

# *Prof. Rex Li's Writings*

**Category:** Study of John Dewey

**Sub-category:** /

**Code:** JD 01-006

**Title:** Dewey's Liberal Naturalism

**Year Written:** 2019

**Summary/ Abstract:** Prof. Li chaired the Fudan-Dewey Lecture Series in October 2019. The keynote speaker is Prof. Richard Bernstein, a renowned pragmatist philosopher. This PPT is Prof. Li's opening remarks on Day 2, which outlines Dewey's liberalism and naturalism.

© Rex Li 2021

All rights reserved. To quote or cite, please acknowledge the author (Prof. Rex Li) and source of retrieval from this website ([www.profrexli.com](http://www.profrexli.com)).

For quotes or citation of over 100 words, please write to the author for written permission.

Fudan – Dewey Lectures  
Series III — Richard J. Bernstein

Day 2  
16  
October  
2019

# Dewey's Liberal Naturalism

Rex Li, EdD.

Visiting Professor

Dewey Center

Fudan University



**Below is a summary of  
Dewey's  
Liberalism and Naturalism**

## (A) Liberalism

1. Dewey's idea of democracy started as early as 1888.

In *The Ethics of Democracy* (EW1: 227 – 249), Dewey suggested that:

..... **democracy is an ethical idea**, the idea of a personality, with truly infinite capacities, incorporate with every man. Democracy and the one, the ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity are to my mind synonyms..... (EW1: 248)

# (A) Liberalism

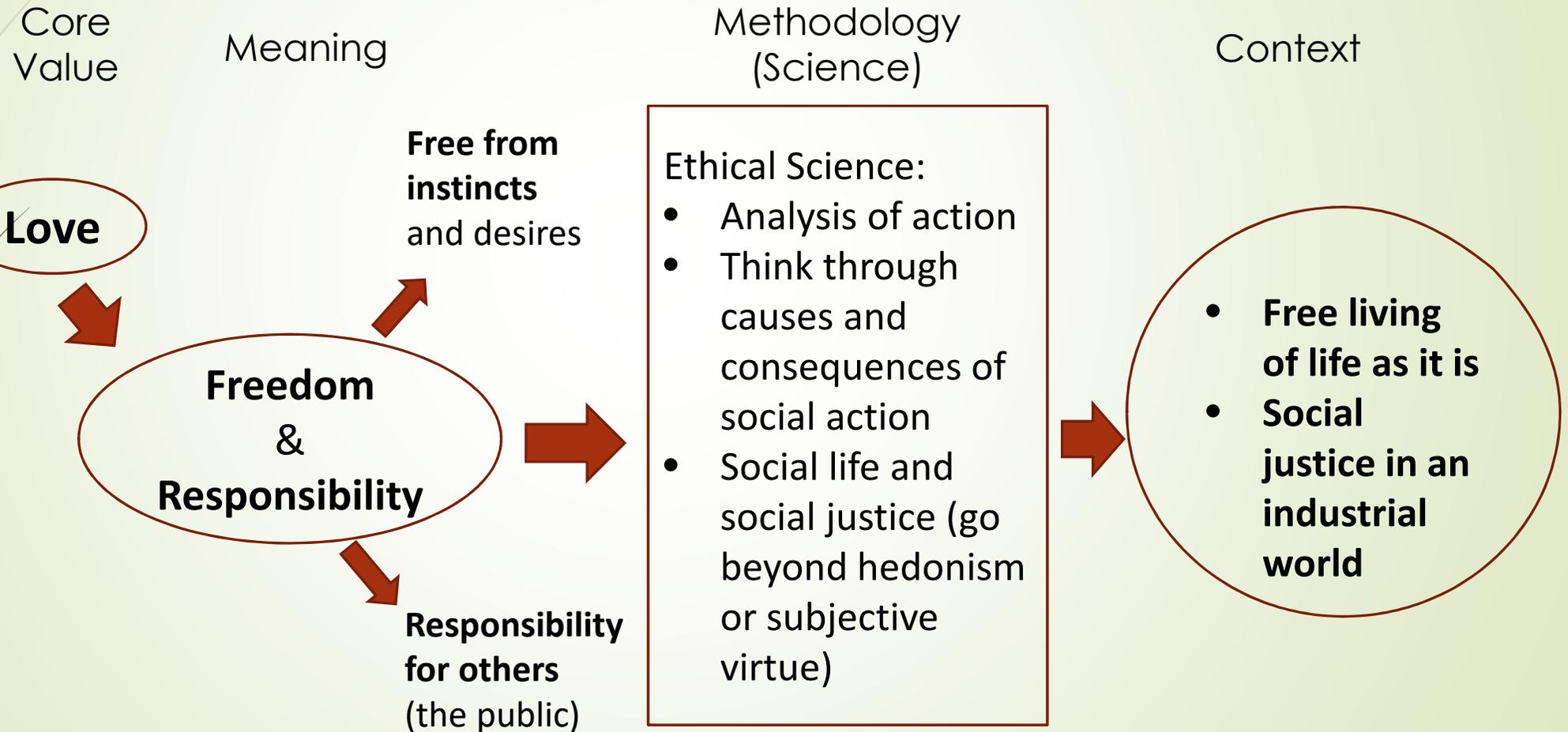
## 2. Dewey's notion of love and justice (1894)

... **Love is justice** brought to self-consciousness... a full standard of value... love is justice, ... is not simply the supreme virtue; **it is virtue**. It is the fulfilling of the law – the law of self. Love is the complete **identification of subject and object**, of agent and function...  
(LW4: 361)

*The study of Ethics: A Syllabus (1894)*

# (A) Liberalism

## 3. Graphic Presentation of Dewey's Ethics (1894)



## (A) Liberalism

### 4. Liberty as self-restraint and self-respect.

For Dewey, liberty is not unchecked freedom, impulsive whimsical behaviors nor seeking for immediate self-gratification, but be **free from the control of ones impulse**. It is that one can act freely in **social relation** with self-control, self-restraint and self-respect.

## (B) Naturalism

Dewey's Notion of Empirical naturalism was expounded in *Experience and Nature (1925)*

- 1) Scope:**
  - A theory of Nature (existence)
  - Metaphysics
  - Being qua being
  - The generic traits of all existence
  
- 2) Certainty / Stability VS Uncertainty / Change**
  - Everything is process
  - Every existence is an event
  - Structure is existence that changes more slowly

## (B) Naturalism

### 3) Emergent Evolution

- Existence / event is a process
- New organization of events create new qualities
- Three Main “plateaus” of existence – matter, life, mind

### 4) Qualities Existent in nature

- Organism and environment in interaction creating qualities
- Shown in immediate experience
- Consummatory objects – to desire or to avoid.

## (B) Naturalism

### 5) Interpretation of Science / scientific knowledge

- Not the inner nature of things
- Not the underlying structure
- But the tools to attain qualities  
(consummatory objects)

### 6) Man and Meaning

- Man is part of nature, attaining consciousness and meaning
- Meanings arise out of experience and community life
- Language and communication enlarges meaning in a symbolic world

## (B) Naturalism

### 7) Values and Judgement

- Values as intrinsic qualities of events
- Immediate value VS long-term consequences
- Judgement of value by philosophy
- (criticism of criticism)