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CROCE AND DEWEY

When Benedetto Croce died in 1952, within six months of John Dewey, the two thinkers had lived long and remarkable lives, earning reputations for civic achievement that few philosophers have ever matched. In two domains – progressive politics and public education – their success had similar motives and the same reach, if we allow for their different historical circumstances. Also, in the smaller world of philosophy, both were wayward children of Hegel. Of philosophers from Italy and the United States in modern times, if any two were fated for convergence, that pair would seem to be Dewey and Croce. Sadly, instead of convergence, their lot was conflict – trivial and unworthy of them both.

The habitual deafness of Anglophone philosophers to their Italian colleagues was part of the problem. Another part was the divergence in philosophical trajectories between those two cultures. Idealism – especially Croce’s idealism – thrived in Italy after expiring in Anglophonia. This mismatch was global. Locally and individually, Dewey’s eccentric career created other difficulties. In his creative period, after renouncing idealism, he philosophized in a way that was anomalous in its native setting, less intelligible to Americans than Croce’s reformed idealism was to Italians. For Italians alert to Dewey as a voice of pragmatism – a movement admired in Italy for its energy even by critics – the confusion was fatal, while for Americans it was merely bewildering.¹

¹ In Guyer (2014), 3.105, the third volume of an authoritative history of aesthetics, Croce enters as an expatriate: “in spite of Croce’s indubitable centrality in the history of Italian philosophy, he will be considered here because of his enormous influence in Anglophone, especially British, aesthetics.” To be sure, Guyer’s account of Croce is a vast improvement on the attitudes described by Simoni (1952) and Roberts (1995); the latter compiles a medley of caricatures of Croce as “a romantic, an expressionist, a primitivist, and a partisan of irresponsible

Having started as a neo-Hegelian in the Anglophone style, Dewey abandoned idealism because he found it helpless against dualisms that he had once hoped to defeat with Hegel's weapons. That was the *pars destruens* of his career. The *pars construens* grew from the allure of pragmatism, as first taught to him in the classroom by Charles Peirce and as he learned it later from William James's books. But Dewey's turn to pragmatism led him away from the usual epistemic puzzles, which he tried to preempt with a holist metaphysics and psychology, grounded in an original phenomenology of experience.²

While Husserl was constructing a different phenomenology and giving it that name, Dewey had cognate but undeclared ambitions, lacking Husserl's persistence and finesse. But what Dewey produced in metaphysics sometimes has the flavor and power of Husserl's student, Heidegger, if only sometimes. For the home audience – English-speakers friendly to pragmatism as a reform of British empiricism (despised by Croce as 'sensism') – this creativity made his work difficult. The post-idealist Dewey used a vocabulary familiar to Americans: 'action,' 'experience,' 'ideas,' 'perceptions,' 'qualities,' 'relations,' 'sensations,' 'truth' and so on. But, to the native ear, he was speaking this language creatively, in utterly new and – *culpa felix* – baffling ways. When Croce heard him from abroad, the muddle could only get worse.

To gauge the originality of Dewey's thinking, *ideas* are a place to start. For him, ideas (meanings) are bio-social and behavioral. They are organic and interpersonal responses – physically grounded – to *situations*. Ideas operate to settle unsettled situations, guiding them from states of disequilibrium to equilibria that are dynamic rather than static. Humans and some other animals encounter situations directly in larger contexts of active *experience* – *interactions* with the environment that sustain all animals and shape all existence. Situations are spatio-temporal wholes integrated by *relations* among their parts, which are *events* or *transactions*.

private imagination.” For Dewey's reception in Italy, see Federici Vescovini (1961).

² Fesmire (2015) is a recent survey of Dewey's thought; Hook (2008), originally published in 1939, is a livelier account by a student and advocate – known as 'Dewey's bulldog'; Jane Dewey (1951), by Dewey's daughter, was approved by Dewey before publication.

Drifting in and out of homeostasis, situations attain, lose and recover stability. In all its components, a *reconstructed* or restabilized situation has reappropriated an individuating *quality* (like the Scotist hecceity revived by Peirce), which is otherwise indeterminate yet experienced as *meaning*: this quality marks the situation as just the unified particular that it is and shapes its teleological development. *Perception*, which is non-cognitive but active – not passive like merely receptive *sensation* – works to stabilize this unitary meaning as it develops. Perception grasps the relations – even before they are known – that tie a situation’s elements together, making purpose and meaning out of psycho- physical materials presented in the situation. Meanings properly developed are ideas, and ideas are plans for action, the aim of the planned action being to stabilize a situation as it finds closure.

Ideas and meanings are behavioral, social and objective: the observed sharing of them establishes their objectivity. But meanings are not static; they develop and have histories. Some meanings have been used in the past to reconstruct previous situations: those meanings have been habituated as tools for planning the actions that ideas aim at presently and in the future. Ideas – ideas in propositional form, strictly speaking – are true or false in virtue of such results, if they have been predicted and are publically observed. An idea is good or true or effective that underwrites a verified prediction, thus helping to resolve an unstable situation by settling an *inquiry*: again, Dewey follows Peirce, his teacher.

In hypothetical form, predictions are inferential. Predicting might then need a logic or theory of inference. But Dewey’s logic – the core of his work after turning from idealism to pragmatism – is a method and theory of scientific inquiry, meant to explain why logic bears on action, as plainly it does. Inquiry proceeds by testing predictive hypotheses against public observations. Logical proofs are a type of test, and testing is sometimes physical, using material instruments. The standards for testing are conventional yet reliable, rules given priority as habits of reasoning observed to work better than other rules as guides for confirming or disconfirming predictions.

Such rules and other logical forms are not a priori: they come from inquiry, which is the discourse, viewed operationally, that manipulates symbols as steps toward manipulating things. Logical forms (*L*) warranted by yesterday’s inquiries constrain inquiries today, using symbols instrumentally to resolve situations (unsolved problems) that need

resolution. Starting within a situation (S^Q) individuated by an otherwise indeterminate quality (Q), inquiry reveals that S^Q needs reconstruction by comparing it with past situations (S^R) already reconstructed. To move S^Q toward reconstruction, plans of action – ideas, in other words – are stated in symbols to form predictions (P^X) or hypotheses about elements of S^Q . The P^X are to be checked by observations, as those observations (refined by physical experiment) are counter-checked against the evolving P^X . In keeping with L , the P^X are converted into P^Y , P^Z and so on, which are then compared to discover which types of P work best to advance the reconstruction of S^Q . The inquiry reaches *closure* when S^Q has been reconstructed – and a problem has been solved.

Dewey's logic as scientific action, with its claims about behavioral, situational and instrumental ideas, is the basis of a philosophy of experience, the doctrine that frames his aesthetics. Inquiry reconstructs a situated experience to study its scientific meaning, for the scientist to describe and analyze. *Art* reconstructs a situated experience to show its aesthetic meaning, constituted by the *work* of art and exhibited by a physical *product* of that work: the work of art is an action, not an object, which can only be a product of art. Both types of meaning, aesthetic and scientific, flow from actions that are both mental and bodily – sensing, perceiving, thinking – and are also continuous with one another, leaving no epistemic breaches of subject from object and no ontological gaps between matter and mind, body and soul.

Dewey's organic philosophy of experience treats everything as made whole and made one by ceaseless transactions between the world and all its parts and among all the parts. Experience is the entire field of those events, encountered in situations that have their own unities and are both *mediated* and *immediate* – the latter in that one's experience of a situation is full and direct, in no way vicarious or piecemeal, the former in that the situation has temporal parts (events, transactions) that affect each other and the whole, one part leading to another and each reflecting the whole.

Most experience is nondescript most of the time, never achieving integration. Most situations dissolve in indeterminacy, their integrity disrupted by resistance to it. Some situations, however, provide not just experience but '*an* experience,' which is intense and memorable because it is unitary, bounded in time and headed for a goal or *consummation*.

Experiencing such situations may be pleasant, like hearing a symphony, or unpleasant, like having the flu. To be situations at all, these cascades of events must be integral and particular, individuated and regulated by an otherwise indeterminate quality that makes the situation just what it is – *that* situation and *an* experience.

Situations equipped with such a quality – individuating and regulative toward wholeness and purpose – are the remarkable experiences in which meanings propagate. Meanings may be scientific or may be moral but are always aesthetic in some measure. In most situations, however, the regulative quality that gives rise to meaning remains tacit: only *an* aesthetic experience makes its quality explicit as an exhibited ground of meaning. But that particular situation, in the web of all situations, also illuminates the role of some such quality in every situation, whether or not its meaning is explicitly aesthetic.

Just because they are situational, the scientific experience of inquiry and the moral experience of choice also have aesthetic character, though it usually goes unremarked. Since *an* aesthetic experience always displays the quality of its situation, giving access to it as meaning, aesthetic meaning reveals more about the philosophy of experience than science, morality and other such efforts. “Esthetic experience is experience in its integrity,” says Dewey: “to esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is.... The theory of esthetics put forth by a philosopher ... is a test of the ... [philosopher’s] system.”³

The primary aim of aesthetic theory is to clarify the experiential work of art, which is a situated process, not a thing – though things like poems on pages or paintings on walls or sonatas in music halls are products of such processes: both the product and the process are spatio-temporal. “The real work of art,” according to Dewey, “is the building up of an integral experience out of the interaction of organic and environmental conditions and energies.” Once integrated in this way, *an* experience stands out as aesthetic. But its aesthetic character does not detach it from ordinary experience. Each situation hovers between integration and disintegration in a matrix of other labile situations. All are possible contexts for meanings exhibited as aesthetic: eating a cookie (Proust); seeing a grid of streets

³ Dewey (1934), p. 274: for recent accounts of Dewey’s aesthetics, see Alexander (1987); Shusterman (2000), pp. 3-33; Guyer (2014), 3.309-34; Fesmire (2015), pp. 189-217.

(Mondrian); strolling past pictures at an exhibition (Mussorgsky) – all within the continuum of the everyday experience where only some situations present their aesthetic character.⁴

Just as Dewey finds no “chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience,” he sees “art itself as the best proof of a ... union of material and ideal.” Ruling out any body/mind or matter/spirit or nature/freedom opposition, he puts material objects alongside embodied thoughts (the only thoughts) within aesthetic situations, which get started not from “mere flux” but from the dynamic equilibria that operate even in non-living matter. Rhythms of loss and recovery of integration with the environment are more apparent in living organisms, however: plants and animals thrive on harmony and unity with the world, growing when they overcome obstacles to that unity and, when they do not prevail, finally dying.⁵

Nature throws up barriers to the unifying of situations and to embedding them in the matrix of other situations. These disruptions of harmonious experience are productive in many ways: they stimulate evolution in biology, learning in society and aesthetic activity in culture. Humans – in whom consciousness has evolved but who first encounter experience pre-cognitively – initially become conscious not of any integrated situation but of *resistances* to it, things and forces that fragment and destabilize what could otherwise be unified and stable. As moments of loss (death, in the end, so the stakes are high) and of recovery (health and growth, for a time) enter consciousness, psycho- physical materials that might be lost or recovered for a situation can be selected as of *interest* to it, and in their contingency these materials arouse *emotion* (still indistinct and unconscious) in the conscious agent.

Once a situation has fully and finally recovered, leaving nothing precarious about it, its aesthetic career is over: no longer at risk, that situation no longer stands out as *an* experience from the slack, humdrum, anaesthetic background of most experience. Even when it lacks tension, however, experience stays active and interactive, right from the start. “Impulsions are the beginnings of complete experience,” says Dewey, “because they proceed from ... a hunger ... that belongs to the organism as a whole and that can be supplied only by ... interactions with the

⁴ Dewey (1934), pp. 3, 11, 37, 54-5, 64.

⁵ Dewey (1934), pp. 10, 13-15, 27.

environment.” *Impulsions* of the whole organism, like a vampire’s craving, are not mere ‘impulses’ or local reflexes, like a gland salivating at a feeding bell.⁶

When resistances to impulsion provoke the impelled agent to solidify a dissolving situation by resisting those same resistances, the agent profits by awareness of what resists its impulsion: a fully evolved faculty of consciousness will work to the agent’s advantage, making it realize that material threats to situational integrity can be turned into means to that very end. Resistance guides impulsion, at first blind, to reinforce itself counteractively. “Such is the outline of every experience that is clothed with meaning,” Dewey explains, “a transformation of energy into thoughtful action, through assimilation of meanings from the background of past experiences.” Primitive, impulsive, ineffective actions within the repertory of all living things become effective as human and intelligent steps toward meaning.⁷

Impulsions can be *discharged* directly or *expressed* indirectly. On a smaller scale, a discharged impulsion – a craving satisfied, for example – is like a situation closed by achieving the reconstruction of its integral character: it can no longer be *an* experience. To lead to that aesthetic situation, an impulsion must be expressed over time, not instantly discharged.

An infant, just a few weeks old, screams and keeps screaming and then stops: an impulsion has been discharged, but nothing has been expressed. (A parent who finds the screaming expressive is mistaken, strictly speaking.) A few months later, the child repeats the performance. Once again, the screaming goes on and on, and then it stops. But by now the child has lived through many such situations, watching others react to them, also experiencing pains – bleary eyes, runny nose, raspy throat – as materials not only of the enraged situation but also of its meaning, of the expressed rage that may become entirely theatrical for an even older child: the rage will then be the childish work of art that never charms its audience.⁸

For a child to turn rage into drama, for a hunger artist to make art out of a craving, healthy organs of sense, attached to motor apparatus

⁶ Dewey (1934), p. 58.

⁷ Dewey (1934), p. 60.

⁸ Dewey (1934), pp. 61-3.

in good order, are needed but not enough: an artist of the situation must do more than sense the materials presented by it; she must perceive and transform them. Sensation and perception are both receivers of experience, but sensation is passive receptivity, where perception is active. Sensation is enough to recognize things and their relations. In nesting season, birds sense and identify the twigs and leaves that will go into nested relations: that itself is a situational achievement. But the recognizing falls short of perception, which grasps materials in their relations instrumentally, seeing them as means to ends – to rescuing a situation from its constant peril.

What a bird does, with its sensory equipment and perhaps a wisp of purpose (some birds may be tool-users), is a model for the architect: even so, the bird's project lacks the intentional and proleptic character of art. Does the bird ever think – thinking *about* a nest to be constructed in the future? It seems not. But the perceiving human who turns an enraged situation into tragedy will have made that drama a goal and will have thought about it artfully, taking meanings (ideas fit for a king named Lear) suited to it from matching situations now past (sad stories of the death of kings).

Within experience there is *doing* and *undergoing*, *agere* and *pati*, action and passion, which must be unified and balanced to keep a situation stable – or, in case of instability, must be rebalanced. Conscious experience, enjoyed by the artist who perceives the equipoise of doing and undergoing, enables her – as the doer of the work of art – to detect the situation's balance or imbalance. She then maintains or sets it right by selecting some materials, related within the situation, as of interest for the situation and also by adjusting them in various ways.

Such doing always entails undergoing, which stimulates further doing and hence more undergoing and then more doing and so on until harmony prevails and closure – not cessation – arrives. All situations, playing out in time, come to an end. Only aesthetic situations reach the closure that Dewey calls *consummatory*, the finale of *an* experience. Cycles of doing and undergoing, patterns of action, give such an experience its aesthetic form and structure, the meaning grasped by perception, which is intelligent and a kind of thinking. Aesthetic thinking, grounded in unmediated perception of those rhythmic patterns, is directly about qualities – unlike science, which thinks about things indirectly, by way of signs.

Emotion pervades perception, which acts through the whole organism; agitated by an impulsion, a pervasive emotion can color a whole situation. Except for that excitement, however, impulsion produces nothing that can be expressed. And for the excited situation to become *an* experience, the excitement must be intentional – *for* or *about* something in the situation within which excitement stirs. Apart from its intentionality, this emotion is indistinct, not yet love as apart from fear or joy as apart from hate – distinctions beyond the reach of direct, pre-cognitive perception. Still, this global charge of emotion excludes what it opposes, building toward *an* experience by selecting from among the materials presented in the situation – choosing some as of interest for a work of art. Emotion is also the glue that holds the chosen materials together.

In an otherwise anaesthetic situation, these natural materials that underlie emotion also supply its content. Emotion selects and organizes them as *means* and *media* of *expression*, which – unlike perception – is therefore mediated. To be expressive, the work of art needs emotion, which is not the work's content nor what is expressed. What is expressed is the meaning or meanings of the situation, where generalized meanings (ideas) are assimilated from past experience to be joined undividedly with current experience – concrete, particular, unmediated and directly perceived. An expressive act works on material both inside and outside the instant situation, making inner, emotional material meaningful as aesthetic content, changing the outer material of past experience into means and media of expression. Expression clarifies the originally turbid emotions that respond to blind impulsions: expression (including representation) in art particularizes meaning, while statements in science use signs to generalize the meanings that they represent.

“Consciousness is always in rapid change,” Dewey writes, “where the formed disposition and the immediate situation touch.... It is turbid when meanings are undergoing reconstruction ... and becomes clear as a decisive meaning emerges. ‘Intuition’ is that meeting of old and new” – of past meanings with present materials made meaningful by them – “in which the readjustment ... is like a flash of revelation, although ... prepared for by long and slow incubation.... The background of organized meanings” – taken from past experience into present experience – “can alone convert the

new situation from the obscure into the ... luminous. When old and new jump together, like sparks ..., there is intuition.”⁹

Unlike emotion, expression and perception, *intuition* gets no headlines in Dewey’s account of the aesthetic situation. But the few words he gives to it place intuition securely in his theory. Current situations draw on past meanings to mark some situated materials as meaningful and hence of aesthetic interest. When meaning seems to arrive suddenly, even though the preliminaries have been long, we call it intuition. At this point, Dewey has nothing more to say about intuition, except that it is “neither an act of pure intellect ... nor a Crocean grasp by spirit of its own images.” Later, however, he singles out the word ‘intuition’ as especially ambiguous. Although Platonists have taken essence to be its proper object, Croce has merged intuition with expression and has identified both with art, giving “readers a good deal of trouble.”¹⁰

Dewey traces the trouble to Croce’s “philosophic background,” which disposes him to impose theory on “an arrested esthetic experience.” Uninformed about Croce’s unarrested experience of so very many arts, Dewey reaches this snappish conclusion about an idealist who “believes that the only real existence is mind.” If the empiricist’s perception, as seen by the idealist, is of objects deemed to be extramental, what grasps the reality of art can be no such thing. It must instead be intuition, which “knows objects as, themselves, states of mind.” These mental states are what expression manifests, what intuition knows and what a work of art is constituted by – according to Croce. Like Schopenhauer, he gets credit for greater sensitivity to art than most philosophers. “But his version of aesthetic intuition is ... [a] complete failure of philosophy.” Claiming no interest in refuting Croce, Dewey calls his view – as stated by Dewey – evidence of “the extreme to which philosophy may go in superimposing a preconceived theory upon esthetic experience, resulting in arbitrary distortion.”¹¹

To be of any use at all, of course, a theory (as distinct from an insight) must be preconceived – conceived in advance of what it explains. What really rankles Dewey, however, is not prejudice or preconceptions but the idealism that he attributes to Croce, viewing it with his own practiced eye

⁹ Dewey (1934), p. 266.

¹⁰ Dewey (1934), pp. 266, 294.

¹¹ Dewey (1934), pp. 294-5.

after repudiating that faith for a different one – pragmatism. Since pragmatism is usually identified with the theory of truth promoted by William James, Dewey’s conversion to it might be seen in epistemic terms as just another spasm of the post-Kantian *Erkenntnisproblem*. But it was the experimentalist James of the *Principles of Psychology* (1890), along with Peirce and his logic, who turned Dewey away from Hegel.

Dewey’s own insights, crystallized in 1896 by “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology,” were more psychological and metaphysical than epistemic. His famous article revises the schema of stimulus and response, a dogma of the new (at the time) experimental psychology. Dewey charges that “the older dualism between sensation and idea ... [and] of body and soul finds a distinct echo in the current dualism of stimulus and response.” His remedy is to show, empirically and conceptually, that “the so-called response is not merely *to* the stimulus; it is *into* it.” Stimulus and response, always seen “as distinct physical existences,” are really “always inside a coordination and have their significance purely from the part played in maintaining or reconstituting the coordination.”¹²

After much reworking, the ‘coordination,’ ‘significance’ and ‘reconstituting’ of Dewey’s 1896 article would become the ‘situation,’ ‘meaning’ and ‘reconstruction’ of *Art as Experience* in 1934. By then, Dewey was the last surviving prophet of pragmatism, which he sometimes saw as ‘instrumentalism.’ Now a public figure of great stature, he stood behind a principle of continuity in a philosophy of experience that was his settled answer to the metaphysical (body/soul) and epistemic (sensation/idea) dualisms that he had called out in 1896. At that time, however, he had already been doing philosophy for fourteen years as a Hegelian, finding in that system “an absolute mind ... manifested in social institutions” – his first defense, now deemed wanting, against dualism.¹³

In 1940, when Croce first replied to Dewey’s harsh words in *Art as Experience*, it would have been hard for him to know much about his critic’s long march away from idealism. For Italians as for others, Dewey was a pragmatist, and pragmatism was the epistemic doctrine that makes “the practical success of a thesis the criterion of truth” – nothing like the rich phenomenology of situations recorded by *Art as Experience*.

¹² Dewey (1896).

¹³ Jane Dewey (1951), p. 17.

Commenting on the political excitement about Dewey in post-war Italy, even the acute Garin misjudged the American's Hegelian past, finding it "interesting how much he could assent to some idealist claims, even if they were acquired unconsciously." To Italy's idealist faithful before the War – Guido De Ruggiero is Garin's witness – Dewey's flashes of orthodox insight had looked like bulletins "from the lands of the infidels." But Dewey was no infidel. He was an apostate, not the least unconscious about idealism.¹⁴

Had Croce seen his critic as a fellow expert on Hegel, had he known how carefully Dewey moved toward his breach with idealism, perhaps his reply to those few nasty lines in *Art as Experience* could have been more generous – less sordid than an insinuation of plagiarism. Likewise, a deeper, longer look at Croce's aesthetics in its whole development might have kept Dewey from insulting that great thinker in the first place¹⁵

Reading the "Reflex Arc" of 1896 as a prelude to other works – "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism" (1905), *How We Think* (1910), *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Quest for Certainty* (1929) – reveals a system of great scope and ambition emerging over the four decades before *Art as Experience*. Equal (at least) in scope and ambition is Croce's philosophy of the spirit, which also grew out of smaller but decisive works, some accessible to few Anglophone readers. Had the Dewey of 1893 known Croce's breakthrough essay of that year, "History Brought Under the General Concept of Art," or had he been a regular reader of *La Critica*, his own aesthetics might have gone differently.¹⁶

By 1917 Croce's whole project was on view in the English of Douglas Ainslie, who started with the *Aesthetic* in 1909. In 1915 Ainslie also translated *What is Living and What is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel*,

¹⁴ Di Napoli (1961), p. 165; Garin (1997), pp. 567-77.

¹⁵ Croce was aware of Dewey's early idealist phase: see Croce (1940), p. 353 and (1948), p. 207, on "the fanaticism and emptiness of ... the Kantians and Hegelians who were his first masters."

¹⁶ Croce (2006), pp. 7-145, translated with commentary in Copenhaver and Copenhaver (2012), pp. 92-98, 484-514; for bibliographical details on Dewey's works, see "Writings of John Dewey," which fills 75 pages of Schilpp (1951), pp. 611-86.

a crucial introduction to Croce's mature thinking. That Dewey also read the friendly exposition of Croce's aesthetics in Edgar Carritt's works is clear: *Art as Experience* quotes Croce's words in Carritt's versions, with no mention of Carritt. Moreover, there is no trace in Dewey's book of more than a glance at the first, pellucid chapters of the grandly titled *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*. The spotlight on 'expression' in Croce's title showed the Italian and American philosophers walking the same paths – already trod by many other students of aesthetics.¹⁷

Closer reading would have shown Croce to be not at all shy about his idealism. Elements of experience that Dewey regarded as united and continuous – parts of situations indispensable to their wholeness – are “what still falls short of the spirit,” according to Croce, and are “actually non-existent.” Since existence is a “fact of the spirit,” and since “impressions, sensations, feelings, impulses, emotions” are not of the spirit, they simply do not exist. Croce deposits the vital organs of Dewey's aesthetics in the morgue of nothingness. Such items may be “postulated for the convenience of exposition,” but they are no part of reality: so much for a philosophy of embodied experience.¹⁸

The aesthetics that makes this bold move has the courage of its ambition – to launch a system that “exhausts the entire field of philosophy.” The outlines of Croce's philosophy of the spirit are familiar. The spirit's theoretical activity is aesthetic and logical, its practical activity economic and moral; economy is “the aesthetic of practical life, morality its logic.” Will is the practical form of the spirit whose theoretical form is knowledge – of two kinds, intuitive and logical. Through intellect, logical knowledge of the universal and of relations produces concepts. Through imagination, intuitive knowledge of the individual and of things produces images. Intuition will be the gateway to aesthetics, then, and aesthetics is the portal to philosophy.¹⁹

But philosophy has tended better to logic than to intuition, unaware that the mixture of concepts with intuitions in daily life is only apparent since concepts never survive the mixing, which eliminates their

¹⁷ Croce (1915), (1953); Carritt (1914), p. 192; (1931), pp. 192, 241-2; Dewey (1934), p. 294; (2008), p. 364.

¹⁸ Croce (1953), p. 11, is Ainslie's translation, cited here because of its relevance for Dewey; the Italian text of the *edizione nazionale* is Croce (2014), 1.44.

¹⁹ Croce (1953), pp. xxix, 55; (2014), 1.11, 91.

autonomy, while unmixed intuitions are everywhere in works of art. Even when these works contain concepts as well, their “total effect ... is an intuition.” Although this intuition is perception, perception of this type is not confined to the actual – to what is grasped right now as real. The screen between real and unreal is transparent to intuitive perception. As to a child, nothing is real or unreal in this “undifferentiated unity of the perception of the real and the simple image of the possible.” In this state, we are not subjects perceiving objects already at hand. Instead, “we simply objectify our impressions, whatever they may be.”²⁰

Despite Croce’s formulation – *le nostre impressioni* – how impressions can ever be *ours* is unclear, since impressions belong to what “falls short of the spirit and is not assimilated by man.” Perhaps they are only “postulated for the convenience of exposition,” and in that case what it means to ‘objectify’ them might be moot. Yet this objectifying goes on “in our intuitions” – a key site for Croce. Although space and time are said by Kantians to be forms of intuition, “we have intuitions without space and without time” – instantaneously of a patch of color, for example. Not located in time or space, an intuition is still accessible to art because it has “character, individual physiognomy.” But Croce is no more informative about this character than about objectifying. We learn only that both are tasks of intuition and that the former is a mark “of things in their concreteness and individuality.” *Concretezza* – a refuge of the desperate in post-Hegelian Italy – was the language of the *Aesthetic* as of 1908, but Croce expunged it in revisions after 1922.²¹

Intuition, with its concrete character, is barred from “sensation, formless matter, which the spirit can never apprehend in itself, ... only ... with form and in form,” though again sensible matter might be postulated “as a mere limit.” Across that boundary lies “matter clothed and conquered by form” – supplied with concreteness by form’s “constant ... spiritual activity,” while formless matter stays passive and inconstant. To confuse simple material sensation with intuition defies common sense, according to Croce, though sensations may arise from memory or the unconscious in complex associations, as proposed by Hume and the ‘sensualists.’ But if

²⁰ Croce (1953), pp. 3-4; (2014), 1.35-6.

²¹ Croce (1953), pp. 4-5, 11; (2014), 1.36-8, 44; 2.142; Copenhaver and Copenhaver (2012), pp. 70-71, 108-17, 131-41.

association gives rise to forms and distinctions, it will be productive and synthetic, an act of the spirit beyond the pale of sensing.²²

Like association, the “representation or image” has sometimes been treated as merely psychological rather than intellectual: this is Croce’s complaint. But just as association is synthesis only when enacted by the spirit, representation is intuition only when severed from psychology. This genuine representation or intuition is also expression. Since intuition is always of sensations and impressions, these are indeed what art expresses: “to intuit is to express,” and only that. In Ainslie’s translation, “intuitive or expressive knowledge (*conoscenza*)” is “the aesthetic or artistic fact (*fatto*).” This possible but flat-footed rendering misses *conoscenza* as ‘consciousness’ and *fatto* as ‘action,’ ‘event’ or ‘deed’ – more like Dewey’s ‘doing’ than Ainslie lets on.²³

The aesthetic act is neither content alone (impressions) nor form applied to content (expression plus impressions). Art does not simply add a formative, expressive ingredient to impressions, leaving them enhanced but intact as what they were. Impressions go into expression “like water put into a filter,” Croce explains, “the same and yet different on the other side. The aesthetic fact ... is form and nothing but form.” Impressions, where intuition gets content to express, are plainly necessary. And yet from content to form “there is no passage” unless and until impressions are changed by expression into form: before that transformation, impressions have no “determinable qualities.”²⁴

Expression’s relation to impressions is form’s relation to matter – a relation of absolute distinction. Only when formed will some impressions, though not all, play their part in the aesthetic act, which is synthetic as well as expressive, creating a purely formal “unity in variety” that excludes any non-formal, material principle of individuation. Nowhere in the aesthetic act’s content are there some impressions distinct from other impressions: since all the content is unformed, none of it can be distinct. Impressions, received by bodily organs, are starting points for expression, but the organs and their functions are merely physical and physiological, and “expression does not know physiological facts (*fatti*).” Even the “physiological path” to the mind goes one way for impressions, another way

²² Croce (1953), pp. 5-6; (2014), 1.38-9.

²³ Croce (1953), pp. 7, 11-12; (2014), 1.40, 44-5.

²⁴ Croce (1953), pp. 15-16; (2014), 1.48-9.

for expression, whose activity is a “fusion of the impressions in an organic whole ..., unity in variety.... Expression is a synthesis of the various in the one,” Croce concludes, also insisting that “every expression is a unique expression.”²⁵

Ainslie has ‘single’ rather than ‘unique’ for *unica*, used by Croce to claim a stronger singularity for expression than the mere individuation that matter might bestow on a particular. Nonetheless, the concreteness that Croce attributes to immaterial intuitions does some of the individuating work that aesthetic quality does for Dewey: Croce’s point is that intuitive knowledge – immaterial because matter has “no passage” to form – is of the individual and hence not abstract, just as Dewey’s perception grasps *that* situation directly, though pre-cognitively. Both Dewey and Croce locate the integrity of the resulting aesthetic act in an “organic whole.”²⁶

Both philosophers see aesthetics not as a division of philosophy – on a par with metaphysics or epistemology – but as a foundation, on the same level as logic. Philosophy itself for Dewey is a philosophy of experience, and it is aesthetics that studies experience. In the theoretical part of the *Aesthetic*, however, Croce shows no interest in experience – predictably, since both Kant and Hegel had left *Erfahrung* stranded by the spirit: as systematic empirical cognition for Kant, and for Hegel as sensory material ordered by concepts. Without commenting on experience, Croce precludes what Kant professes about it: that experience combines intuitions – represented passively to the faculty of sensibility – with concepts. In that impossible combination, concepts would lose the form that makes them conceptual.

Since no traffic crosses a bridge from content to form, unformed impressions stay stuck on the side of nothingness. Only intuition and expressions exist, according to Croce – not impressions. Quite the contrary for Dewey, who slights the intuition that Croce exalts: the experience – ignored by Croce – within which situations emerge is impulsive and sensory before it is thoughtful. And undergoing is just as real as doing: both shape the aesthetic situation. Permitting no divide between action and passion, form and matter, Dewey has no worries about a gap between a situation’s materials (Croce’s impressions) and their meanings (Croce’s concepts).

²⁵ Croce (1953), pp. 19-20; (2014), 1.52-3.

²⁶ Croce (1953), pp. 16, 20; (2014), 1.49, 53; Dewey (1934), pp. 54-5, 64.

Doing and undergoing, patterns of embodied action, give the situated experience its aesthetic form and structure, as meanings grasped by perception. The quality of *an* experience – its inseparable individuator and regulator – does not need to be conferred on it by a transforming form.

In Dewey's judgment, Croce is still tangled in dualisms that Hegel had failed to untie. His besetting error is to think that whatever is material or bodily or sensory needs to be quarantined, waiting to be purged of its dross by the spirit's immaterial form. Form dematerialized is a phantom, according to Dewey, nothing as mighty as the spirit ought to be. On the other hand, just as Dewey describes situations as integral, Croce says that expression is synthetic. The aesthetic act is organic for them both. Croce treats all impressions as candidates for expression, and Dewey believes that *an* experience can emerge from any experience. The whole world is the artist's scene and stage.

Still, in the end, Dewey's philosophy of experience is aggressively naturalist – hence incompatible with Croce's philosophy of the spirit, which is animated by a fierce contempt for naturalism. So antagonistic are the two philosophies that Croce's first response to Dewey's aesthetics – in 1940, six years after the publication of *Art as Experience* – seems off the mark. He treats Dewey as an ungrateful client, not an adversary. After (justified) complaints about thin documentation and disregard for history, Croce notes the "obvious agreement of his [Dewey's] doctrines with so-called idealistic aesthetic," explaining this by being "pleasantly surprised to meet on every page observations and theories long since formulated in Italy." Disowning any "claim to authorship or priority," Croce lists eighteen cases of happy coincidence – only five from the introductory chapters of *Art as Experience* that lay out the main lines of Dewey's theory. In fact, the list masks the stark incompatibility of Croce's theory with Dewey's.²⁷

In his reply, published in 1948 with the English version of Croce's review, Dewey doubts that anything on the list depends on "any philosophical system," dismissing Croce's points as little more than "commonplaces." On the other hand, "slighting acknowledgments" is not his way, Dewey protests, nor is "xenophobia." Yet he finds no "common ground" for an exchange. He charges that Croce has foreclosed

²⁷ Croce (1940), translated in Croce (1948a), the English version cited here; Dewey (1934), pp. 3-105.

conversation by treating his aesthetics as “pragmatic philosophy,” whereas the burden of pragmatism is epistemic – a load that his aesthetics does not carry.²⁸

Pragmatism is a “theory of knowing,” he points out, and he has denied “that aesthetic subject matter is a form of knowledge.” Nonetheless, where his larger system posits a “pragmatic theory of knowledge,” its postulate is that “knowing is an activity of human beings as living beings,” and the same postulate holds for *Art as Experience*. Speaking of the title of that book, Dewey points to the ‘experience’ highlighted there and in his first chapter on “the live animal,” declaring his intent to illuminate two facts, both missed by Croce: first, his non-epistemic aesthetics is not pragmatist just because it is not epistemic; second, his pragmatist account of knowledge in non-aesthetic contexts is not empiricist – thus not a reversion to sensism, Croce’s *bête noire*.²⁹

Dewey’s defense wobbles. First, if Croce failed to see the point of *Art as Experience*, Dewey’s vigorous but disorderly writing was partly to blame. Had he read Italian, he might have emulated the bold, crisp sentences of the *Estetica*, especially its first schematic chapters. Second, just as Croce makes large claims for intuition as basic to philosophy itself, Dewey puts aesthetics at the head of the table whenever experience is on the menu. Hence, if his whole system is a philosophy of experience that includes a pragmatist account of knowledge, walling some of that philosophy off from pragmatism would be hard.

Dewey’s reasoning did not persuade Croce: it made him angry, no longer just peeved. Four years later he replied, calling Dewey’s dismissal of his eighteen points “degrading” and “mortifying.” Despite Dewey’s declarations of 1948, Croce still assails his “persistent profession of empiricism and pragmatism,” decrying those views for damaging “the great and beautiful truth Dewey teaches.” What mainly upsets Croce, however, is that the American could find no common ground with him. His *nolo contendere* is unacceptable: not to engage is blind despair, not only impugning God’s goodness but also defiling the sacred soil where he and Dewey already stood together – “on the grounds of philosophy.”³⁰

²⁸ Dewey (1948).

²⁹ Dewey (1934), pp. 3-19; (1948), pp. 207-8.

³⁰ Croce (1952), pp. 1-3.

Croce also returns to Dewey's harshest remarks in *Art as Experience* – the lines that castigate the Italian's "philosophic preconceptions." When Croce quoted the whole offending passage in 1948, he had let the preconceiving and the "arbitrary distortion" pass without comment, perhaps feeling that his own charge of "vicious circles and positivistic tautologies" would even up the name-calling. But in 1952 he behaved as if the insult had been festering. "When I read these words," he fumes, "I thought I was dreaming ... that in America a man like Dewey should represent me as the 'extreme' type ... [that he] doesn't even consider worthy of being refuted." Dewey makes this gaffe because "empiricism and pragmatism have not been good counselors." Duped by ingrained errors, he "cannot overcome the dualism of mind and nature," so he lives with a delusion – "that he has overcome it by means of a continuous process of nature-mind, in which the hyphen connecting the two words would provide the victory."³¹

This old man's squabble shows Croce at his best and worst, skewering his opponent with a mark of punctuation, then congratulating him on the natural gift of "genial insight" that has often led him to "speculative" truths. Had Dewey read those words, would he have realized that 'speculative,' said by an acolyte of the spirit, might – or might not – have been a term of praise? We will never know. Dewey never saw Croce's final blast, published in September of 1952. The eminent American had died in the previous June, to be followed in November by his equally esteemed Italian critic.³²

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³¹ Croce (1948), pp. 206-7; (1952), pp. 5-6; Dewey (1934), pp. 294-5.

³² Croce (1952), p. 6.

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Articolo presentato in Marzo 2017. Pubblicato online in luglio 2017
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IL PENSIERO ITALIANO. RIVISTA DI STUDI FILOSOFICI, 1(2017)
DOI: 10.6092 / 2532-6864 / 2017.1.51-72