

Larry A. Hickman

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Department of Philosophy, 980 Faner Drive, US-62901 Carbondale (IL)
lhickman@siu.edu

John Dewey's Naturalism as a Model for Global Ethics

Abstract

This essay considers the lessons about global ethics that John Dewey learned during his international travels, especially during the two years he spent in China, 1919–1921. I argue that Dewey's naturalism, which is based on an appreciation of the ways in which the work of Charles Darwin can be applied within humanistic disciplines, provides models for cross-cultural discussions of ethics. I suggest that some of the impediments to appreciating Dewey's contribution to global ethics lie in misreadings and misinterpretations of his work, such as those advanced by Roberto M. Unger. Finally, I suggest that it is unlikely that a global ethics will emerge until human beings transcend narrow supernaturalist and non-naturalist dogmas and embrace naturalistic world views.

Key words

ethical naturalism, Darwin's theory of evolution, global ethics, John Dewey

Since this year, 2009, marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of John Dewey, it seems appropriate to recall, very briefly, some of the details of his biography. Born in Burlington, Vermont on October 29, 1859, Dewey died in New York City on June 1, 1952. The technological bookends of his remarkable life were the drilling of America's first oil well in 1859, on one end, and the first test of the hydrogen bomb and the first successful tests of the birth control pill in 1952, on the other. The political bookends of his life were the election of President Abraham Lincoln in the year after his birth and the election of President Dwight Eisenhower in the year he died.

Despite the fact that the *New York Times* once hailed him as "America's Philosopher", Dewey's reach was global. In addition to numerous trips to Europe with his family, Dewey visited schools in the Soviet Union, Turkey, Mexico, and Japan. Perhaps his most important time abroad, however, was the twenty-seven months he spent in China, from May 1919 to July 1921.

The International Dewey: teaching and learning

These well-known biographical facts are relevant to the topic I wish to discuss. They reveal some of the factors that influenced Dewey's thinking about issues that we today associate with globalization, and more particularly, with global ethics. As a boy in Burlington, Dewey witnessed immigration and industrialization on a scale that prepared him for the decade he spent at the University of Chicago, from 1894 to 1904. During those years Chicago was the scene of massive immigration, especially from southern, central, and eastern Europe, and equally massive industrialization that involved inhumane work-

ing conditions and produced muckraking novels such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, an expose of Chicago's meat packing industry.

How were these immigrants, among whom there were dozens of languages and sharply conflicting cultural practices, to relate to one another and to their new environment? The situation that Dewey and colleagues such as Jane Addams faced during those years is remarkably similar to the situation that we face in our own time. How will the world's peoples, among whom there are hundreds of languages and sharply differing cultural practices, relate to one another and to the shrinking world that is a result of our expanding communications media?

Many of the nascent feminist, racial, and cultural identity movements of Dewey's time have in our own time come to full flower. Dewey, who marched with women who were demanding the vote and who was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, took these issues very seriously. His published work and his correspondence reveal the extent to which his concern with social issues that we today would term 'global' influenced his philosophical thought more generally.

There is much to say about Dewey's trips abroad that is relevant to my topic. However, I will pass over his trips to the Soviet Union, Turkey, Mexico, and Japan in order to consider his twenty-seven months in China as indicative of his continuing relevance to our present milieu of rapid globalization.

The first thing to say about Dewey's visit to China was that he was a listener who did not seek to impose a Eurocentric model on the traditions and cultures he found there. Jessica Ching-Sze Wang's recent book *John Dewey in China* carries the subtitle *To Teach and to Learn*. In addition to reviewing and revising previous scholarship on Dewey's relationship to China in the light of recently published correspondence and other archival materials, Wang argues that Dewey learned much about China that influenced his thinking and writing about issues that are still of concern to us today. Regarding Chinese political psychology, he wrote that a Westerner could not hope to understand such matters "without a prior knowledge of the historic customs and institutions of China, for institutions have shaped the mental habits, not the mind the social habits".¹ Emphasizing his own view that democracy cannot be exported, he wrote that "China can be understood only in terms of the institutions and ideas which have been worked out in its own historical evolution" (MW.11.216).²

It was from Dewey's experience in China, Wang argues, that he solidified his view that the spread of democracy and cultural cooperation cannot be fostered in the absence of broad efforts at cross-cultural understanding. These efforts must go well beyond those of governments and NGO's and include the diffusion of aesthetic components such as food, music, and other cultural values. They must seek potentials for communication among every level of civil society.

The Darwinian Dewey: naturalism

It is also significant that Dewey's birth year, 150 years ago, saw the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Dewey thought that the importance of Darwin's new naturalism could not be overestimated. In 1899 he wrote that

"The conception of evolution is not so much an additional law as it is a face-about. The fixed structure, the separate form, the isolated element, is henceforth at best a mere stepping-stone to knowledge of process, and when not at its best, makes the end of comprehension, and betokens failure to grasp the problem." (MW.1.123)

In his 1909 essay celebrating the 50th anniversary of Darwin's publication, he continued this theme.

"The influence of Darwin upon philosophy resides in his having conquered the phenomena of life for the principle of transition, and thereby freed the new logic for application to mind and morals and life. ... [H]e emancipated, once for all, genetic and experimental ideas as an organon of asking questions and looking for explanations." (MW.4.7–8)

Dewey's Darwinian naturalism has too often been misread, mangled, and maligned. Since it is the basis of his work in ethics, however, it is important that we understand precisely what he had in mind, how some current interpretations of his work fail to reflect an understanding of his texts, and how it continues to be relevant to our own globalizing milieu.

It is fair to ask about the character of Dewey's naturalism, beyond its energetic appropriation of Darwin's experimentalism and rejection of fixed essences. Kai Nielsen, who has characterized four species of naturalism can help us here. *Cosmological* naturalism holds that everything is composed of, or dependent on, natural entities, as opposed to supernatural, or non-natural entities such as are encountered in theism, deism, and idealism, and which would include gods, spirits, and *noumena*. *Methodological* naturalism involves a commitment to employing only the methods of inquiry most prominent in the empirical sciences and mathematics. *Ethical* naturalism is the view that ethical beliefs are a subspecies of empirical beliefs. *Scientistic* naturalism is the view that all acceptable methods of justification are commensurable with scientific beliefs.³

With some qualifications, Dewey's naturalism embraced the first three of these types, and rejected the fourth. First, it is well known that he rejected both supernaturalism and non-naturalism. Second, he thought that the methods of inquiry developed by the experimental sciences and mathematics are the best so far developed for fixing belief, which is to say that they are superior to the methods of tenacity, authority, and *a priori* reasoning. *It should be added in this connection, however, that he thought that inquiry was broader than what is exhibited by the sciences, that is, that inquiry in the sciences is a special case of inquiry in its more general sense, which includes inquiry in the arts and humanities, and whose proper study is the business of logic, or what he termed the theory of inquiry.* So it should be clear that Dewey's position is not scientistic: inquiry is active in the arts and humanities as well, and in fact wherever, short of luck, there is successful adjustment to the exigencies

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MW.13.215. References to John Dewey's published works are to the critical (print) edition, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–1991), and published in three series as *The Early Works: 1882–1898*, *The Middle Works: 1898–1924*, and *The Later Works, 1925–1953*. These designations are followed by volume and page number. "LW.1.14", for example, refers to *The Later Works*, volume 1, page 14. In order to insure uniform citations of the standard edition, the pagination of the print edition has been preserved in *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953: The Electronic Edition*, edited by Larry A. Hickman (Charlottesville, Virginia:

InteLex Corp., 1996). See: Jessica Ching-Sze Wang, *John Dewey in China: To Teach and To Learn* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 76.

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Wang, *John Dewey in China*, 76.

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Kai Nielsen, *Naturalism and Religion* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Press, 2001), 136. More specifically, I would add that scientism of this sort tends to hold that: a) the methods of the sciences are applicable to all areas of experience, b) that the contents of findings of science are applicable to all areas of experience, and c) that the sciences are value free.

of life. Third, he thought that the is/ought split that has haunted much of traditional philosophy was an unfortunate effect of committing what he called the philosopher's fallacy, that is, the taking of the *results* of a sequence of inquiry as if it had existed *prior* to that sequence of inquiry. To put the matter in its simplest form, Dewey thought that ethics is a matter of experimental inquiry. If we drill down further into Dewey's naturalism, we note that he strenuously rejected claims that his naturalism entailed materialism. In 1944 he and his Columbia University colleagues published a volume to which they gave the title *Naturalism and the Human Spirit*. Dewey did not, as some of his critics then as now have claimed, reject spirituality; he instead identified spirituality with the very human ability to project goals and ideals that transcend both the present moment and explicit plans for their realization. He thought that the spiritual dimensions of human experience, understanding 'spiritual' in the sense just described, were as much a part of the natural activities of human beings as are walking and chewing.⁴

Critics of Dewey's naturalism and a reply

Even a cursory reading of Dewey's published work provides a clear sense of the main lines and potential consequences of his naturalism. So it is all the more surprising, and even somewhat unsettling, to find widely circulated interpretations of his work that run counter to his clearly articulated positions.

Examples are readily available. Some come from the right wing of Evangelical Christianity in the United States, where Dewey is regarded as the devil incarnate.

On the other end of the political spectrum, Soviet Cold War scholarship, if you will allow me to use that term a bit loosely, often attacked Dewey on the basis of quotations that were not only made up out of whole cloth, but which directly contradicted his widely available published work.

Such attacks on Dewey are absurd to the point of being amusing. More troubling however, are misreadings and misinterpretations published by highly regarded academics. In this connection I direct your attention to Roberto Unger's recent book *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound*. Unger is particularly critical of philosophical Naturalism, which he regards as pernicious because it represents an "incomplete rebellion against the perennial philosophy".⁵

First, Unger thinks that Naturalism enshrines a difference between fact and value; second, it continues the unfortunate tradition of European metaphysics; third it approaches nature from the outside, from a god-like mind, refusing to recognize that "we are wholly within nature".⁶

Unger writes that Dewey betrayed his potentially radical vision of philosophy because of what he calls a "naturalistic compromise", embracing a fatalist position which regards the human toolmaker "as himself a tool: a tool of natural evolution".⁷

Unger thus thinks that Dewey's work is vitiated by his naturalism: "The naturalization of man", he writes, "will be his dehumanization".⁸ Unger faults all three founding pragmatists, Peirce, James, and Dewey, for attempting to impose "on pragmatism an overlay of naturalism. Philosophers for whom human agency was supposed to be everything", he writes, "took up once again the ancient and universal quest for a place above both human and the nonhuman reality. They should instead have agreed to see the nonhuman world from the only place we really have—a place within the human world."⁹

But as I'm confident you have already noted, the version of naturalism that Unger describes in considerable detail, and that he attributes to Dewey, does not square with the version that Dewey embraced.

First, far from enshrining a difference between fact and value, Dewey's naturalism undercuts that distinction as it has traditionally been articulated. Facts that enter into inquiry are always selected on the basis of interests, and thus on the basis of values simply held or evaluations previously made. On the other hand, values as evaluations always function in the context of facts-of-a-case. Here is Dewey in 1939, in a remarkably clear statement of his view of the matter.

"The separation alleged to exist between the 'world of facts' and the 'realm of values' will disappear from human beliefs only as valuation-phenomena are seen to have their immediate source in biological modes of behavior and to owe their concrete content to the influence of cultural conditions." (LW.13.249)

I fail to see how he could have put the matter more clearly.

Second, far from continuing the tradition of European metaphysics, as Unger alleges, Dewey dismissed most of that tradition as a useless impediment to clear thinking. (Whether or not you think that is a good idea, it is a fact of Dewey's philosophical position.)

In his 1896 essay, "The Metaphysical Method in Ethics", Dewey *explicitly* calls for a philosophy that would be independent of both metaphysics and theology.

"[L]et us", he writes, "give it the same intellectual freedom that we now yield to mathematics and mechanics. Let us not, even unconsciously, give philosophy the appearance, without the substance, of an independent position. . . . [W]hat ethical theory now needs is an adequate psychological and social method, not a metaphysical one." (EW.5.33)

Third, contrary to Unger's claim that Dewey and the other Pragmatists "took up once again the ancient and universal quest for a place above both human and the nonhuman reality", Dewey clearly argued that human beings are wholly within and a part of nature. We experience ourselves *in medias res*, and as agents we engage natural processes from our places in nature. I shall have more to say about this in a moment, when I turn to Dewey's 1898 essay "Evolution and Ethics".

Finally, contrary to Unger's claim, Dewey did not accept the fatalist position which regards the human toolmaker "as himself a tool: a tool of natural evolution".¹⁰ What Unger in fact describes is in fact closer to the view of Herbert Spencer than that of Dewey.

Richard Hofstadter addressed this issue in his 1967 book *Social Darwinism in America*.

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I recently encountered a book with the mind-bending title *Spirituality for Dummies*. Of course the book is not designed for "dummies", but it does advance the same separation between spirituality and religion that is a part of Dewey's naturalism.

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Roberto M. Unger, *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 19.

6
Ibid., 21.

7
Ibid., 35.

8
Ibid.

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Ibid., 36.

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Ibid., 35.

“The pragmatists’ most vital contribution to the general background of social thought was to encourage a belief in the effectiveness of ideas and the possibility of novelties – a position necessary to any philosophically consistent theory of social reform. As Spencer had stood for determinism and the control of man by the environment, the pragmatists stood for freedom and control of the environment by man.”¹¹

For Dewey, nature is neither fixed and static, nor does it involve an inevitable march. It is precarious in a way that can only be made stable either by luck or by the type of direct human intervention he at times termed ‘technology’.

Evolution and ethics for a global milieu

I have so far invited you to consider the *international Dewey* who rejected Eurocentrism and top-down social and political arrangements and attempted to understand cultures other than his own on their own terms and from the ground up. I have also invited you to consider the *Darwinian Dewey*, whose naturalism was cosmological, methodological, and ethical, but not scientific. I have attempted to take the measure of a recent work by one of Dewey’s interpreters, not in the spirit of gratuitous criticism but as an occasion to indicate what Dewey’s naturalism is *not* in order to emphasize what it *is*. It is now time to turn to a more detailed consideration of his naturalistic ethics, and the implications of his views for our rapidly globalizing milieu.

In 1896 Dewey published an essay entitled “Evolution and Ethics”. He was responding to T. H. Huxley, who had argued that there are two orders: a “cosmic” order of struggle and strife, and an ethical order of cooperation and sympathy. Whereas the cosmic order involves struggle for survival, the ethical order involves fitting of as many as possible to survive. Huxley thought the two processes are opposed to one another (EW.5.36). (A similar view would later be advanced by American theologian and public intellectual Reinhold Niebuhr: amid the struggle of nations there is the leavening element of moral life.)

Dewey responded that this split was both unnecessary and debilitating. It is not that ethics demands that we set ourselves against nature, but rather that we use one part of nature to manage another part. When a gardener sets aside one part of nature for the purposes of managing the flora and fauna that is found or transferred there, it is not that she has gone beyond nature; she has instead involved herself more thoroughly *with* nature. As for the gardener herself, she, too, is a part of nature, namely that part of nature that has the intelligence to manage the evolution of plants and animals, including herself.

Here is his central point as it pertains to global ethics: *our task is to read the possibilities of a part through its place in the whole.*

“Every one must have his fitness judged by the whole, including the anticipated change; not merely by reference to the conditions of today, because these may be gone tomorrow.” (EW.5.41)

Dewey’s message in this essay is radical: it offers a philosophy grounded in the natural and social sciences rather than metaphysics or theology. He argues that there are naturalistic, experimental means and measures by which we can measure both the extent to which ethical and religious practices have evolved, and the relative fitness of those practices for emerging conditions. This claim has several parts.

First, as we know, Dewey’s experimental ethics rejects supernaturalism and non-naturalism as legitimately determining factors within ethical inquiry. It is important that I not be misunderstood on this point, since it is one that in-

volves many sensitive issues. As I have already noted, Dewey does not reject “spirituality”. Nor does he deny the importance of religious experience. What he *does* deny is the legitimacy of authority as a method of fixing belief, including ethical belief. And that would include the authority of sacred texts as well as appeal to putative supernatural or non-natural entities.

Ethical and religious values are just that: they are what some person or some group holds as a value. To be *valuable*, however, is to have been subjected to inquiry, to have been determined to be *of* value in a way that is both warranted and assertable. It is important to be clear that Dewey's naturalistic ethics does not deny a place at the table for supernaturalist or non-naturalist claims. It simply demands that they pay their own way in terms of the consequences of their adoption, whether possible or actual, as measured by the type of inquiry that has proven to be successful across time and cultures, whose most dramatic successes have been in the sciences, and which he offers as a model for what we would call a global ethics. The value of supernaturalist claims does not lie on their face. To be valuable there must be experimental work that leads to warrant with assertibility in a larger biological and cultural framework.

Second, Dewey's naturalism provides ways of opening up avenues of communication among cultures that have evolved differently in terms of their ethical commitments. Even a casual reader of his major works cannot fail to note that his story begins with what we as humans have in common due to our evolution in a natural world, and then it moves on to what is cultural. Unlike many of his contemporaries, his work in ethics demonstrates a clear concern with cultural difference. In 1930, for example, in an address to the French Philosophical Society at a meeting in Paris, he discussed “Three Independent Factors in Morals”. He enumerated these factors as goods, rights, and virtues.

There are several things worth nothing about this lecture. First, he incorporates some of the main ethical traditions, Western and Eastern, within his framework. There are the immediate goods or values of emotivism, subjectivism, or those of the sybarite. There are the rights and duties of liberal democracies, perhaps grounded in deontological ethics and certain forms of rule utilitarianism. And there is the virtue ethics advanced by some contemporary ethicists as a part of what Martha Nussbaum has ironically termed their “salvaging operation”, namely their attempt to salvage the ethical system of the Athenian Greeks, but that is certainly at the heart of Confucian ethics as well.

Dewey reminds us that ethics involves conflict. Goods often conflict with rights, rights with virtues, and virtues with goods. How, then, are we to decide in any particular case what is to be done? Dewey's naturalistic ethics offers neither blueprints nor formulas: in terms of our topic, global ethics, it is not Procrustean. What he offers instead is the idea that serious and systematic inquiry that involves research into and application of experimental data offers our best chance of success when ethical disputes are at issue, including ethical disputes that are grounded in the ways that different cultures accentuate one of these independent factors at the expense of the others.

I will conclude with a brief example. It involves demands on the part of the United States that China improve its record on human rights, and China's re-

jection of such demands. How is this issue to be resolved? Where the American government is asserting an ethics of rights, the longstanding tradition in China involves a Confucian-based ethics of virtue.

Ronald Dworkin's visit to China in 2002 sheds some light on this issue. In his book *Beyond Liberal Democracy*, Daniel A. Bell argues that Dworkin had failed to do his homework with respect to the Chinese cultural context into which he had parachuted, resulting in a series of embarrassing miscalculations on his part. Bell notes that even those who were sympathetic to Dworkin were put off by his approach.

“Rather than appealing to his radical first principle (which underpins his critique of economic inequality), he stuck to American political common sense that equates human rights with civil and political rights. As a result, Professor [Jiwei] Ci notes, ‘the United States and the West as a whole, emerge triumphantly above the threshold, well placed to sit in judgment of the human rights record of the rest of the world.’”¹²

It is interesting to note the difference between this account of Dworkin's visit to China in 2002, provided by Bell, and the account of Dewey's visit to China a little more than eighty years earlier provided by Jessica Wang. You will recall that Wang wrote that Dewey refused to impose a Eurocentric model on his thinking about Chinese culture. Regarding Chinese political psychology, he wrote that a Westerner could not hope to understand such matters “without a prior knowledge of the historic customs and institutions of China, for institutions have shaped the mental habits, not the mind the social habits” (MW.13.215).¹³

This disconnect between rights talk and virtues talk has also been addressed by Roger Ames and the late David Hall, who are both advocates of a type of Neo-Confucianism that they claim is consistent not only with aspects of rights ethics, but also (and especially) with the work of John Dewey. Their 1999 book *The Democracy of the Dead*, for example, carries the subtitle “Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China”. It invites sensitive discussions about the ways in which American Pragmatism and Chinese Neo-Confucianism share common goals and can advance on a common path.

Hall and Ames list six points on which Dewey's Pragmatism and Neo-Confucianism are in agreement: 1) the avoidance of ethnocentrism and the importance of narrative; 2) social engagement; 3) self-cultivation; 4) the duty of remonstrance (the mutual duty of rulers and ruled); 5) the importance of tradition; and 6) a democratic vision.¹⁴

It is worth emphasizing the similarity between Dewey's notion that American democracy must involve progress toward a realization of the virtues of community within the context of a tradition of rights, and the Neo-Confucian emphasis on community as the basis for democratic progress toward increased rights. Underlying both conceptions is the indispensable foundation of economic justice that is often missing in talk of individualism and human rights in liberal democracies. In fact, Bell charges that this is where Dworkin went wrong: his rights talk remained abstract when it should have stressed the ways in which rights talk can be nested within a Confucian tradition that values community, and thus, implicitly, economic justice.

At this point I will go out on a limb and say that in terms of Dewey's evolutionary model, we can count humanistic religions such as Confucianism and many forms of Buddhism as more evolved, that is, more “fit” in terms of the emerging demands of global ethics than most are most supernaturalist religions. I suppose I am not the first to note that many strands of supernaturalist

religions tend to be less flexible and more dogmatic in outlook than humanistic religions such as Buddhism, since they claim to have unique access to divinity.

But of course it is not a difference about cosmological naturalism that divides the approaches of Dworkin and Dewey. The dividing line, at least in this case, is respective levels of commitment to ethical naturalism – the degree to which it is necessary to drill down into empirical data rather than leaving things on the drawing board. Dewey's methodological and ethical forms of naturalism are experimental: they led him to reject what he termed a "dialectic of concepts" in which potentially good concepts remain stranded in a heaven of abstractions because they have not been brought down to earth in order to be subjected to what Dewey called "checks and cues". This is what lies at the heart of the strategic mistake with which Bell charges Dworkin, and it is also what lay at the basis of Dewey's approach to understanding and learning from Chinese culture.

Had I more time, I would discuss the work of several philosophers who are working on issues of global ethics along lines that are inspired by Dewey's ethical naturalism. Alas, I have time only to mention the work of Paul Thompson in agricultural ethics and Bryan Norton on sustainability.¹⁵

Larry A. Hickman

Naturalizam Johna Deweya kao model za globalnu etiku

Sažetak

Rad razmatra predavanja o globalnoj etici koje je držao John Dewey tijekom svojih međunarodnih putovanja, posebno tijekom dvije godine koje je proveo u Kini (1919.–1921.). Tvrdim da je Deweyev naturalizam, utemeljen na uvažavanju načina na koje se djelo Charlesa Darwina može primijeniti u humanističkim disciplinama, pruža modele za međukulturalnu etičku diskusiju. Smatram da se neke prepreke uvažavanju Deweyevog doprinosa globalnoj etici mogu naći u pogrešnim čitanjima i krivim interpretacijama njegovog djela, poput onih koje je razvio Roberto M. Unger. Naposljetku, smatram da postoji mala vjerojatnost pojave globalne etike sve dok ljudi ne nadiđu uske nad-naturalističke i ne-naturalističke dogme i ne prihvate naturalističke svjetonazore.

Ključne riječi

etički naturalizam, Darwinova teorija evolucije, globalna etika, John Dewey

¹²

Daniel A. Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

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Wang, *John Dewey in China*, 76.

¹⁴

Roger Ames and David Hall, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope*

for Democracy in China (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1999), 150–161.

¹⁵

See, for example, Bryan G. Norton's book *Sustainability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and Paul B. Thompson's book *Food Biotechnology in Ethical Perspective*, second edition (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).

Larry A. Hickman

John Deweys Naturalismus als Modell für globale Ethik

Zusammenfassung

Diese Abhandlung untersucht die Erkenntnisse über globale Ethik, die Dewey während seiner internationalen Reisen, insbesondere während seines zweijährigen Aufenthalts in China 1919–1921, gewonnen hat. Ich behaupte, dass Deweys Naturalismus, welcher auf einem Verständnis der Möglichkeiten basiert, Charles Darwins Arbeit in den Geisteswissenschaften anzuwenden, Modelle für interkulturelle Diskussionen liefert. Ich weise darauf hin, dass einige der Hindernisse, Deweys Beitrag zur globalen Ethik anzuerkennen, in falschem Lesen und falscher Deutung seiner Arbeit liegen, so wie jene, die von Roberto Unger avanciert wurden. Letztendlich behaupte ich, dass das Auftreten einer globalen Ethik solange unwahrscheinlich sein wird, bis die Menschen die engen supernaturalistischen und nicht-naturalistischen Dogmen überschreiten und sich die naturalistischen Weltansichten zueigen machen.

Schlüsselwörter

ethischer Naturalismus, Darwins Evolutionstheorie, globale Ethik, John Dewey

Larry A. Hickman

Le naturalisme de John Dewey en tant que modèle pour une éthique globale

Résumé

Cet essai examine les cours d'éthique globale dispensés par John Dewey à l'occasion de ses voyages à l'international, notamment durant les deux années qu'il a passées en Chine (1919–1921). Je soutiens que le naturalisme de Dewey, fondé sur la prise en compte des façons dont l'oeuvre de Charles Darwin peut s'appliquer dans les sciences humaines, offre des modèles pour une discussion éthique interculturelle. Je considère que certains obstacles à l'appréciation de l'apport de Dewey à l'éthique globale résident dans les mauvaises interprétations de son oeuvre, comme celle de Roberto Unger. Enfin, je considère qu'il est peu probable qu'une éthique globale apparaisse tant que l'homme n'aura pas transcendé les dogmes surnaturalistes ou non-naturalistes et embrassé les points de vue naturalistes.

Mots-clés

naturalisme éthique, théorie de l'évolution de Darwin, éthique globale, John Dewey