



# DEWEY STUDIES

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**Mission:**

*Dewey Studies* is a peer-reviewed, online, open-access journal of the John Dewey Society, dedicated to furthering understanding of John Dewey's philosophical work and enlivening his unique mode of engagement with the vital philosophical questions of our time. Please visit our [website](#) for more information about the journal, or to view other issues of *Dewey Studies*.

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

LEONARD J. WAKS  
Temple University, Emeritus  
Editor-in-chief



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This issue of *Dewey Studies* is pleased to present four articles, two book reviews, and an interview. The articles, which have been anonymously peer reviewed, were submitted independently ‘over the transom’ yet they display a certain unity of focus on Dewey’s process philosophy and its implications.

Jim Garrison, in “Creative Democracy as the Aesthetic Solution to Nihilism,” notes that Dewey’s post-Darwinian philosophy completely rejects the metaphysics of substance - the image of individual subjectivity seeking to penetrate an independent and external ‘reality’ and to express truths about that reality in language. Dewey’s philosophy, in contrast to classical metaphysics, as well “forswears inquiry after absolute origins and absolute finalities.” Instead, it takes its starting points for inquiry in the troubled situations of present moments, as individuals are impeded in attaining immediate ends.

To move forward individuals need to reorder factors in the situation. If they are not pursuing “absolute ends,” however, how are they to guide their lives? This question has been at the forefront since Nietzsche declared that “God is dead.” He proposed that agents must take upon themselves the creative capacities previously assigned to their Gods. Related responses to the spectre of nihilism include Foucault’s Baudelarian-inspired dandy and Rorty’s ironist.

Garrison finds all of these post-nihilistic stances rooted in conceptions of the individual self that remain entangled in classical metaphysics and are also incompatible with democratic self-governance. They all, in different ways, blink the evident fact that humans develop their individual selves not in isolated acts of self-fashioning, but through the process of engaging with others in reconstructing community life. This necessitates communication with others., which forces them to listen to and take on board the experience of others. When they speak, they must formulate speech utterances not only intelligible to others but sufficiently persuasive as

to generate cooperation in common pursuits. In this process both speakers and listeners change.

Lawrence Heglar, in “Dewey’s Treatment of Language as Action,” further clarifies the way in which Dewey’s philosophy of language moves beyond metaphysical notions. Inquiry seeks to re-order situations to unblock action. Language, whether in solitary or collective inquiry, is a necessary tool in establishing order. Its job is not to refer to some external reality, but to serve as a tool in ordering situational elements immediately at hand.

Scott R. Stroud, in “*Dissoi Logoi*, Rhetoric, and Moral Education: From the Sophists to in Dewey’s Pragmatism,” investigates the rhetorical notion of *Dissoi Logoi*, or taking up both sides of an argument to come up with a deeper truth. Drawing on the work of Edward Schippa, Stroud notes that the notion can be interpreted in two ways. A *subjective* interpretation notes that there must be two sides to an issue in order for anything genuinely to be *at issue*. It focuses on the subject’s ability to take up arguments for both sides. Stroud notes resonances of this interpretation with the pedagogical device of switch-side debate, where participants have to argue for either side, or both sides, of some proposition, providing necessary training for spontaneous argumentation and debate competitions.

John Stuart Mill has offered a profound and much-quoted defense of *dissoi logoi* in this sense:

He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion. Nor is it enough that he should hear the arguments of adversaries from his own teachers... That is not the way to

do justice to the arguments, or bring them into real contact with his own mind. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them; who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form; he must feel the whole force of the difficulty which the true view of the subject has to encounter and dispose of; else he will never really possess himself of the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

Stroud notes that an alternate, *objective* account of *Dissoi Logoi* points toward a process metaphysics akin to Dewey's. On this interpretation, the rhetor is not merely instructed to take up both fixed sides of an argument, but also to see that 'reality' is not neatly divided into true and false, but is in constant flux. True and false are inseparable, and like yin and yang, attract and complement and even turn into their opposites. *Dissoi logoi*, like Dewey's process philosophy, thus prepares us to live in a world of constant change and uncertainty.

Finally, Mark Jackson, in "Pragmatism and Economic Doctrine," offers a critique of the standard approach to economic science. Classical and neoclassical economics alike locate axioms based on a fixed, *a priori* conception of human nature - "economic man." They then derive theorems about economic behavior and extend their economic analyses into other spheres of life including the family and the polity.

This entire project, Jackson shows, becomes suspect when confronted with a process philosophy. Jackson lays out a view of human behavior derived from Dewey, in which habit as a motivating

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<sup>1</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, Gutenberg Project [EBook #34901], p. 67.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/34901/34901-h/34901-h.htm>

force in behavior is shaped in interaction with ever-changing institutional norms, which are in turn strained and changed as a result of action. Economic action takes place in an arena - as already described by Garrison, Heglar and Stroud - of shifting laws, shifting market norms, and ever-changing actors. As the Arab says in William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*, "No foundation. All the way down the line."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Saroyan, *The Time of Your Life*.

[https://archive.org/stream/SaroyanW.TheTimeOfYourLife.APlay./Saroyan%20W.%20The%20Time%20of%20Your%20Life.%20A%20Play.\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/SaroyanW.TheTimeOfYourLife.APlay./Saroyan%20W.%20The%20Time%20of%20Your%20Life.%20A%20Play._djvu.txt)

## ***Dewey Studies - Call for Papers***

### **Special Issue: “After the Insurrection: Addressing the Crisis in Liberal Democracy.”**

Edited by Leonard Waks, Hangzhou Normal University; Liz Jackson, Education University of Hong Kong; and Sophie Ward, University of Durham.

Scheduled for publication in December 2021.

### **The Crisis in Democracy**

According to “Democracy Under Siege,” the 2020 Annual Report of the non-profit organization Freedom House:

*As a lethal pandemic, economic and physical insecurity, and violent conflict ravaged the world in 2020, democracy’s defenders sustained heavy new losses in their struggle against authoritarian foes, shifting the international balance in favor of tyranny.*

*Incumbent leaders increasingly used force to crush opponents and settle scores, sometimes in the name of public health, while beleaguered activists—lacking effective international support—faced heavy jail sentences, torture, or murder in many settings.*

The democratic decline is now felt alike by citizens of the cruelest dictatorships and long-standing democracies. Democratic freedom is diminishing in China, Russia, India, and Eastern Europe. Meanwhile far right parties make progress in Germany and France, while democratic institutions erode in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Lying behind the crisis is the impasse in the neo-liberal world order and economic globalization. As globalization has entailed the shift of manufacturing and other industries to nations with lower

labor costs, workers in de-industrializing countries have lost both income and social status. Meanwhile the flow of immigrants has challenged cultural norms and hierarchies, leaving the national groups feeling threatened and displaced.

In the United States, the 2016 election campaign of Donald Trump appealed to de-industrialized workers, the “losers” of globalization, and to those—mostly older white males—nursing cultural grievances as ethnic minorities and immigrants gained cultural and political power. In January 2021 an insurrectionist mob, provoked by Trump, stormed the capitol and disrupted the certification of his opponent’s election. Leading up to the insurrection the Trump administration removed mechanisms of accountability, spread false claims of electoral fraud, and responded to protests against racial injustice with irregular federal police violence.

In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Boris Johnson completed the “Brexit” withdrawal from the European Union. Brexit won narrow popular support on the basis of similar false claims regarding its economic benefits and appeals to racial and cultural grievances. The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU weakens the pro-democracy European project, which has been further weakened by the rise of the far right in other member countries.

In Asia, the Covid-19 pandemic has cast political and socioeconomic inequities and lack of representation within societies in a new light. China’s pandemic response has spurred critical questions about its mechanisms for democratic accountability and global information sharing, while its treatment of regional groups reached crisis points in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. In Philippines, India, and Thailand, challenges with human rights have been intensified and exacerbated with tragic results alongside the rise of Covid-19.

### **The Special Issue**

To respond to these developments, the editors of *Dewey Studies* invite contributions to a special issue, “After the Insurrection: Addressing the Crisis in Liberal Democracy.” We seek short papers of up to 1500 words, in response to such questions as these:

- How can philosophers, humanities and social science scholars, and educators at all levels respond to the crisis in liberal democracy?
- What new theoretical frameworks or empirical research studies might clarify the crisis and point to avenues for its resolution?
- How can the crisis of democracy be addressed through the standard formats of academic activity such as papers in scholarly conferences, publications in scholarly journals, and the introduction of new courses or curriculum content?
- What new forms of scholarly activity and publication can be initiated to reach new audiences with new forms of communication?
- What kinds of collaborative projects, in research or teaching, within and beyond academia, might address the crisis?
- How can academic professionals join forces with pro-democracy activists and contribute to their efforts?

We especially seek brief, informal contributions offering new insights. While reference citations are expected, the editors welcome original and provocative ideas regardless of scholarly embellishments. We also welcome reviews of recent books addressing the crisis and bibliographies of recent scholarship on any of its dimensions.

\* \* \*

Submissions are due by August 1, 2021. Authors will be notified by September 15, 2021 and final drafts will be due on November 1. For further information, please contact Leonard Waks at:

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([s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk](mailto:s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk))

# CREATIVE DEMOCRACY AS THE AESTHETIC SOLUTION TO NIHILISM

JIM GARRISON

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When Fredrich Nietzsche famously pronounced “God is dead” he was referring to the death of the western metaphysics of substance, or what Jacques Derrida called “the metaphysics of presence” and Martin Heidegger ontotheology. While less percussive in expression, Dewey’s rejection of metaphysics amounts to the same thing. One result of the demise of western metaphysics is the specter of nihilism. Nietzsche proposed an artistic-aesthetic solution to nihilism that posited what I call a selfish self-creating übermensch whose descendants include Michel Foucault’s Baudelairian inspired dandy and Richard Rorty’s ironist that is obsessed with self-creation. Dewey too has an artistic-aesthetic solution; it is superior because it emphasizes social self-creation in community with others.

Keywords: creative democracy, metaphysics, nihilism, the Other, self-creation.



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Whatever one may think of John Dewey's metaphysics of the generic traits of existence, Dewey entirely rejects the metaphysics of substance or what Jacques Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence (Garrison, 1999). Let us consider the interconnected concepts comprising such a metaphysics. In "The Influence of Darwinism On Philosophy" Dewey affirms: "Philosophy forswears inquiry after absolute origins and absolute finalities" (MW 4: 12). This sentence simultaneously sweeps away the *arche* as ultimate origins, foundations, or first principles, as well as "a true final term, a *telos*, a completed, perfected end," which classical Greek metaphysics called the *entelecheia* (5). Darwinism has no ultimate end or purpose; there are no cosmic purposes fulfilling themselves in history. In classical metaphysics *entelecheia* is associated with *energeia* as full and complete actualization. The fully actualized perfect *telos* or *entelecheia* promotes the actualization of latent potential (*dynamis*) as the capacity or force to achieve perfect self-actualization. Dewey retains the notion of potentiality, but not of latent potentiality.

Dewey mentions that to the principle of metaphysically fixed and final form, property, or essence, "Aristotle gave the name, *eidōs*. This term the scholastics translated as *species*" (5). He reminds us that "the classical notion of species carried with it the idea of a purpose" (8). Dewey does for all forms and essences what Darwin does for animal species. *Ousia* refers to ultimate entity, subject, or, substance; it is often identified with the *eidōs* as *entelecheia*, the complete actualization of dynamic processes. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey's most metaphysical work, substances are replaced by events, which "being events and not rigid and lumpy substances, are ongoing and hence as such unfinished, incomplete, indeterminate" (LW 1: 126-127).

The collapse of the metaphysics of substance is not especially distressing to the Confucian, the Taoist, or the Buddhist followers of

Nagarjuna *Madhyamaka*, which centers on rejection of the metaphysics of substance *svabhava*.<sup>1</sup> However, in Western context, the overthrow of classical metaphysics has resulted in a catastrophic crisis perhaps best articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him” (GS, Bk. 3, sec. 125). How did humankind kill God? Simple, “he” was an anthropomorphic creation that served human, all too human, purposes. Of course, having slain God, we may have also slain “Man” his creator along with such metaphysical essences as “rational animal,” forty-six chromosomes, and the like. There simply are no eternal immutable essences providing metaphysical comfort as the *entelecheia* of the quest for certainty regarding human meaning, knowledge, or value.

“Nihilism” is the word Nietzsche uses to identify the despair arising from the inability to believe in antecedent foundations, ultimate substances, eternal and immutable identities, or cosmic purposes. For Nietzsche, nihilism means “*the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer” (WP, sec. 2). Of course, when any cultural or personal highest values devalue themselves, the world loses all meaning; the result is nihilism. Moreover, much global conflict involves one culture’s *summum bonum* colliding with that of another.

Nietzsche identifies four psychological states of nihilism wherein the first three are passive and the fourth is active (WP, sect 12). The first involves finding no cosmic purposes operating in the universe to join forces with, so one becomes a nihilist by becoming discouraged, pessimistic and giving up on life. The second state arises for those that once assumed “unity, some form of ‘monism,’” demanding the “devotion of the individual,” but no longer find such

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<sup>1</sup> Westerhoff (2009) shows that Nagarjuna separated epistemological “essence-*svabhava*” from metaphysical “substance-*svabhava*” only condemning the latter. Like Dewey, Nagarjuna retains the logical functions while rejecting ontological substance.

unity (WP, sect. 12). Third, after having reached the postmetaphysical point “one grants the reality of becoming as the *only* reality, forbids oneself every kind of clandestine access to afterworlds and false divinities—but *cannot endure this world though one does not want to deny it*” (WP, sect. 12). While passive nihilism is life denying and destructive, the fourth stage, or active nihilism, indicates a sense of power that devalues timeless, unalterable ends, harmony, and true Being while starting to appreciate the power of human creative potential.

Active nihilists pass out of nihilism once they take upon themselves the creative capacities previous assigned to their Gods within what Heidegger calls “ontotheology.” This yields an artistic-aesthetic solution to nihilism. This state of being does not seek otherworldly immortality; rather, one participates enthusiastically in the power and joy of continuous creation. Nietzsche concretizes this ideal in the image of the *übermensch* as a ecstatic, life-affirming, assertive, playful constant creator of values obsessed with expressing his will to power. Just as the *übermensch* is captivated by self-creation, so are his descendants including Michel Foucault’s Baudelairian inspired dandy and Richard Rorty’s ironist. There are less self-assertive companions such as Heidegger’s Kierkegaardian-inspired authentic man, who is existentially thrown into the world that recognizes he has no possibilities beyond those culture provides and yet does not passively accept safe cultural preinterpretation of their identity. Instead, by resolutely affirming their thrownness, they locate their best possibilities within a given social order. Unlike the *übermensch*, authentic selves are more receptive than willful.

Here, I concentrate on Foucault who agrees Heidegger devastated the idea any social practice, including the social sciences, can determine the truth of humankind. There is no *arche* upon which one may ground their existence. Nonetheless, he rejected Heideggerian authenticity as passively accepting cultural possibilities

even as it actively chooses among them. As Dreyfus (1996) observes, “Heidegger stresses that we can only preserve endangered practices by being open to the gathering power of things, while Foucault insists on the willful and active resistance involved in transforming oneself into a work of art” (1). Indeed, Foucault (1983) implicitly contrasts his Nietzschean stance with that of Heidegger and Sartre when he says, “From the idea that the self is not given to us I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art” (237). I agree with Foucault about the superiority of creating new possibilities; however, one can immediately see there is a problem with postmetaphysical self-creation. There is no center of the self to serve as a fulcrum for creatively lifting oneself up. I prefer the notion of creating new possibilities out in the world as well as within ourselves. Accordingly, I also prefer the notion of creatively lifting each other up in community since we cannot go it alone anyway.

Foucault often acknowledges Nietzsche’s influence. For instance, in an interview Foucault (1988) insists, “Nietzsche was a revelation to me” (12). Foucault (1970) declares, “Nietzsche rediscovered the point at which man and God belong to one another, at which the death of the second is synonymous with the disappearance of the first” (343). Affirming the death of “God” and “Man,” Foucault commends celebrating self-creation at the funeral.

Besides rejecting the metaphysics of substance, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Dewey share a robust empiricism, emphasis on embodiment, naturalism, a reliance on genetic method, and surprisingly to some, the artistic-aesthetic solution to nihilism. However, Dewey’s understanding of self-creation diverges dramatically. I characterize Nietzsche and Foucault as offering an ideal of selfish self-creation that remains entangled with classical metaphysics and is antidemocratic in the case of Nietzsche and incompatible with robust democracy in the case of Foucault. I

contrast their selfish self-creation with Dewey's pluralistic, communicative, and democratic ideal of social self-creation.

Foucault's (1984) thinking about self-creation is ensconced within his post-Nietzschean, post-metaphysical understanding of late modernity:

I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. And by "attitude," I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. (39)

A "voluntary choice"? One finds odd traces of voluntarism and free will throughout Foucault—as well as Nietzsche's will to power—involving a foundationalism hard to reconcile with their rejection of classical metaphysics.

More than a relationship with the present, Foucault (1984) thought modernity a mode of "relationship that has to be established with oneself . . . an indispensable asceticism" (41). One's relation to oneself so absorbs Foucault that it becomes the chief focus for all three volumes of his final work, *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault (1983) carried out a series of interviews not long before his death (June, 1984) titled, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress." The work in progress was the third volume "History." Foucault remarked that "sex is boring" and that what he is really interested in is "problems about techniques of the self" (229). It is peculiar and constricting to make one's relation to the self central to a genealogy of ethics. Most people think our moral relations to others is as important as the "techniques of the self." I find Foucault's ascetic understanding of the modern relation to one's self narcissistic.

To elaborate his sense of modernity as an ascetic attitude emphasizing a special relation to the self, Foucault (1984) turns to Baudelaire:

[M]odernity for Baudelaire is not simply a form of relationship to the present; it is also a mode of relationship that has to be established with oneself . . . . [T]he asceticism of the dandy who makes of his body, his behavior, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art. Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not "liberate man in his own being." (41)

Foucault is right that the deep dark postmetaphysical secret of the self is that there is no deep dark essence at all. However, there is a serious problem with how he understands self-invention.

One might first strive to establish relationships with others wherein the partners transactionally co-create each other. One might also join with others to invent the world they share, and, thereby transactionally invent their selves. This is social self-creation. Foucault (1984) stridently rejects it:

[T]his transfiguring play of freedom with reality, this ascetic elaboration of the self—Baudelaire does not imagine that these have any place in society itself, or in the body politic. They can only be produced in another, a different place, which Baudelaire calls the arts. (42)

Meanwhile, Dewey finds the primary task of his philosophy of art to be that of "recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living" (LW 10: 160). For him, all social

practices are creative arts. For instance, “science itself is but a central art auxiliary to the generation and utilization of other arts” (33). Any artful social practice requires relatively stable warranted assertions. Indeed, when the art of statecraft is well informed by warranted assertions it can contribute immensely to social self-creation.

Foucault (1983) wishes to confine aesthetic experience to a putatively private domain:

For centuries we have been convinced that between . . . our personal ethics . . . and the great political and social and economic structures there were analytical relations, and that we couldn't change anything, for instance, . . . our family life, without ruining our economy, our democracy, and so on, I think we have to get rid of this idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and other social or economic or political structures. (236)

This is insightful passage, but any Deweyan pragmatist will recognize the false self versus society dualism. Foucault shares this catastrophic error with not only Nietzsche, but also with Rorty, who writes in *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*:

This book tries to show how things look if we drop the demand for a theory which unifies the public and private and are content to treat the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable. It sketches a figure whom I call the “liberal ironist.” (xv)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Later, Rorty (1989) remarks, “Ironist theorists like Hegel, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault seem to me invaluable in our attempt to form a private self-image, but pretty much useless when it comes to politics” (83). I do not agree, but a Deweyan pragmatist could reconstruct them. Anyway, Rorty is surely right about the role of

Surely there are individual acts that are truly private, although, as Dewey points out in the *Public and its Problems*, even the most private of acts potentially have public consequences. Contrary to devotees of selfish self-creation, a life of ordered richness, the fullness of one's freedom, and the aesthetic quality of one's self-creation depends on one's family and one's community locally, nationally, and globally.

When asked with whom subjects struggle for identity, Foucault (1980) answered, "I would say it's all against all. There aren't immediately given subjects of the struggle . . . Who fights against whom? We all fight each other. And there is always within each of us something that fights something else" (208). Foucault is alluding to Nietzsche's war of all against all. Narcissistic selfish-creation can readily instigate social conflict.

Early in his career Dewey articulated what he called "The Ethical Postulate" to which he remained committed:

IN THE REALIZATION OF INDIVIDUALITY THERE IS FOUND ALSO THE NEEDED REALIZATION OF SOME COMMUNITY OF PERSONS OF WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL IS A MEMBER; AND, CONVERSELY, THE AGENT WHO DULY SATISFIES THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH HE SHARES, BY THAT SAME CONDUCT SATISFIES HIMSELF. (EW 3: 323)

Unlike Foucault, Dewey finds a necessary link between ethics and social structures. The result is social self-creation:

The kind of self which is formed [created] through action which is faithful to relations with others will be a fuller and

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democratic solidarity.

broader self than one which is cultivated in isolation from or in opposition to the purposes and needs of others. (LW 7: 302)

Dewey's postulate and his stance on social self-formation arises from his insight into the social nature of the self. Nietzsche, Foucault, and Rorty recognize the social self, yet they still seek an inner sanctum as separate as possible from social influence.

Foucault (1970) understands "knowledge has anatomico-physiological conditions" as well as "historical, social, or economic conditions" (319). These correspond nicely to the biological and cultural matrices of Dewey *Logic* (LW 12: chapters 2 and 3). There are anatomico-physiological and historical conditions of self-creation. Dewey recognizes what we would now call species-typical traits and behaviors (LW 10: 250). However, he also recognizes unique potential.

Biologically, there is the uniqueness of our genetic endowment found in fingerprints and the like in the biological matrix of self-creation. Besides first nature, the biological matrix includes second nature, "Habit is second nature" and "under ordinary circumstances as potent and urgent as first nature" (LW 13: 108). We acquire our habits from our habitat, which includes our social habitat, the social matrix.

In regard to social habits, prelinguistic responses to others condition habits of conduct. However, linguistic habits are especially important. For Dewey, "Mind is seen to be a function of social interactions" and "meanings forms the solid content of mind" (LW 1: 6 and 7). We acquire meaning by coming to agreement in social practices (see LW 1: Chap. 5). Dewey concludes: "Customs persist because individuals form their personal habits under conditions set by prior customs. An individual usually acquires the morality as he inherits the speech of his social group" (MW 14: 43). The social

environment cannot seize any two individuals in identical ways. Self-creation involves breaking old habits and acquiring new ones.

An environment is what enters our functioning; the rest is merely surroundings. The contingencies of being differentially distributed temporally and spatially alone are enough to assure that not even identical twins have an identical physical, biological, and social environment. Besides, not even identical twins have identical fingerprints. Of course, the distinction between organism and environment is only functional since, "The processes of living are enacted by the environment as truly as by the organism; for they *are* an integration" (LW 12: 32). Transactionally, if someone can recognize the physical, biological, and cultural environmental contingencies that condition their habitual conduct, they can re-create their selves indirectly by re-creating their habitat. Often the most important parts of the social habitat are people different from ourselves since they disrupt our habits and patterns of meaning making and thereby require us to form new ones.

There are three things I want to call attention to in the following statement of social self-creation taken from *Art as Experience*:

Individuality itself is originally a potentiality and is realized only in interaction with surrounding conditions. In this process of intercourse, native capacities, which contain an element of uniqueness, are transformed and become a self. Moreover, through resistances encountered, the nature of the self is discovered. The self is both formed and brought to consciousness through interaction with environment . . . . [T]he self is created in the creation of objects, a creation that demands active adaptation to external materials, including a modification of the self so as to utilize and thereby overcome external necessities by incorporating them in an individual

vision and expression. (LW 10: 86-87)

First, notice that the self is created in the “creation of objects” wherein the individual finds self-expression by overcoming “external necessities” and “incorporating them into an individual vision” while selfish self-creation emphasizes establishing an internal relation with oneself in “an indispensable asceticism” (*op. cit.*). Social self-creation requires establishing relations with other things and people. I want to concentrate on democratic social relations, which as in all relations, are transactional and reciprocally trans-forming.

Second, Dewey proclaims that “potentiality is a category of existence” (LW 14: 109). However, he reconstructs the classical notion of latent potential (*dynamais*) by eliminating the *entelecheia* since “these powers are not unfolded from within but are called out through interactions with other things” (109). In *Democracy and Education* Dewey proclaims: “Power to grow depends upon need for others and plasticity” (MW 9: 57). I am especially interested in pluralistic social interactions involving dialogues across difference, which include cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender differences to name only a few.

Third, notice that every individual has “an element of uniqueness.” This unique potential provides “anatomy-physiological conditions” for self-creation actualized (*energeia*) through interactions with the physical, biological, and socio-cultural environment. However, because potentialities are only actualized as consequences of interactions, “potentialities cannot be *known* till *after* the interactions have occurred.” (MW 14: 109). Dewey draws the obvious conclusion, “There are at a given time unactualized potentialities in an individual because and in as far as there are in existence other things with which it has not as yet interacted” (109). For human beings the most interesting “things” are usually other individual humans.

Dewey's two criteria for evaluating any society are: "How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?" (MW 9: 89). The criteria call for pluralism within and without a given form of life. Both point toward creative democracy. "Only a philosophy of pluralism, of genuine indetermination, and of change which is real and intrinsic," Dewey declares, "gives significance to individuality. It alone justifies struggle in creative activity and gives opportunity for the emergency of the genuinely new" (LW 14: 101). However, because "Custom is Nomos, lord and king of all, of emotions, beliefs, opinions, thoughts as well as deeds," creative activity often requires shaking loose from cultural convention (164). Such loosening is important since, "Every invention . . . has its genesis in the observation and ingenuity of a particular innovator" (164). Foucault's "man" who strives to invent himself is valuable to democracy (*op. cit.*).

Dewey famously declares, "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (MW 9). Pluralistic communicative democracy becomes most creative in dialogues across difference. In Dewey's essay, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us" human otherness and difference meets social self-creation in ways bound up with his democratic ideals:

To cooperate by giving differences a chance to show themselves because of the belief that the expression of difference is not only a right of the other persons but is a means of enriching one's own life-experience, is inherent in the democratic personal way of life. (LW 14: 229)

In "Time and Individuality," Dewey writes, "The ground of democratic ideas and practices is faith in the potentialities of

individuals . . . if proper conditions are provided” (LW 14: 113). Recall, “There are at a given time unactualized potentialities in an individual because and in as far as there are in existence other things with which it has not as yet interacted” (*op. cit.*). Self-creation is always social simply because we need others to actualize our unique potential, and especially others different from ourselves.

I agree with Hans Joas (2000) when he claims Dewey has a distinctive understanding of altruism as “the radical readiness to let oneself be shaken by the Other in order thereby to realize oneself with and through other people: as shattering intersubjectivity” (116). Narcissistic selfish self-creators present themselves as strong and independent of others precisely because they fear what the self-transcending, empathetic, altruistic democrat has the courage to embrace: the “shattering intersubjectivity” of co-creative democratic dialogues across differences.

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# DEWEY'S TREATMENT OF LANGUAGE AS ACTION

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In addition to exploring how logic served and could better serve a regulative function in conducting inquiry in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Dewey also saw that his theory of inquiry needed a supportive account of the functions of language in regulating human activity both in relation to everyday interaction and our activities of investigation. This required an instrumental approach to language. In such an approach, language is viewed as part and parcel of our ordering activities and as a form of action with observable consequences. Looking at Dewey's philosophy in this way suggests that we take more seriously its *methodological* functions as a guide to inquiry, and less on its metaphysical implications.

*Keywords:* empiricism, ontology, metaphysics, epistemology, scientific method, language, experience, context of inquiry, meaning, action.



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### Language: A Methodological Approach

The history of the natural sciences, both physical and life sciences, demonstrated to Dewey that major advances in empirical method involved making new aspects of our relationship to the world available for conscious, reflective control. Empirical method depends on our activities of interacting with and ordering original material. Seeing these activities and deciding when and what aspects of them need to be controlled is a continual task and depends on the results of our inquiries. Our *tools* in inquiry which may require control include physical, social and language resources.

An important advance in empirical method that Dewey saw in the natural sciences concerned a greater attention to the manner in which language was used in inquiry. Language was coming to be appreciated for its operational value – its use in helping us organize our observations. With this use a change in status of the basic concepts of physics and life sciences was occurring. No longer could we award an ontological status to our various uses of language and assume they directly represented features of reality. In the natural sciences, it was the operational, or directive, force of a technical term that gave it significance in the process of inquiry. What this means is that most of our major concepts were now being considered to include, as part of their definition, an explicit recognition of the work they are designed to do in inquiry.<sup>1</sup> The importance of language as one of our tools of inquiry was coming to be explicitly recognized.

In the natural sciences this turn toward an instrumental

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<sup>1</sup> Percy Bridgman, *The Logic of Modern Physics* (New York; MacMillan, 1927); Philipp Frank. *Foundations of Physics. International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, 1 (7). (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1946).

treatment of concepts was driven by the necessities of empirical inquiry. In order to adequately make sense of experimental findings it had become necessary, and fruitful, to treat concepts as instrumentalities. Philosophy, on the other hand, does not have this empirical base to drive such a change. Hence it remains stuck in what Dewey referred to as the “ontological context.”<sup>2</sup> This involved the practice of assuming an ontological significance of our concepts and accounts, which functions to hide from view what we are doing with language.

For present purposes the “ontological context” may be seen to entail the conviction that formulating philosophical accounts and resolving logical, conceptual difficulties is equivalent to working directly with reality. This means treating our terms such as “experience” or “language” as substantials and an important objective of inquiry is the definition of their nature. We assume that dualisms and logical inconsistencies must be resolved before we can use a perspective. This is what is meant by awarding our accounts an ontological status. These activities are important because we believe we are defining the nature of the real world.

Dewey considered the awarding of ontological status to our accounts to be an issue of method. It is methodological in the sense that it is a certain practice, involving certain assumptions and having certain consequences. We make distinctions and invent terms and then forget that it is we who made the distinctions in the first place and that we did so for particular reasons. To hide what they are for is to preclude any explicit empirical justification of *why* they were introduced in the first place, it imposes rigid constraints on our

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<sup>2</sup> John Dewey. “Dewey’s reply to Albert G. A. Balz.” In *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953. Vol. 16, Essays, Typescripts, and Knowing and the Known*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

activities of observation and description, and it prevents any analysis or statement of the *work* they are supposed to be doing in an overall project. It does not, in other words, allow us to take language seriously as a tool of inquiry and provide us with any conceptual resources for bringing it under control.

What we need is an approach to language which postulates that when constructing accounts of phenomena that we are involved in an ordering activity, not simply representing reality. The question then becomes how to recognize and control for that ordering.

Dewey's alternative was to take an instrumental point of view and consider language as a form of action. Such a view requires that we view language, whether in inquiry or in our everyday activities, in a context by which we can determine its functions. In Dewey's view, our use of language in inquiry is one component of how we ensure an empirical approach by organizing our original material, define our subject-matter, and regulate our own activities so that effective change in existential conditions made be made. Dewey's project therefore was to develop a conceptual apparatus— itself a language account—that would be of use in empirical inquiry. The criteria for judging the validity of his account would be the consequences that ensue upon its use. For Dewey, the consequences most relevant to inquiry are that 1) our accounts must be formulated and used in such a way that they aid us in the description of actual concrete events and 2) the conceptual apparatus would have to be useful in making our own manner of working with language available for control. This meant relating the distinctions we make in our language accounts to existential conditions. Language was viewed instrumentally, as a tool for exploration.

There have been a few articles explicitly concerned with Dewey's concept of language and which outline his general view.<sup>3</sup> It

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Max Black, "Dewey's philosophy of language," *The Journal of*

is important to compare and contrast Dewey's conceptual apparatus with others and understand how his postulated functions of language may serve to resolve conceptual and dialectical difficulties. However, what we also need is a characterization of what we are doing with language, both as a general topic and as related to the context of inquiry. No treatment so far is explicitly concerned with the methodological, that is, instrumental, significance of Dewey's conceptions of language. *The approach taken here is entirely methodological.* By that is meant that the ideas and conceptions, or more concretely, the words and accounts we formulate serve a directive function in inquiry and so have to be evaluated according in relation to the consequences of their use. This means that Dewey's conception of language must be viewed in terms of his project to bring the empirical method of the sciences to philosophy.

I start with Dewey's postulate that language is an act of organizing the world and our relationship to it. We have to make our ordering activity visible before it can be available for control. As will be seen, controlling our use of language is to reconsider the ontological status we normally award philosophical accounts and view it as an instrument for exploring the world.

We can gain access to the issue by a discussion of the distinction between form and matter which Dewey emphasizes in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.

### **Form and Matter**

When it comes to thinking about mathematics, logic or language it is

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*Philosophy* 59, no. 19 (Sept. 13, 1962), 505-523; Thorus Midtgarden, "Dewey's philosophy of language," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, Vol. 62, No. 245 (3), John Dewey (septembre 2008), 257-272; and Roberta Dreon, "Dewey on language: Elements for a non-dualistic approach," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, VI (2), (2014), 109-124.

customary to start with a distinction between form and matter. It is this distinction that encourages us to treat formal systems as ontologically real objects and to consider pre-existing meaning as the prerequisite for communication. Inquiry thus consists of defining the nature of the objects and the meaning they are believed to contain or allow us to express. Dewey identified a rigid reliance on this distinction to be an important hinder to empirical inquiry, even while in certain contexts it is useful as an analytic device. In an ontological analysis attention to the concrete situations in which the formal system is used is not considered relevant to its understanding. Thus we create the problem of how mathematics, logic or language relates to the world. In the sense that such an analysis turns our attention away from existential conditions to the “nature” of a logical construct it is not an empirical approach.

With regard to “language” the empirical consequences of relying on this distinction are clear. Its use directs our attention away from the physicality and temporality of what might more appropriately be called “vocal conduct” to symbolic systems of rules or open-ended worlds of meaning which exist somewhere beyond the actual situation in which talk appears. In this way empirical analysis of the origin, use and functions of vocal conduct is precluded by establishing abstractions as objects of analysis which are independent of the context in which vocal conduct originates and functions.

Whether we are talking about formal systems such as logic or syntax or a concept of pre-existing meaning, the “form” is considered to be our primary subject matter and exists apart from concrete situations. This means that our own formalizations and glosses of meaning are more real than the phenomena we are trying to make sense of. An alternative, instrumental point of view would consider symbolic systems as analytic formulations based on generalization from concrete events, not discoveries. They represent our attempt to

bring order to our subject matter, which is actual behavior. In the theory of inquiry, discovery is considered a matter of being able to show relationships between actual concrete events. The symbolic tools we use to establish the linkages, such as a formal logic, categories of classification or narratives, have no ontological status and do not constitute our subject matter. Their purpose is to aid us in seeing relationships among actual events. In linguistics for example, categories such as phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics and the rules which we derive from studying these aspects would more appropriately be considered as resources or frames of reference for the exploration and handling of vocal events in social processes. They ought not be taken as essentialist characteristics of language itself.

In his theory of inquiry Dewey had sought to do for logic and philosophy what had been occurring in physics with mathematics. Mathematics had become divorced from metaphysical implications. With the theory of relativity it had become evident that different geometrical systems could be formulated to fit the requirements of new observations. No longer could we identify mathematical, formal systems with reality. It is now treated as a means of controlling our experimental activities.

Giving mathematics an ontological status leads to a situation in which our experiments and findings are subject to dominance by our conceptual apparatus. Instead of modeling reality on our formal systems, we need to investigate how our formal systems are useful in helping us understand reality. The same considerations apply to logic. Logic must be separated from ontological considerations and given an instrumental status, a task Dewey undertook in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Dewey, "Logic: The Theory of Inquiry," in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Vol. 12, 1938*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

Dewey also saw that this was not simply an issue specific to logic, but that it was important issue for language in general, of which logic was one particular form. A rectification of the separation of form and matter in our treatment of language was central to the development of his theory of inquiry. In the *Logic* he says, "The adequate development of the theory of inquiry must await the development of a general theory of language in which form and matter are not separated."<sup>5</sup> If we consider his treatise on logic as the specific theory of inquiry, it would be appropriate to consider such a view of language as the necessary step toward a general theory of inquiry. A postulatory framework for the empirical study of language was developed by Dewey and Arthur Bentley in *Knowing and the Known*.<sup>6</sup>

Our question for investigation shifts from asking about the "nature" of language to the empirical question of what we are doing with language. Perspectives in various domains of the life sciences were suggesting that we need a view of language which emphasizes its regulatory function as part of the way in which we adjust to the environment. It may be thus considered as a form of action that is an important factor in the discrimination of relevant characteristics of the world which are significant for our ongoing activities. It is in these discriminations, carried out in specific contexts of use, that the origin of meaning lies. From Dewey's work on logic, language, and his own manner of working we may piece together guiding principles for a view of language that does not rely on the distinction between form and matter as an ontological given.

I would like to develop Dewey and Bentley's notion that language be considered as a form of action and how this allows us to find the origin of meaning in its context of use rather than having to

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<sup>5</sup> Dewey, LW 12:4

<sup>6</sup> John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, "Knowing and the Known," in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953, Vol. 16, 1949-1952*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

be imposed from without. This will also help us understand some characteristics of Dewey's own work with philosophical texts.

### **Locating Meaning in the Situation**

The case of an essentialist semantics or meaning had been taken up earlier in Chapter 5 of *Experience and Nature*<sup>7</sup> in which Dewey analyzed the consequences of treating meaning as an a priori "essence." In this view meaning exists prior to its appearance in actual situations – perhaps as a word or thought in a mind. The problem then arises as to how to get the form, the meaning, into the matter, and here is where various dialectically created faculties are postulated to fulfill that function. The most common hypothesis is that language serves a basic function of expressing thought. "In consequence, the occurrence of ideas becomes a mysterious parallel addition to physical occurrences, with no community and no bridge from one to the other."<sup>8</sup> Dewey argued that it is a view of vocal conduct as serving a primary function of coordinating conduct, that conceptually bridges the gap between existence and essence.

How is that accomplished? It does so by replacing the traditional conception of language as a formal system, the "nature" of which is investigated through logical analysis of a system of rules, with a notion of language as a form of action, the characteristics of which reflects the purposes for which it is used. As a form of action, "meaning" has to be understood by examining vocal conduct in the concrete situation. By postulating a function of social coordination we consider language as a form of action in social processes that has observable and describable consequences.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, "Experience and nature," in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Vol. 1, 1925*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Dewey, LW 1:134

<sup>9</sup> The approach to meaning taken here is consistent with Dewey's postulate of

What we need therefore is some general account of what we are *doing* with language. This general account must provide us with the tools to allow us to relate meaning and function to the concrete situations in which it occurs. The problem of postulating a rigid separation of form and matter will be avoided by returning to the phenomenon that is most immediately present, what we see before us - actual talk or written texts.

### **Language as a Form of Action**

*...language is veritably man himself in action, and thus observable.<sup>10</sup>*

Dewey's takes up the general issue of how language is used in inquiry with Arthur Bentley in *Knowing and the Known*. At the beginning of that book, in a chapter entitled *Vagueness in Logic*, the authors discuss the problems encountered in various texts on logic with defining in a clear way what is meant by such terms as "proposition," "fact," "meaning" and so forth. They identify the source of vagueness in the uncritical adoption of a distinction between "(1) men; (2) things; (3) an intervening interpretative activity, product, or medium – linguistic, symbolic, mental, rational, logical, or other – such as language, sign, sentence, proposition, meaning, truth, or thought."<sup>11</sup> We have here the classic distinction between subject and object with the requirement for an intervening mechanism for linking the two. The "vagueness" is due to the conceptual or logical nature of the intervening process and lack of a concrete basis for clarifying the terms referring to this process as well as the characteristics of the world upon which these processes operate. The mistake is to take

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"naturalism." For a more expanded discussion see John Dewey, "Meaning and existence," in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Vol. 1, 1925*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:45

<sup>11</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:9

our logical categories as ontological subject matter. Their alternative is to adopt a simple dichotomous distinction between “men” and “things,” or what might be alternatively said as “men in action”:

[This text] will treat the talking and talk-products or effects of man (the naming, thinkings, arguings, reasonings, etc.) as the men themselves in action, not as some third type of entity to be inserted between the men and the things they deal with. *To this extent* it will be not three-realm, but two-realm: men and things. The difference in the treatment of language is radical. Nevertheless it is not of the type called “theoretical,” nor does it transmute the men from organisms into putative “psyches.” It rests in the simplest, most direct, matter-of-fact, everyday, common sense observation. Talking-organisms and things – there they are; if there, let us study them as they come – the men talking.<sup>12</sup>

Their subject matter is therefore overt behavior. Their approach to language will be to attend to the “words as words” and leave aside questions of underlying or hidden intent, meanings behind the words, personal experience, or metaphysical questions of “exactly what things are.” We are going to strip away the postulation of a subjective world behind talk and look for the observable consequences of using words. For Dewey and Bentley we are *doing* something when we use language. So what kind of action is this that is observable? It can clearly not be a kind of Platonic, cognitive “actionless action,” a phenomenological “interpretation,” or an ontological act of “representing.” Nor are the specific functions or consequences captured by the generalized functions of the ordinary language philosophers.

We find our guide in *The Quest for Certainty*. Dewey characterizes significant human action as the following:

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<sup>12</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:11

It recognizes that experience, the actual experience of men, is one of doing acts, performing operations, cutting, marking off, dividing up, extending, piecing together, joining, assembling and mixing, hoarding and dealing out; in general, selecting and adjusting things as means for reaching consequences.<sup>13</sup>

Applying a principle of continuity of form and function, language may be considered a mode of activity that emerges evolutionarily and developmentally from prior modes. The principle therefore that will guide us is that language is, in the first instance, a specialized behaviour of differentiation and selection that serves the same regulatory functions as all behavior. We see it in the “simple” act of naming, which Dewey and Bentley take to be the primary and most easily observable instance of the “construction” of knowledge:

Naming does things. It states. To state, it must both conjoin and disjoin, identify as distinct and identify as connected . . . . Naming selects, discriminates, identifies, locates, orders, arranges, systematizes.”<sup>14</sup>

Language is therefore considered as an extension of what we do with our bodies. It is a highly refined form of the characteristic human activity - that of cutting, pasting, ordering, etc. As such we would say that it is part and parcel of the manner in which we regulate ourselves and our relationship to the world, including other persons.

When we name we bring something out of the background and into the fore, we establish relationships among the myriad

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<sup>13</sup> John Dewey, “The Quest for Certainty,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Vol.4, 1929*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:134.

aspects of a situation. We do not simply “denote” and represent what was previously there as if it had closed meaning. We identify what something *is* at the same time as what something *is not*. When we name we distinguish. We fixate events and objects out of continuous processes. Naming does not only distinguish; it immediately links and pulls together phenomena, that is, it *relates*, it groups, and is therefore part and parcel of our ordering activity. There are no words for particular things, as Dewey says in the *Logic*. We indicate the particular from the general by the use of articles – *this* chair. To *name* is immediately an act of distinguishing and relating. A word, in this view, is a kind of open-textured format (its use is a kind of “habit”), a kind of generic or universal category, which is adapted to the particular situation as a way of managing the work to be done in coordinating behavior. Its meaning is therefore *indexical* of an entire situation. Its use is an act of selection and reflects the ongoing activities and concerns of the person. Because naming both distinguishes and relates, I will use a more general locution, *partition*, to refer to this basic function of language.

Language is therefore indexical of more general processes of creating information and meaning by a partitioning of the surroundings. Note that it is the action, the naming itself which creates information or meaning because the action of doing so occurs and functions within a particular context. Therefore, there is no need for an a priori distinction between word and thing, which requires something to put them together. Words are actions, are embedded in broader postural actions, and the actions partition aspects of the situation making possible further actions. Without specifying the actual conditions in which talk appears we are always operating on the “generic” or conventional level of dictionary abstractions. Language always functions in concrete situations. Its primary “referent” is to the situation in which it does its work – whether the content is ostensibly about events in the past, the

present, or the future. This is the case in social interaction as well as in work with textual materials.

By focusing on naming as an action we provide an empirical justification for the above account. What we “see” is a behavior of naming; we do not “see” a distinction between word and thing, or sign and referent. Our subject matter is a behavioral event involving an act of designation using a word. An understanding of the action therefore requires examining that behavior in the context where its appearance has meaning. It would perhaps therefore be more appropriate to replace the noun “sign” with the verb “to sign,” or to refer to the act of “signing.”

The unity of sign and referent is thus a characteristic of behavior. The distinguishing of sign and referent is a reflective action on our part. When we remove the terms from the behavior and make them into substantive nouns we are entering into the realm of ontology and we create all kinds of logical problems regarding the relation of word and thing. Midtgarden<sup>15</sup> discusses many of the logical issues created by this distinction, referring to the work of Black, Carnap, Morris, and others.

Dewey unfortunately gave us another kind of justification by comparing his own characterization of the “nature of experience,” or “qualitative thought,”<sup>16</sup> with that of more traditional accounts found in philosophy. I take this as an example of a practice that Dewey later came to regret – that he had often treated “experience,” or in this case “qualitative thought,” as a substantial “thing”. This may be a source of much of the subsequent debate about Dewey’s “metaphysics.” The criteria by we justify the postulate that sign and referent are unified

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<sup>15</sup> Midtgarden, “Dewey’s philosophy of language.”

<sup>16</sup> John Dewey, “Qualitative thought.” *John Dewey: The later works, Vol. 5: 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 245-252. Ratner, Altman and Wheeler, *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley*, 124.

should be in reference to the behavior, rather than to inherent characteristics of experience or thought.

Despite the new potentialities that arise when we move from communication to language, we must still consider the latter in the context of action. All the elaborations of behaviour that language represents – symbolic communication, the capacity for abstract thought, etc. emerged out of these prior functions of selection and choice. These original functions are not replaced with later functions, but the later functions conform to the basic schema, even when new properties and possibilities emerge.

Talk, we might therefore say, is the tip of the iceberg within a broader context of bodily postural and attentional resources for partitioning the surround—as we orient to the surround posturally and attentionally we make distinctions necessary for the possibility of action. This activity takes place within the framework of partitioning that has already been done: culture.<sup>17</sup> Its communicative function of is that of coordinating activity with others via the mutual, shared partitioning of the surround, creating a shared attentional focus and context.

As a form of behavior language greatly expands our ability to control our relationship with the world. We regulate this relationship through the greater attention to details and we

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<sup>17</sup> A comparison with Mead is useful here. In making such a comparison, Black discussed the extensive similarities between Mead and Dewey but noted that Dewey did not refer to Mead's notion of "taking the stance of the other." His conclusion was that Dewey's perspective was a diluted form of Mead's. However, this ability is too easily cognitivized. For Dewey, taking the stance of the other *has largely already been accomplished* and does not require a special cognitive mechanism. A shared biological and cultural morphology means that much of the work of social interaction—the basic system of partitionings reflected in behaviors of attentional control and focus—has already been put in place during the process of development. Midgarden points out that some of this system is determined by the structure of language itself. How the child adopts the cultural partitionings is a matter for empirical investigation. See Max Black, "Dewey's philosophy of language," and Midgarden, "Dewey's philosophy of language."

simultaneously regulate ourselves—our emotional states and activities—as well as inquiry. Conceived in this way, these functions are served by overt, observable activities; hence language is conceived as a form of action that is observable as an activity of partitioning.

The simple act of naming therefore has a “double-fronted” character. Dewey and Bentley draw our attention to how observation (or naming) involves both that which is named and the act of naming:

Observation is operation; it is human operation. If attributed to a “mind” it itself becomes unobservable. If surveyed in an observable world—in what we call cosmos or nature—the object observed is as much a part of the operation as is the observing organism.”<sup>18</sup>

The act of “naming” is therefore to be viewed “transactionally” – the simultaneously holding in view the action on the part of the observer and the event or process being observed. In other words, we are involved in an activity of selection and choice and the distinctions we make are successful or not given our own criteria of their helping us achieve the outcomes we desire. By seeing language as an activity of selection we put the observer back in the picture. In order to keep both the actor and that which is acted upon in view, Dewey and Bentley use a variety of compound terms such as “naming-named” and “knowings-known.” These help us keep in view both domains, the *what* which is known and the *act* of selection by which it is known. Since action does not take place in a vacuum, but in a situation with a myriad of possibilities for partitioning, we must simultaneously hold in view the act as well as that which is being

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<sup>18</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:55-56.

worked upon. This explicit attention to the act as well as the subject matter is particularly necessary at this historical point in the development of philosophy and the human sciences. It assists us in keeping in view our own activities of ordering.

The more traditional hypothesis that language serves a basic function of representation poses a logical problem and is not an empirically testable hypothesis. We must assume that there is some faculty doing the representing and that we could a priori know the nature of an independent world in order to establish criteria for evaluating the veridicality of the representation.

The alternative presented by Dewey is testable. The hypothesis that language is a form of action serving a basic function of discriminating or partitioning and that this activity in turn has implications for social coordination is a hypothesis that requires attention to observable processes.

In the context of inquiry, this means that our concepts, theories and language accounts in general, are treated for purposes of inquiry as tools we use for regulating our exploratory activities. Viewed in this way, our concepts and theories do not ontologically define our subject matter or tell us what is “out there,” they are instruments in helping us explore what is there. They are means by which we select, order, group, and organize phenomena for the purpose of bringing events into new relations. Their value lies in the new kinds of relationships we see through their use and the control we can exert over processes in order to bring about desired outcomes. Their validity, in Dewey’s point of view, lies in the consequences of their use. A functional approach toward language is therefore in order. We have here a theory which ties *meaning* to its actual situations of use, avoiding the essentialist notion of meaning as carried over into a situation from without.

### A Note on the “Denotative Method” and Other Terminology<sup>19</sup>

In the introduction to the first edition of *Experience and Nature* Dewey stated that philosophy needed to adopt the “denotative-empirical method” if it wanted to avoid the consequences of the ontological formula, or idealism and realism. Dewey describes this method: “. . . ‘denotation’ comes first and last, so that to settle any discussion, to still any doubt, to answer any question, we must go to some thing pointed to, denoted, and find our answer in that thing.”<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, this method has led to a great deal of confusion, in large part it seems because it is often subsumed in a discussion of experience considered from a sensationalist point of view. It seems as if Dewey is saying that to denote should make everything clear, obvious, and true.

Given the above characterization of naming we could develop the notion of “denote” along different lines. To do so it is necessary to keep the overall project in view. The empirical method is a method of controlling experience - or activities, to be more concrete. Introducing the empirical method into philosophy means to introduce controls on our experiences/activities. It is necessary to allow inquiry to be controlled by both our conceptions and our subject-matter. The fact is that in science, we always have to start and end with that which can be described. The problem is, in philosophy, how to “ground” our accounts in a way that is not “foundational” and which recognizes the knower’s contribution to the grounding.

Traditionally, “pointing to” is based on a denotative theory of language which includes a notion of closed meaning as part of its

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<sup>19</sup> The following characterization is consistent with Dewey’s emphasis on the context for an understanding of denotation. See John Dewey, “Meaning and Existence,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 25(13), 1928, 345-353.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey LW 1:372

apparatus. In this approach, we *warrant* an account by *pointing to* or denoting evidence which establishes its *truth*. This assumes that *pointing* is the basic function of language, and that we therefore have an intuitive notion or faculty of “to point.” “Warranting” in this case refers to a closed decision procedure—the attribution of a closed meaning to that which is denoted. This may be considered a possible technical description of “denote.” Dewey criticizes this approach in the *Logic* as the theory of mere or pure demonstrative propositions.<sup>21</sup>

An alternative, based on the above characterization of naming, is to consider the naming of objects to be an act of discrimination, or partitioning. Examples provide emblematic support, *anchoring* an account by articulating meanings which are *indexical*, thereby giving the account *heuristic* support and making it *warrantably assertible*. “Indexing” is used because the behaviour of “pointing” is to make a distinction. Instead of pointing in a denotative sense, which would require some concept of “to point,” we could postulate that the basic process is partitioning. Therefore we maintain our notion of continuity—this process is continuous with other bodily activities of partitioning or differentiating and doesn’t require a special mental faculty. “Anchoring” then depends on a shared context (the “situation” if we are engaged in oral talk, or the complete text if we are analysing written texts). When we denote or point or name we partition and index a meaning (“much more is meant than is said”). We are not saying that an object *has* a meaning. We are partitioning that object as distinct from the surround. We are saying what it is *not* as the same time as we are saying what it is. Instead of denoting an object and creating a closed meaning, we “index” a set of relationships. In this way we avoid a distinction between a word and meaning. It’s “meaning” is related to the ordering work it does in the actual situation of its occurrence.

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<sup>21</sup> Dewey, LW 12:241-242

This view accepts open-texture and incompleteness. Our terms will never be completely defined as if they were ontological objects. “Nothing new can ever be learned by analyzing definitions,” as Peirce said.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless our approach may be put in order by definitions and a familiarity with how a word will be used. A word’s meaning is not however exhausted by such definitions. A word, or a term, is open-textured, its elaboration ultimately stemming from the range of contexts in which it is used and the effects obtained. To “anchor” an account (or the use of a term; or a naming) is to provide contextual support for the action of naming. An anchor is therefore a resource – an operation upon and manipulation of the constraints of a situation through the activities of selection and choice – an ordering of our subject-matter. To index a meaning is to provide an open-textured analysis, one that does not seek to establish a true reading but a heuristic, temporary, and conditional reading.

An important sign of philosophy’s misdirection with regard to Dewey is the endless debate over what he meant by terms such as “denote,” “experience,” and “metaphysics” without taking into account the issues he was trying to address. Dewey is searching for a language, not a foundation. Not only did he severely restrict the proper use of the term “experience,”<sup>23</sup> but he also stated that he would possibly replace the term “denote” with that of “designation.”<sup>24</sup>

The eventual rejection and replacement of these terms should cause us to be cautious in trying to understand Dewey by queries into the “nature” of the terms. To go too far in this endeavour is another form of the ontological formula – the consequences are that we get stuck in definitional questions of what exactly Dewey was referring to and do not consider the issue which

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Peirce, “How to make our ideas clear,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 25.

<sup>23</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:263

<sup>24</sup> Ratner, Altman and Wheeler, *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley*, 249.

he was trying to address, which requires situating those terms in the context of Dewey's overall project. Dewey felt he was after something for which he needed the correct words. Terms, for Dewey, constitute "placemarkers" in an overall project of constructing an account of inquiry. He experienced great difficulty in choosing terms that would avoid introducing large amounts of philosophical intellectual baggage.

### **The Direct Descriptive Method**

Dewey and Bentley consider the word "description" to refer to an expanded form of naming, or that "naming" is a truncated form of description.<sup>25</sup> As with naming, description is an activity of ordering. When we describe, we are selecting and choosing what is relevant out of all the possible aspects of a situation we could identify. The result is one possible representation of some objective state of affairs. Appropriate subject matters for empirical inquiry are those that "yield to description." Our descriptions have to be anchored or grounded in observable processes. This is to say that our descriptive activity has to be controlled in the final analysis by our subject matter.

Because description involves operations of selection and choice, judgment is inherent in all descriptive activity. Judgment may be controlled by the explicit, reflective adoption of concepts and regulative principles which guide the descriptive activity and help us select what is relevant within any particular context of investigation. Dewey primarily drew his regulative principles from the biological sciences—principles of continuity, process, function and systems. The goal in science is to come up with descriptions that will further inquiry, ones that order and organize phenomena such that we are able to achieve desired consequences. In order for this process to be

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<sup>25</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:146

successful we need to give our descriptive activities “free rein,” that is, by not using our conceptions in such a way as to exert complete control over our descriptive activities by pre-judging our subject matter.

The primary way in which we impose unnecessary and undesirable constraints on our descriptions is by treating our principles, categories, descriptions and terms as if they had an ontological status. Descriptions and their terms become objectified. This practice has the consequences of decontextualizing objects and events, specifying a priori what is significant and what is not, and localizing the origin of phenomena in the inherent “nature” of our descriptive distinctions and terms. As Dewey and Bentley said, our current practice of applying the ontological formula “shatters the subject matter into fragments in advance of inquiry and thus destroys instead of furthering comprehensive observation for it.”<sup>26</sup>

Within the theory of inquiry, Dewey and Bentley draw attention to a trend that was slowly being recognized in both the physical and life sciences, which was that description can be carried out without giving ontological status to the “entities” described and thereby giving them determinative or causal force. In chapters 4 and 5 of *Knowing and the Known* they relate how descriptive activities in the sciences have evolved from the attribution of various forms of self-action, in which objects are viewed as acting under their own power; to interaction, in which one or more independent things are related in some causal connection; and most recently to the notion of transaction, in which it is held that description and naming may be carried on without the attribution of forces or causal powers to any independent entity. While the second, that of interaction, added a valuable relational component to our descriptions, only transaction represents an amplification of the phenomena to include the

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<sup>26</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:67

observer. When we do that, we find that the previous attribution of independent status to our entities becomes superfluous, and they become a matter of emphasis, not of ontological identity. The notion of “transaction” was therefore a concept which drew our attention to our own activities of ordering and was formulated as a regulative principle for inquiry that would allow description “free rein” by avoiding constraints imposed on our descriptive activities by the hypostatization or reification of language terms. With the notion of transaction we change the status of our descriptive activities from accounts of reality to *manners of representing* reality. Whereas the former two approaches utilize the ontological formula the transactional approach recognizes descriptions as “systems of description and naming” which have logical or symbolic status and not an ontological status. Dewey and Bentley are now contrasting two different *methods* of observation and description.

A better understanding of the above comments requires supportive examples. Here it may be noted that these issues are quite important and still being worked out in the life sciences, particularly in the area of biological development. In the domain of ontogenesis for example (the study of the development of biological form), it is coming to be recognized that we can describe the development of living forms without ascribing causal force to independent factors of genes or environment. The focus is becoming that of describing the system that produces the forms. This requires that we describe both characteristics of what we have previously held apart as organism and environment. The notion of species-typicality or that of maturation, for example, does not have to be pre-judged as a statement of inheritability, but simply of incidence—of relative frequency and predictability across the normal range of environments. Or in animal ethology, “territoriality” may be described as the coordinated patterning of a species’ behavior in relation to certain environments, without pre-judging the origin of

that behavior as being located in the genes or environment. “Control” becomes an issue that is not pre-specified but which depends on the analyst’s point of view.<sup>27</sup>

The notion is that if we do not give description free rein and allow our conceptions to be modified by the subject-matter being described, we often find an incoherence or incompatibility between our conceptions and our descriptions of actual processes. Our ideas or conceptions may be perfectly logical consistent but are still incoherent if they do not act as appropriate guides for empirically exploring our subject matter. This means that activities of description, while having to be guided by our conceptual apparatus, also have to be allowed to feed back to and modify our conceptions. Distinctions such as those between subject and object, genes and environment, mind and body, person and situation, organism and environment, natural kinds and human kinds, innate vs. acquired, etc. are evaluated for their utility in helping us describe phenomena.

The notion of transaction was derived from these recent trends in the physical and biological sciences. It does not have any a priori status as being either a characteristic of reality or as a fixed condition of inquiry. It is a general conclusion drawn from considering what happens when we describe a subject matter. The fact is that *under description*, for an adequate treatment, we are forced to attend to both the organism and environment, the cell and its surround, the child and the characteristics of the classroom, the businessman and business, the “territorial” behavior of the animal and the territory, the light ray and the conditions of observation, the genes and their environment, the word and the thing, the object and its value. When we describe the process of inquiry itself we find that our descriptions have to take into account both the act of observing as well as what is observed. Thus, the principle of transaction is a

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<sup>27</sup> Susan Oyama, *The Ontogeny of Information: Developmental Systems and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

conclusion reached by generalizing from the requirements of describing what we do in knowing something. Its generality is given in its being a guide for the description of our subject matters in the research domain, as well as a guide for conducting inquiry in the analytic domain. It is a principle that helps us avoid the “ontological fallacy” by drawing attention to inquiry as an action of selection and choice on our part. It is a notion that is designed to give free rein to description, which is where inquiry starts and to which it has to return.

Description is freed in the sense that the locus for making partitions in our subject matter, rather than being determined a priori, is placed in the hands of the investigator doing the describing, making the choice of terms and distinctions that guide the process contingent on the subject matter and the act of organizing itself. The principles that guide the process must be conditional or contingent depending on the requirements of the subject matter, and therefore must be flexible, both in how they are interpreted and as far as their relevance to the subject matter is perceived.

Our assertion is the right to see in union what it becomes important to see in union; together with the right to see in separation what it is important to see in separation – each in its own time and place; and it is this right, when we judge that we require it for our own needs, for which we find strong support in the recent history of physics.<sup>28</sup>

### **Applying the Direct Descriptive Method to Philosophical Texts**

The study of written texts (or their spoken equivalents) in provisional severance from the particular organisms engaged, but nevertheless as durational and extensional behaviors

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<sup>28</sup> Dewey, LW 16:107

under cultural description, is legitimate and valuable. The examination is comparable to that of species in life, of a slide under a microscope, or of a cadaver on the dissection table – directed strictly at what is present to observation, and not in search for non-observables presumed to underlie observation though always in search for more observables ahead and beyond.<sup>29</sup>

Philosophy's primary proximal subject matter is written texts, and its primary activity is their analysis and interpretation. It would perhaps be better to use the word "reading" rather than the more cognitive "interpretation." Constructing an empirical reading is a matter of "observing" the visible features of a text by *anchoring* the determination of their significance in the text as a whole. All readings have the same status as descriptions in general – they are the product of an activity of ordering or organizing, and as such they are temporary, conditional and on-trial. If successful, a reading may be utilized by others to create a similar experience when reading the text as experienced by the author of the reading. The criteria for evaluating a reading is as much a matter of aesthetics, coherence or harmony, as logical.

As quoted earlier, Dewey and Bentley "will treat the talking and talk-products or effects of man (the naming, thinkings, arguings, reasonings, etc.) as the men themselves in action.." I have used the word "partitioning" to characterize this action. They say that the primary meaning of a word must be determined by locating the word in a sequence of behavior.<sup>30</sup> It is there that the activity of selection and choice, or partitioning, occurs.

Textual analysis, being a form of description, requires guiding principles for controlling the reading. The power of

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<sup>29</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:89

<sup>30</sup> Dewey and Bentley, LW 16:109

Dewey's critique of western philosophy is due to the analytic tool(s) he brings to bear on the texts of this history. He employs a technique of stripping away the content of a philosophical text and noting the distinctions made and the status given to those distinctions.<sup>31</sup> He looks for the lines drawn, whether the action is justified by the author on logical or empirical grounds, and then follows the course of inquiry by observing the consequences in terms of where we are led—the activities engaged in, questions asked, and the problems posed. Predictions may be made. If we understand the method a philosophy text uses, we know where it is going to go, regardless of the specific content. For example, when a philosophical text begins with a distinction between the human sciences and the natural sciences, given rigidity by a claim of inherent ontological differences in subject matter, the only way to proceed is to try to bridge the abyss by dialectical argument.<sup>32</sup>

The text is a record, condensed in space and time, of action.

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<sup>31</sup> For those interested, I might note that Dewey and Freud share a similar understanding of empirical method. In an article titled *Negation*, Freud describes his technique in the following manner: "In our interpretation we take the liberty of disregarding the negation and of simply picking out the subject-matter of the association" (p. 213). They are both using a guiding principle of partitioning. Dewey, in his critical work, focuses on how distinctions are made logical and in his constructive work focuses on linkages. Freud, in his therapeutic work, emphasizes the groupings, the *associations*. Dewey of course worked with textual accounts and Freud with oral accounts, related subject-matters but which arguably require a difference in focus. See Sigmund Freud, "Negation" in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*, ed. Philip Rieff, (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 213-217.

<sup>32</sup> A good example of filling the gap by dialectical argument is Gadamar's treatise on "ontological phenomenology." His technique is to claim an ontological difference between the subject matters of the natural and human sciences, requiring different faculties for knowledge in each domain. This text is a treatise on a mechanism, in this case that of "understanding," which he believes must be postulated to demarcate the distinction and fill the gap. This filling takes him 584 pages of logical argument to complete. See Hans-Georg Gadamar, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1989), and Joseph Ratner on the dialectical gap in "Introduction to John Dewey's philosophy." In *Intelligence in the Modern World*, edited by Joseph Ratner, 1-241. New York: Random House, 1939.

The task is to describe the actions taken. Using this notion as a heuristic tool, the reading will therefore stay on the “surface” of the page. It does not look for anything behind the text and that unifies the text. Nothing is hidden in terms of meaning or intentions. We do not have to infer a content behind the text, often understood to be the real subject matter. Nothing more is meant than what is said. We focus on the text itself and gain our initial access to it using our shared cultural understanding of words. The method, in other words, consists of approaching the text literally in terms of determining what actions a writer is taking – the “moves” that are made. The moves consist of the lines drawn, the distinctions introduced, how the words function as markers within the overall account, the language employed and its grammar, and how words, sentences and paragraphs are collated. Our task is to display how these features relate to each other. Analysis has to be grounded or anchored in the features of the text itself. Words or terms are open-textured and part of their meaning is given by their location in the overall project. A functional approach means asking what a term does, what is it *for*. This approach differs in significant ways from an ontological treatment of the text in which terms are taken out of context and their definition becomes the primary concern. In this latter approach, the function of terms in the overall text, i.e. their use, is ignored.

The text may be historically and culturally situated in relation to other texts and traditions beyond itself, however, such comparison does not explain what is being done. We need to “provisionally” sever the text from its wider context and in a sense treat it as “autonomous.” Comparing and contrasting the texts of different writers of philosophical systems, when done, needs to examine the method used rather than the content. It is not difficult, for example, to find different authors discussing the characteristics of “experience” in very similar ways. However, to compare different descriptions of

experience based on their content, such as those by Ortega y Gasset, Heidegger, Csikszentmihalyi or Jung with Dewey's, is not to explain the use of the concept of experience by Dewey, nor is the concept "validated" by its similarity in content to that of other writers. To focus on the content is to decontextualize the concept of experience and remove it from its critical function in an overall project. There is an important difference, for example, in a phenomenological description of experience that is contained within a different network of terms than those employed by Dewey. The use of a word has to be located in the context of each philosopher's text, to see exactly what work it does *there*.

The purpose of textual analysis for Dewey is to evaluate the utility of the text for directing our attention and inquiries to empirical subject matter.

### **Implications**

It is important that we reflect for a moment on the broader implications of the foregoing characterization of language as a form of action.

The characterization presented here is of language as an activity of ordering the world in such a way that we can successfully regulate our relationship to it. This entails its manipulation to achieve desired results. Given this point of view, there is no possible meaning to the idea that we can know an independent reality. Either our language accounts are considered as activities of ordering or they are not. This means that we cannot give any aspect of Dewey's philosophical account the status of "metaphysical." For Dewey, the claim that any language statement represents an independent reality apart from our ordering activity is a form of justification. He replaces this method with the notion that justifications have to be based on utility, or use. If we do this with the "generic characteristics of

existence,” for example, we would change the status of these characteristics from ontological to postulatory, or what we might call regulative principles. This is more consistent with Dewey’s statement that his discussion of these characteristics were introduced in *Experience and Nature* as a tool of criticism.<sup>33</sup>

This raises the further question of what status we should award our accounts, regardless of their particular form. Can we continue to view them as direct, ontological representations of the world to be evaluated for their truth? Or are they produced as part of an activity of organizing and reflect the conditions of their production?

Assuming the latter, perhaps a map analogy would be more suitable than that of an ontological representation, an analogy that Dewey uses throughout his work.<sup>34</sup> As “maps,” our philosophical accounts are to be evaluated for their utility, which will depend partially on their logical constructions, but primarily according to the consequences of their use. They are constructed for a particular purpose as a tool of inquiry, to help us navigate from one situation to another. They are *forms of representation*, are infinite in their possible variety, and are tested for their utility. We may treat our philosophical accounts in the same way. By doing so we are forced to take into consideration the role of the user in map construction, its purpose or use, and situated criteria for its validity. A map is always a conditional heuristic—temporary, conditional and on-trial. Questions regarding which map is the “true” map are non-sensical.

If we view Dewey’s philosophy as having the status of a map,

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<sup>33</sup> John Dewey, “Experience and existence: A comment” in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953, Vol. 16, 1949-1952*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Jim Garrison, “Dewey on metaphysics, meaning making and maps,” *Trans. of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 41 (4), 2005. 818-844; for a good discussion of the map analogy applied to theories in physics see Stephen Toulmin’s *The Philosophy of Science: An Introduction* (London: Hutchinson & Co.,1953).

it helps us understand the choices he made in its construction. His primary concern was that it functions to engage us in empirical concerns over the resolution of logical problems, and that it made our use of language, as a form of action, available for control. Our questions regarding his account are no longer to be concerned with its truth value as a description of reality, but its utility as a particular form of representation.

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*DISSOI LOGOI*, RHETORIC, AND  
MORAL EDUCATION: FROM  
THE SOPHISTS TO DEWEY'S  
PRAGMATISM

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This study explores the importance of pragmatist philosophical theory for rhetorical inquiry. In particular, it engages the ethical thought of John Dewey to highlight certain practical and metaphysical consonances with longstanding thematics in rhetorical education such as the notion of *dissoi logoi*. By explicating the connections between the metaphysical flexibility posited by Dewey's ethics and the practical rhetorical pedagogy connected to two-sided argument (*dissoi logoi*), one can see pragmatism as a vivid ground of expansion for rhetorical pedagogy that troubles the often-separated arenas of rhetorical theory and rhetorical praxis. Alternatively, the importance of rhetorical pedagogy in expanded accounts of pragmatist ethics becomes important, since the situatedness of moral inquiry proffered by thinkers such as Dewey entail educative methods of teaching moral reasoning sensitive to pluralistic settings and democratic communities. Thus, moral education and rhetorical training form a close-knit unit in a rhetorically-sensitive reconstruction of Dewey's philosophy.



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One of the vital themes resident in the Western rhetorical tradition is the close interlinking of pedagogy and education. Some of the earliest names we count as rhetorically-sophisticated thinkers—Protagoras, Isocrates, and so forth—were deeply committed to educating individuals in the art of speaking and arguing. Jeffrey Walker, among others, has worked to reclaim this education-focused rendering of the central rhetorical figures to the long tradition of rhetorical thought. In a time of high theory that seems so removed from matters of practice, Walker's explorations of Isocrates and others are refreshingly engaged. Pedagogy is placed not only at the center of the rhetorical tradition, but long-standing traditions of rhetorical theory are shown to be pedagogical in their deepest reaches.<sup>1</sup>

The actual and potential connections between rhetorical theory and practice, philosophy and pedagogy, must be given more attention. Scholars too often separate practice from the acts of theory and putative knowledge creation, often to the detriment of practice. This article will take Walker's enunciation of the heart of rhetoric as pedagogically inclined and extend it into the pragmatist philosophy of moral argumentation. By exploring the use of rhetorical practices of argument and counter-argument such as *dissoi logoi*, we can not only see the intimate linkage between rhetoric's philosophy and pedagogy that Walker and others gesture at, but we can see a way to bring rhetoric and moral argument together. By moral argument, I mean the theories and practices of how we enunciate reasoned positions on matters of moral concern, and how we deal with the arguments concerning moral matters that are uttered by others. In other words, the synergy and integration between rhetorical theory and rhetorical pedagogy has implications for wider matters of ethics and ethical argumentation, and Dewey's pragmatism will be shown

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Walker, *The Genuine Teachers of This Art: Rhetorical Education in Antiquity* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2011).

to be a vital part of this evolving story. To extend on this premise, I start this inquiry with the classic source of *dissoi logoi*—Protagoras and his cryptic utterance about opposite accounts—that has extended resonances throughout the tradition of rhetorical pedagogy. This genealogical and reconstructive approach will allow me to enunciate a version of this technique as not simple argumentativeness, but instead as ensconcing a deeply flexible view of what the world is and can be. More than these metaphysical commitments, this longstanding rhetorical valuing of two-sided argument implies a recipe for rhetorical education and training. One learns how to speak through asserting and countering those assertions. This seemingly-contradictory method is what has attracted much philosophical scorn for the sophists from figures starting with Plato.

After exploring these classical roots and the worries about the implications of *dissoi logoi*, I will further inquire into the relationship of rhetorical training to the art of critical thinking by engaging the contemporary tradition of American pragmatism. John Dewey, famed pragmatist and exponent of a world without certainty, should have been friendly to the sophists, but standard philosophical biases in favor of Plato too often rendered him a mechanical critic of rhetoric. Dewey's theory of inquiry, and its related metaphysical commitments, drew him conceptually closer to sophist views than he may have realized. Leveraging his ethical theory as an extension of this theory of inquiry, however, allows us to see a place for *dissoi logoi* or two-sided argument in ethical training. Dewey's pragmatist ethics emphasizes the complexity and inherent conflicts within moral situations, leading us to see the pedagogical implications of his way of approaching moral training as parallel to those of the sophists. Tools like ethics case studies therefore become the impetus and site of training in a pragmatist version of *dissoi logoi*, or moral sensitivity to complex ethical situations, thereby showing a continuity from ancient accounts of rhetorical pedagogy to modern intuitions about

ethical disagreement and development.

### ***Dissoi Logoi* as Philosophy and Pedagogy**

The rhetorical tradition, starting in antiquity, is clearly invested in matters of pedagogy and education. As Walker's account indicates, "rhetoric" has come to mean many things—ranging from theories of human communication and meaning making to acts of critical interpretation. It also can mean, however, what the ancient voices in the western tradition mark it out as: "the *teaching* of persuasive discourse or the *cultivation of rhetorical capacity* (speaking/writing ability)."<sup>2</sup> Henri Marrou and Donald Lehman Clark have produced comprehensive studies of education in the Greco-Roman world, and recent accounts have explored the role of mental and bodily cultivation in what can be termed "rhetorical education."<sup>3</sup> All of these readings flesh out the intimate connection of writings and theorizing about the nature of rhetoric to the actual teaching of how to practice the art of rhetoric. Figures such as Protagoras, Isocrates, and, later, Quintilian and Cicero, wrote about rhetoric as a way to help their students—and those teaching others—conceptualize and more fully instantiate capacities for rhetorical action in public spaces. Beyond this, however, one can see that these writings and *theories*, to use our modern way of carving up the world, represented not simply pedagogical routines, but instead deeply rhetorical ways of *thinking* and *acting* with and in language. Even some of the perplexing texts of the sophist Gorgias exhibit this ambiguity—are they theoretical

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956); Donald Lehman Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Praeger, 1977); Susan C. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998); Debra Hawhee, *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009).

statements about his views on this world, or are they sample speeches his students used in declamation exercises?<sup>4</sup> They may be a mix of both, but that is part of the challenge of rhetoric taken in its ancient form: theory and educative practice are closely intertwined.

To exemplify the interaction between theories or general accounts of what rhetoric does and how it was actually taught, we can turn to one concept with an especially long history—that of *dissoi logoi*. The first clear mention of this concept occurs in one of the few surviving fragments from the fifth century Greek thinker, Protagoras. This fragment effectively claims that for each event or issue, there are two contrary accounts possible. I will go deeper into this fragment in what follows; as we shall see, there is quite a bit of theory involved in the choices of translating the actual fragment. And there are clear disputes about what is at stake with our contemporary understandings of figures such as the sophists, as is evident in the debates over whether one discovers or invents a theory of sophistic rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> It is certain that Protagoras was invested in pedagogy, though, since he was one of Plato's targets when he turned to criticizing the sophists for functionally equating knowledge to specific sums of currency.<sup>6</sup> I will not rely on the portrayal of Protagoras in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*, or even Plato's discussion of Protagoras' teaching in his *Theaetetus*, since it is

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<sup>4</sup> Scott Consigny, "The Styles of Gorgias," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 22 (3), 1992: 43-53.

<sup>5</sup> For the disputes concerning how to "correctly" interpret the sophists, consult: Scott Consigny, Edward Schiappa's Reading of the Sophists," *Rhetoric Review*, 14 (2), 1996: 253-269; Edward Schiappa, "History and Neo-Sophistic Criticism: A Reply to Poulakos," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 23 (1990): 307-15; Edward Schiappa, "Neo-Sophistic Rhetorical Criticism or the Historical Reconstruction of Sophistic Doctrines?" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 23 (1990): 192-217; John Poulakos, "Interpreting Sophistic Rhetoric: A Reply to Edward Schiappa," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 23, 1990: 218-28.

<sup>6</sup> James Fredal, "Why Shouldn't the Sophists Charge Fees?" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 38 (2), 2008: 148-170.

uncertain how much Plato's animosity toward the sophists affects his portrayal of their doctrines. There is also the question of whether this portrayal is accurate in its details to the historical teaching practices of Protagoras.<sup>7</sup> How he taught his students is subject to speculation, but it seems likely that he worked with his pupils in small group settings that privileged argument and debate along with the declamation of longer example speeches. His fragments, repeated in a range of sources beyond Plato, will also prove valuable to piecing together some of Protagoras' key themes and beliefs. Even if our construction of Protagoras must be, to some extent, an inferred creation, the question will be—what is its use, especially when held up next to Dewey's moral theory, in helping us to understand contemporary demands of ethics, argument, and moral pedagogy? It is in this reconstructive spirit that this study proceeds.

The commitment to the power of discursive argument and language comes across in some of Protagoras' surviving fragments. The most notable fragment in this regard is the *dissoi logoi* ("two *logoi*" or argument) fragment. This fragment was first recorded and attributed to Protagoras, at least in regard to surviving sources, by Diogenes Laertius some 600 years after Protagoras could have uttered it. This fragment may very well be a paraphrase of what Protagoras asserted, but it is what we have—and it offers enough hermeneutic mystery for our purposes of exploring the possibilities inherent in rhetorical education. Edward Schiappa has fleshed out the difficulties in interpreting, or even translating, this fragment.<sup>8</sup> Put simply, what one believes the statement entails is important for how you translate the words. Schiappa arranges most translations of

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of these concerns, see F. Rosen, "Did Protagoras Justify Democracy?" *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought*, 13 (1-2), 1994: 12-30.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

this sentence into two types: the *subjective interpretation* and what he labels the *Heraclitean interpretation*. The former sort of translation emphasizes the existence of two opposed arguments on any given issue or question: “On every issue there are two arguments opposed to each other” (Michael J. O’Brien) or “On every question there are two speeches, which stand in opposition to one another” (Theodor Gomperz).<sup>9</sup> These are defensible translations of the *dissoi logoi* fragment, but Schiappa’s point is that they inevitably involve preliminary choices or assumptions about the fragment’s scope and application. Such translations tend to focus on the speaking *subject’s* ability to produce arguments or speeches on either side of any issue. This parsing of the fragment illustrates a path forward to rhetorical training that emphasizes the ability to debate or dispute any given point or issue. There are clear resonances here with modern pedagogical practices of switch-side debate in which participants are forced to argue for either side of some proposition.<sup>10</sup>

This interpretation and translation is not incorrect, and it is satisfying insofar as the rhetorical tradition has interpreted *dissoi logoi* in a manner that often seems to leverage and train the ability to argue for any given side. According to authorities such as Diogenes Laertius, Protagoras was supposedly the first to utilize debates in his training sessions, the first thinker to use “eristic,” and the first to use questioning techniques in the way that is now associated with the “Socratic Method.”<sup>11</sup> There was a clear connection between the politics of Periclean democracy and Protagoras, and an implied pedagogical connection with his method of honing the debating skill of his students: one them that seems to arise from the various

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>10</sup> R. W. Greene & W. Hicks, “Lost Convictions: Debating both Sides and the Ethical Self-fashioning of Liberal Citizens,” *Cultural Studies*, 19 (1), 2005: 100-126.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 186.

accounts of Protagoras, whether they stem from sources that are friendly or unfriendly, is that of “participation by the many—through discourse—in making judgments.”<sup>12</sup> For the rhetorical tradition after Protagoras, the pedagogical tool of *dissoi logoi* was a way to train any given individual for such political and rhetorical activity. As Jeffrey Walker points out in his reconstruction of Isocrates’ *techne* or book of speaking exercises, the skills of variable confirmation and refutation would surely have played an advanced pedagogical role.<sup>13</sup> Later rhetorical textbooks seem to concur with this pedagogical implementation. *Progymnasmata* such as the 4<sup>th</sup> century (A.D.) work known as *The Preliminary Exercises of Aphthonius the Sophist* feature sections on refutation, or the “overturning of some matter at hand” and advise its use in a matter that “is neither very clear nor [that] is altogether impossible, but what holds a middle ground.”<sup>14</sup> Similar statements and techniques continue to be found and explicated in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (A.D.) commentary to Aphthonius’ text by the author known as “John of Sardis.”<sup>15</sup> The idea of debate-ability has clear echoes in the pedagogy of early and later sophists.

There is another reading of Protagoras’ fragment, however, that does not contradict the subjective interpretation but instead extends its meaning by bringing in a metaphysical structure to Protagoras’ philosophy of rhetoric. This metaphysical context is provided by a pair of important ancient thinkers—Parmenides and Heraclitus. Parmenides is well-known as the writer of one of the first sustained arguments about the metaphysical nature of the world, a partially preserved poem that is often referred to as “On Nature.” Divining his exact philosophical commitments is difficult, as the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Walker, *The Genuine Teachers of This Art: Rhetorical Education in Antiquity*, 109-111.

<sup>14</sup> George A. Kennedy (Translator), *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 101.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 200.

work is incomplete and rendered in poetic verse. One traditional account emphasizes a monistic reading of Parmenides, focusing on the claims that what exists is singular and changeless in its essential nature, and that the world of change is only apparent and not truly real.<sup>16</sup> Thus, true knowledge focuses on the timeless and certain versus the ever-changing ephemera of the world of appearance and opinion, themes that would reoccur in Plato's works. Opposite of this account was Heraclitus, another thinker living around 500 B.C.E. Like Protagoras, much of what we "know" about Heraclitus is what we construct or infer from the available evidence. One of the themes we see in the handful of fragments that survive from his works is a commitment to a world in constant flux. *Logos* (sometimes translated as "word") may thread through this world of change, but the presence of fluctuation and contraries is ever-present. Unlike Parmenides, Heraclitus intimates no escape from such a condition, nor any unifying metaphysical structure behind the flux that resolves the changing properties and their clashes. Like a river, the world and its properties never calm down for Heraclitus, leaving humans to deal with a world of less certainty and continuous change.

If one reads Protagoras as an enemy of Parmenides and his monistic proto-philosophy, and as an ally of Heraclitus and his philosophical emphases on flux, one can position this fragment as part of a rejoinder to views that see the world as settled or even as "one" in some deep sense. This would involve seeing Protagoras and his *dissoi logoi* fragment as "a logical extension of the Heraclitean theses popularly referred to in modern times as his theory of flux and

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<sup>16</sup> For this reading, see W.K. C., Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Volume 2: The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). A different account is presented in Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides: A Study of Word, Image, and Argument in the Fragments* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; 1970).

his ‘unity of opposites’ doctrine.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of pointing to the ability of argumentative subjects to dispute virtually anything under contention, the fragment instead reads in a more metaphysically-inclined fashion and would seem to assert that the nature of the world holds contradictory properties. If Schiappa is right that the “fragment is clearly a claim about the relationship between language and the things of reality,” the ability to argue contrary claims or positions about some reality or “thing” stems from that reality holding contrary properties.<sup>18</sup> If our language tracks some part of the world, and if contrary uses of language are both allowable, this all would be explainable through the world itself enshrining contradiction. In this way, Protagoras can be seen as extending Heraclitus’ intuition that much of the world that we experience is constantly changing, and what is more, contains opposite powers or tendencies in its very nature. This all is incompatible with the monism of Parmenides, who saw a perfect and unchanging reality that was simple one thing; it also jarred with the sensibilities of the later thinker, Plato, who desired truths that were certain, unchanging, and without contradiction.<sup>19</sup>

This reading of Protagoras’ *dissoi logoi* fragment fits well with some of his other philosophical commitments. For instance, his “man is the measure” fragment (“A human being is the measure of all things, of those things that are, that they are, and of those things that are not, that they are not”) seems to imply a human-centered relativism of knowledge and perception.<sup>20</sup> Thus, objects can exist or

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Another source of support for this anti-Parmenidean reading can be found in older commentaries, such as the mention by Porphyry that he found “Protagoras using similar counterarguments against those who propose being as one.” See Rosamond Kent Sprague, *The Older Sophists* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001), 20.

<sup>20</sup> For this fragment, see Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff (eds.), *Early Greek*

not exist (depending on the perceiving agents), or have contrary properties. This relativism that animated Plato's counter-charges in his dialogues such as the *Theaetetus* is compatible with the reading of the *dissoi logoi* fragment given above—the world's deep conflicts and ambiguity could easily ground the perceptual and epistemic divergences among agents.

Reading the *dissoi logoi* fragment as pointing beyond mere argument and into the nature of the world is a powerful, and seemingly counter-intuitive, position. It is challenging insofar as it seems to give up on what we know as the "law of the excluded middle" and the "law of non-contradiction."<sup>21</sup> The Protagorean position reconstructed here would give up on the demands that any matter about the world must be one way and not its opposite, and that holding such contradictory views would be a problem, a position that also has its rare advocates in other eliminate traditions beyond Greece.<sup>22</sup> Given this deep metaphysical pluralism rooted in the contradictory nature of reality itself, Protogoras' *dissoi logoi* fragment becomes "Two contrary reports [*logoi*] are true concerning every

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*Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 186.

<sup>21</sup> These labels connote the meaning that Aristotle gave them in his account of metaphysics and logic, and arose in response to Protagoras' instigations.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, for more on Jaina philosophy and the similar doctrine of *anekantavada* in the Indian context, see Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anekānta-Vāda)* (Ahmedabad, India: L.D. Institute of Indology, 1981); Scott R. Stroud, "Anekāntavāda and Engaged Rhetorical Pluralism: Explicating Jaina Views on Perspectivism, Violence, and Rhetoric," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, 17 (2), 2014: 131-156; Scott R. Stroud, "Comprehensive Rhetorical Pluralism and the Demands of Democratic Discourse: Partisan Perfect Reasoning, Pragmatism, and the Freeing Solvent of Jaina Logic," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 47 (3), 2014: 297-322; Jonardon Ganeri, "Jaina Logic and the Philosophical Basis of Pluralism," *History and Philosophy of Logic*, 23 (4), 2002: 267-81.

experience.”<sup>23</sup> Training students in debating both sides of almost any issue then becomes a pedagogical extension of—and philosophical recognition of—the metaphysical position that the world is not settled or sedimented in one particular order or way. One can see this in the text we know as the *Dissoi Logoi* (c. 400 B.C.E.), likely influenced by Protagoras’ thought. This text fits the spirit of the sophist’s fragment of the same name, as it is filled with arguments both for and against assertions ranging from properties of existent objects to judgments of what is shameful.<sup>24</sup> Its thorough-going relativism is of a piece with what we know of Protagoras through his various fragments, as well as in partially trustworthy accounts such as those of Plato’s dialogues. What is certain, however, is that this text embodies the sort of skill of argument for and against in almost any subject that Protagoras thought was vital to a skilled—and possibly virtuous—rhetor. In this way, we can see how Protagoras’ philosophy and pedagogy result in an attempt to cultivate able citizens, ones empowered to argue virtually any point that seems important to them, and not simply in students skilled in Socratic dialectic aimed at unveiling the certain and unchanging Forms behind changeable appearance. The world was inherently unsettled, and pedagogy that assumed or strived for order and certainty was not metaphysically accurate or useful. Protagoras, on this reading, wanted to create skilled navigators of the flux of human experience, be it in natural or social environments.

### **Pragmatist Ethics, Moral Education, and Complexity**

The preceding analysis of Protagoras and his important, but

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 100.

<sup>24</sup> See *Dissoi Logoi* in Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff (eds.), *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 296-308.

enigmatic, fragment on *dissoi logoi* fragment illustrates its connection to both philosophy *and* to specific practices of cultivating speaking skill. In other words, it highlights rhetoric in both the form of theory and in theory-inspired practice. I want to argue that this unique merging of theory and practice in rhetorical pedagogy has something to teach us in the important arena of moral argument. I will do this by engaging the account of moral judgment that comes from John Dewey, one of the central figures in the emergence of American pragmatism around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like Protagoras' cryptic utterances, Dewey is a sort of enigma for those interested in rhetorical theory and pedagogy. He clearly *should* have explored and even promoted the thought of the sophists, as Robert Danisch comprehensively shows in his study of pragmatism's affinity with classical rhetorical figures.<sup>25</sup> But Dewey too often rejected practical training in argument—especially “debate”—and often took the side of Plato when he dreamily thought back to antiquity.<sup>26</sup> Of course, many of these returns to Plato were done to push a pragmatist vision of the world as uncertain, and to brand the Platonic project of finding essences behind the appearances of flux as a fool's errand. But that is the point—ideally, Dewey should have found an ally in Protagoras and the democratic entailments he derives from the philosophy of flux. Historical oversights aside, it is a useful question to ask—how can the pedagogy of *dissoi logoi*, especially when matched with a metaphysic of radical complexity in the nature of the world,

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Danisch, *Pragmatism, Democracy, and the Necessity of Rhetoric* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007). For more on the conceptual connections between pragmatism and the sophists, see the essays contained in Steven Mailloux (ed.), *Rhetoric, Sophistry, Pragmatism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> William M. Keith, *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), Scott R. Stroud, “Mindful Argument, Deweyan Pragmatism, and the Ideal of Democracy,” *Controversia: An International Journal of Debate and Democratic Renewal*, 7 (2), 2011: 15-33.

enlighten our practices of teaching moral judgment and ethical reasoning?

Pragmatist ethics, at least in the form of Dewey's account, has many similarities with the traditions of rhetorical teaching that teach moral reasoning through argument. This includes those sources in antiquity that emphasize a rational pathway for rhetorical skill that involves the ability to argue contrary sides to any given issue, but it also includes the tradition of casuistry that reached its apex between 1550 and 1650 A.D.<sup>27</sup> In their important study of moral reasoning, Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin position casuistry as the unstable middle path between the eternally-popular method of sorting out moral problems by finding putatively certain and universal moral principles and the path of everything-goes relativism. Instead of being captivated by the "dream of an ethical algorithm—a universal and invariable code of procedures capable of providing unique and definitive answers to all of our moral questions," Jonsen and Toulmin attempt to recover casuistry as the useful art of "the practical resolution of particular moral perplexities" through analyzing specific cases.<sup>28</sup> Moral argument and the applied practice of rhetorical sensitivities becomes important in such a practice, as moral judgment becomes less about applying the right rule and more about creatively sensing opposing arguments and finding a way to identify the strongest course of judgment and action in the midst of complexity. One can see how this sort of practice serves as a later evolution of the theme enshrined in Protagoras' fragments, as well as the image of his pedagogy that we catch glimpses of from our distant contemporary vantage point. Moral

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<sup>27</sup> Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 13. These themes parallel Toulmin's concerns with rationality and reasonableness in his other works, such as *Return to Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

theory still has an allure, however, because casuistry and moral argument centering on a range of cases seems to need some order. It is here where the “middle-level” moral theory of Dewey’s pragmatism can be rhetorically important and pedagogically useful.

Grounding much of Dewey’s thought on moral reflection was his more general theory of inquiry. In works such as *Experience and Nature* and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Dewey explicates a procedure that reflection often takes, progressing from an indeterminate or problematic situation to the proposing of a problem and hypothesizing of solutions or effective reactions that might “fix” the meanings of the situation so as to make it determinate or satisfactory (given our purposes and goals). The idea he has is simple—experience sometimes (but not always) jars with our meanings and expectations, so the secondary or reflective experience of thinking through a problem emerges, one that identifies “facts” and “patterns,” connects them with antecedent states and consequents, and tries to give order to a situation noticed as disordered. Inquiry does not unearth the “truth” to a situation in some part of the world, instead it introduces a temporary and useful order to one part of our experience.<sup>29</sup> Inquiry was Dewey’s term for the use of human reason to think through aspects of the world that became a temporary stumbling block for us.

Dewey’s theory of inquiry is based upon longstanding commitments he had concerning epistemology, and it connects to the concerns this study focuses on in moral argument. In terms of epistemology, inquiry extends Dewey’s arguments—perhaps as early as 1903 in his *Studies in Logical Theory*—concerning the value of appearance in experience. Shunning a Platonic division between appearances and reality, Dewey maintains that objects and experiences can be divided in a range of ways, all depending on

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<sup>29</sup> For a useful summary of Dewey on inquiry, see James Campbell, *Understanding John Dewey* (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1995), 45-53.

contingent purposes. In essays such as “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” from 1905, he argues that the scientific account of the objects of experience do not hold some trumping claim over other, less rigorous, reactions to experience.<sup>30</sup> He gives the example of the perception of a horse—the horse trader, the biologist, and the child will all see different things with different meanings, but it is not clear that one account is the real account and the others are some sort of illusion. Seeing the horse as an object that takes up certain expanses of space or as having a certain biological nature are not more fundamental or true than experiencing the horse as a sound investment or as a personified companion; each is a valid and real reaction, and one cannot be said to be reducible to or more true than another. What can be said, however, is that certain reactions or ways of experiencing an object or situation are more useful, or more in need of reflection and refinement, than other ways. Thus, Dewey’s theory of inquiry recognizes the plurality of ways of experiencing the world, *as well as* the idea that each of these ways can be corrigible and subject to improvement. In some cases, one might even abandon a way of reacting to the world through acts of perception as not worth maintaining. Inquiry or reflection takes over in those moments when something about our engagement with the ever-changing world needs rectification or improvement, as judged by our own purposes and values.

This sort of complexity of the world not only connects to Dewey’s epistemology, but it also grounds his approach of moral judgment. Dewey’s moral theory values complexity, and like any conceptual edifice associated with the long-lived American philosopher, it changed and evolved in its details over his many decades of life. Before 1904, and especially in the 1890s, Dewey put

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<sup>30</sup> John Dewey, “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” in Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977).

forward a view of ethics that was heavily influenced by Hegelian notions of self-realization. In early works such as *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (1891) and *The Study of Ethics* (1894), Dewey focuses on optimizing the functional relationship between the internal capacities of an agent and the resources in a social situation.<sup>31</sup> As his pragmatism changed into a more naturalistic idiom after 1904, Dewey's ethics focused less on the goal of realizing one's "self" in its connection with society and more on the idea of *growth*. This state of progressive equilibrium-reaching grounded his aesthetics in *Art as Experience* (1934) as well as his constantly evolving reading of ethics. One constant in his later ethics, however, was the idea that with optimized habits, individual agents can grow in ways beneficial to their own projects as well as in regard to the larger endeavor of forming integrated communities.

The idea of moral growth as related to individual habits was central to Dewey's later thought, and it often intersected with his work on moral judgment and communication. For instance, in his 1927 work, *The Public and Its Problems*, we see the invocation of the ideal of growth alongside of his diagnosis of the challenge of democracy in America: "The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public."<sup>32</sup> After 1915, Dewey's ethics becomes more clearly focused on how such intelligent communication and judgment would proceed in moral matters. It

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<sup>31</sup> John Dewey, "Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics," in Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press); John Dewey, "The Study of Ethics," in Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4 (pp. 221–364) (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press). For an extensive study of Dewey's early ethics, consult Jennifer Welchman, *Dewey's Ethical Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> John Dewey, "The Public and its Problems," in Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 2 (pp. 235–372) (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 365.

would center on what he would call in the 1930s “three independent factors” in morality.<sup>33</sup>

Before I explore what these factors are, and how they relate to the rhetorical tradition of education through opposing arguments, it is important that we see the orientation toward moral theory in general that Dewey takes. This orientation will illustrate how close he is to what Jonsen and Toulmin call the tradition of casuistry. In Dewey’s lecture “Three Independent Factors in Morals” from 1930, we see the pragmatist clearly lay out the entailments to his commitment to a world at least partially in flux. Put simply, major moral theories in the western tradition err insofar as they seek to reduce moral judgment—and consequent argumentation with others—to one foundation: “Whatever may be the differences which separate moral theories, all postulate one single principle as an explanation of moral life.”<sup>34</sup> All of these theories, including approaches that we would classify as Kantian or as utilitarian, assume that the world *is* one way, and that our moral discourse can capture that in consistent and abstract theories of the moral life. For these traditional approaches that seek certainty, “it is not possible to have either uncertainty or conflict: *morally* speaking, the conflict is only specious and apparent.”<sup>35</sup> As Jonsen and Toulmin note in a different context, such an orientation to moral judgment means that those who oppose you in moral disagreement are assumed to be wrong, or at best, competitors for the true or just account of some aspect of our moral experience. In other words, this orientation encourages us to see moral matters as through the lens of certainty and as holding one best description of the moral value of what was done and what is yet

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<sup>33</sup> John Dewey, “Three Independent Factors in Morals,” in Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 5 (pp. 279-288) (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

to be done. On the contrary, Dewey's commitment to a world without foundations or certainty—a central theme of his important 1925 work, *Experience and Nature*—leads him to assert that “uncertainty and conflict are inherent in morals; it is characteristic of any situation properly called moral that one is ignorant of the end and of good consequences, of the right and just approach, of the direction of virtuous conduct, and that one must search for them.”<sup>36</sup>

The important point of morality for Dewey then turns toward the individual in the form of habits of judgment. As he puts it in his lecture in 1930, moral progress means individuals possessing “the ability to make delicate distinctions, to perceive aspects of good and of evil not previously noticed, to take into account the fact that doubt and the need for choice impinge at every turn.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, moral education for Dewey becomes a matter of inculcating through practice the right habits of attention and imagination to complex moral situations. In this lecture, as well as in the 1932 edition of his co-authored book *Ethics* (with James H. Tufts), Dewey posits three factors that are essential in moral situations. These are independent variables, and he labels them as “the good,” “the right,” and “the virtuous.” *The good* as a concept is extracted from the experience of desire that organisms experience in their course of striving for various things or states connected with pleasure. Hedonistic theories like utilitarianism fixate on this factor and reduce morality to a pursuit of the maximal pleasure across all involved community members. Alternative theories grow from another aspect of human moral experience, one that appears when more than one agent pursues objects of idiosyncratic desire. This is the concept of *the right*, a notion that deals with agents coordinating their abilities to act among and with other agents. Kant's system of deontology emphasizes this aspect with his elevation of law-like regularity

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 280.

among equally-free agents to a universal normative status in his various formulations of the moral law. Finally, the aspect of *the virtuous* arises from the part of our experiences that involve our observation of, and reaction to, the actions of others that do not directly affect us (or our happiness). We often experience reactions of approval or disapproval, and Dewey finds that this experiential factor grounds theories such as Aristotle's that focus on community-approved virtues that are encouraged and inculcated in agents.

The challenge to moral *judgment* and ethical *inquiry* is simple—none of these variables can be reduced to one or both of the other variables, or dismissed outright. Each has an important basis in the phenomenology of human experience, and each plays a role in moral situations insofar as these situations become moral when there is a conflict among these values. Traditional moral theories err insofar as they focus primarily on one aspect to the complex situation of moral experience—“one cause for the inefficacy of moral philosophies has been that in their zeal for a unitary view they have oversimplified the moral life. The outcome is a gap between the tangled realities of practice and the abstract forms of theory.”<sup>38</sup> For Dewey, moral cultivation must instead focus on the realization that “each human being has to make the best adjustment he can among forces which are genuinely disparate, [which] would throw light upon actual predicaments of conduct and help individuals in making a juster estimate of the force of each competing factor.”<sup>39</sup> Dewey's form of pragmatist ethics thereby becomes an act of training agents to balance moral values in a complex world, and among other contending arguers. It becomes a matter of how we *attend* to or mind the various readings of situations that matter, and it moves our “attention away from rigid rules and standards” and instead encourages moral agents “to attend more fully to the concrete

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 288.

elements entering into the situations in which they have to act.”<sup>40</sup> This is the only advisable path to take, Dewey believes, once one has given up on the idea of the world as holding one truth (moral or otherwise) that can be captured in the right proposition or argument. If one sees the world as one that holds *both* stability and change, the ultimate fixation on or quest for certainty becomes secondary, and one’s projects then seek a fallible, temporary equilibrium between one’s present needs and one’s present natural or social environment. All of this can change, of course, as our needs and environments evolve and change through time.

### **Pragmatist Ethics, *Dissoi Logoi*, and the Pedagogy of Moral Case Studies**

For Dewey, moral judgment and consequent moral argumentation err when they assume or entail that there is one right answer for some problematic situation that is defined by conflict among *prima facie* values. The world is not that simple, and our moral judgments must also not be that simple if they are to ultimately be useful in our present and future experience. What this means for moral inquiry in group situations is clear. These conflicting values must be noticed, and then balanced through argument in and among other arguers. This gloss on Dewey’s moral theory brings it very close to the tradition of *dissoi logoi* that started with Protagoras teaching his students to argue both sides of any given issue concerning the world disclosed through human experience. How can Dewey’s account of morality as imaginative balancing add to this tradition of confirmation and refutation? What can the tradition gain from Dewey’s account of moral exigency relating to an irreducible conflict among or between desire, coordination of action, and our reactions

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 288. For more on Dewey’s mature system of ethics, see Gregory F. Pappas, *John Dewey’s Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

to the actions of others? I will end this article with the same synthetic and reconstructive spirit that scholars such as Jeffrey Walker display when they creatively use and appropriate the resources of long-past traditions and thinkers. For a pragmatist, such synthetic activity is a good thing, since it shows that we can utilize past thinkers and theories as resources for our present social and intellectual needs.

If a central metaphysical theme to both Protagoras *and* Dewey is that the world is not set or simple, we can see an interesting path forward to the cultivation of moral judgment and argumentation. Like Jonson and Toulmin's account, my reading of these thinkers would bring cases or important problematic instances to the foreground of moral pedagogy. Casuistry, however, seems to desire a moral taxonomy that arises out of similar but disparate cases, so Dewey's pragmatist moral theory is not exactly on the same track—it is a theory, or a general account of how moral judgment *in any given case of conflict* should proceed. But it is not a reductive theory that fixates on one of the independent factors or variables in moral experience. Thus it shares the case-focused instinct of casuistry, but it offers more deductive guidance on how to sort out various aspects of a novel case of moral disagreement. Part of the pedagogical practice of this moral theory will involve what the rhetorical tradition would label as *dissoi logoi*.

Let us take an example from the world of digital ethics. New AI-enhanced programming has allowed for the merging of real videos to make fake videos, or videos depicting an identifiable agent doing something that he or she never did. This technology is often called “deepfakes” technology after its programmer's internet handle. This technology has raised *moral* issues because of its connection to courses of action that proffer extreme harm to individuals or communities. For instance, this technology causes worries insofar as its creators and first adopters often used it to create fake porn videos featuring identifiable individuals who never actually appeared in

adult content. This might represent an intrusion on the privacy of individuals, or a tortious course of false light or slander, that current law is having trouble keeping up with. There is also worry about its implementation in fake news or propaganda to create panics or crises when world leaders are seen as saying something inflammatory or harmfully false.<sup>41</sup> How can moral inquiry proceed in regard to such a topic? Like similar concerns such as “revenge” or non-consensual pornography, the case of this technology seems very simple to many observers—the phenomenon is simple to grasp, and it is clearly and always morally wrong.<sup>42</sup> Yet these are precisely the sort of simplified reactions that Dewey’s ethics wants to delay or derail.

It is here that the tradition of rhetorical pedagogy can add something to the practice of Dewey’s ethics in educational settings. How might we really do justice to the complexity of inquiry and argument in moral situations, such as those involving deepfakes technology? The first goal that Dewey’s ethics ask us to accomplish is to unpack the various values in conflict. This can be conceptualized in a Protagorean manner in the form of opposing arguments. For instance, the deepfakes scenario actually involves a range of considerations—the action of making these videos, the harms of sharing them, and so forth. The aspect of *the good* could implicate the

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Chesney & Danielle Citron, “Deep Fakes: A Looming Crisis for National Security, Democracy and Privacy?” *Lawfare*, February 26, 2018. Available at: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/deep-fakes-looming-crisis-national-security-democracy-and-privacy>; also see James Felton, “‘Deep Fake’ Videos could be used to influence Future Global Politics, Experts warn.” *IFLScience*, March 13, 2018. Available at: <http://www.iflscience.com/technology/deep-fake-videos-could-be-used-to-influence-future-global-politics-experts-warn/>; Megan Farokhmanesh, “Is It Legal To Swap Someone’s Face Into Porn Without Consent?” *The Verge*, January 30, 2018. Available at: <https://www.theverge.com/2018/1/30/16945494/deepfakes-porn-face-swap-legal>.

<sup>42</sup> Scott R. Stroud, “The Dark Side of the Online Self: A Pragmatist Critique of the Growing Plague of Revenge Porn,” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 29 (3), 2014: 168-183.

reputational harm that could come from someone featured in a pornographic deepfakes video, but it must also be weighed against uses of deepfakes technology that aim to satirize or criticize some agent. Also included might be artistic employments that serve as updated video versions of the nude statues anonymous critics constructed and publicly displayed of the controversial President Donald Trump shortly after his inauguration.<sup>43</sup> Each of these employments could serve as data for a more nuanced reading of the conflict within the aspect of the consequences of deepfakes technology. Beyond this, moral inquirers could be spurred to construct opposing arguments as to the impact of deepfakes technology on the coordination of action in a community. Clearly, causing harm is something that is often curtailed by an individual's legal rights and protections, but it is not an absolute trumping factor to the rhetorical actions of others—many legitimate and legal uses of free speech (such as harsh criticism or investigative reporting) are intended to do some amount of harm to an individual or entity. The aspect of *the right* becomes prominent when the issue of free speech enters the discussion about deepfakes. The technology might prove harmful in some employments, but is this enough to limit its use *in toto* by all speakers or creators? Furthermore, one might argue that even if you were justified in disliking this technology, can one craft legislation precise enough to step on its harmful uses and not its beneficial or artistic uses? Our reaction to the deepfakes case also involves a reaction of global disapproval—the technology and the falsity it integrates in its operation are repulsive, some might think. But not all instances of this technology's use are public; some videos may simply be created for one person's enjoyment or amusement.

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<sup>43</sup> Mazin Sidahmed, "Anarchist Group installs Nude Donald Trump Statues in US Cities," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2016.

Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/18/nude-donald-trump-statues-new-york-indecline>.

How might this added dimension of public and non-public uses add to the deepfakes controversy or complexify our reaction to its moral worth—what Dewey calls the factor of *the virtuous*?

Dewey's moral theory would call for an agent to interrogate this sort of complex case with the orientation that there is not one right answer or straightforward judgment; such quick judgments would undoubtedly oversimplify the phenomena at hand, or would prove unable to provoke consensus with others disagreeing on the grounds of some other factor or aspect buried in the complex instance. As is the case in the ancient implementation of *dissoi logoi*, the rush to find *the* correct answer is delayed by an exploration of contrary arguments and conflicting factors. Dewey gives a theoretical typology of what is at stake in each specific case of conflict, even though he would be the first to admit that the complexity and ever-changing nature of the world ensures that the specific conflicts will be instantiated in unpredictable ways. Issues of individual pleasure and the protection of agential rights will be very different in street protests and sharing viral deepfakes videos online. Identifying and balancing these novel conflicts is the charge of moral education, and the pedagogical tool of anticipating and looking for opposing arguments is clearly in line with Dewey's account of moral theory as imaginative attention and balancing of valuable features in conflict.

If we take Dewey's commitment to inquiry in the face of uncertainty, we can see him as residing closer to the Heraclitean intuitions in Schiappa's interpretation of Protagoras' *dissoi logoi* fragment than the "anything is arguable" sort of subjective orientation, since for Dewey the world is not reducible to one certain and true set of propositions that track "the real" in a consistent way. The use of problematic cases designed to be—in an adaptation of the phrasing of the *progymnasmata* that followed the early sophists—not clearly absurd and not obviously (in the sense of truistic) correct would be a very useful method of training agents to make sensitive

distinctions in complex issues like that of the currently pressing deepfakes controversy. Creating or forming such case studies with materials that enshrine the conflicting interests and values in a given controversy would provide the instructor—and his or her pupils—with the materials to search for and construct contrary positions. The elucidation of conflict in such heated areas of controversy is a partial victory, since much of moral thinking (on any side of a moral issue) is a simple rush to confirming one's own view, or the view of their in-group, as correct and any opposing view as benighted or unjust.<sup>44</sup> This is not only unjustified in terms of the nature of the world on the accounts of Dewey and Protagoras (for the world most likely enshrines some changing or contradictory aspects), but it is less than useful when seen from a civic or democratic perspective. If moral argument is meant to resolve conflicts, or at least form community in such a way as to allow for a path forward on some issue that matters, dividing and rejecting opposing views in a strong sense is not strategic—it holds a way to merely create more motivated and recalcitrant opponents. Instantiating some amount of imaginative sympathy with the capacities and judgments of others, even if they are a partial account of some moral conflict, seems to promise the most sustainable account for solving communal conflicts now and also in the future.<sup>45</sup>

Some actions seem to reveal no conflict or disagreement about their description, value, or adjudication. Not every situation is

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<sup>44</sup> For more on what could be called “partisan perfect reasoning,” see Scott R. Stroud, “The Challenge of Speaking with Others: A Pragmatist Account of Democratic Rhetoric,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 29 (1), 2015, 91-106.

<sup>45</sup> Sympathy occupied an important part of Dewey's ethics, as well as the accounts residing within his political thought. See Steven Fesmire, *Dewey* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Scott R. Stroud, “Democracy, Partisanship, and the Meliorative Value of Sympathy in John Dewey's Philosophy of Communication,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 30 (1), 2016: 75-93; Gregory Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

*problematic*, in the terms of Dewey's theory of inquiry. Few, if any, would argue in favor of a serial killer murdering an unsuspecting jogger. But things become more difficult when the killing of innocent people is tied to wartime strategies that may save many more innocent lives. The same may be true of other vexing social issues. Most cases of moral importance that we seem compelled to discuss and deliberate involve reasoned disagreement by community members. Complexity besets us in the issues that divide us and that animate a range of mutually exclusive action paths. But the rub of moral inquiry comes in these difficult cases, the cases or situations that allow for rich disagreement and passions both for and against some action. Even in the case of heated arguments over something related to "racism," one can see the room for dispute. One side describes some utterance as "pure racism," but the other side believes that the controversial utterance is simply telling the harsh truth about, say, welfare or immigration politics. How do we proceed to judgment among others in such a situation? How can we preserve and promote community with disagreeing others in and through the engagement with this specific moral dispute? How can moral inquiry engage—and perhaps even transform—individuals we judge to be undeniably racist? These are the sorts of questions foregrounded by the embrace of complexity and uncertainty in the Deweyan approach to moral problems. Dewey, like Protagoras, seems both resigned and excited to be inhabiting a world without much certainty, a world of flux amidst moments of temporary stability that still demands of us at least temporarily consistent paths of judgment and action.

The rhetorical implications of the challenge of moral judgment in diverse community settings shows us how the use of arguable and conflict-ridden cases could serve as a way to bring the pedagogical and metaphysical commitments of Dewey and Protagoras closer together in the realm of moral inquiry and argumentation. Ideally, pupils analyze and address moral dilemmas in

a way that persuades those who disagree with them, or those that elevate a different value inherent in the case (say, free speech rights over preventing harm). Moral theory, as Dewey tells us, is not a quest for *the* right answer to our moral questions, nor does it allow us to *solve* any controversies. There are not right answers on Dewey's or Protagoras' account of the world and in our uses of language to know it. Instead, moral judgment is an artistic balancing act regarding situations that are important precisely because they contain values that cannot be rendered absolutely consistent.

Moral inquiry has more in common with the *techne* proffered by the sophistical tradition than the forms of certainty-seeking readings of moral virtue or worth that fill important tomes from western thinkers. Presenting opportunities to find conflict in important cases and then enunciate the balance that one believes needs to be struck is a moment of pedagogical gain that both Dewey and the sophists would recognize. In this way, a case-based method that asks students to find—or charitably construct—opposing arguments in important moral situations implements both the pedagogical intuitions of Dewey's ethical theory and Protagoras' program for training effective and engaged citizens. These similarities can be usefully leveraged in exploring the potentials of Dewey's thought for rhetoric and the training of democratic citizens. These ways of recognizing the potential and actual diversity in arguments and beliefs around any given issue makes Dewey's—and I would add, Protagoras'—account of moral judgment and inquiry well-fitted for our modern democratic challenges of polarization and severe division in our communities. How do we train our students to be the sort of democratic citizens that can function in, and possibly heal, such a fractured electorate? Do we present the *right* theory or account that captures what it means to be ethical in any situation? Or do we present cases or instances that ultimately reveal *the* right answer, a sort of moral fable that students engage with until they see

what they should have seen all along? All of these seem too unimaginative, at least on the terms of the account of ethical inquiry and argument presented here.

What is needed are difficult cases, instances that enshrine the conflict and uncertainty of truly problematic situations in communal life. These are the core of ethics, at least its interesting and difficult parts that exercise so much of our activity as community members. Part of the way to teach engagement with the difficult decisions we face is through the engagement with such cases in pedagogical contexts. If used effectively, they enable the inculcation of the imaginative skills required in sensing a range of reasonable opinions, even if they are always contingent and corrigible, and allow us to see how they might be defended and argued. In finding a path forward through moral argument in a democracy, the account we have extracted from Protagoras adds an element that's often not emphasized as much in Dewey's accounts of moral judgment or moral inquiry—these processes are often *group* activities, not one of a *lone* individual rendering indeterminate situations determinate. Using the moral imagination alone, and in concert with others, can help us respect the diversity of opinions and perspectives on contentious issues, and can therefore go a good distance toward instantiating and training the habits we need for democratic citizenship. The method of *dissoi logoi* therefore becomes an integral part to forming the sort of ethical reasoner and reflective citizen that diverse democracies need to solve the problems of the present, as well as to sustain the communal bounds to solve the problems that face the community tomorrow.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin has produced a series of ethics case studies inspired by this line of thinking. These cases, funded in part by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, can be found at [www.mediaengagement.org](http://www.mediaengagement.org).

# PRAGMATISM AND ECONOMIC DOCTRINE

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There is continuity in the progress of ideas from Adam Smith's eighteenth century moral philosophical system of political economy to the positive mainstream economic doctrine of today. The orientation, methods and prescriptions are quite consistent. This continuity is anchored in the notion that the social world is governed by fixed and immutable laws and that the goal of social science is the discovery and application of these immutable laws. These social laws are deemed to be founded upon an innate and immutable human nature. The normative theme is strictly regarded as *laissez faire*. My intent is to provide an outline of the evolution of the continuous elements in political economic theorizing from Smith to today. I will then provide a critique of mainstream economic doctrine from a pragmatist perspective. Finally, I outline some preliminary thoughts regarding the reconstruction of economic doctrine towards an evolutionary political economy.

*Keywords:* Pragmatism, Political Economy, Evolutionary Economics, Institutional Economics



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There is continuity in the progress of ideas from Adam Smith's eighteenth century moral philosophical system of political economy to the positive economic doctrine of today. The orientation, methods and prescriptions are quite consistent. This continuity is anchored in the notion that the social world is governed by fixed and immutable laws and that the goal of social science is the discovery and application of these immutable laws. These social laws are deemed to be founded upon an innate and immutable human nature. The normative theme is strictly regarded as *laissez faire*. My intent is to provide an outline of the evolution of the continuous elements in political economic theorizing from Smith to today. I will then provide a critique of mainstream economic doctrine from a pragmatist perspective. Finally, I will outline some preliminary thoughts towards an evolutionary political economy.

### **The Eighteenth-Century Natural Law Philosophy of Adam Smith**

The eighteenth-century moral philosopher Adam Smith is widely regarded as the defining figure of Classical English Political Economy. Smith worked within the natural law framework characteristic of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century western philosophy. "It was common for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century deists to perceive God as a creative demiurge who desisted from direct intervention in human affairs via miracles, visions and so on. On this view, God is the First Cause, ... creating it [the Natural world] perfect and equipping it with uniform laws of Nature in order to keep it in motion."<sup>1</sup>

Smith envisioned the social world as a harmonious machine

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Hill, "The hidden theology of Adam Smith," *European Journal of Economic Thought* 8:1 (Spring 2001): 5.

with its origins in Nature, with Nature being the product of an “all-wise Being.”

The idea of that divine Being, whose benevolence and wisdom have, from all eternity, contrived and conducted the immense machine of the universe, so as at all times to produce the greatest possible quantity of happiness, is certainly of all the objects of human contemplation by far the most sublime. ...

The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension; the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country...<sup>2</sup>

For Smith philosophy was:

... the science of the connecting principles of nature. ... by representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to allay this tumult of the imagination and to restore it...<sup>3</sup>

In Adam Smith we find the doctrine of a harmonious natural order. This order is established by First and Final Causes, installed through divine providence, providing for limited human control

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Los Angeles: Enhanced Media Publishing, 2016), 208.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 45-6.

over events, and with self-interested human activity proving to be socially beneficial. This divinely inspired natural order operates through propensities instilled in humans by a divinely inspired Nature. These propensities are Smith's "connecting principles of nature." Two of Smith's major works explore the workings of these propensities and how they insure social harmony and wellbeing independent of any individual or collective human intent or desire.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith identifies the propensity of "sympathy" as the guiding principle that insures the moral and ethical workings of society.<sup>4</sup> Smith's notion of sympathy is what we would call empathy today—the word empathy did not come into use until the twentieth century. In Smith's system sympathy is instilled in us by divinely inspired Nature through what Smith terms the "impartial spectator."<sup>5</sup> The impartial spectator resembles a Cartesian conscience that counsels us to virtue; defined by "prudence,"<sup>6</sup> "justice and beneficence."<sup>7</sup>

Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), turns his philosophical gaze from the moral and ethical foundations of society towards questions regarding the economy. Smith begins by introducing his principle of the division of labor and the propensity to "truck, barter and exchange:"

This division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual, consequence of a certain propensity in human

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 13-6.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 77.

nature, which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.<sup>8</sup>

Further on, Smith identifies the critical propensity of self-interest or self-love:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages.<sup>9</sup>

He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. ... he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this ... led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest, he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Smith reveals to us his perfect system of Lockean natural liberty. A system that has the critical normative character of *laissez faire*, a term Smith did not use, but which is consistent with his view of a limited role for the sovereign (government):

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into The Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House, 1994), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 485.

According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign has only three duties to attend to; three duties of great importance, indeed, but plain and intelligible to common understandings: first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works, and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expense to any individual, or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society.<sup>11</sup>

Smith was a political economist, envisioning an intimate relationship between the political and the economic in society:

[p]olitical economy, considered a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator, proposes two distinct objects: first, to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or more properly to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and secondly, to supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the public services.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Rise of Nineteenth-Century Social Physics**

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 275.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 779.

The nineteenth-century can be characterized as a time of boundless scientific optimism, with growing confidence in the power of progress driven by positive scientific developments. Science and philosophy felt they were on solid ground in their quest to solve the mysteries and miseries of the physical and social world. At the beginning of the nineteenth-century no one captured this spirit more than Pierre Simon de Laplace. Laplace “claimed that if he had stood beside God at the moment of Creation he could have used Newton’s laws to predict the entire future of the universe.”<sup>13</sup> Laplace described his dream to discover a single mathematical formula that could describe the entire history of the world:

An intellect which at a given instant knew all the forces acting in nature, and the position of all things of which the world consists—supposing the said intellect were vast enough to subject these data to analysis—would embrace in the same formula the motions of the greatest bodies in the universe and those of the slightest atoms; nothing would be uncertain for it, and the future, like the past, would be present to its eyes.”<sup>14</sup>

Certainty and predictability became the goals of science, the understanding of final, true causes.

Under the influence of positive scientific determinism, political economy witnessed a significant transformation in outlook beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century. Political economy would no longer be the domain of speculative moral philosophy, but rather became the striving to create a social physics. The rational

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<sup>13</sup> F. David Peat, *From Certainty to Uncertainty: The Story of Science and Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2002), 117.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Phillip Mirowski, *More Heat Than Light: Economics as Social Physics, Physics as Nature’s Economics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 27.

search for divinely inspired natural laws was replaced by the search for Laplace's intellect—the search for the objective laws of nature governing the social world modeled along the lines of Newtonian physical mechanics. “Conceptions of the world largely borrowed from the physical sciences channeled the evolution of economic theory far more profoundly than the idiosyncratic whims of any individual or of any school could possibly explain.”<sup>15</sup>

John Stuart Mill was a classical political economist in mid-nineteenth-century England. Mill was a key transitional figure in the evolution from classical political economy to the social physics that would come to known as neoclassical economics. Mill asserted that a complex subject like economics needed to be studied using deductive methods—arguing that the complexity of the social world could not be intelligently understood using inductive methods:

In Mill's view, a complex subject matter like political economy can only be studied scientifically by means of the deductive method. Since so many causal factors influence economic phenomena, and experimentation is generally not possible, there is no way to employ the methods of induction directly. The only solution is first inductively to establish basic psychological or technical laws—such as “people seek wealth,” or the law of diminishing returns—and then deduce their economic implications given specifications of relevant circumstances. Empirical confirmation or verification has an important role in determining whether the deductively derived conclusions are applicable, in checking the correctness of the deductions and in determining whether significant causal factors have been left out, but such testing does not bear on one's commitment to the basic “laws.” They

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<sup>15</sup> Mirowski, *More Heat Than Light*, 192.

have already been established by introspection or experimentation. Political economy is in this regard similar to the science of tides ...<sup>16</sup>

While Mill believed that his premises accurately described causal factors, he recognized that these were “tendencies” and not “universal laws.”

The basic generalizations are instead statement of tendencies. Since these tendencies are subject to various “disturbances” or “interfering causes,” which cannot all be specified in advance...<sup>17</sup>

Note that deviations from critical assumptions are deemed “disturbances,” not indicative of a property of complex social systems inhabited by purposeful, fallible, human agents. This perspective has led to the liberal use of the ‘*ceteris paribus*’ (all other things being equal) clause in economic theorizing. The notion that if the theory doesn’t work, then look for some ‘external disturbances.’

The final eclipse of classical political economy came in the 1870’s with the ‘marginal revolution,’ marking the full ascendancy of neoclassical economic theory. With the work of Stanley Jevons and Leon Walras the deductive logic of mathematics became the only acceptable methodology for neoclassical theorizing. Jevons stating:

The theory of the economy thus treated presents a close analogy to the science of Statical Mechanics, and the Laws of Exchange are found to resemble the Laws of Equilibrium of a lever ... The nature of Wealth and Value is explained by the

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel M. Hausman, “Economic Methodology in a Nutshell,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring, 1989): 116.

<sup>17</sup> Hausman, “Economic Methodology in a Nutshell,” 116.

consideration of indefinitely small amounts of pleasure and pain, just as the Theory of Statics is made to rest upon the equality of indefinitely small amounts of energy.<sup>18</sup>

Walras published his *Elements of Pure Economics* in 1874, introducing the concept of general equilibrium into economic theorizing. Equilibrium is a concept imported from physics where a body or physical system is in a state of unaccelerated motion, where the sum of all forces acting on it are zero. In economics, equilibrium reflects the conditions necessary for supply and demand to be in balance, resulting in all markets clearing.

In his [Walras] opinion, a pure science is only concerned with the relationship among things, the “play of the blind and ineluctable forces of nature,” which are independent of all human will. ... Walras demands, the application of the *same* mathematical techniques as those deployed in mid-nineteenth-century physics. In Walras’s scheme of things, other social phenomena tainted by the influence of human will would be relegated to studies employing nonscientific literary techniques.<sup>19</sup>

In 1900 Lord Kelvin expressed his certainty that; “In essence, everything that could be known was, in principle at least, already known.”<sup>20</sup> Lord Kelvin was confident that Newton’s theory of motion could be extended to explain two remaining troubling phenomena, heat and light. But it wasn’t long before the perfect certainty of nineteenth-century mechanics was upended. In 1905

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<sup>18</sup> William Stanley Jevons, *The Theory of Political Economy*, (New York: A.M. Kelly, 1965), x.

<sup>19</sup> Mirowski, *More Heat Than Light*, 220.

<sup>20</sup> Peat, *From Certainty to Uncertainty*, ix.

Einstein published his Special Theory of Relativity, followed in 1915 by his General Theory of Relativity. Newtonian mechanics fell to a new definition of gravity as the effect of mass warping the four-dimensional fabric of space/time. But the truly devastating blow to certainty in science came with the development of quantum mechanics.

In the second half of the nineteenth-century science had been steadily penetrating the atomic world, with the remaining mystery being light energy. Light energy in the mid-1800's had been conceived of as a wave, proposed by Maxwell in 1865. In 1900 Max Planck demonstrated that light energy is emitted in discrete quanta. In 1913 Niels Bohr extended the notion of light energy as quanta to radiation emitted from atoms. Bohr took the dual character of energy as a wave and a quanta, and developed his principle of complementarity. Bohr's complementarity principle makes the physical world a bit messy, something could be "both A and not A" at the same time; "And with it uncertainty entered the heart of physics."<sup>21</sup> Ultimately Planck and Bohr's work would result in the theory of quantum mechanics developed in the mid-1920's. Chance was now embodied in the very nature of the sub-atomic world.

The economist W. Brian Arthur clearly summarizes the significance of the early twentieth-century changes in scientific outlook:

The story of sciences in the twentieth century is one of the steady loss of certainty. Much of what was real and machine-like and objective and determinate at the start of the century, by mid-century was a phantom, unpredictable, subjective and indeterminate. What had defined science at the start of the century—its power to predict, its clear subject/object

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<sup>21</sup> Peat, *From Certainty to Uncertainty*, 7.

distinction—no longer defined it at the end. In the twentieth-century, science after science lost its innocence. Science after science grew up.

What then of economics?<sup>22</sup>

### **Economics as a “Positive Science”**

While the physical sciences may have been losing their innocence in the early twentieth-century, economics took a very different turn. By the 1930’s Mill’s “tendencies” morphed into unassailable hard-core axioms. Lionel Robbins boldly states:

The propositions of economic theory, like all scientific theory, are obviously deductions from a series of postulates ... These are not postulates the existence of whose counterpart in reality admits of extensive dispute once their nature is fully realized. We do not need controlled experiments to establish their validity: they are so much the stuff of our everyday experience that they have only to be stated to be recognized as obvious.<sup>23</sup>

The following is an outline of the main postulates of neoclassical economic theory, the “stuff of our everyday experience:”

- Perfect rationality—all agents are perfectly rational, allocating their incomes so as to maximize their total utility.

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<sup>22</sup> W. Brian Arthur, “The End of Certainty in Economics,” Accessed March 7, 2021,

<http://tuvalu.santafe.edu/~wbarthur/Papers/Magritte.pdf>, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Hausman, “Economic Methodology in a Nutshell,” 117.

- All economic agents have preferences that are innate, immutable and transitive.
- All agents are independent, in the sense that they are not influenced in their behavior by other agents—methodological individualism.
- Perfect knowledge—all agents, buyers and sellers, are perfectly aware of the prices and the comparative quality of all goods.
- All producers in the market have complete information regarding the resources and technologies available, and in use.
- All markets are composed of small-scale participants with complete freedom of market entry and exit—no buyer or seller, or group of buyers or sellers can dominate the market.
- All factors of production have complete freedom of mobility for entry and exit from the market.
- Economies are equilibrium systems—seeking and returning to equilibrium when disturbed.

Given this set of assumptions economics employs the deductive logic of mathematics to create a theoretical system that is complete and rigorous. The conclusions are ‘true’ based upon the application of deductive logic, creating a value free positive social science.

Lord Robbins was also responsible for narrowing the definition of economics. Recall that Adam Smith had defined his political economy in terms of the provisioning of the requisites of life. Alfred Marshall from the 1890’s until the early 1920’s was one of the principal theorists of the new neoclassical school. Marshall’s *Principles of Economics* was the primary text in neoclassical microeconomics throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Marshall begins by stating:

Political Economy or Economics is a study of mankind in the ordinary business of life; it examines that part of individual and social action which is most closely connected with the attainment and with the use of the material requisites of wellbeing.<sup>24</sup>

Robbins redefined economics in the 1930's: "Economics is the science which studies behavior as a relationship between given ends and scarce means which have alternative uses."<sup>25</sup> Economics is by this definition a study in constrained optimization. Economics is focused on the efficient use of scarce resources, the efficient use of things, as opposed to the study of social processes and relations operating in the provisioning of human welfare. Accordingly, all the critical socio-cultural processes involving learning, experimentation and innovation are outside the boundaries of economics.

Terence Hutchinson in 1938, responding to Robbins, argued that the claims of neoclassical theory were empty definitional or logical truths—tautology:

An economic problem is a problem as to how people behave. Equilibrium economics describes a community without economic problems, because *so far as it affects him* everybody knows how everyone else is going to behave...

If economists are once and for all going to abandon often completely misconceived notions and standards of the "exactness" and "necessity" of their conclusions, and strive, rather after more practical and "realistic" applicability, they

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<sup>24</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, (London: MacMillan Co. Ltd., 1962), 16.

must be prepared to extend the range of their conclusions to include political and sociological factors, or to co-operate in formulating their conclusions with specialists in these fields.<sup>26</sup>

Frank Ramsey, the Cambridge mathematician and philosopher, who was influenced by the pragmatist C.S. Peirce, provides a clear understanding of the nature of axiomatics:

In his [Ramsey] entry to the 1929 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica on “The Foundations of Mathematics,” he said, with respect to geometry, “all that the mathematician can say is that if the axioms are true, then all the rest of geometry will be true also.” Whether the axioms are true, “lies with the physicist.” Similarly, he thought that all the mathematician can say in economics is that if the assumptions are true, then all the rest will be true. Whether the assumptions are true, is a matter for psychology, philosophy and ethics.<sup>27</sup>

Neoclassical economic theorists have continually attempted to defend their assertions about the positive nature of neoclassical theorizing. One of the most cited arguments for the positive scientific status of neoclassical doctrine came in the 1950’s when Milton Friedman published his “The Methodology of Positive Economics.”<sup>28</sup> Friedman asserts that economists seek usable predictions, not understanding or explanation. Friedman creates a means/ends dichotomy by asserting that predictive hypotheses are all

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<sup>26</sup> T.W. Hutchinson, *The Significance and Basic Postulates of Economic Theory* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishing, 1965), 164-5.

<sup>27</sup> Cheryl Misak, *Frank Ramsey: A Sheer Excess of Power*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 327.

<sup>28</sup> Milton Friedman, “The Methodology of Positive Economics,” in *Essays in Positive Economics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 3-43.

that is important in theory creation, dismissing any relationship to the realism of the assumptions. Friedman states; "... theory is to be judged by its predictive power for the class of phenomena which it is intended to explain."<sup>29</sup> The unfortunate problem is, "the implications of neoclassical theory have certainly been contradicted on many occasions."<sup>30</sup>

### **Pragmatism—Some Basics**

Pragmatism comes about in opposition to critical elements of the two major branches of modern western philosophy—Cartesian Idealism and Lockean Empiricism. There are three foundational figures in the history of American pragmatism. C.S. Peirce (1839-1914), who developed the original formulations of pragmatism, had expressly Kantian influences while finding appeals to Kantian transcendental a priori truth as unwarranted. William James (1842-1910), who was one of the original members of the Metaphysical Club at Harvard in the 1870's along with C.S. Peirce, is firmly centered in the tradition of British Empiricism. James discards the crude correspondence theory of truth found in Locke. Finally, John Dewey (1859-1952), was the inheritor and extender of pragmatism from Peirce and James. Dewey began his philosophical life as a Hegelian idealist, ultimately abandoning idealism, but clearly maintaining the Hegelian notions of continuity.

Peirce's pragmatism is scientifically elitist, James's is psychologically personalistic, Dewey's is democratically populist.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics," 8.

<sup>30</sup> Hausman, "Economic Methodology in a Nutshell," 121. Also see Tony Lawson, *Economics and Reality*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 112.

<sup>31</sup> R. Ormerod, "The history and ideas of pragmatism," *Journal of the Operational*

In a very real sense pragmatism is the anti-traditional western philosophy. Traditionally idealist philosophy has been the search for absolute, authoritative sources and immutable foundations to anchor human understanding and action in a changing and uncertain world. These absolute, authoritative sources and immutable foundations have historically been conceived of as residing separate from the natural world. Access to this extra-natural plane has historically been conceived of as occurring through some form of pure thought, thus skeptically discounting the world of everyday physical experience. This disembodied approach to philosophy is evident in Aristotle's essences, Plato's ideal types, Hegel's philosophy of history, and most importantly in Descartes famous statement that, "I think, therefore I am"—the dichotomous separation of mind and matter.

The notion of a disembodied mind that has access to some realm where truth resides outside the physical world is what Peirce objected to in notions of a priori truths—foundational truths that come to us from nowhere. The notion of a disembodied spirit realm is what Dewey rejects in Hegel. Hegel's idealism was cast as an ongoing continuous dialogue between human efforts in the real world and the ideal types of the spirit realm, creating a dialectical process of human endeavors to attain the ultimate good of the spirit through successive cycles of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Dewey retains the dialectical process but casts it in an empirical naturalistic framework. The obvious issue whenever we discuss idealism is some notion of supernaturalism, a realm beyond the natural physical world we inhabit. Pragmatism, as a form of empiricism, generally avoids appeals to any forms of supernaturalism and transcendental a priori truths.

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*Research Society* (2006) 57: 893.

Descartes' hard and fast separation of mind and body, claiming that there is some special character of the mind that is capable of transcending the physical world and capable of accessing pure thought producing unassailable truths, leads to a number of hard and fast dualisms—mind-body, subject-object and value-fact, to name a few. These dualistic notions belie what it means to be human; we cannot separate values from facts, the subjective from the objective, much less mind from body.

Dewey makes the point regarding the relationship of the knower and the known in opposition to the objective spectator theory of knowledge and the quest for certainty, stating:

What is known is seen to be a product in which the act of observation plays a necessary role. Knowing is seen to be participant in what is finally known. Moreover, the metaphysics of existence as something fixed and therefore capable of literally exact mathematical description and prediction is undermined.<sup>32</sup>

Dewey made this observation as part of his Gifford Lectures given in 1929; "...nobody ... spoke or wrote more profoundly about the epistemological meaning of Heisenberg's [uncertainty principle] than Dewey did in these lectures."<sup>33</sup>

For pragmatists the world is constantly evolving, changing, and uncertain, and our knowledge of the real world is fallible and incomplete. "All that people are capable of and fortunately all they are really interested in is getting better control over their

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<sup>32</sup> John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 4: 1929, The Quest for Certainty*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 163.

<sup>33</sup> Steven Toulmin, "Introduction" in *John Dewey the Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 4: 1929, The Quest for Certainty*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), ix.

environment, enlarging their horizons, and enriching and improving their lives.”<sup>34</sup> This never-ending process is broadly a function of community, not the exclusive domain of expert individuals and/or political leaders. Peirce defined truth as that which ultimately a community of scientists would agree upon, a movement toward ultimate agreement, but never to be attained. Dewey was much broader in his conception of community, for Dewey everyone could and should jointly participate in the process of inquiry—fostering democratic critical intelligence.

The other major branch of western philosophy that pragmatism discards, Lockean Empiricism, consists in the crude representational theory of knowledge: knowledge of the world impressed on the mind like symbols pressed into clay tablets, Locke’s famous ‘Blank Slate.’ James rejects this crude representational empiricism and realism, and establishes an active role for the mind in interpreting, understanding, extending and exploring the real world. Knowledge is based in experience, but experience that is enhanced and interrogated by human intelligence. James was trained as a medical doctor and explored human psychology in some depth, producing a masterpiece of instinct psychology, his *Principles of Psychology*<sup>35</sup>—a work that sees human nature as the constantly evolving interaction of instincts and habit—nature and nurture.

Pragmatists do not accept the notion that our ideas are true copies of the real world, our ideas originate in the real world through primary experience. These primary experiences become the basis for inferential beliefs generated through human intelligence. Human intelligence is the product of interactions between evolved innate

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<sup>34</sup> Richard A. Posner, “John Dewey and the intersection of democracy and the law,” in Elias Khalil ed., *Dewey, Pragmatism, and Economic Methodology*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 181.

<sup>35</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology, Vols. 1-2*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017).

neural biology and culturally evolved habits, creating beliefs. Beliefs are models or maps, secondary products we use to navigate the world, both physical and social. These models or maps are never true representations of the world, they are in the words of Peirce, fallible. Understanding belief as being fallible does not lead to skepticism. Through testing our models, maps, and beliefs in the real world they may become what Dewey called warranted assertions.<sup>36</sup> Warranted assertions are settled beliefs that we utilize until we encounter a problem that disturbs these beliefs, motivating us to further inquiry. This is the true sense of pragmatic instrumentalism, not the common notions of “whatever works.”

This empirical method I shall call the *denotative* method. That philosophy is a mode of reflection, often of a subtle and penetrating sort, goes without saying. The charge that is brought against the non-empirical method of philosophizing is not that it depends upon theorizing, but that it fails to use refined, secondary products as a path and leading back to something in primary experience. The resulting failure is three-fold.

First, there is no verification, no effort even to test and check. What is even worse, secondly, is that the things of ordinary experience do not get enlargement and enrichment of meaning as they do when approached through the medium of scientific principles and reasonings. This lack of function reacts, in the third place, back upon the philosophic subject-matter in itself. Not tested by being employed to see what it leads to in ordinary experience and what new meanings it contributes, this subject-matter becomes arbitrary and

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<sup>36</sup> John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 12: 1938, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 15.

aloof—what is called “abstract” when the word is used in a bad sense to designate something which exclusively occupies a realm of its own without contact with the things of ordinary experience.<sup>37</sup>

Inquiry is the key, for Dewey inquiry was the scientific attitude and the experimental method employed to solve problematic situations. In our everyday experiences we find problematic situations (doubt). These problematic experiences move us to inquiry, using our intelligence we study the problem and develop hypotheses about the nature of the problem. Finally, we return to experience through action to test our hypotheses. For Dewey any problematic situation could be the subject of inquiry; why do the planets go around the sun? or why does tremendous wealth inequality exist, where some people have more than they could ever need and others go hungry? Both are equally subject to and demanding of inquiry.

All pragmatists are Naturalists, simply implying that all aspects of the world can be given a naturalistic explanation, without recourse to any forms of supernaturalism.<sup>38</sup> James and Dewey were additionally committed to Darwinian evolutionary theory, and certainly believed that Darwin’s theory had tremendous import beyond the biological sciences, applicable to the behavioral and social sciences. Dewey published his *Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and*

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<sup>37</sup> John Dewey, *The Latter Works, 1925-1953, Volume 1: 1925, Experience and Nature*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 17

<sup>38</sup> With the exception of James who at various points makes various muddled arguments regarding religious experience being on par with science, at one point stating, “If one should make a division of all thinkers into naturalists and supernaturalists, I should undoubtedly have to go . . . into the supernaturalist branch (VRE:409).” Quote taken from Cheryl Misak, *Cambridge Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Ramsey and Wittgenstein*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 71.

*Other Essays* in 1910:

In laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanency, in treating the forms that had been regarded as types of fixity and perfection as originating and passing away, the “Origin of Species” introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics, and religion.<sup>39</sup>

Below I explore the concept of Gene/Culture Coevolution, providing a version of evolutionary naturalism that I believe is consistent with pragmatism. Of particular importance is the role culture plays in establishing beliefs.

As one would expect, Dewey rejected the standard and easy counterposition of the Individual and the Social as if they were fixed concepts or entities. Individuals are made, not born—they are born only as particular organisms—and are made by the multiple associations of which society consists. And as those associations develop historically, different individuals are created. Concern then must be with specific institutions, political, economic, educational, in their effects in releasing and organizing personal capacities to their fullest desirable growth. We must always ask, and judge a society by its answer, the question: What kind of person is being created?<sup>40</sup>

### **Gene-Culture Coevolution**

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<sup>39</sup> John Dewey, *Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Sydney Hook, “Introduction” in John Dewey, *The Latter Works, 1925-1953, Volume 1: 1925, Experience and Nature*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), xi.

For over 2 million years our human ancestors have had the ability to transmit between generations two kinds of information, one genetic and the other cultural. With the implication being that simultaneously both genetic and cultural evolution have been occurring, driven by complex interactions with the environment. One controversy over the years focuses on the nature of the relationship between genetic and cultural evolution. Specifically, from a human behavioral perspective, which one matters more, 'nature vs. nurture'. Today this debate is more and more arriving at the view that the answer to this question is both. The culture displayed by our human ancestors is the result of a series of genetic adaptations. Culture enables the rapid learning of new skills and behaviors, in response to changing environmental surroundings.

For human behavioural ecologists, culture is viewed as a flexible system that produces the most adaptive outcome in a given environment and that can be altered over a relatively short period of time in response to environmental change.<sup>41</sup>

This theoretical perspective has come to be known as gene-culture coevolution.<sup>42</sup> Human behavior is clearly the result of the interaction of both genes and culture, operating in a specific environmental context.

The social ontology of gene-culture coevolution places the study of institutional evolution at the heart of social science. Institutions are seen as the product of cultural evolution. Within this view, social science is not the search for immutable natural laws,

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<sup>41</sup> Kevin N. Laland and Gillian R. Brown, *Sense & Nonsense: evolutionary perspectives on human behaviour*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 246.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richardson, *The Origin and Evolution of Cultures*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

whether divinely inspired or otherwise, but rather the investigation of the evolution of social institutions driven by human intentionality in creating the requisites of social well-being through historical time:

The consequences of this culture-gene coevolutionary process is that to understand people's psychology we have to consider not only our genetic inheritance but also how our minds have adapted ontogenetically and culturally to local technologies and institutions—present or even a few generations past. Thus, we should expect a rich array of diverse cultural psychologies to go along with disparate societies. The cultural evolution of psychology is the dark matter that flows behind the scenes throughout history.<sup>43</sup>

This understanding allows us to see the social world of morals, laws, and political economic institutions as human creations.

### **A Pragmatic Critique of Economic Doctrine**

Economic doctrine continues to utilize the hypothetical-deductive method to derive 'true' conclusions from axioms. The axioms of economic doctrine are in fact inferences supposedly drawn from empirical observation of the social world, as Robbins stated they are "so much the stuff of ordinary life." Deductive logic is tautology, the conclusions are always 'true' if one follows the proper rules of logic. But what of the axioms? Axioms are inferential beliefs derived from the world of experience and thus require testing to determine their validity, and correspondingly the validity of the deductions derived.

Dewey died in 1952 before the cognitive revolution, much

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph Henrich, *The WEIRD People In The World: How The West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 469-70.

less the explosion of work in experimental psychology,<sup>44</sup> neurobiology,<sup>45</sup> and experimental economics.<sup>46</sup> Today there is a large and growing body of experimental work from psychology, neurobiology and experimental economics that one can draw on to evaluate the conceptions of pragmatists', as well as neoclassical economists,' views of human cognition. In 2002 the Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to the experimental economist Vernon Smith and the psychologist Daniel Kahneman, "This signaled that knowledge from psychological research and the use of experimental methods is accepted as 'mainstream' in the field of economics."<sup>47</sup> As one would obviously expect the cognitive capabilities of humans revealed in these experimental sciences do not resemble the axioms of mainstream economic doctrine.

There have been attempts to 'relax' some of the fundamental axioms of economic doctrine to make them more 'realistic.' These attempts have led to the development of what is called Behavioral Economics. Unfortunately, Behavioral Economics still operates within the same framework as mainstream neoclassical economics. Behavioral economics relaxes several of the basic assumptions of mainstream theory; utilizing very limited notions of bounded rationality, bounded self-interest and malleable preferences. While an improvement on mainstream theorizing, behavioral economics is still a species of constrained optimization completely divorced from the richness of cultural habit and experience, denying the existence of true uncertainty, and downplaying the role of human

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<sup>44</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, (New York: FSG Adult, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Robert M. Sapolsky, *Behave: The Biology of Humans at our Best and Worst*, (New York: Penguin, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Nicolas Jacquemet and Oliver L'Haridon, *Experimental Economics: Method and Applications*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Dag Oivind Madsen and Tonny Stenheim, "Experimental methods in economics and psychology: A comparison," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 187 (2015): 113.

imagination.<sup>48</sup> The Noble Laureate Daniel Kahneman noted: “Theories of behavioural economics have generally retained the basic architecture of the rational model, adding assumptions about cognitive limitations designed to account for specific anomalies.”<sup>49</sup>

A pragmatist would pose the question, axiomatics or inquiry? The axioms of economic doctrine assume away all the critical questions of what it means to be human, part of a social existence struggling to get by in an uncertain and precarious world. The orientation of pragmatism sees economics not as a problem of choice under scarcity or constrained optimization, but rather as how people collectively utilize habit and imagination in confronting an uncertain future, and in the process create new beliefs and institutions.

Economics is the study of how humanity copes with its needs by means of resources that the natural world and its own social organization provide. This task of administration can only be done if there is knowledge of the needs and the resources. Knowledge exists in the minds of individuals. This is the only form in which it can be effective and usable. We can have knowledge of some degree of what is and what has been. We cannot have knowledge of what will be. The course of human affairs is something that humans themselves will create by their actions based on an imaginative interpretation of their world.<sup>50</sup>

The rich complex social world that we see around us today is the product of millions of years of human evolution, both biological

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<sup>48</sup> Peter E. Earl, “Economics fit for the Queen: A Pessimistic Assessment of its Prospects,” *Prometheus*, 28(3), (2010): 216-7

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Kahneman, “Maps of Bounded Rationality,” *American Economics Review*, 93(5), (December 2003): 1459.

<sup>50</sup> G.L.S. Shackle, *Epistemics and Economics: A Critique of Economic Doctrine*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), i.

and cultural. Evolution has given us the creative imagination to constantly seek new opportunities, new ways and means of making a living, and imagining the future. This is the true essence of the study of economics, not trying to reduce human behavior to a series of mathematical equations used to solve an optimization problem based upon a complete knowledge set.

The market economy is not something that has always existed, it is not a “natural” entity obeying its own inner laws. Despite Adam Smith’s claim, to “truck, barter and exchange,” are not innate human characteristics. The creation of the market economy, and associated culture beliefs, are a product of human social engineering over the last several hundred years. Exchange has been around for thousands of years, much of it ceremonial. Exchange economies did not become the primary means for making a living until very recently.

the legend of the individualistic psychology of primitive man is exploded. Neither crude egotism, nor a propensity to barter or exchange, nor a tendency to cater chiefly for himself is in evidence. ... As a rule, the individual in primitive society is not threatened by starvation unless the community as a whole is in a like predicament. It is the absence of the threat of individual starvation which makes primitive society, in a sense, more humane than nineteenth century society, and at the same time less economic.<sup>51</sup>

Today the dominant cultural paradigm is that the economy is “autonomous, coherent, and regulated by its own internal logic. Many go to the next step and embrace the idea that if we pursue

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<sup>51</sup> Karl Polanyi, “Marketless Trading in Hammurabi’s Time,” In Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg and Harry W. Pearson, eds, *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, (New York: Free Press, 1957), 69.

policies that conflict with the imperatives of capitalism, they will inevitably backfire.”<sup>52</sup> The economy is walled off from society, considered out of bounds for “democratic tinkering.” This makes economics truly the domain of experts.

The issue of experts was one that Dewey clearly addressed. Dewey used a clever metaphor to convey his point, “The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied.”<sup>53</sup> Dewey saw experts as being embedded in and not above participatory democracy.

Dewey’s approach is “democratic” in the sense of emphasizing the community over the exceptional individual. Knowledge is not produced mechanically by the repeated application of algorithmic procedures by expert investigators all trained the same way, but by the tug of communal demands, the struggle between doubt, and habit, the diverse strivings of individuals of diverse background, aptitude, training, and experience, and the application of methods of inquiry, such as imagination and intuition, that owe little to expert training. No one, no elite even, has a pipeline to truth—truth is always just out of reach, like the grapes of Tantalus, at most a regulatory, an orienting, ideal—and if this is the case with scientific truth, it is all the more likely to be the case with moral and political truths as well.<sup>54</sup>

In the post WWII era neoclassical economics has been unrivaled in its command of academia and governmental economic

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<sup>52</sup> Fred Block, *Capitalism: The Future of an Illusion*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 2.

<sup>53</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 365.

<sup>54</sup> Posner, “John Dewey and the intersection of democracy and the law,” 170.

policy—truly experts if there ever were. While all neoclassical economists employ the standard set of assumptions and methods discussed earlier, they curiously fracture along ideological lines. Neoclassical economists come in all stripes from socialists to free market capitalists.<sup>55</sup>

The two dominant branches of neoclassical ideology in the post WWII era have been characterized as ‘Freshwater vs. Saltwater’ economists. Freshwater economists refer to the constellation of ‘free market’ economists originally around the University of Chicago and the development of New Classical Economics. Saltwater economists were predominately associated with the program of integrating Keynes’ ideas into the neoclassical framework. This work was done by economists around MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, thus saltwater.

Both freshwater and saltwater economists start from an idealized vision of perfect competition. Mathematically it can be shown that this idealized model of perfect competition results in all factors of production (labor and capital) receiving what is referred to as their marginal product, and thus resulting in a Pareto Optimal outcome—maximum efficiency—with all factors of production being completely employed. This is referred to as the Marginal Productivity Theory of Distribution, developed by J.B. Clark. Clark argued that, “... the distribution of the income of society is controlled by a natural law, and this law, if it worked without friction, would give to every agent of production the amount of wealth which that agent creates.”<sup>56</sup> In 1962 Milton Friedman used Clark’s argument to justify the distribution of income under capitalism, declaring that “marginal

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<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *Is There a Future for Heterodox Economics?* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 2019), 8.

<sup>56</sup> John Bates Clark, *The Distribution of Wealth: A Theory of Wages, Interest and Profits*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1902), v.

productivity theory shows that each man gets what he produces.”<sup>57</sup>

Any deviations from the idealized model of perfect competition results in what is referred to as Market Failure. Market failure is the failure to account for all costs and benefits necessary for the production and consumption of a good. Market Failure results in a non-Pareto Optimal outcome, where the market will not supply the “socially optimal amount of a good”—allocative inefficiency. The question of market failure goes to the heart of the differences between freshwater and saltwater economists. Saltwater economists argue that because market failures are so widespread and produce suboptimal outcomes, government action is required to remedy these failures. Freshwater economists generally agree that market failures are pervasive, but the outcomes of “imperfect” markets are preferable to governmental interference in the market. The post WWII era has been dominated by the conflicts and confrontations between those who subscribe to the notion of governmental responsibility for improving market outcomes and those who argue “the market knows best.”

The notion of market failure is a very peculiar one. Markets are the product of the creativity of cultural existence, displaying all the characteristics associated with the process of social institutional evolution. As such, markets must be studied as they exist by understanding their unique historical path dependent developmental processes and outcomes. Markets are institutions of constantly evolving formal (legal) and informal monetary exchange relationships embedded in a broader set of cultural institutions oriented towards the provisioning of the requisites of human life, and should be studied as such.

Fesmire summarizes Dewey’s view of cultural experience as a product of nature:

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<sup>57</sup> Milton Friedman, *Price Theory: A Provisional Text*, (Chicago: Aldine, 1962), 198.

The imaginative creativity of cultural existence, from industry to the fine arts, stretches beyond what is already distinctly disclosed to reveal nature's generative potential. Dancing, writing a haiku, and improvising a jazz solo are events as revelatory of nature as a double-blind scientific experiment...disclosing nature's emergent potentialities.<sup>58</sup>

For Dewey "nature is what nature does,"<sup>59</sup> accordingly markets are what markets do. Markets are evolving and experimental creations of human imagination, they are real social structures, but at the same time products of human knowledge creation and therefore fallible. Accordingly, if the outcomes in specific markets are viewed as problematic, they are open to experimental change and ongoing improvement, not based upon the standard of some ideal type, but in accordance with the goal of improving the quality of human life, not of trying to engineer market outcomes to match an abstract timeless model of perfect competition.

In *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey provides his view of the nature and problems with established economic doctrine:

Its [the doctrine that nature is rational] paralyzing effect on human action is seen in the part it played in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in the theory of "natural laws" in human affairs, in social matters. These natural laws were supposed to be inherently fixed; a science of social phenomena and relations was equivalent to discovery of them. Once discovered, nothing remained for man but to

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<sup>58</sup> Steven Fesmire, *Dewey*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 61.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas M. Alexander, *The Human Eros: Eco-ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 17.

conform to them; they were to rule his conduct as physical laws govern physical phenomena. They were the sole standard of conduct in economic affairs; the laws of economics are the “natural” laws of all political action; other so-called laws are artificial, man-made contrivances in contrast to the normative regulations of nature itself.

*Laissez-faire* was the logical conclusion. For organized society to attempt to regulate the course of economic affairs, to bring them into service of humanly conceived ends, was a harmful interference. ...

Human intervention for the sake of effecting ends is no interference, and it is a means of knowledge.<sup>60</sup>

### **Towards an Evolutionary Political Economy**

*Political economy* provides a more encompassing and fruitful framework. It embraces two core assumptions ... The first is that political and economic processes, though analytically distinct under capitalism, are interlinked and should be studied as a complex and interrelated whole. The second is that the economy, the sphere of ‘material provisioning’, has a special weight in explaining and properly understanding the polity and politics. Governments are not perceived as neutral umpires correcting malfunctions in the market economy, but as central institutions both reflecting and shaping the distribution of power and resources in society.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, 169-70.

<sup>61</sup> Ian Gough, *Heat, Need and Human Greed: Climate Change, Capitalism and Sustainable Wellbeing*, (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), 6.

Evolutionary Political Economy draws on elements of systems theory, generalized Darwinism and institutionalism. Culture is a complex adaptive system composed of numerous interdependent and coevolving subsystems; social, political and economic. Understanding coevolution is critical. Due to interdependencies a change in one subsystem may impact other subsystems; creating tensions and triggering change in a process of adaptation within a constantly evolving cultural environment. Complex adaptive systems are characterized by non-linear and emergent behavior. As such, from an ontological perspective evolutionary systems are never in equilibrium; they may experience long periods of relative stability (stasis), punctuated by periods of rapid change.<sup>62</sup>

Generalized Darwinism understands evolutionary processes within complex adaptive systems as being characterized by: variation, selection and reproduction. Variation, selection and reproduction occur at both the individual and the group level.<sup>63</sup> A perspective where, “multi-level selection processes with the novel feature that both individual-level behaviors and group-level institutional characteristics are subject to selection and intergroup conflicts play a decisive role.”<sup>64</sup>

Institutionalism builds on the notion discussed earlier that biological evolution has created in humans well-ingrained cognitive schemes for intergenerational cultural learning. Thus, recognizing that cultures are composed of institutions:

There is now quite a wide consensus that this term refers

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<sup>62</sup> Orion A. Lewis and Sven Steinmo, “How Institutions Evolve: Evolutionary Theory and Institutional Change,” *Polity*, Volume 44, Number 3, (July 2012), 320.

<sup>63</sup> David Sloan Wilson, *This View of Life: Completing the Darwinian Revolution*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2019), 121.

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Bowles and Astrid Hopfensitz, “The Co-evolution of Individual Behaviors and Social Institutions,” *Santa Fe Institute Working Paper: 2000-12-073*.

broadly to systems of rules that structure social interactions. These rules include norms of behavior and social conventions as well as legal or formal rules. Accordingly, systems of language, money, law, weights and measures, traffic conventions, table manners, and all organizations are institutions. But not all institutions are organizations.<sup>65</sup>

Institutions are culturally acquired mental rules and routines that structure behavior in specific environmental contexts. As such, institutions can be viewed as belief systems. Beliefs can be conceived of as similar to genes in biological evolution, elements subject to variation, selection and reproduction within cultural environments. Imperfectly replicating beliefs provide us insights into institutional evolution and change. Copying errors and human imaginative modification of behavior schemes and social rules generate variations in beliefs within cultural institutions, creating contention and conflict. These variations and conflicts are what become the grist for selection and replication, thus generating path dependent evolutionary change. But evolution *does not* imply progressive optimization in a linear fashion.<sup>66</sup>

With this understanding it is clear that evolutionary political economy is not a predictive science. The evolutionary biologist Ernst Mayr stated:

Although evolutionary phenomena are subject to universal laws ... the explanation of a particular evolutionary phenomenon can be given only a 'historical narrative.' Consequently, when one attempts to explain the features of

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<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey M. Hodgson and Thorbjorn Knudsen, *Darwin's Conjecture: The Search for General Principles of Social and Economic Evolution*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 170.

<sup>66</sup> Lewis and Steinmo, "How Institutions Evolve," 319.

something that is the product of evolution, one must attempt to reconstruct the evolutionary history of this feature.<sup>67</sup>

Evolutionary political economy can be conceptualized as a branch of Culture Science,<sup>68</sup> focused on comparative historical institutional evolution.<sup>69</sup> Hodgson in a recent work outlined his vision of economics as comparative historical institutional analysis:

I believe that economics must rely much more on (historical and geographical) comparative analyses of real-world institutions and policies. At the policy level it should engage in cautious experimentation. It should be driven much less by the unrealistic utopias of full-blooded socialists or ultra-individualistic marketeers. Such a pragmatic vision of economics is not free of ideology—far from it—but it is a much more pragmatic and empirically-oriented science than many practitioners currently exemplify.<sup>70</sup>

Through comparative historical institutional analysis we can evaluate the success or failure of various institutional arrangements within specific environments that can become the basis for trial-and-error experimentation.

Critically the process of inquiry and trial-and-error experimentation depend upon an innovative cultural milieu, a culture imbued with the scientific attitude of inquiry, experimentation and growth.

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<sup>67</sup> Ernst Mayr, *Towards a new philosophy of biology: Observations of an evolutionist*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University), 149

<sup>68</sup> John Hartley and Jason Potts, *Culture Science: A Natural History of Stories, Demes, Knowledge and Innovation*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Sven Steinmo, *The Evolution of Modern States: Sweden, Japan, and the United States*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Hodgson, *Is There a Future for Heterodox Economics?* vii.

Demic or cultural evolution enables the *reproduction of knowledge* ... But knowledge cannot simply be reproduced unchanged (that way extinction lies). It has to be reproduced with growth: added newness. The continuous productivity of that process over the extreme long term can hardly be overstated.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Hartley and Potts, *Culture Science*, 214.

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BOOK REVIEW OF  
*JOHN DEWEY: UNA  
ESTÉTICA DE ESTE  
MUNDO*

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Luis Arenas, Ramón del Castillo, and Ángel M. Faerna (eds.). *John Dewey: una estética de este mundo*. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2018, 447 p. ISBN 978-84-17358-59-4.



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In the late 1980s, John Dewey's aesthetics came out of the limbo it had been locked in by analytical philosophy. In fact, apart from very few favorable comments made sporadically,<sup>1</sup> Dewey's aesthetics, when not completely forgotten, suffered decades of ostracism. A detailed tracing of the profound reasons which had blasted Dewey into oblivion for so long goes far beyond the scope of a review. Anyhow, in the late 1980s the critical situation has been very well depicted by Thomas M. Alexander: "I have seen tenured philosophy professors struggle to associate... [Dewey's] name with a library cataloguing system or with the opponent defeated by Truman."<sup>2</sup>

Between the 1980s and the 1990s, Alexander's book *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature*, together with the works of Richard Shusterman,<sup>3</sup> have been the main sources of a renewed interest in Dewey's aesthetics, which today is fermenting worldwide. During the last years, together with the ever-present American criticism, crucial international contributions came from Italy,<sup>4</sup> Japan,<sup>5</sup> Great Britain<sup>6</sup> and France,<sup>7</sup> to mention just a few. This

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas M. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: Suny Press, 1987), p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> See, in particular, Richard Shusterman, "Why Dewey Now?", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, V. 23 No. 3, (1989), 60-67; *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992). It is important to stress also the chapter on Dewey's aesthetics by Robert B. Westbrook in *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 387-428. Already in the 90s, Philip W. Jackson offered a first insight on the educational implications of Dewey's aesthetics. See *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Roberta Dreoni, *Fuori dalla torre d'avorio. L'estetica inclusiva di John Dewey oggi* (Genoa, Milan: Marietti 1860, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Masamichi Ueno, *Democratic Education and the Public Sphere: Towards John Dewey's Theory of Aesthetic Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Kazuyo Nakamura, "A Progressive Vision of Democratizing Art: Dewey's and Barnes's Experiments in Art Education in the 1920s", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, V. 53 No. 1 (2019)

renewed interest is evident not only for the ongoing publication of books focusing on varied aspects of Dewey's aesthetics, but also for the growing space that international meetings and academic journals are giving to the topic.

Consequently, a review of the Spanish book *John Dewey: una estética de este mundo*,<sup>8</sup> represents an unbeatable opportunity to describe the undisputable progress on Dewey's research also within the Spanish speaking world. Both Spain and Latin America, have nowadays a consolidated academic tradition on classical pragmatism and are actively contributing to enrich the discussion about Dewey's aesthetics. Within the last decades, in fact, the research on pragmatism has acquired considerable importance and recognition in countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Perú. Although not a Spanish speaking country, Brazil is a remarkable reference within the Latin American context, too.<sup>9</sup>

To find the roots of *John Dewey: una estética de este mundo*, we

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<sup>6</sup> Andrea R. English and Christine Doddington, "Dewey, Aesthetic Experience, and Education for Humanity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Dewey*, ed. S. Fesmire (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) 411-444.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Pierre Cometti and Giovanni Matteucci (eds.), *Après L'art comme expérience. Esthétique et politique aujourd'hui à la lumière de John Dewey* (Paris: Questions théoriques, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> The translation in English is *John Dewey: An Aesthetics of this World*. To help the international reader who does not know Spanish, we offer the English translation of the titles of the book's sections and chapters. Furthermore, all the quotations from the book are our translations.

<sup>9</sup> The *International Meeting on Pragmatism* in Sao Paulo, already in its 19th edition, is –together with the Brazilian Journal *Cognitio*–, a point of reference for international advancement of pragmatist studies. For a wider reassessment of the pragmatist research in Latin America see: Gregory F. Pappas (ed.), *Pragmatism in the Americas* (New York: Fordham, 2011); María C. Di Gregori and Federico E. López, *Regreso a la experiencia. Lecturas de Peirce, James, Dewey y Lewis* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2014); Pablo Quintanilla and Claudio M. Viale (eds.), *El pensamiento pragmatista en la actualidad: conocimiento, lenguaje, religión, estética y política* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú, 2015).

must go back to 2014, to an International Symposium organized in Toledo (Spain) to commemorate the 80th anniversary of *Art as Experience*. The book, edited by the Spanish scholars Luis Arenas, Ramón del Castillo, and Ángel Faerna, is the product of extensive work, which lasted four years and involved experts from Spain, Argentina, Italy, Poland, and Puerto Rico. The volume consists of 17 chapters which, in turn, are grouped in six thematic sections. Its main goal is to shed light, through a range of different and original approaches, on a complex topic—Dewey’s aesthetics—always open to new interpretations.

The first of the six sections, “Arte y sociedad” (Art and Society), starts with the study of Carlo R. Sabariz entitled “John Dewey y el arte de hacer bien las cosas” (“John Dewey and the Art of Well-Doing the Things”, 35-56), which insightfully addresses an issue which is pivotal within Dewey’s thought, namely the continuity between aesthetics and everyday life. For Dewey, art is a form of complete experience, capable of materializing in any human activity when it reaches its own consummation—not just art as experience, therefore, but also “experience as an art” (40). In his essay, Sabariz follows an argument recently deepened also by Scott R. Stroud, among other intellectuals.<sup>10</sup>

The following chapter by José Beltrán Llavador, “En el taller de John Dewey. La experiencia común del arte” (“Within John Dewey’s Workshop. The Common Experience of Art”, 57-76), deepens the fruitful link which Dewey established between artistic and associated life. Beltrán Llavador highlights a focal point—often ignored by critics—which, on the one hand, allows to fully

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<sup>10</sup> See Scott R. Stroud, “Economic Experience as Art? John Dewey’s Lectures in China and the Problem of Mindless Occupation”, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, V. 27 No. 2 (2013) 113-133; “The Art of Experience: Dewey on the Aesthetic”, in *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics: Critical Perspectives on the Arts*, ed. W. Malecki (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014) 33-46.

understand Dewey's aesthetics in his long gestation before *Art as Experience*, and, on the other, shows the strong ties existing between Dewey's aesthetics and his philosophy of education. Contrasting with the well-known criticisms by Herbert Read and Philip W. Jackson—according to both, Dewey never paid too much attention to establish a link between art and education—Beltrán Llavador insightfully suggests to interpret *Art as Experience* considering his previous work at the Laboratory School of Chicago (1894-1904), connecting it with *Democracy and Education* (1916) and, finally, relating *Art as Experience* with Dewey's involvement, starting from the early 1920s, in the educational project of the Barnes Foundation of Philadelphia (58-59; 70-71).

The third chapter, “La corrosión de la experiencia. Populismo, abstracción y cultura de masas” (“The Corrosion of Experience. Populism, Abstraction, and Mass Culture,” 77-98) by Ramón del Castillo, attempts to overcome some common misunderstandings of *Art as Experience*. First, del Castillo rejects the widespread tendency to consider Dewey's approach to art as a populist one. Secondly, he supports the Deweyan idea of art conceived of as apolitical. Thirdly, he highlights Dewey's view that art is equidistant from both naturalism and formalism. Finally, he argues that, when trying to reconcile arts with everyday life, Dewey has certain reservations regarding modern forms of communication. Consequently, he avoids falling into a dangerous apology of mass culture.<sup>11</sup>

Particularly interesting are the references to American art movements, which arose under Roosevelt's New Deal, and their alleged closeness to Dewey's thought (85-86). Stefano Oliverio, within “El arte y la ‘recreación’ de/en la metrópolis. Consideraciones

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<sup>11</sup> For a good insight into the relationship between Dewey and mass culture see also Nakia S. Pope, “Hit by the Streets: Dewey and Popular Culture”, *Education & Culture*, V.27 No.1 (2011) 26-39.

filosófico-educativas sobre *El arte como experiencia* (“Art and the ‘Recreation’ of/in the Metropolis. Philosophical-Educational Considerations on *Art as Experience*”) displays a twofold approach, political and educational. Starting from the unfair criticism of Lewis Mumford against Dewey’s excess of instrumentalism,<sup>12</sup> Oliverio demonstrates how, for the pragmatist philosopher, art has a double aspect. On the one hand, art gives place to an experience that is able to articulate the individuality of the human being and, on the other, simultaneously it can promote the democratic survival of the community. The author points out interesting parallelisms between Dewey’s and Simmel’s views of large cities, emphasizing that the core of Dewey’s aesthetics strongly relates to his experience in Chicago, the big metropolis where he lived between 1894 and 1904. Particularly valuable is his remark on the closeness of Dewey’s aesthetic (and social) project with the tasks of Jane Addams in the Hull House during his stay in Chicago (101-110).<sup>13</sup> Oliverio thus historicizes, within the frenetic context of the metropolis of Chicago in the late 19th century, what Ramón del Castillo had previously said about the relationship between Dewey and the incipient mass culture.

The aesthetic project of Addams and Dewey conceives art as an “instrument of authentically human participation and

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The Golden Day: A Study in American Experience and Culture* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1926) 264.

<sup>13</sup> Although there exists a vast literature on Jane Addams socio-political and aesthetic thought, the connection between her ideas on aesthetics and those developed by Dewey a few years later has not been properly studied. About Addams art project at the Hull House see Mary Ann Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House 1889-1901: Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr”, *Woman’s Art Journal*, V.10 No.1 (1989) 35-39; Judy D. Whipps, “Humanities as a Source of Resilience in Jane Addams Community Activism”, in *Pragmatism and American Philosophical Perspectives on Resilience*, eds. K.A. Parker and H.E. Keith (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020) 139-156. Some connections between the Hull House and Dewey’s aesthetics are described in Mary J. Jacobs, *Dewey for Artists* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

communication" (109), i.e. as an alternative to the easy and ephemeral subjective evasions produced by the modern entertainment industry. Oliverio's statement about the influence of Chicago on Dewey's aesthetics seems to be confirmed by a private letter sent by the philosopher to his wife Alice in 1894: "Dwelling in Chicago somehow gives you the feeling that the salvation of America will have to come out of pictures or some form of 'igh art [sic]".<sup>14</sup>

The second section, "Antecesores y coetáneos" ("Precedents and Contemporaries"), traces the legacy of two important American intellectuals, Ralph W. Emerson (the precedent) and George Santayana (the contemporary), within *Art as Experience*. In the chapter by Antonio Fernández Díez, "Una historia común y más amplia" ("A Common and Wider History" 119-146), Emerson is described as a silent but constant presence in Dewey's thought. Though there already exists a vast literature about Emerson's influence on pragmatist philosophy in general, and pragmatist aesthetics in particular,<sup>15</sup> Fernández Díez's essay focuses on the similar concept of experience developed by the two intellectuals. Within "Notas sobre la presencia de George Santayana en *Arte como experiencia* de Dewey" ("Notes on George Santayana's Presence in Dewey's *Art as Experience*", 147-170), Daniel Moreno identifies similarities and differences between Dewey's and Santayana's aesthetics. It is important to stress that the meager literature about this topic makes Moreno's essay extremely interesting and original.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Larry Hickman (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Dewey*. Volume 1 (Charlottesville: Intelex, 2008) 1894.09.12,13, N. 00173.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Richard Shusterman, "Emerson's Pragmatist Aesthetics", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, V. 53 No. 207 (1999) 87-99; Jonathan Levin, *The Poetic of Transition: Emerson, Pragmatism and American Literary Modernism* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> A good precedent is the book by the same Daniel Moreno, *Santayana the Philosopher: Philosophy as a Form of Life*, trad. C. Pardon (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2015).

Among other things, the scholar appropriately points out the prominent position which the aesthetics of Santayana occupied in the cultural *milieu* of the Barnes Foundation (155-156).

The third section, “Estética y metafísica” (“Aesthetics and Metaphysics”) highlights the radical differences between Dewey's aesthetics and the basic ontological framework of main modern theories of art. “El arte, la experiencia y la crisis de la metafísica” (“Art, Experience and the Crisis of Metaphysics”, 171-190) by María A. Di Berardino and Ángel M. Faerna, offers the reader an overview of Dewey's arguments to discuss and reject traditional metaphysical perspectives. The next contribution, “Implicaciones onto-lógicas de la estética de John Dewey”, (“Onto-logical Implications of John Dewey's Aesthetics”, 191-212), by Rosa Maria Calcaterra, sheds light on the artistic dimension of an experience, on the one hand, and on its ontological value, on the other. The author takes, as a starting point, the Foucaultian interpretation of Kant's conception of *Kunst*. The section ends with the chapter by Roberta Dreon, “La ‘distinción de lo estético’ en clave pragmatista. Dewey, Gadamer y la antropología de la cultura” (“The ‘Distinction of the Aesthetics’. Dewey, Gadamer and the Anthropology of Culture”, 213-236). In her essay, the scholar makes an interesting comparison between Dewey's refusal to separate art and life and the same conception developed by Gadamer in *Truth and Method* (1960). Besides, Dreon accurately emphasizes an almost unexplored but essential aspect to fully understand Dewey's aesthetics: the reconstruction of the interactions between the pragmatist philosopher and Franz Boas.<sup>17</sup> As noticed by Dreon, “with his arrival at Columbia University in 1904, Dewey got in personal contact with Franz Boas, with whom he realized a seminar between 1914 and 1915. His book *The Mind of Primitive Man* appears between the bibliographical references of *Experience and*

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<sup>17</sup> For a wider insight into the relationship between Dewey, Gadamer, Boas, and Malinowski, see Chapter 4 of Dreon's book *Fuori dalla torre d'avorio*, cit., 121-158.

*Nature*" (232).

The fourth section "Arte y democracia" ("Art and Democracy") suggests an aesthetic reinterpretation of another pivotal topic of Dewey's thought, i.e. democracy. The chapter "La experiencia estética como fundamento de la democracia deweyana" ("The Aesthetic Experience as the Founding of Deweyan Democracy", 237-262) by Julio Seoane, analyzes the possibilities offered by the aesthetic experience not only to emphasize the most attractive elements of life, to stimulate individual self-formation, but also to act within the political and moral structures of society. The experience thus conceived ceases to be something merely private and takes the form of a collective social identity. This is followed by the chapter written by Krzysztof P. Skowroński "Política y estética en el pragmatismo de John Dewey: la idea de la democracia liberal y sus manifestaciones artísticas según *El arte como experiencia*" ("Politics and Aesthetics in John Dewey's Pragmatism: The Idea of Liberal Democracy and Its Artistic Manifestations Following *Art as Experience*", 263-284). The author claims, against a purely formalist view, that art has always been crossed by the cultural, moral, political, and religious tensions which characterize society. Of particular interest is the political approach with which Skowroński analyzes Dewey's critique of museums in *Art as Experience* (269), which explicitly differs from the vision proposed by Thomas M. Alexander.<sup>18</sup> As before del Castillo did before, Skowroński also focuses on the relationship between Dewey's aesthetics and contemporary art (269; 271).

The fifth section "Arte y conocimiento" ("Art and Knowledge") analyzes the link between Dewey's aesthetics and science. The chapter "¿Es el arte la continuación de la ciencia por otro medio?" ("Is Art the Continuation of Science by Other Means?", 285-

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<sup>18</sup> See Thomas M. Alexander, cit. 185.

310) by Luis Arenas, seeks to eradicate the widespread (and deeply erroneous) idea which renders pragmatism as a form of cryptopositivism. The author highlights the disdainful judgment of various European intellectuals (Heidegger, Horkheimer, Scheller) regarding both Dewey and all pragmatism in general. At the same time, it clearly shows the strong link between aesthetic experience, education and democracy in Dewey's philosophy. The following contribution by Juan Vicente Mayoral, "Unidad, emoción y significado: la estética de Dewey y la experiencia científica" ("Unity, Emotion and Meaning: Dewey's Aesthetics and Scientific Experience", 311-342), shows, starting from a series of historical examples, the intervention of aesthetic values, like beauty and harmony, in scientific theories.

The last section, "Lo estético y lo orgánico" ("The Aesthetic and the Organic") offers some insights into the properties of aesthetic pleasure, such as rhythm, balance, emotion, unity, and desire. According to Gregory F. Pappas, in the chapter entitled "La noción de equilibrio en la concepción de Dewey del ideal de vida" ("The Notion of Balance in Dewey's Conception of the Life Ideal", 343-366), the concept of balance is a central value for Dewey, not only in the formulation of his aesthetic ideas, but also in his ethics and general conception of life. The following chapter, "El pulso del proceso estético: una ilustración multicultural de la noción deweyana de ritmo" ("The Pulse of the Aesthetic Process: A Multicultural Illustration of Dewey's Concept of Rhythm", 367-384), by Gloria Luque Moya, focuses on the more formal aspects of Dewey's aesthetic. In particular, it clarifies the importance of the concept of rhythm by using the effective example of Chinese calligraphy. Guido Baggio's, "La emoción y el deseo como constituyentes de la experiencia estética" ("Emotion and Desire as Components of the Aesthetic Experience", 385-404), deals with the issue of aesthetic pleasure and its experiential nature from a psychological point of

view. The final chapter, “La unidad de la obra de arte. Variaciones pragmatistas de un tema leibniziano” (“The Unity of the Work of Art. Pragmatist Variations on a Leibnizian Theme”, 405-420) by Evelyn Vargas, explores the unity of the work of art within Dewey’s thought, through a comparison with the concept of unity in Leibniz.

Summing up, the articles of *John Dewey: una estética de este mundo* comprise an excellent book regarding the quantity as well as the quality of the texts. It is a recourse that could be useful for the specialist and also for those who have a general interest in philosophy. The main aspects to be highlighted in this book, –leaving aside a great range of insights–, are two: firstly, the several links between Dewey’s aesthetics and other branches of his thought (philosophy of education, theory of knowledge, social and political theory, etc.); secondly, the ties between the pragmatist philosopher and other important thinkers of our recent past (Boas, Gadamer, Santayana, Simmel, etc.). Without pretending to exhaust the discussion about multiple aspects of Dewey’s aesthetics, this Spanish book is an excellent example that Dewey’s theory of art has not showed evident signs of ageing. On the contrary, it claims that Dewey’s *Art as Experience* has still a lot to say about contemporary culture, times and problems.

REVIEW ESSAY OF *JOHN  
DEWEY'S DEMOCRATIC  
EDUCATION AND ITS  
INFLUENCE ON  
PEDAGOGY IN CHINA 1917-  
1937*

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John Dewey's two-year visit to China, from 1919-1921, created a shared educational experience between China and America. Therefore, it is imperative to view Dewey's visit from the perspective of cultural pluralism. Lei Wang's new book, *John Dewey's Democratic Education and its Influence on Pedagogy in China 1917-1937*, echoes the theme of diversity in education. This review aims to help readers better understand her work. I will first state the book's primary contribution and its significance to Deweyan research domestically and internationally. Then I will focus on the most promising feature of this scholarly work. Finally, I will inquire into a few disparities between Lei Wang's writing and my own research on this topic to open a dialogue with the author and readers of *Dewey Studies*.

### **Significance and Contributions**

John Dewey's sojourn in China from 1919 to 1921 is one of the most fascinating episodes in the educational history of modern China. Under Dewey's influence, Chinese devotees of Dewey endeavored between 1920s and 1930s to adopt, transfer, and apply the American philosopher's pragmatism to Chinese education. Paradoxically, for decades, one of the least publicized aspects of John Dewey's scholarly work has been his influence on Chinese society. On the one hand, since 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in China, John Dewey and his Chinese disciples were labeled as the advocates of American imperialism or being in collusion with it. As a result, Dewey's pragmatism inevitably became the target of fierce attack in China between 1950s and 1970s. Not surprisingly, for Western scholars, in particular American Deweyan scholars, Dewey's role in modern Chinese education had been downplayed or neglected for a long time.

Fortunately, Deweyan studies eventually returned to the

Chinese intellectual community with China's advent into the period of Reopening and Economic Reform since the late 1970's. In fact, in recent years we have witnessed a resurgence in interest and remarkable progress in scholarly work relevant to Dewey's effect on China. Nowadays, Deweyan scholars from both China and the U.S increasingly spotlight Dewey's connection to China, studying this subject from a variety of perspectives. Specifically, during 2019, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dewey's arrival in China for a two-year visit, both Chinese and international scholars from interdisciplinary approaches worked cooperatively to promote the studies of Dewey's visit. Against the backdrop of the scholars' growing engagement in Deweyan studies on China, as a German-trained scholar in the field of education, Dr. Lei Wang contributed her seminal work to the international dialogue; her book comes out at the right time and in the right atmosphere.

Lei Wang's research objective is twofold. First, Wang sets out to discuss "Dewey's expedition to China from 1919 to 1921 and his influence on Chinese educational practice in the year 1917 to 1937." (1). Second, the book aims to "examine in particular Dewey's efforts to use pragmatism and democratic education as a tool for coping with social, economic, and cultural change" (1). In other words, Lei Wang's book attempts to answer two questions: What kind of influence did Dewey bring to Chinese pedagogy in 1917-1937? And how did Dewey's Chinese disciples apply Dewey's pragmatism to Chinese social and cultural reality? In my judgment, the first question is a crucial one. The answer to the second question is closely intertwined with how we answer the first one.

Lei Wang's book consists of 12 chapters, which could be divided roughly into five sections. Chapter One aims to explain her work program, including topics, research questions, literature, method, and significance, etc. Chapters 2-4 should be considered the second section, which introduces Dewey's life and ideas and

contextualizes his sojourn in China historically and culturally. The third section, covering chapters 5-6, explores the theoretical aspects of Dewey's stay in China through interpreting the American philosopher's lectures in China, and analyzing limitations, misunderstandings, and translation defects in the lectures. The fourth section, made up of chapters 7-10, provides a comprehensive insight into Dewey's influence on Chinese education between the 1920s and 1930s, combining the case study of Tao Xingzhi and Hu Shih. In the final section consisting of chapters 11 and 12, the author offers a retrospective look at Dewey's influence on Chinese education, followed by a concise conclusion on the central topics and research findings of her book.

In general, Lei Wang's work demonstrates a solid structure and significant highlights, together with providing critical analysis and discussion. In terms of the history of Chinese education in the Republican Period, and the comparative educational study of China and the U.S, her book presents a profound and innovative contribution to Dewey research. Meanwhile, for scholars from German-speaking countries, the book is especially useful and informative. Her substantial work also adds weight to Chinese scholarship relevant to the study of Dewey's impact on Chinese education, simultaneously strengthening ties between the Dewey Center at the University of Cologne and the Dewey Center at Fudan University.

### **Greatest Strength**

From my perspective, the most promising feature of Lei Wang's book is chapter 5, which investigates some misunderstandings and translation errors in Dewey's lectures in China. During his two-year stay in China, Dewey made over 200 speeches in public, accompanied by his Chinese students or followers as interpreters.

Since Dewey left for the U.S in July 1921, his Chinese disciples subsequently published the Chinese version of Dewey's lectures under the title of *Five Major Lectures of John Dewey* (杜威五大演讲). Unfortunately, so far Deweyan researchers have had difficulty locating the original English manuscript of the American philosopher's Chinese lectures. Further, the current English version of Dewey's Chinese lecture series should be considered works of retranslation, which had been completed by a group of Deweyan scholars between 1970 and 1980s, based on the Chinese translation manuscripts. As a result, Dewey scholars have had for a long time to rely on the non-original English version of Dewey's Chinese lecture series.

Dr. Wang seeks to identify and rectify significant distortions in Chinese readings of Dewey's philosophy, as well as to locate nuanced disparities on certain subjects between Dewey's writings or lectures and his Chinese students' translation and interpretation. For the scholars studying Dewey's visit to China, a shortage of English manuscripts of Dewey's Chinese lectures indeed poses a great challenge to understanding Dewey's interactions with China holistically and accurately.

In the face of this challenge, Lei Wang painstakingly works to uncover Dewey's actual influence on China. First, she undertakes an intensive literature review to grasp Dewey's pragmatism as a whole. Her reading covers a wide range of materials, including Dewey's correspondence and essays, his textbook on democracy and education, archive documents and biographies, as well as relevant secondary documents. Second, she uses her literature review as a yardstick in reviewing Chinese readings of Dewey's philosophy and the English version of Dewey's speeches in China translated back from Chinese, Lei Wang is able to interrogate their authenticity, interpolations, and exact meanings.

According to Lei Wang's literature research, there are three

central misunderstandings and misinterpretations of Dewey's fundamental ideas by Chinese scholars and educators. After comparing Dewey's philosophy with Dr. Sun Yat-sen's idea carefully, Wang realizes that Dr. Sun's "To know is difficult and to act is easy (知难行易)" is a total reversal of Dewey's epistemology, in that it called for blindly following the political leadership in promoting nationalism. The second significant misunderstanding unearthed in Wang's research is that Chinese scholars' translation misinterpreted Dewey's account of the relation between the individual and society. The third central misunderstanding is about Chinese educators' distortion of Dewey's child-centered methodology.

There is little doubt about Lei Wang's solid scholarly competence in investigating, organizing, identifying, and interpreting an abundance of primary and secondary documents. Her inquiry into Dewey's lectures in China fills a research gap, which has been left unfilled and unexamined by Deweyan researchers for decades. Dr. Wang's thorough study undoubtedly opens a correct pathway through which both Chinese and international scholars can access and assess a wide range of documents relevant to Dewey's trip to China.

### **Discussion**

In general, Dr. Wang makes her entrance into John Dewey scholarship with a comprehensive study of Dewey's educational experience in Chinese culture and society. Nevertheless, I find that there are a few issues with this book, calling for some critical discussion. First of all, regarding the title of the book, Dewey's influence on "Chinese pedagogy" very possibly became the most important and problematic aspect in Lei Wang's works. However, the definition of "pedagogy" in this book remains somewhat vague.

In the section on “Method and curriculum in pragmatic pedagogy” in chapter 2, Dr. Wang elaborates on the key components embraced by Dewey’s idea of pedagogy: “Experience as a basic principle; Reference to action; Inquiry-five steps of the thinking process, and Method of occupation” (36-42). In Wang’s view, Dewey’s idea of pedagogy mainly involves teaching-learning activities, the objectivity of schooling, the methodology of thinking, and vocational training in education. Thus, Wang seems to use the word “pedagogy” in a narrow sense. That is to say, the definition of “pedagogy” in Wang’s writing does not exceed the scope of teaching-learning experience, the acquisition of scientific method, and school-society interactions.

However, in her subsequent discussion, Lei Wang integrates her discourse on the Deweyan Chinese students’ (in particular, Guo Bingwen and Jiang Mengling) attitude toward Western and Chinese culture into chapter 7, “Dewey’s influence on pedagogical professions” (190). By the standard of the definition of “pedagogy” in the early part of this book, the content regarding the Chinese scholars’ balanced cultural perspective might not fit well. The earlier definition of pedagogy needs to be clarified and broadened to encompass its later use.

In addition, I am not convinced by Wang’s contention that Dewey’s observation and understanding of Chinese society during his two-year sojourn exerted a tremendous impact on his Chinese students’ efforts to balance Chinese culture with Western culture. For example, in citing one paragraph from Dewey’s lecture in China, Wang argues:

Dewey reminded his Chinese colleagues not to blindly follow Western experiences and theories but to examine them in Chinese practice with an unbiased attitude, in order to create their own educational system (190).

It is worthwhile noting both Guo Bingwen and Jiang Menglin had already formed just such a balanced attitude toward Western and Chinese culture during their pursuit of doctorates in the U.S. before Dewey visited China. For example, in 1914, Guo Bingwen in his dissertation “Chinese System of Public Education” expressed his conviction of building a common ground between Chinese and Western culture (Guo, 1915). Likewise, Jiang Menglin’s dissertation “A Study in Chinese Principles of Education”, which was finished in 1917, also embraces a comparative perspective between Chinese and Western cultural systems. To support her argument on the influence of Dewey’s Chinese experience on his Chinese disciples’ ideas of combining Chinese and Western culture, Wang referred to an article titled “From the Old to the New”, which was written by Jiang Menglin after he returned to China from the U.S (190). However, in reviewing Jiang’s dissertation and autobiography *Tides from the West*, I sense that his insights into the synthesizing of Chinese tradition and Western knowledge did not stem from Dewey’s influence. Instead, in terms of such a cultural syncretism, the article “From the Old to the New” should be more accurately regarded as an extension of Jiang’s own dissertation.

In my view, Dr. Wang might attempt to construct a stronger logical line between her case studies and the rest of the book. In chapters 8- 9 she devotes her attention to Tao Xingzhi and Hu Shih, as the two most prominent examples of Dewey’s Chinese students transferring and applying his pragmatism to Chinese reality. In chapter 9, Wang focuses on the presentation of Tao Xingzhi’s Life Education from the perspective of the pragmatic philosophy of education, providing her critical analysis of Tao’s Xiao Zhuang experimental school (211-231). Of note, Tao’s educational innovation in Xiao Zhuang involves the reconstruction of teaching-learning-action relationships, curriculum development, the

reshaping of schooling objectivity, as well as the combination of life experience and education. In using the definition of “pedagogy”, Wang’s writing of Tao Xingzhi in chapter 8 is very relevant to the central focus in this book, i.e. Dewey’s influence on Chinese pedagogical reform between 1917 and 1937.

Chapter 9, however, concentrates on the application of Dewey’s philosophy to cultural renewal by investigating Hu Shih’s concept of social, democratic change, and cultural reconstruction (232-252). Hu Shih’s language reform and reorganization of national heritage went far beyond the scope of Tao’s Life Education. He views education broadly. Dewey’s influence on Hu Shih has hardly been restricted to just the domain of the teaching profession. The inclusion of the case study on Hu Shih undoubtedly helps readers better understand Dewey’s multi-dimensional connection with China, but readers would gain from a clear account of the connection between the Hu Shih’s case study and Dewey’s influence over Chinese pedagogy.

My final concern is about how to specify certain underlying themes in different phases of the Chinese transformation into modernization. While providing a historical and cultural contextual analysis of Dewey’s visit, Lei Wang states that such a long transformation covered the four phases in an orderly manner. She points out that:

In the beginning, the Chinese were convinced that transformation on the military level was unsuccessful. The second phase of the reform attempt therefore focused on political change, but the experiment with democracy in the young republic failed. The third phase set its sights on economic and technological modernization. In the period of the Movement for a New Culture, according to Dewey’s view, the understanding of Western culture reached a deeper

level. The understanding of democracy and general education, which had led to the reform of the language, among other things, predictably resulted in a reform at the intellectual level (52-54).

For Lei Wang, the third phase refers to “the period of the golden age of Chinese national industry between 1914 and 1922, when Chinese society became more active and the process of social change accelerated” (55). I agree that social, political, and cultural changes in China since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century deeply affected John Dewey’s visit to China. Nevertheless, in reading this book, I found myself wrestling with the question whether the scholar can identify the golden age of Chinese national industry between 1914 and 1922 as an individual stage of China’s transformation to modernization. Perhaps we can adopt the Chinese-American historian Ray-Huang (黄仁宇)’s concept of Macro History to view the process of China’s transformation. According to this concept, the historian should deal with the general direction, rather than the specific details in history. This approach correctly emphasizes the importance of perceiving history from a long-term vision, concentrating on the structural transformation and the trend of changes in the unfolding of history.

From the perspective of Macro History, it is appropriate for historians to categorize the course of Chinese history since the late Qing dynasty into three significant phases: from 1840 to 1895 as the first phase focusing on the introduction of foreign science and technology into the country; from 1895 to 1912 as the second phase pursuing change in the political system; and from 1912 to 1928 as the third phase concentrating on learning foreign ideas and thought. Correspondingly, the underlying themes penetrating these three phases in succession are: self-strengthening, reformation-revolution, and enlightenment. Within such a context, I believe that this short period (8 years) called the golden age of Chinese national industry

could not be described as indicating the general direction of Chinese history. Instead, it should be thought of in terms of specific details between the stage of political institution reform and the stage of intellectual reform. Moreover, it is important to realize that the introduction of Western economics and industry into China by the Qing government occurred during the Self-Strengthening Movement between the 1860s and 1890s.

I share Dr. Wang's view that Professor Dewey's visit to China was definitely one of the most important historical episodes of cultural exchanges between China and the West since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a group of modern Chinese intellectuals, Dewey's Chinese devotees witnessed and participated in a cultural mingling between China and the West. However, in keeping with a macro perspective of Chinese history, for Chinese intellectuals who wanted to achieve national salvation, the introduction of John Dewey's pragmatism to China is a reflection of and an extension of their pursuit of Western culture from the stage of military technology and political institution, to the stage of borrowing systems of ideas. At the same time, Chinese scholars' cultural identities were also undergoing a transition from Confucian scholar-apprentices to modern intellectuals, as China was attempting to transport itself from a dynastic state to a modern nation-state.

Overall, Lei Wang's book is a must-read for all scholars in pursuit of studying Dewey's influence on China and the history and development of Chinese education of the Republican period. The book is also valuable for readers interested in international Dewey research and comparative educational studies. Without exaggeration, the author emphatically succeeds in her goal of demonstrating Dewey's philosophical significance from a non-western perspective. At the same time, the book also provides a critical overview of Dewey's observation of Chinese culture, politics, and society through a close reading of his original writings. More importantly, Dr.

Wang's effort to examine the authenticity of the translations of Dewey's Chinese lectures indeed contributes to the Dewey community's understanding of the American philosopher's influence on China. In the end, I believe that both Chinese and international scholars will benefit from Wang's study, notwithstanding a few disagreements I have mentioned.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH  
DAVID GRANGER: A  
DECADE OF EDITING  
*EDUCATION AND CULTURE*

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*The editors of Dewey Studies asked Jessica Heybach, the current editor of the John Dewey Society journal Education and Culture, to interview the previous editor, David Granger. David served Education and Culture from 2010 to 2020 and has some important insights about trends in Dewey scholarship. The interview begins with an introduction by Jessica Heybach.*

Recently, I had the opportunity to interview the former editor of *Education and Culture*, David Granger, and to learn more about his experience heading up the journal. David's long tenure as the editor of E&C was from 2010-2020, where he oversaw twenty issues of the journal. He stewarded E&C through significant changes in the field associated with the proliferation of journal choices for authors and the explosion of open-access journals. David offers sage advice for current and future editors of academic journals in-general, and Dewey scholars in particular. The stylistic shifts in author voice from formal to informal, as well as the diversity of those engaging in Deweyan scholarship, is reflective of changing cultural and academic norms.

As the current editor of E&C, I already feel the weight of David's insights as presented throughout the interview. The breadth of topics taken up within Deweyan studies is staggering. Similar to David, my knowledge of Dewey's canon was immediately challenged upon taking the role of editor. As a field of study that sits at the intersection of philosophy and education, Deweyan studies demands a certain brand of interdisciplinary skill that can be a challenge for any one scholar to attain. Authors, as well as reviewers, straddle this artificial divide and finding the right balance is necessary to speak to the different audiences within Dewey studies.

David ends this interview with questions all editors struggle with, including "what is the 'right' amount of editing necessary for publications?" I might add that finding the appropriate reviewers for articles to ensure that topics are fully engaged is emerging as another perennial dilemma.

It is quite an accomplishment to shepherd any journal, let alone one riddled with disciplinary fault lines, through ten years of development. I thank David for his time, expertise, and commitment to *Education and Culture*.

*JH: How would you characterize your experience as editor of Education and Culture?*

*DG:* I found editing the journal a very rewarding experience. To be honest, I was a little concerned at first with the idea of serving in the position while living in rural upstate NY, but the journal submission system works very effectively, and I received a lot of support from the staff at Purdue University Press and former editor AG Rud.

Being connected with so many people interested in Dewey's life and work, both authors and manuscript reviewers, was deeply edifying, especially when the journal began to attract increasing numbers of scholars working outside schools or departments of education: folks in English, the natural sciences, political science, psychology and, of course, philosophy. The fact that Dewey contributed to scholarship in so many areas really made this unique experience possible. I certainly learned a great deal about Dewey during my 10 years as editor of *Education & Culture*. The experience also prompted me to reflect a lot on my own scholarship, both its strengths and deficiencies, but especially the latter.

*JH: What were your favorite articles that you published? Why were they your favorites?*

I enjoyed many of the articles published in *Education and Culture* and for a variety of reasons, so I'll just mention a particular issue of the journal. Volume 32, No.1, Spring 2016 included many engaging and well-written articles that really showcased the depth and breadth of Dewey's scholarship. It also contained several very compelling pieces

from the 2015 JDS symposium “The Legacy of Maxine Greene: Critical Engagements with Her Philosophy of Democratic Education.” The articles from the symposium were made that much more special by the inclusion of a previously unpublished manuscript by Maxine entitled “Liberalism and Beyond: Toward a Public Philosophy of Education,” made available to the journal through the good graces of Jim Giarelli and Maxine Greene’s estate. All of the topics addressed in that issue are both timely and urgent, perhaps even more now than at the time of publication. In my experience, this issue of *Education and Culture* is very much worth revisiting.

*JH: What content or stylistic trends in academic writing did you notice over the course of your editorship?*

*DG:* There are several things I could mention here, but I’ll just choose one that I didn’t foresee when I became editor of the journal. I found over time more authors writing in what one might call a conversational style, including frequent use of the first person and often with reference to the authors’ personal experiences. That made it especially important to look closely at the bases of authors’ arguments and the conclusions they were trying to draw from them. Sometimes a manuscript was very readable, making it easy to connect with the author, but the argument wasn’t sufficiently strong, or the conclusion overstated what the argument had (or could have) accomplished. What made the trend that much more interesting, and at times personally and professionally challenging, was that I would include myself among those authors preferring a more conversational writing style. (Of course, too, there’s the further complication that Dewey is known for writing in a rather impersonal and abstract way, such that his personal voice seems to many readers frustratingly absent.)

*JH: What aspects of the publishing experience do you feel should be discussed more openly amongst academics and graduate students coming up in the discipline?*

DG: I'll mention just a few things here. They might seem relatively minor on the surface, but they really stood out to me as editor of *Education & Culture*. The first is the critical importance of writing clarity. As we all know, academics tend to use big, technical words. At times those are appropriate, and perhaps even necessary. But many times this practice also seems forced and unnecessary. When experienced scholars develop the habit, I think it sets a bad example for graduate students and other beginner scholars.

As an editor naturally concerned with clarity, I would always rather read two relatively brief sentences written in a very clear and straightforward (even "choppy") way than one longer sentences with lots of technical verbiage and punctuation. In my experience, very few writers can manage the latter with (what I would consider) the necessary clarity. Finally, I would suggest to beginning writers that, if there is a word being used in a very specific way, keep using it, even if it gets repetitive. I know some authors think it detracts from their writing if their vocabulary seems repetitive, but it's very confusing to readers when important concepts or ideas are suddenly referenced using alternative vocabulary. It's easy for the reader to think the author is referring to something different when they are really only fishing for alternative vocabulary because they think it's stylistically preferred.

*JH: What were some of the more interesting experiences you had and/or ethical challenges you faced as a journal editor?*

DG: Whenever I rejected a manuscript it created an ethical challenge! Even if I was very confident about my decision, it was sometimes very tough. For much of my tenure as editor of *Education & Culture*, I

was also serving on the personnel committee in the School of Education at Geneseo. I was functioning as a gatekeeper of sorts in both capacities. As a result, I was always very aware of the potential consequences for authors of my decisions. Though I obviously depended a lot on manuscript ratings and written feedback from reviewers, I found it very important to read the reviews carefully and to make sure they were equitable and appropriate in tone. This, I would like to think, made the review process as educational as possible (a “teachable moment” of sorts) for the authors, especially with those who were new to the journal submission and publication process. Still, in the end the editor inevitably has to make some very difficult publication decisions.

*JH: What lessons did you learn as editor that you would want to pass on to future editors?*

*DG:* I learned very early on not to procrastinate! Reading new manuscripts as soon as they were submitted and, if warranted, sending them out for external review asap turned out to be very important in managing the workload effectively. In fact, I found that a timely but thoughtful publication decision really benefited all parties. I should say, too, that over the last few years of my tenure as editor I began to send pieces that I knew weren't publishable out for review if the author showed considerable promise as a developing scholar. I would let the reviewer(s) know that I realized a particular manuscript wasn't publishable, but that I was hoping to make the situation a positive learning experience for the author. Our *Education & Culture* reviewers were routinely willing to oblige. Thank you!

In addition, learning to manage reviewer requests so that I spread the workload around and found the right reviewer for each manuscript took some time. I tried not to take advantage of people's good will in serving as reviewers, but some did go above and beyond

on several occasions. That was very much appreciated. Expanding and deepening the academic scope of the stable of reviewers helped with managing reviewer requests as well. In most cases, I was able to locate reviewers in no more than two or three attempts.

Finally, I found that learning to edit manuscripts the right amount and the right way was very important, especially as the journal received increasing numbers of manuscripts from non-native English speakers/writers. It's important to maintain the authentic voice of the author while also attending effectively to readability. There is no magic formula here, and I'm sure every editor handles the issue somewhat differently. Looking back, I feel fortunate that, after editing ten years of *Education & Culture* and over one hundred manuscripts accepted for publication, I never had an author complain that I was too heavy-handed with my editing or interfered with what they were trying to communicate. Of course, that doesn't mean no one ever felt that way! (If I remember correctly, many of Dewey's submissions to *The New Republic* were edited, sometimes almost rewritten, before publication for the benefit of the readership with nary a complaint from Dewey!)