto Croce, he denies any cognitive function to his notion of aesthetic experience, despite the fact that his description appears to describe, as Croce puts it, “precisely what is called . . . aesthetic or intuitive or pre-logical knowledge” (LW, 15:442). This is critical because a judgment concerning ends would seem to require, if not a conception of an end’s value, at least an acquaintance with or recognition of its felt value. The judgment requires some cognitive element—especially on Dewey’s own terms, where “intelligent” action is what is at stake.

Dewey’s way to wisdom seems to falter at the very moment of judgment. Ultimately, as I will try to show in chapter 8, I do not believe this is an adequate reading of Dewey’s thought. Nevertheless, the variety of related criticisms he drew on this score seems to indicate that it is a plausible reading. Brand Blanshard, for example, reduces Dewey’s process of judgment to an infinite regress of clarification of ends. Unlike his predecessors Emerson and Peirce, Dewey leaves little room for a moment of receptive knowing even though he talks of undergoing and reception in aesthetic experiences. It is al-
most as if his fear of claims to absolute wisdom paralyzes his attempt to articulate the possibility of practical wisdom. We have already laid out Bugbee’s concern over this apparent omission in Dewey’s thought. Emerson, too, had a notion of “intellect receptive,” in which an agent was attuned to the items of value in human experience. This no doubt smacked too much of traditional intuition and revelation to suit Dewey’s taste. Peirce, on the other hand, described a moment of “musement” in which one could let ideas “play” to suggest their own settlement; he claimed to follow Galileo’s sense of the naturalness and simplicity of an idea. This is akin to Bugbee’s suggestion that meaning emerges in the synthetic processes of acting and letting things speak. Emerson, Peirce, and Bugbee encouraged the kind of prefatory examination of ends and goods that Dewey’s philosophy provides. Moreover, the judgments yielded were neither absolute nor infallibly correct. This would appear at least to address Dewey’s fear of absolutes entering the realm of finite human existence.

It is just at this juncture that we can return to the “working certainty” of Hocking, Marcel, and Bugbee—to faith, insight, and acquaintance with the ways of things. In his recent book, Kestenbaum has focused on what he calls Dewey’s sense of “vigilance,” of an attentiveness to the ways things go in the world. If we couple this with Dewey’s insistence on the importance of undergoing, of sympathy and sensitivity, and of what he calls “qualitative immediacy,” we can begin to see Dewey’s pragmatism as making the transition from philosophy’s criticism to wisdom’s action. However much “growth” and “the opening of further human possibilities” serve as vague ends for judgment, they are insufficient. We need a sense of faith in, a working certainty of, which growth and what opening of possibility we ought to pursue. Not only do I think the logic of Dewey’s own philosophy requires such a measure, I believe its adoption is more experientially accurate. Philosophy must eventually come to disclose—or “clarify,” in Bugbee’s sense—as well as “create” our working certainties. Kestenbaum maintains that Dewey never outgrew his idealism, he transformed it. Insofar as this is true, bringing his pragmatic outlook on wisdom together with the working certainty of some twentieth-
century friends of idealism helps us understand both better. This is a synthesis I will explore in chapters 8 and 13. At the same time, this synthesis provides a powerful working account of how it is that we should proceed in practically wise ways: with good criticism and intelligence, but also with a strong receptivity that yields a faith in some working certainties. Only thus might we not only be wise, but act wisely.