

## Construing the Knowledge Situation: Stephen Pepper and a Deweyan Approach to Literary Experience and Inquiry

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This paper appraises Dewey's general accounting of experience and knowledge as it bears upon an approach to literary experience and inquiry. A potential inadequacy in Dewey's general account is precluded through an assessment of the perceptual and conceptual poles of the knowledge situation offered by Pepper. Pepper's analysis of purposive activity in knowledge situations lends cognitive underpinnings to Dewey's accounting of experience and knowledge. Pepper also helps clarify the nature and types of evidence at work in the knowledge situation. Two types of evidence, "uncriticized" and "criticized," are noted and developed. A provisional characterization of literary experience and inquiry based upon this assessment of the knowledge situation and the types of evidence is offered. Finally, two modes of attention are deployed in connection with Pepper's two types of evidence. The modes of attention are termed "instrumental" and "aesthetic," and both are then related to the characterization of literary experience and inquiry.

### Dewey on Experience and Knowledge

... we are heirs to a cultural situation particularly unsuited to produce art and likely to encourage the wrong kind of thinking about it. Our experiences and ideas tend to be common but not deep, or deep but not common. We are neglecting the gift of comprehending things by what our senses tell us about them. Concept is split from percept, and thought moves among abstractions.

—Rudolph Arnheim (1969; p. v)

Overt intelligent performances are not clues to the workings of minds; they are those workings.

—Gilbert Ryle (1949; p. 58)

For critics and theorists interested in the connections between lived experience and literature, society and cultural production, one of the chief values of a Deweyan approach to the activity of reading literary works would be the emphasis placed on the embeddedness of literary experience in the texture of general or ordinary experience. In general, Dewey proposes an active and operational approach for dealing with experience and acquiring knowledge of

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ourselves and our environment. Ordinary experience contains a mixture of the uncertain and the unsettled as well as the already secured, stable and uniform; our existence, says Dewey (1929) is a

conjunction of the precarious and the assured, the incomplete and the finished, the repetitious and the varying, the safe and sane and the hazardous. If we trust to the evidence of experienced things, these traits, and the modes and tempos of their interaction with each other, are fundamental features of natural existence. (p. 65)

The uncertain, the unsettled and the precarious, though, can and do form obstacles in our general experience; and in so doing they summon us into deliberate and intelligent action. An impediment in the ordinary course of experience brings about the phenomenon of *having an experience*. The state of being uncertain induces the self into examining the conditions of its present experience and into preparing tentative actions which can resolve satisfactorily what is currently uncertain. Because the self now attends to its inchoate experience, probes into it, questions it, begins to shape it toward resolution, Dewey indicates that the segment of experience under examination becomes a whole and stands out as a distinct entity—*an experience* (Dewey, 1958, p. 35; 1960, p. 223).

Dewey also calls the occurrence of "an experience" by the name "situation". The term "situation" more adequately distinguishes what is crucial about "an experience" from the general course, and often inchoate mixture, of ordinary, ongoing experience. A situation is distinctively marked by a "pervasive quality" which "has a binding force holding together and giving unity to the perceptions, feelings, impulses, and thoughts" which constitute the temporal progress or interaction of "the things and persons involved" (Kennedy, 1959, p. 804). Now, a situation (or *an experience*) develops when the self (or experiencing agent) probes or inquires into what is uncertain or unsettled about an obstacle or impediment in a body of experiential material before it. If no inquiry is needed or instituted, the situation is said to be "determinate"; that is to say, the necessary knowledge is already operative and activity remains routine. If the situation developed admits of no other pervasive quality than confusion or disorientation or conflict or a provoked curiosity, then the situation is called "indeterminate." However, if such an indeterminate situation permits an intelligent inquiry into the problems it presents, then the situation becomes "problematic." Finally, if the problematic situation can itself be solved and confusion dissipated, then the situation becomes a determinate one.

The problem, we say, has been solved. But this determinate situation is not the original one. The live creature is now in some degree a different being operating with an

environment which has also to some extent been changed. A new and different sort of equilibrium has been achieved. (Kennedy, 1959, p. 806)<sup>1</sup>

In other words, new knowledge about ourselves and our environment has been acquired through active inquiry into experience. The *developed* experience or situation is the medium in which this knowledge can be *actively constructed*.

Experience, then, for Dewey, puts a claim on knowledge. Knowledge is necessarily embedded in and tied to experience. The progressive clarification and refining of indeterminate and problematic situations yields new determinations because the practical and constructive activity of the self provides the single intelligence which *can both* feel and inquire, experience and know.

### The Knowledge Situation as a Philosophical Problem

Dewey's concept of experience would appear to "maintain a doctrine of intelligible continuity between experience and thought" and to "allow to experience the right to sit in judgment upon all claims to knowledge" (Smith, 1960, pp. 205, 206). Such sweeping claims for a critical accounting of experience run the very grave danger of failing to address adequately the need for a successfully balanced and intelligible mediation of both the perceptual and conceptual poles of the knowledge-producing encounter or situation. Smith (1960) has said:

The development of modern empiricism has shown that in every concrete analysis of actual knowledge and of the knowledge situation it becomes necessary at some point to acknowledge a distinction between a perceptual and a conceptual pole. That is to say, without the encounter of a reality beyond the thinking activity and without categorial forms of thought by means of which to grasp, explain, and interpret the encounter, there can be no knowledge of reality at all. (pp. 209-210)

There must be some consideration of both the *sensible* and *rational* components of knowledge and the nature of their relationship. Without the perceptual pole or sensible component of the knowledge situation, potential knowledge of reality would collapse into mere congeries of fictional projections or fantasies. The "thinking activity" would be isolated, self-enclosed, adrift, its range of action limited to its projectional resources. The conceptual pole or rational component of the knowledge situation provides the necessary intellectual categories and capacity for synthesis which the "thinking activity"

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Schutz deploys an intriguingly similar analysis of determinate, indeterminate and problematic knowledge situations. Schutz, however, uses a Cartesian or rationalist groundwork and therefore talks about "self-evidencies" and "that which is taken for granted" rather than Dewey's more pragmatic and less intuitional sense of experience. See Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, (R.M. Zaner and H.T. Engelhardt, Jr., trans.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 8-15.

relies upon in order "to grasp, explain, and interpret the encounter." What is sensed or experienced must also be organized and interpreted to be known or understood.

This bipolarity of the knowledge situation has been for European philosophy an ongoing "problematic situation," in Dewey's sense of that phrase, and, often, approaches sheer paradox. Indeed, in the words of Smith (1960), an "impasse has resulted from the radical separation of the domain of fact (frequently denoted by the terms "experience" or "sense perception") and the domain of thought"; and "along with this radical separation has gone *a persistent rejection of any attempt at mediation*" (p. 212).<sup>2</sup> Hume and Leibniz can furnish two representative and classic instances.

Each in his own way aimed at the denial of one of the poles or, more precisely, at the reduction of one to the other. Hume tried to get on with a continuum of perception or sense, taking an idea as a decaying or less vivid sense impression, while Leibniz working from the other direction tried to establish a continuum of conception or thought, making sense perception into confused conceptions. In both cases one pole was interpreted as an inferior form of the other, and in both cases there was a denial of autonomy and distinctness of kind between the poles. (Smith, 1960, p. 210)

Kant perhaps understood this philosophical problem better than his predecessors Leibniz and Hume. His equal theoretical emphasis upon both sense and understanding in his philosophical account of reason demonstrates that he realized that neither the perceptual nor the conceptual pole of the knowledge situation could be collapsed into or conflated with the other. For Kant the logical structure of knowing was also at the same time the very possibility of experience. Yet Kant *separated* and *isolated* sense and understanding as two distinct and heterogenous "elements" at the very beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) versus understanding or thought. The principles of passive "receptivity" or "pure intuition"—that is, the element sensibility—are deduced in the Transcendental Aesthetic while the principles of active or productive "spontaneity"—that is, the element understanding—are deduced in the Transcendental Logic (Kant, 1966, pp. 18, 21-22, 44-46).

The science of all the principles of sensibility *a priori* I call *Transcendental Aesthetic*. There must be such a science, forming the first part of the Elements of Transcendentalism, as opposed to that which treats of the principles of pure thought, and which would be called *Transcendental Logic*. In Transcendental Aesthetic therefore we shall first isolate sensibility, by separating everything which the understanding adds by means of its concepts, so that nothing remains but empirical intuition (*Anschauung*). Secondly, we

<sup>2</sup>This refusal of mediation in favor of an intricate problematizing of the issue still occurs today in the literary and philosophical discourse of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, to name only two prominent and influential instances. See especially Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, (G.C. Spivak, trans.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, and de Man's *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

shall separate from this all that belongs to sensation (Empfindung), so that nothing remains but pure intuition (reine Anschauung) or the mere form of the phenomena, which is the only thing which sensibility *a priori* can supply. (Kant, 1966, pp. 22-23)

Kant thus preserves a radical separation of sense and thought, percepts and concepts, as two isolated "elements" or "stems" of knowledge (i.e., "separate but equal"). He apparently declines to explore the unity or common connection these two separate domains may have from the beginning prior to their critical and analytic factoring out: "There are two stems of human knowledge which perhaps may spring from a common root, unknown to us, viz., *sensibility* and *understanding*" (Kant, 1966, p. 18). This possibility of a common root is not explored; the two poles of the knowledge situation are left thoroughly and radically isolated by Kant's analysis of their distinctly different principles.<sup>3</sup>

### Stephen Pepper and the Method of Root Metaphor

There is, however, a philosopher who has produced a speculative philosophy or "world hypothesis" which seeks to reconcile the perceptual and conceptual aspects of cognition—that is, which seeks out and explores the "common root" of the two poles of the knowledge situation which Kant clove asunder so radically and so skillfully. In *Concept and Quality: A World Hypothesis* Stephen Pepper performs an elaborate and far-ranging description and analysis of a "root metaphor" which perhaps can be recognized as that "common root" of the "two stems of human knowledge" which Kant says remains "unknown to us." For Pepper (1966) a "root metaphor" is

an area of empirical observation which is the point of origin for a world hypothesis. When anyone has a problem before him and is at a loss how to handle it, he looks about in his available experience for some analogy that might suggest a solution. This suggestive analogy gives rise to an hypothesis which he can apply towards the solution. (p. 3)

Needless to say, this search for an hypothesis-generating and empirically-grounded analogy or root metaphor is not a very Kantian procedure; and it is one which Kant himself dismisses as useless to "the discipline of pure reason." In the section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* which addresses hypotheses, Kant (1966) calls them "mere opinions"; he claims that they can serve as grounds of explanation *only* for that which is already "really given and therefore certain"—namely, the pure concepts of reason (pp. 495-502). But

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<sup>3</sup>Kant's Transcendental Dialectic, it should be noted, does not mediate between the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Logic. It is one of the two divisions of the Transcendental Logic and operates as a critique of logical illusions, semblances and sophistries which may be brought against the logic of "pure understanding" proper—namely, the Transcendental Analytic. See Kant (1966, pp. 48-51, 221-230).

for Pepper, Kant's claim of self-evident certainty for his *a priori* concepts would amount to a dogmatic claim to certainty. In Pepper's systematic philosophy based on the root-metaphor approach, claims for the self-evident veracity of rational principles or propositions or axioms are disallowed as dogmatic. Systems of self-evident principles, such as the axioms of Euclidean geometry, have failed or eventually come into conflict in the past; and so

the criterion of self-evidence itself is discredited. For if in one good instance the criterion of self-evidence fails, how can it ever be trusted again? The criterion could not have been better tested than in the example of the Euclidean axioms. These for centuries were accepted as self-evident by the keenest minds. If the claim must be abandoned for these, how can it be legitimately offered for the truth of any other principles? (Pepper, 1942, p. 22)

So-called "self-evident" principles, therefore, do not have evidence at hand adequate to the claim for absolute cognitive certainty; principles or axioms actually are "postulates" in a system whose interrelations and probability must continually be tested and refined by checking them against currently available evidence (Pepper, 1942, p. 22). To examine philosophically the knowledge situation with full regard to evidence and legitimate (non-dogmatic) claims to cognitive adequacy (relative certainty), then, necessitates attention to empirical observation and available experience. Pepper's (1942) root-metaphor method of philosophy seems to achieve such needed attention:

A man desiring to understand the world looks about for a clue to its comprehension. He pitches upon some area of common-sense fact and tries if he cannot understand other areas in terms of this one. This original area becomes then his basic analogy or root metaphor. He describes as best he can the characteristics of this area, or, if you will, discriminates its structure. A list of its structural characteristics becomes his basic concepts of explanation and description. We call them a set of categories. In terms of these categories he proceeds to study all other areas of fact whether uncriticized or previously criticized. He undertakes to interpret all facts in terms of these categories. As a result of the impact of these other facts upon his categories, he may qualify and readjust his categories, so that a set of categories commonly changes and develops. Since the basic analogy or root metaphor normally (and probably at least in part necessarily) arises out of common sense, a great deal of development and refinement of a set of categories is required if they are to prove adequate for a hypothesis of unlimited scope. (p. 91)

This basic statement of Pepper's root-metaphor method indicates that an attempt "to understand the world" depends upon "basic concepts of explanation and description"—"a set of categories"—which are not intuited or determined self-evidently but derived from a singularly significant region of experience and observation. These concepts or categories can then be used to study and interpret other areas of "common-sense fact" while at the same time being progressively developed and refined through such practical contact. In *Concept and Quality* Pepper offers the root metaphor of the "purposive

act" and two sets of categories—the qualitative and the conceptual—as a world hypothesis which can describe and analyze the basic unity and interactive cooperation of the perceptual and conceptual aspects of cognition and actual knowledge situations. Purportedly, this hypothesis, diverging as it does from the cognitively-problematic Kantian way of proceeding, can probe the unknown and unexplored "common root" of Kant's sundered "stems of human knowledge."

Pepper chooses typical goal-seeking or appetitive behavior, behavior which humans seem to share with many other creatures, as the "area of common-sense fact" from which the root metaphor of the purposive act is derivable. Pepper describes in ample and insightful detail the factors involved in the goal-seeking purposive act of wanting and going in search of a drink of water; this activity is characteristic and representative of so many other such purposive acts (Pepper, 1966, pp. 19-23).<sup>4</sup> Three basic reasons inform the choice of the purposive act as Pepper's root metaphor. The first one is that it

is the most highly organized type of simple purpose—possibly the most highly organized activity in the world of which we have any considerable evidence. It is the act associated with intelligence. And so it entails the features of the organism which performs the act. (Pepper, 1966, p. 17)

This reason foregrounds the intelligent and organized nature of any purposive act; by this fact, it implicates an agent who is capable of organization, intelligence and performative action. In other words, there are no acts without active agents. The second reason for the choice of the purposive act as root metaphor has to do with such an act's feelingful impact on consciousness.

We can feel its whole qualitative course from initial impulse to terminal satisfaction. We can have the immediate feel of the perceptual demands of an environment in all its qualitative variety and graded intensity upon the search for the means of satisfaction. And we can feel the shock of a blocked anticipation when a wrong choice is made. (Pepper, 1966, p. 17)

This reason foregrounds the felt quality of a satisfying interaction with the environment on the part of the active agent. The "perceptual demands" made by the environment upon the active agent are themselves integral features of the agent's purposive act and its felt quality. Finally, Pepper's (1966) third reason is that the "qualitative structure" of a purposive act can be "submitted to a detailed conceptual analysis in behavioristic terms"; that is, a purposive act provides "an ideal opportunity to see how a set of effective and well elaborated concepts come to apply to a qualitative structure lived through in a man's immediate experience" (pp. 17-18). This third and final reason fore-

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<sup>4</sup>Pepper describes and analyzes purposive behavior, drives, objects and values at great length in his *A Digest of Purposive Values*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947, pp. 1-100.

grounds the accessibility of a purposive act to systematic interpretation and conceptualization. In sum, then, the choice of the purposive act as a basic analogy or root metaphor is itself an hypothesis that the typical perceptual and purposive interactions of an active agent and the environment are accessible to conceptual understanding through a detailed analysis of the act itself.

Pepper's (1966) description of his purposive search for a glass of water yields two results: "a detailed conceptual description, and an immediate qualitative act to which the description applies" (p. 23). The "immediate qualitative act," however, does not remain mysterious, private or unrepresentable:

Perhaps at this point, someone is asking just what the description is describing. Is it describing my inner feelings or someone's observations of my outer behavior? It is basically describing my qualitative activity between the awakening in the night and the quenching of my thirst. Fortunately in this instance (and I chose it partly for that reason) I have access to the qualitative activity. I performed it and can remember it and verbally describe it. And I am thinking that my readers have had similar experiences and can follow my description in their own qualitative terms. I suppose we have all read novels about qualitative acts much more intricate than this one and were not utterly mystified by the symbols. (p. 24)

From our own extensive experience and observation, we have felt, performed, followed, recognized, read and described our own and others' qualitative activity. Through introspection, retrospection and empathy, we have normal access to ordinary qualitative knowledge of purposive acts. Yet at the same time, or perhaps later in retrospect, we can institute a conceptual analysis of the same purposive act. The conceptual analysis may not square with the qualitative description at all points and, indeed, will very likely go well beyond it in terms of its rigorous probing of conditions and operations. Yet regardless of their exact relation, the two kinds of "reports" on purposive activity—the qualitative and the conceptual—"are wedded to each other" because they both describe the same "segment of fact":

We have a highly articulated qualitative description and a highly articulated conceptual description which refer to exactly the same actual process. The bifurcation of nature into conceptual systems and qualitative experience meet here at this point. (Pepper, 1966, pp. 26-27)

The purposive act, then, can be recognized as the "common root" of the "two stems of human knowledge" which Kant analyzed in separation. It is the one and the same basic activity which both qualitative and conceptual descriptions come to bear upon and from which they bifurcate in their articulations of its two cognitively distinct aspects or poles. Kant's radical separation of sensibility and understanding can be radically altered through Pepper's situating of the problem of behavioral knowledge or cognition in the domain of common-sense fact, observation and hypothesis and through recognizing



purposive activity as the meeting point of felt qualities (or percepts) and concepts. For Pepper, the "gap" between qualities and concepts is philosophically and pragmatically manageable.<sup>5</sup>

Pepper's root metaphor of the purposive act and its set of qualitative and conceptual categories, as a consequence, can lend cognitive underpinnings to Dewey's concept of experience and his embedding of knowledge in experience. Dewey's notions of "situation" or "an experience" could be thought through more expressly as goal-seeking purposive acts, a project not at all incompatible with his "empirical naturalism" (Dewey, 1929, pp. xiv-xv). The main thing here, though, is the way in which Pepper clarifies the claim which experience has on knowledge. His root-metaphor method successfully balances and renders intelligible the meeting or mediation of both the perceptual and conceptual poles of the knowledge situation.

### Pepper and the Types of Evidence in the Knowledge Situation

Pepper also clarifies the nature of fact, or of evidence, and its dynamic relation within the knowledge situation. Claims of self-evident or certain evidence must be dismissed as cognitively weak, inadequate and dogmatic. Instead, Pepper (1942) asks "why should knowledge begin with certainties? Why should it not dawn like day out of a half-light of semiknowledge and gradually grow to clarity and illumination?" (p. 39). As with Dewey, knowledge for Pepper should emerge through and from the progressive clarification and refining of indeterminate and problematic situations. Pepper (1942) says:

There appear to be two broad types of evidence: uncriticized, and criticized or refined evidence. Socially and individually knowledge begins with the former and gradually passes into the latter. (p. 39)

Uncriticized evidence is also called "common sense," and "uncriticized fact": what Plato termed "opinion."<sup>6</sup> Basically, uncriticized evidence or common sense consists of two broad areas of human experience. The first area includes a great array of common and shared sensations and perceptions—a kind of cultural sensorium or sensibility; the second holds common and shared opinions, beliefs and ordinary or everyday facts and habits of our human form of life. The qualitative aspect of our purposive activity generally would

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<sup>5</sup>Pepper says of *Concept and Quality* (1966): "This book regards the gap as nothing other than the failure to notice the distinction between the immediate felt quality of a cognitive process and its referential functioning in a problematic situation—or, more generally, between immediate intuitive cognition of felt quality, and the referential cognition of concepts" (p. 68).

<sup>6</sup>Throughout the rest of this paragraph and the next three, I will be drawing freely on pp. 39-51 of Pepper (1942). These pages are perhaps the best and most concise statement of Pepper's theory of knowledge.

appear to draw from and refer to this area of "uncriticized evidence" or "common-sense fact." The evidential or factual descriptions of our qualitative acts are characteristically phrased in terms of our common and shared sensations and perceptions and our opinions and beliefs concerning their immediate import. Such uncriticized facts or evidences of our purposive behavior possess three traits: (1) they are indefinitely or imprecisely cognized; (2) though unstable, they are secure because they are never lacking; they are always there, insisting on cognition, but never allowing perfect or absolute cognition; (3) they are cognitively limitless, vague, unorganized and contradictory; and such unreliability seems endlessly irritable and problematic. Uncriticized evidence or fact is bountiful, supportive and seemingly always on the verge of being troublesome.

Such evidence, though, naturally and often quite continually sets up a tension between a second broad type of evidence—namely, criticized or refined evidence or fact. This second type of evidence emerges from the process of critically clarifying and refining the cognitive material of common sense. Through focussing attention on the further cognitive possibilities of the indefinitely, vaguely yet insistently cognized facts of common sense, we seek more reliable, responsible and consistent knowledge. Yet such refined knowledge must maintain a tensile relation with its secure and always bountiful cognitive source.

This tension between common sense and expert knowledge, between cognitive security without responsibility and cognitive responsibility without full security, is the interior dynamics of the knowledge situation. The definiteness of much detail in common sense, its contradictions, its lack of established grounds, drive thought to seek definiteness, consistency, and reasons. Thought finds these in the criticized and refined knowledge of mathematics, science, and philosophy, only to discover that these tend to thin out into arbitrary definitions, pointer readings, and tentative hypotheses. Astounded at the thinness and hollowness of these culminating achievements of conscientiously responsible cognition, thought seeks matter for its definitions, significance for its pointer readings, and support for its wobbling hypotheses. Responsible cognition finds itself insecure as a result of the very earnestness of its virtues. But where shall it turn? It does, in fact, turn back to common sense, that indefinite and irresponsible source which it so lately scorned . . . . And critical knowledge hangs over a vacuum unless it acknowledges openly the actual, though strange, source of its significance and security in the uncriticized material of common sense. (Pepper, 1942, pp. 44-45)

The "interior dynamics of the knowledge situation," then, exhibit a varying tension between uncriticized common-sense fact and the critical knowledge which can gradually be refined and made determinate from it. Responsible critical knowledge cannot usefully or securely exist apart from its actual and material source in common sense. This is not to say, however, that criticized evidence or critical knowledge fails to have a reconstructive or redirective impact on common sense. Socially regarded, such reconstruction would naturally be extremely gradual; individually regarded, it can have far more

redirective and overt impact. For the most part, though, the tension involved in the knowledge situation "drive[s] thought to seek definiteness, consistency, and reasons" for uncriticized evidence while drawing criticized evidence back towards its source by always posing the threat of cognitive insecurity and insignificance.

Refined or critical knowledge here would be the detailed conceptual description and analysis of purposive activity which Pepper provides in *Concept and Quality*. Conceptual analysis of the same purposive act of which we have an uncriticized and qualitative description can provide critical or refined knowledge of the act's occurrence and processes. The qualitative act and its conceptual analysis constitute two different types of evidence of purposive activity: the first, immediate, felt, secure, insisting on clarification and refinement; and the second, reflective, criticized, consistent and cognitively responsible to the qualitative act it conceptually elaborates.

It should be noted that Pepper indicates that criticized evidence or critical knowledge can and must be corroborated in two ways. Critical knowledge achieves corroboration through "corroboration of man with man, and corroboration of fact with fact." The first type Pepper (1942) calls "multiplicative corroboration" and the second "structural corroboration" (pp. 47-48). The first type of corroboration charts critical agreement—that is, the ways in which cognitively adequate criticized evidence can be achieved between or among various refiners of knowledge. The second type of corroboration of critical knowledge stems from the degree of interrelation and self-consistency among criticized facts; the overall structure and fit of refined or criticized facts helps to corroborate their cognitive legitimacy and adequacy. Critical agreement (consensus) and self-consistency (coherence), then, are the two ways in which critical knowledge can be evaluated and judged and hence accepted as cognitively adequate and conceptually descriptive.

### **Characterizing Literary Experience and Inquiry**

It is now possible to offer a provisional description or, rather, characterization of literary experience and inquiry based on the foregoing assessment of the work of Dewey and Pepper. In general, literary experience cannot be disencumbered of literary inquiry nor *vice versa*. The activity of literary reading is an experience which insists on instituting an inquiry into the evidence of its own occurrence. Literary inquiry constitutes the way and means that readers, and readers as critics, have for gradually clarifying and refining the indeterminate and problematic situations, which most reading involves, into literary or critical knowledge. Knowledge is inextricably implicated in the activity of reading because reading is an act of cognition which is best described as a purposive act. As purposive activity, reading is accessible to both qualitative description and conceptual analysis. Such is the case, for

the structural characteristics of the purposive act disclose that such activity is both immediately qualitatively felt and open to conceptual probing, description, refinement and explanation. The qualitative and the conceptual "reports" on the activity of reading may not square at every juncture; but they do arise from, or actually already meet at, the one and the same actual process of literary reading. Uncriticized evidence or facts, indefinitely cognized in the qualitative act of reading, are secured and available for clarification and refinement into criticized evidence. Through corroboration by critical agreement or consensus ("multiplicative corroboration") and by conceptual self-consistency or coherence ("structural corroboration"), this criticized evidence can be evaluated, judged and accepted as persuasive and adequate critical knowledge. Criticized evidence, the produce of literary inquiry, however, maintains a tensile relation with its cognitive source in the qualitative act of literary reading. To fail to do so would eventually render critical knowledge arbitrary, brittle, unreliable and cognitively irresponsible.

And finally, the activity of literary reading demarcates a particular area of our purposive behavior which can strike us as especially aware and directed. As such, we do not attend to the world and our own activity in it merely in the usual or ordinary way. We do not suspend attention or alertness or cognition but instead *attend* closely and with circumspection to the actual movements and workings of our literary reading and inquiry. Literary purposive activity is able to achieve heightened and exacting awareness as well as extended self-reflection. In an exemplary manner, this compounded awareness characteristic of the activity of reading recovers an earlier sense of the word "attention": stretched toward some other thing in expectation, heeding, listening, tensed with taut awareness.

*Apropos* this final point, Walsh, in her book *Literature and Knowledge* (1969), develops a Deweyan case for recognizing literature as eliciting "the duality of self-reflexive awareness." She states, "[a]n experience, as life experience, is self-consciously recognized by the experiencer as *his*. An experience is not just awareness; it is awareness of awareness" (pp. 81-84). This compounded awareness happens to the self in and through an experience. Dewey's concepts of experience and knowledge are here employed by Walsh and connected to a philosophical psychology of the self which attains its most exemplary exfoliation in the encounter with a literary work.

A literary work, says Walsh (1969), elicits a "revelatory or cognitively significant" relation with an attentive reader and "his perceptive insight and his funded knowledge of other works of literature"; and this literary encounter offers "some intimate engagement with knowledge"—"knowing by living through" (pp. 5, 11, 13). Walsh throughout distinguishes "knowing by living through" from "knowing about," and these two types of knowledge can be likened to Pepper's one broad type of criticized and refined evidence or critical knowledge. What Walsh's distinction in critical knowledge helps clarify is the

prevailing mode of attention being elicited in an experience. When the self is aware of "knowing about" something in its experience, then it can be said to attend instrumentally to its own awareness.<sup>7</sup> Yet when the self is aware of knowing something in an intimate and revelatory way, of "knowing by living through," then it can be said to attend aesthetically to possibilities of experience yet unrealized or left unrealized and unknown in ordinary life experience by the instrumental mode of attention. Or as Walsh (1969) herself phrases this point, we "look to literary art for a disclosure of the possibilities of experience, for an understanding of what things might come to *as* forms or modes of human experience" (p. 90). This "understanding" characteristically takes the form of a "realization." We understand our experience by realizing it, by living through it and by "attend[ing] to the qualitative character of our mode of having or undergoing it" (p. 87). And so, as Walsh (1969) concludes, "literary art, when functioning successfully as literary art, provides knowledge in the form of realization: the realization of what anything might come to as a form of lived experience" (p. 136). In solid Deweyan fashion, Walsh (1969) is able to relate the broad terms "literature" and "knowledge" and make a case for "the recognition of the distinctive kind of cognitive significance literary art can have" (p. 15).

### Two Modes of Attention and Two Forms of Reading

By the way of conclusion, it should be pointed out that Pepper's two general types of evidence and the corresponding qualitative and conceptual descriptions of purposive activity postulated by his root metaphor of the purposive act would seem to imply two modes of attention, two general ways of cognitively attending to the world and the actions performed in it. The word "attention," moreover, carries both a general sense of cognitive experience as well as a more specific sense of a consciously directed or intentional act of cognition. Because of this additional specific sense, the word "attention," sufficiently qualified, may be used to demarcate a particular area of purposive activity which is especially aware and directed. Not all purposive acts seem to exhibit active agents showing particular awareness of and focussed interest in the actual proceeding of the acts. The arts, however, do appear to demand and cultivate an aptitude precisely for such particularly aware and directed purpo-

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<sup>7</sup>Walsh's designation "knowing about" would seem to be a composite of two aspects of cognitive behavior which Gilbert Ryle, in the second chapter of his *The Concept of Mind* (1949), distinguishes as "knowing how" and "knowing that." An ordinary cognitive act can be described and explained in terms of the ability or capacity demonstrated and the content or information made present or evoked; the former involves description of rules and procedures and the latter qualities, attributes or predicates. If we have in mind Walsh's naming of "knowing by living through," a consummate form of understanding which she also calls "realization," we can think of Ryle's "knowing how" as "realizability" and "knowing that" as "that which is available for realization."

sive acts. Pepper, for one, recognizes the fine state of conscious development aesthetic qualities have attained in the arts in the final and capstone chapter of *Concept and Quality*, a chapter he entitles "Aesthetic Quality." Such qualities, Pepper (1966) shows, achieve in the arts a maximum of aesthetic intensity and virtually unparalleled depth and spread of significance (pp. 561-619). For the purposes of this exposition, two modes of attention will have to be distinguished.

The first mode marks out the more or less usual performance of purposive acts. Here qualitatively felt acts and conceptual descriptions serve to move us along in everyday life, instrumentally, pragmatically and frequently satisfyingly. We attend to the performance of such acts in no undue or extraordinary manner; we are not really interested in the actual movements and precise course of these purposive acts.<sup>8</sup> Our interest is limited for the most part to a relatively determinate and familiar purpose or objective. We can even institute inquiries, in the full Deweyan sense developed above, into these acts and their performances in order to gain clarification or further information or a satisfactory interpretation of their occurrence. Pepper's example of awakening in the night and going in quest of a drink of water is a case in point, and his use and exploration of the episode as a philosophical example and a successful purposive act yield a Deweyan sort of inquiry into an otherwise ordinary and purely instrumental act. These purposive acts, or what Dewey would call "experiences" or "situations," remain primarily, if not completely, instrumental. This first mode of attention I choose to call the "instrumental mode of attention."

We may also attend to purposive activity in a second mode, distinct yet not other than the instrumental mode of attention. Human beings can attend to past, present and imaginary purposive acts in a way which brings into the foreground the actual movements and workings of the acts themselves. Instrumentality is here self-reflectively aware of itself. Such attention usually inhabits the arts but by no means is or should be restricted to them alone. For instance, working out in detail the covert cognitive assumptions implied in the barbarous use of diction, syntax and argumentative organization in an article on chemical engineering or circumspectly exhibiting the subliminal use of sado-masochistic sexuality in American media advertising would both yield non-artistic examples of this second mode of attention. What these two examples do have in common with the arts, however, is particularly careful and exacting reading and interpreting of words, images, textures or sounds. Such acts of reading and interpreting characterize this mode of attention; they are the representative and exemplary instances of experiences which are also

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<sup>8</sup>Such approaches as ethnomethodology, frame analysis and symbolic action studies in the fields of anthropology and sociology foster and carefully exhibit analyses of the qualities and concepts performed in ordinary, instrumental purposive activity.

at the same time full inquiries into their own occurrences and particulars. Questions about the appropriateness, meaning and depth of perceptions, feelings and responses—felt qualities—as well as questions about the appropriateness, significance and fit of thoughts, ideas and contexts—conceptions—insist on being recognized and confronted in all their fullness and complexity. Here performers of purposive acts double-up, so to speak, to function as attentive readers of their own acts as well as those of others. This second mode of attention I choose to call the “aesthetic mode of attention.”

It has been on the basis of Dewey's and Pepper's work in epistemology and cognition that I have asserted that the activity of reading is an act of cognition which is best described as a purposive act. Now the main purpose involved in literary reading, moreover, would appear to be the achievement of a heightened and exacting awareness of some particular area of our general purposive behavior and the possibilities of action and thought it can give rise to. An apposite example is Pepper's own study of Alfred Noyes' ballad “The Highwayman.” Pepper (1946) shows that the activity of reading the poem induces us to suppose and undergo a sequence of “anticipatory and apprehensive emotions” based on our past experience and familiarity with such emotions and their sources in behavior. These readerly or aesthetic emotions are “genuine emotions,” but they instate a “psychical distance” between themselves and their source emotions. This distance permits voluntary control over our emotional responses (pp. 237-238). From this vantage point, as it were, we can become more aware of the particular sequence of emotions undergone and their implications for our emotional response and activity in general. Or in the terms which I have just developed above, the activity of reading permits the direction of “the aesthetic mode of attention” upon both our “instrumental mode of attention” and itself in an act of compounded awareness. In the activity of reading, we attend to the ways in which poets and characters and, indirectly, ourselves attend to the world and a particular range of purposive acts in it. The sequence of acts which we undergo in reading leads us into supposals of purposive acts in the world; and, in reading, we can attend aesthetically to this compounded awareness.

In a recent book which explores the activity of reading, Rosenblatt considers very generally the way in which a poem is evoked and attended to aesthetically. Her approach can offer some useful general concepts for discussing the activity of reading. The term “poem” for Rosenblatt (1978) “stands for the whole category, ‘literary work of art’, and for terms such as ‘novel’, ‘play’, or ‘short story’.” The term also and more importantly “presupposes a reader actively involved with a text and refers to what he makes of his responses to the particular set of verbal symbols” (p. 12). This active involvement is “an event in time,” an “evocation” which develops only as “a process in time”:

The relation between reader and text is not linear. It is a situation, an event at a particular time and place in which each element conditions the other . . . the reader looks to the text, and the text is activated by the reader. (pp. 12, 69, 16-18)

Rosenblatt's sense of the activity of reading, then, seems to be interactional. The evocation of a poem, this temporal event or process which is literary reading, constitutes the basic and ongoing purposive activity. This purposive activity, of course, is occasioned by and through interaction: the reader acting upon the text, and the text being brought into action by the reader.

The activity of reading itself, then, forms the crux of Rosenblatt's concept of the "poem." Her book aims primarily at realizing "the concept of the poem as the experience shaped by the reader under the guidance of the text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 12). Even though she prefers to call her general theory of this experience a "transactional theory of the literary work," picking up on the use of "transaction" in Dewey's and Bentley's *Knowing and the Known* (1949), I think Rosenblatt's (1978) realization of her concept of the poem can be seen to subsume an interactive paradigm (pp. ix-xv). That is to say, the evocation of the poem, forming the basic event or process in need of critical attention, nevertheless admits an eventual analysis into two interactive roles: the enacting agent or reader and the relatively "stable" text which is open to being acted upon while at the same time imposing its constraints or limits and its guidance upon the reader (pp. 99, 129-130). Here the definitive features of the reader and the work are actually already implicated in the purposive activity of reading and cannot logically be curtailed.

Rosenblatt (1978), though, logically considers the event of literary reading or, variously, the concept of the "poem" through the concept of "aesthetic reading." She contrasts two forms of reading or "reading-events": "efferent" (from the Latin verb "*effere*," meaning "to carry away") and "aesthetic." In efferent reading, "the reader's attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out." In contrast, in the case of aesthetic reading, "the reader's primary concern is what happens *during* the actual reading event": "*In aesthetic reading*," Rosenblatt emphasizes, "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (pp. 23-25). These two forms of reading are quite similar to the two modes of attention I have developed above. In developing the two modes of attention, instrumental and aesthetic, I have been concerned not to limit them to the experience of reading alone. Rosenblatt's two forms of reading, though, offer specific formulations of the instrumental and aesthetic modes of attention as they would apply to particular reading-events. In efferent reading, we attend to a text and search out information or results to be carried away and applied elsewhere; we read instrumentally, looking for that which can pragmatically advance our activity



in some ordinary region of our general purposive activity. In aesthetic reading, in contradistinction, we focus on or attend to "the qualitative living-through" of the specific activity of reading; here the reader "turn[s] his attention toward the full lived-through fusion with the text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, pp. 25, 47). The additional concept of "selective attention," moreover, "makes possible the adoption of an aesthetic or efferent stance, and the modulation of interest in specific details" (p. 46). We can choose to read efferently or aesthetically and can modulate our interest in the specifics to which we may and do attend. Following Rosenblatt, we can derive or carry away several practical yet general concepts which can help begin to separate and characterize several basic features of the purposive activity of reading: the poem (and its logical presupposition of a reader involved actively with a text), efferent and aesthetic reading and selective attention. My only reservation with these general concepts has to do with the fact that aesthetic reading does not necessarily entail that "the instrumental mode of attention" is in abeyance. As I have contended above, in my own conception of literary reading, "the aesthetic mode of attention" is involved in a *compounded* act of awareness. In aesthetic reading, that is to say, instrumentality has become self-reflectively aware of itself.

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