

**UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCE:
LANGUAGE, INFERENCE, AND JUDGMENT**

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ABSTRACT: Philosophers have used broad strokes to identify a significant trait of the communicative aspect of experience. Benjamin spoke of language, Dewey of inference, and Buchler of judgment. This paper discusses what each meant, why each addressed the question as he did, and in the end which is preferable. The argument is made that Benjamin and Dewey exaggerated the role of language and inference respectively, and that among the three the concept of judgment best captures the character of the manipulative and communicative nature of experience. Dewey was right that the traditional approach to experience, wherein sensory perception is passively received and then acted upon by the mind, is unacceptable, but his alternative view that inference is built into experience is also not adequate. The primary reason for this conclusion is that much of our experience, though manipulative and communicative, is characterized not by inference but by other forms of judgment and query.

When attempting to delineate or discriminate a feature of something that has not been noticed before, philosophers have few good choices.¹ We can, and sometimes do, invent a term, or use an obscure term, to refer to the newly designated feature. Peirce, Whitehead and Buchler all did this, as did Heidegger and many others. If we do not see the need or do not wish to create a neologism, we may use an already familiar term in a new way, which has also been done many times. Either way we are subject to criticism. If we use a neologism or draw on an unfamiliar linguistic past we may be accused of obscurantism and failing to be sufficiently clear to be able to speak in straightforward language. If we stretch terms to accommodate new meanings we may be accused of misleading our readers and creating unnecessary confusion.

¹ This paper is a slightly revised version of a paper of the same title that was presented at the conference Emancipation: Challenges at the Intersection of European and American Philosophy, held at Fordham University in February, 2015. I am grateful to those who heard the presentation and made significant comments and criticisms, to the reader of the paper for this journal, and to the editor of this issue of the journal.

In what follows I am interested in considering three instances of the latter phenomenon, which is to say three cases in which philosophers have used familiar terms in ways that may be insightful but may also be guilty of confusing and misleading us. I am specifically interested in how Walter Benjamin, John Dewey, and Justus Buchler approached the manipulative and communicative character of experience, and how we might evaluate and benefit in our own work from what they offered. In Benjamin's case the term in question is "language", for Dewey it is "inference", and for Buchler it is "judgment".

In all three cases the general issue is how we are to understand that aspect of experience in or through which we manipulate our environment or our world. To put it this way is to speak more in the categories of Dewey and Buchler than Benjamin, though I think that Benjamin might have been able to agree with the point. In his 1916 essay "On Language as Such" he argues that everything is characterized by language, and language is the way anything and everything communicates itself or its nature, "communication in words being only a particular case of human language..."² Benjamin goes quite a bit further, though, and says that everything, animate and inanimate, partakes of language insofar as everything communicates its "mental contents". To refer to inanimate things as possessing and communicating mental contents is already quite clearly using existing terms in very much new ways. Language in this new meaning is the communicative activity or action of all entities insofar as they may have meaning in any given context. In this respect language, in Benjamin's treatment, is not a way of assimilating the world but, so to speak, of interjecting oneself into it; it is, in that it is an instance of communication by or to us, an aspect of the manipulative rather than the assimilative aspect of experience.

² Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such", in *Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913 – 1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 62 – 74; see p. 62.

In Benjamin's treatment, all mental being, as he puts it, has a component that is communicable, which he refers to as its "linguistic being", and it is this linguistic being of all entities that is communicated. It is not, however, communicated by language, he says, but rather "in" language, where the force of the word "in" is to say that language and linguistic meaning are identical. Language, in other words, is the linguistic meaning, or that which is communicable, in any entity. In the case of human being, language is that through which we communicate our linguistic being, and we do so, which is to say human language does so, through naming. Human language functions through naming, though evidently the languages of other entities do not. That other entities communicate to us – Benjamin mentions a mountain, or a fox – is clear enough because we would not be able to name them if they were not meaningfully available to us, and that availability is their communication, their language. So naming, or human language, is the embodiment we may say of a meaningful relation between people and our world; through it and through the language of all things we discriminate entities and enter into meaningful, functional relations with them.³

Benjamin is careful to distance his approach to language from a view of language as instrumental, or as a tool. He insists that neither we nor anything else communicate by or with language, but through or in it. So we may say that he has a relational and even transactional understanding of language as the communication of the mental or linguistic being of anything such that meaningful interaction is possible, but his is decidedly not a pragmatist view in that he rejects the idea of language as a tool or means of communication. In this regard we may say that Benjamin has a way, in his conception of language, of understanding how in experience we engage our world meaningfully that has similarities and differences with another approach to this question, I have in mind Dewey's, that appeared within a few years of Benjamin having written his. In

Dewey's case the relevant concept is not language, however, but inference.

In fact we will introduce here two other conceptions, namely Dewey's use of the term "inference" and Buchler's recasting of the concept of "judgment". In that both are attempts to point out how we meaningfully manipulate elements of our experience they make common cause with Benjamin's understanding of language, and the similarities and differences are instructive. We need first to explicate Dewey's and Buchler's approaches and then undertake at least a brief analysis and evaluation.

There is a disagreement in the history of the pragmatic naturalist conception of experience over how best to understand the manipulative aspect of experience, and by implication how best to understand its creative character. The disagreement is expressed most clearly in the differences between the respective approaches to this question by Dewey and Buchler. We will describe the difference and consider which approach among Benjamin, Dewey and Buchler's, if any, is sufficient to meet the goal of a fruitful understanding of experience and its place in our lives.

Unlike in relation to Benjamin, the differences between Dewey and Buchler concerning experience are a family disagreement. Buchler was standing on Dewey's shoulders, and inherited from him much of the general pragmatic naturalist approach to experience by contrast with the traditional empiricist or Kantian alternatives. Dewey and Buchler share the view that experience is fully an aspect of nature, moreover that it is the interaction of an individual with her environment, most broadly understood. They agree also that the traditional understanding of experience wherein sense data, or anything else, is "given", and then worked on or processed by the mind, is faulty and cannot issue in an adequate understanding of human being and our relations with the world. Furthermore, Dewey and Buchler both draw the distinction between the

³ *ibid.* p. 64.

assimilative and manipulative aspects of experience, though they do so at different levels of generality, in the sense that we both undergo and undertake in our ongoing interaction with our environments.

At this point they begin to diverge. Dewey introduces the distinction between primary and secondary experience, wherein primary experience is a more assimilative, immediate, non-reflective undergoing while secondary experience is a more manipulative, refined, articulated experience that contributes to an understanding of primary experience. The refinement and articulation that characterizes secondary experience is achieved, Dewey thought, through inquiry, and inquiry is the primary form of the active, manipulative aspect of experience. Inquiry is the more or less systematic application of intelligent, rational reflection on primary experience such that primary experience is rendered coherent and meaningful. Inquiry in this sense is as ubiquitous in experience as is meaning and knowledge. Nature, as the arena in and through which experience takes place, is imbued with meaning because inquiry is the way human beings engage their world and resolve the problems we face. For this reason Dewey said that when we understand experience properly we see that it "is full of inference", and that "there is, apparently, no conscious experience without inference; reflection is native and constant."⁴

Buchler's approach is significantly different. Like Dewey, as we have said, Buchler recognizes that in experience we both assimilate and manipulate. Though he is not inclined to make Dewey's distinction between primary and secondary experience, basically because he does not think that any sense can be given to the idea of immediacy, he is interested, like Dewey, in considering carefully the manipulative aspect of experience, as long as it is not radically separated from the assimilative, because it is in our manipulation of elements of our

environment that the creative character of our experience occurs. Here, though, is the critical difference between Buchler and Dewey: if for Dewey the manipulative aspect of experience is characterized above all by inquiry and inference, for Buchler the relevant concept is judgment.

This is not just a difference in words, or at least it appears not to be merely a difference in words if we take Dewey and Buchler at their word with respect to the language and concepts they use. In other words, if we assume that when Dewey talks about inquiry he means in fact the process that he painstakingly describes and explores in many of his works over many years; and if we assume that when he speaks of inference he means that function within inquiry whereby we move reasonably from one proposition to another, whether that specific form of reason is deductive, inductive, or abductive, then it is fair to say that Dewey wishes reason, inquiry, and inference to characterize the manipulative aspect of experience to a degree that Buchler thinks is far too extensive. From Buchler's point of view, the manipulative aspect of experience can take several forms, only one subset of which can appropriately be described as inquiry and therefore as inferential. In Buchler's opinion, then, Dewey misses too much of the manipulative and productive character of experience by focusing as he does on inquiry and inference.⁵

⁴ John Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy", *Middle Works*, Volume 10, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980 pp. 3-48; see p. 6.

⁵ Justus Buchler, *Nature and Judgment*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1955, pp. 103-105. Though there is relatively little secondary work on Buchler, there has been some, and some of that points to this feature of Buchler's relation to Dewey, i.e. his disagreement with Dewey's emphasis on inference and inquiry as too restrictive an approach to experience. Among the secondary literature where the point is made one might look to Richard Bernstein, "Buchler's Metaphysics", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 74:22, 1967, pp. 751-770, reprinted in Armen Marsoobian, Kathleen Wallace, and Robert S. Corrington (1991) *Nature's Perspectives: Prospects for Ordinal Metaphysics*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 29-47.; Robert G. Olsen, "Two Questions on the Definition of Man's Status in Nature" *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LVI, No. 5,

Buchler's theory of judgment articulates an alternative, more finely grained account of the manipulative aspect of experience. In so far as in experience people manipulate elements of our environment, we are producing, which is to say that the manipulative aspect of experience issues in products. The process through which we produce in experience is what Buchler called judgment.⁶ This can be a misleading term because it has traditionally had meanings, several of them, that are much narrower than the sense in which Buchler uses it. His idea, basically, is that when we engage or interact with our environment such that we manipulate some of its elements we are effectively appraising the available possibilities and selecting from among any number of them. This selection is not necessarily a conscious process, but simply indicates that in any form of manipulation there are typically several possible processes that can be undertaken and products that can result, and in manipulating in one way rather than others we are appraising and 'selecting' from among those possibilities, and to that extent our manipulation is judgment.

In a nutshell, there are three modes of judgment: assertive, exhibitive, and active. When we judge in the assertive mode we make a claim in some propositional

way, usually though not necessarily linguistic. Assertive judgments state something, something that can typically be assigned truth-value. The propositions that constitute the writings in most academic disciplines, for example, are assertive judgments, as are the typical contents of journalism, in general works of non-fiction, and much of normal discourse. Mathematical and logical propositions are also assertive judgments, though they are not expressed linguistically. Assertive judgments tend to issue in products that are assertions of which we can usually say they are true or false in a fairly standard sense of the term.

Exhibitive judgment differs in that when we judge exhibitively we do not say something, rather we show something. In judging exhibitively we do not assert but rather shape; we show rather than state. And the judgment is the shaping or showing. It is not a mental event in which we think about or in any way evaluate the showing; rather it is the showing itself. We may and often do think about and evaluate our exhibitive judgments, our showings, and propositions we may frame in those rational instances are themselves assertive judgments. The showings or shapings themselves are exhibitive judgments. The primary and more obvious examples of exhibitive judgments are works of art. A painting, or a piece of music, or a dance, is an exhibitive judgment. It demonstrates or portrays something. An exhibitive product may be no less meaningful, and we may add cognitive, than the assertive product despite the fact that it is in no way propositional. We should add that among examples of exhibitive judgments we need to include works of literature, both prose and poetry. These are judgments in which language is the medium for exhibitive rather than assertive judgment. This is an important point because it enables us to avoid a good bit of confusion concerning how to understand the linguistic judgments in fiction and poetry. Some philosophers have been confused about this because they have assumed that uses of language are generally propositional, and then

February 26, 1959, pp. 208-214.; Beth J. Singer, "Introduction: The Philosophy of Justus Buchler", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Special Issue on the Philosophy of Justus Buchler, Special Editors Beth J. Singer and Joseph G. Grassi, 1976, pp. 3-31.; and Beth J. Singer, *Ordinal Naturalism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Justus Buchler*, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1983, see pp 82ff.

⁶ To be more precise, Buchler's theory of judgment is one aspect of his broader theory of 'proception', which receives fairly thorough articulation in Justus Buchler, *Toward a General Theory of Human Judgment*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1951, and Buchler, *Nature and Judgment*, op. cit. The theory of proception is Buchler's way of dealing with what is traditionally meant by the term experience, though without what he thought were the inadequacies and conceptual confusions in the various ways experience has traditionally been understood. For our purposes we have continued to talk of experience rather than proception in order to minimize new and potentially puzzling terminology.

they have to come to terms with what they take to be the propositions that constitute fiction or poetry and their presumed truth-value. Much of the difficulty here fades away when we realize that the language in literature is not propositional at all because the judgments are not assertive but exhibitiv.

The third form of judgment is active, wherein it is actions themselves that are the products rather than any sayings or showings. When we hammer a nail or hit a golf ball or walk down the street we are judging actively. As in the cases of the other modes of judgment, in each such case there are alternative actions that might have taken place, and in acting as we do we appraise the possibilities and in the action itself select one possibility over others. Such actions, therefore, are judgments no less than other sorts of selections.

In many products in our experience we judge in more than one mode. A dance is an obvious example of a judgment that is both exhibitiv and active. Similarly, a piece of philosophy may be both assertive and exhibitiv, for example a work of Plato or Emerson that has both propositional and literary significance, or the conceptual structure of the Hegelian architectonic, which is as much exhibitiv recommendation as asserted proposals. The modes of judgment describe aspects of our productive experience rather than sharp categories into which we must fit experience.

We must also understand that some judgments, though not all, are exploratory. When I go for a walk I am judging actively, and perhaps even acting methodically if my walk is part of an effort to stay in shape or to lose weight, though there need not be anything exploratory about it. But when the astronomer points her telescope in a specific direction the active judgment is taking place within a broader process of exploration, in such a case typically systematic, methodic exploration. We sometimes, in other words, wish to explore or investigate something, and when we judge in the context of such exploration we engage in what Buchler

called query. This is an important concept for us because as we develop it the differences between Buchler and Dewey's understanding will become clearer. Sometimes exploratory judgment is assertive, but not always. When the physicist or philosopher or journalist puts a question to himself, the answer is likely to be a proposition with truth-value in the standard sense, which is to say an assertive judgment. The process of arriving at that judgment is a specific form of query that Buchler calls inquiry. Here he would be more or less in agreement with Dewey in that he understands inquiry as a rational process of gathering information and drawing inferences. He and Dewey both understood of course that there are many different ways that this happens, and that the physicist does it differently from the philosopher or the journalist, but they are all engaging in the process of drawing inferences and articulating propositions.

Dewey seems to think that all forms of exploration are forms of inquiry, which presumably is the reason he said, "there is no conscious experience without inference." Buchler, by contrast, says that inquiry and its inferential processes are only one form of query, and the reason he thought so is that some forms of exploration are not rational or inferential at all, but rather exhibitiv or active. An example of the sort of thing he had in mind is when a painter sets a problem to be resolved on the canvas, or when a student of music composition is assigned a problem in Baroque counterpoint. The products that result from these sorts of explorations are not assertions, nor is the process of exploration itself a matter of drawing inferences, yet the processes are indeed exploratory in that they are methodically resolving problems. This suggests that there is query in the sense of methodic exploration that is not inquiry.

So here we have the three different, though more or less overlapping, accounts of the manipulative, creative aspect of experience: in Benjamin's case the issue is communication and an understanding of language in which all meaning, communication and thereby

creativity in experience occurs; for Dewey it is inquiry that describes the creative aspect of experience because all reflective, secondary experience is a matter of inferential problem solving; for Buchler judgment describes the creative aspect of experience because not all forms of query are inferential, so a broader notion than inquiry is necessary if we are to understand experience adequately. How, we now ask, may we deal with these differences?

Perhaps the first question to ask is what is at stake in the disagreement? If we decide that nothing really turns on the differences then in a Jamesian spirit we may conclude that there are no relevant disagreements. But if we can see differences in application then we will have grounds for some sort of pragmatic valuation of the alternatives. And of course we should keep in mind the possibility that perhaps yet another alternative would be preferable.

So are there any differences in application? On the face of it, what is at stake here is our understanding of experience generally, and more specifically our understanding of the manipulative side of experience. At a less general level, also at stake is our conception of the place of communication, inquiry and rationality in experience, and by further implication our conceptions of knowledge and truth, and how knowledge and truth are related to rationality, science, language, and art. So, it would appear, there is a great deal at stake.

Benjamin's approach has features in common with Dewey and Buchler's. Most obviously, all three are very much interested in communication. Like Benjamin, Buchler regards communication to be at the heart of any conception of human being and experience, and he devotes a chapter in *Toward a General Theory of Human Judgment* to an understanding of communication. Dewey is equally sensitive to the centrality of communication, and all three hold, not surprisingly, that language must be understood if we are to have a plausible conception of communication and therefore of experience.

The primary difference among them is also what distinguishes the naturalism or pragmatic naturalism of Dewey and Buchler from the broader philosophical commitments of Benjamin, which at least at the time of his essay on language was a kind of mysticism. Perhaps the point can best be made by suggesting that in his conception of language Benjamin reads nature anthropomorphically by suggesting that the way all entities embody their potential meanings is through a feature of existence, if we may speak this way, that is properly attributable to human being. Benjamin explicitly denies this anthropomorphical reading, though I do not see any other available interpretation.⁷ In this respect Benjamin has more in common with Whitehead than he does with Dewey or Buchler. Whitehead read nature generally, in particular in his conceptions of actual occasions and entities, through the prism of experience, rather like Benjamin's attribution of communication and language to all natural entities. Neither Dewey nor Buchler would do this, and their approaches are the stronger for avoiding this sort of anthropomorphism. So while Benjamin treats the communicative and meaningful aspects of experience as characteristic of all natural entities, both Dewey and Buchler attempt to understand how the meaningful, communicative, manipulative aspect of experience contributes to what it is to be human. Both, like Benjamin, are interested in language as an aspect of the process, but neither will read language into nature as a trait of all natural entities.

There remain, however, important differences between Dewey and Buchler. We need first to keep in mind, as we mentioned earlier, that they both wish to distance themselves from the traditional empiricist and rationalist conceptions of experience, and the Kantian as well. One of the failures of those traditions they would have said is that each in its own way was a philosophy of the given, in which experience is understood as operation performed on sense data. Dewey's opposition to this

⁷ See Benjamin op. cit, p. 64.

approach to experience is in fact one of the reasons he wants to say that inference is not a mental act performed on something given, but reaches all the way down in experience. Buchler agrees with Dewey's misgivings about the tradition, but not with his solution. Another of the failures of the traditional approaches is that they construed experience almost solely in its relation to knowledge, or more precisely as the more or less reliable vehicle of knowledge.

Buchler thought, however, that despite Dewey's desire to develop an approach to experience that moves beyond the traditional views, he nonetheless remained too much captive of them. Specifically, Buchler thought that Dewey was too much predisposed to privilege reason in experience over other modes of methodic utterance and judgment. To see what he means we can look at the passage in "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" in which Dewey says that, to paraphrase, conscious experience is infused with inference. The general context in the first few pages of the essay is to distinguish the conception of experience Dewey prefers from the traditional view, which is to say his idea that experience is the ongoing interaction of a person with her environment over against the empiricist and rationalist views. Specifically, he suggests that the traditional view divorced thought from experience, in the sense that experience was something one 'had', on which thought then operates. It is in this connection that Dewey wants to say that this dichotomy is mistaken because "experience...is full of inference."

Interestingly, a few lines earlier Dewey also objected to the traditional conception of experience on the grounds that "In the orthodox view, experience is regarded primarily as a knowledge affair", a view of which he does not approve because experience should be taken more broadly, i.e. as "an affair of the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment."⁸ Buchler says, however, that despite Dewey's objection to the

overly epistemological flavor of traditional conceptions of experience, this traditional approach "held [Dewey] in its grip more than he suspected."⁹ What Buchler meant is that by describing conscious experience as "full of inference", and by casting secondary experience as a matter of thought and inquiry, Dewey ironically remained consistent with the tradition by defining experience in terms of knowledge.

It certainly appears as if Dewey does in fact understand experience in this way. As we suggested earlier, if we assume that by "inference" Dewey means what the word typically means, which is to say drawing a proposition according to logical principles from other propositions, and if conscious experience is full of inference, then conscious experience is primarily a matter of thought. But if it is primarily a matter of thought, then it is primarily a matter of knowledge or the pervasive attempt to acquire knowledge. That Dewey held this highly "epistemologized" conception of experience is also suggested by the fact that as an element of thought, inference occurs in the context of inquiry, and inquiry is, Dewey held, the process whereby we transform an indeterminate situation into a determinate one. Because we are continually engaged in the process of resolving indeterminate situations, we are continually engaged in thought and inquiry, and this, presumably, is why conscious experience is "full of inference".

Dewey saw that the traditional conceptions of experience were inadequate in part because they read experience as largely epistemological, but now it appears that Dewey holds his own version of an epistemologized conception of experience. The irony of course is that among the greatest and most influential philosophers Dewey stands out as being aware of and sensitive to the breadth of experience. One need only look at *Art as Experience* to see the point. Yet here he is interpreting experience, or at least manipulative

⁸ Dewey op. cit., p.6

⁹ Buchler, *Nature and Judgment*, op. cit., p. 141.

experience, as a matter of inquiry and inference. The question we have posed ourselves is whether this approach, i.e. that relies as heavily as does Dewey's on thought, inquiry, and inference, is adequate? Buchler thought not, and that is one of the reasons he developed his theory of judgment, i.e. to try to capture what Dewey wanted without the lapse into the tradition. The question then is whether there are good reasons to endorse Buchler's alternative?

As Buchler has put it, "Thinking,' as activity, is only one instance of manipulation..." because in fact in experience we regularly engage the world manipulatively in ways other than those described by the processes of thinking, inquiry, and inference.¹⁰ A closer look at art an ordinary experience may help us see the point that there is something odd and strained in reading manipulative, and even reflective, experience as shot through with inference and as instances of inquiry.

On the face of it there does not seem to be any reason to describe what a painter does as a process of inquiry and drawing of inferences. Even when artistic production is consciously a matter of solving problems, formal or otherwise, as it has been and remains for many artists in many contexts, there appears to be something other than inquiry and inference at work. There is creative activity to be sure, and the process no doubt has some moments in common with inquiry as Dewey and Buchler understand it. The artist needs to clarify the problem, for example to determine whether it is a matter of formal elements, and if so which, or whether there may be matters of content and meaning involved in the problem. The artist needs to know the capabilities of the materials with which she is working and the tools available for solving the problem. These moments are, presumably, shared with instances of inquiry. What the artist typically does not do, however, is engage in the drawing of inferences as a primary way of resolving whatever aesthetic problem has been set. The artist may

even experiment, but she does so exhibitively rather than inferentially. And even in those cases, especially instances of narrative art, where a case is being made for an idea or set of ideas, the case is typically made through showing rather than inferring, and the case is exhibitively offered rather than propositionally. In other words, there are occasions of manipulative experience in which reflective and methodic interaction is undertaken but for which the concepts of inquiry and inference are not suitable descriptions. The same point might be made in those cases of artistic production that are not instrumental, something that is certainly a possibility.

The point also applies to cases of more ordinary, quotidian experience. We do things in the course of walking down the street, or cleaning the house, or eating dinner, that involve manipulation of our environment, and that may even be exploratory, but that do not necessarily involve inference. When, for example, we direct our attention to the taste of a particular dish at a meal such that we note, savor, and enjoy it, there are manipulations of our environment at work, there is even a sense of exploration in the savoring, but there is nothing inferential going on, at least not necessarily. Dewey well captures this sort of thing when he describes aesthetic experience, but his overly epistemologized sense of experience does not do justice to it. We may say something similar about the process whereby an athlete hones a particular skill, say a three-point shot or effecting a header off of a corner kick. The process is manipulative and even methodic, but it is not inferential. And on both Dewey and Buchler's terms, if a process is not inferential then it is not an instance of inquiry.

If it is adequate and reasonable to describe some instances of refined, manipulative, and even methodic experience – the examples we have given are in the creation of artworks, the enjoyment of eating, and athletic practice – which are not cases of inference and inquiry, then Dewey's idea that experience is full of inference in the sense that inference pervades conscious experience does not work, and his related understanding

¹⁰ *ibid.*

of secondary, refined experience as a function of inquiry is too narrow. What is needed is a conception that can account for this breadth in the manipulative aspect of experience, including its inferential moments. Buchler's theory of judgment appears to do just that. And if Dewey meant something different by "inference", for example something broader that might resemble Buchler's descriptions of judgment, then his theory is still not sufficiently finely grained because we remain in need of something that would distinguish among the various sorts of "inference". Again, Buchler's conception of judgment does that well.

By identifying several modes of judgment, in this case three, and by accommodating the fact that methodic exploration occurs in all of them, the theory enables us to account for the breadth of experience as we find it. When the philosopher attempts to work out the meaning and ramifications of an idea, as we are doing here, there is clearly inference and inquiry in a process of methodic exploration. When the artist works out the relation of colors or rhythms there is also methodic exploration, but in that case there is likely not to be inference and inquiry at work, but query of an exhibitiv kind. And as the basketball player perfects her three-point shot, there is methodic, even exploratory active query taking place, but it is not inferential and it is not inquiry in any standard sense of the term, or at least it is not enough to call it inquiry if we wish to understand how it works in experience.

Moreover, this broader understanding of judgment and query allows us to develop a more adequate epistemology than is available otherwise. One of the problems with traditional, especially analytic, epistemology is that it has assumed that all knowledge is propositional, and that knowledge is available to us only through those forms of exploration that engage in inquiry through some combination of empirical grounding and rational articulation. The natural and social sciences, mathematics, and even philosophy for the more broad-minded of such epistemologists, can be

said to issue in knowledge. This is good as far as it goes, but it leaves out far too much. We have every reason to say, for example, that the arts have a cognitive dimension such that knowledge is available without inquiry as traditionally understood. Given that knowledge is available in exhibitiv judgment, and we may add in active judgment as well, and that methodic query in those modes of judgment differs importantly from inquiry, an adequate conception of knowledge must be able to accommodate knowledge arising in these plural ways. By implication, we will also need a broader conception of truth than that which is applicable only or primarily to propositional knowledge. These broader notions of knowledge and truth can be articulated through the theory of judgment, and they are more likely to be curtailed through a conception of experience that places too much emphasis on inquiry and inference. It is also, in the end, preferable to a conception of communication and language that is grounded in a mystical sense of experience and that anthropomorphizes critical aspects of experience.

Both Benjamin's understanding of language and Dewey's theory of inquiry and experience are of course much more thorough and rich than we have been able to explore here. In their richness both offer virtues that we would be sorely mistaken to overlook or abandon. With respect to their overly broad conception of language and too focused an emphasis on inference and inquiry respectively, however, we would do well to attend to Buchler's more adequate theory of judgment.

We may end by reiterating the import of these considerations. Dewey developed a theory of experience for several reasons. One of them was that traditional approaches were inadequate to an understanding of human being. Another reason was that he felt, correctly and importantly I think, that a defensible theory of experience was necessary for a theory of education. And there was also the fact that he understood the importance of the aesthetic dimension of experience, of which there was no sufficient way to account in the

context of traditional theories of the given and of experience. These and others were and remain good reasons to sustain a strong theory of experience. But if Dewey's theory is flawed in the ways that Buchler proposed, and I have argued that there is reason to endorse Buchler's objections, then we are in need of further development of a theory of experience. Buchler's contributions to that effort are in his theories of perception and judgment. But those efforts are not the end of it either. We stand in need of a reformed theory of experience that embraces both Dewey's and Buchler's insights, that resonates with current work in the ideas of the embodied and embedded mind, that answers to aspects of experience that their theories do not encompass, and that revisits critical issues in experience such as knowledge, truth, power, and other central features of our lives. There is, in other words, a good deal of work left to do.¹¹

¹¹ Mark Johnson in *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007 goes some distance in the right direction.