THE ECHO OF GOD'S LAUGHTER: AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND THE

VIRTUE OF OPENNESS WITHIN A

PRAGMATIST ETHICS

by

AARON A. RODRIGUEZ

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Student: Aaron A. Rodriguez

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Dr. Mark Johnson	Chairperson
Dr. Naomi Zack	Core Member
Dr. Colin Koopman	Core Member
Dr. Michael Stern	Institutional Representative

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy	Vice President for Research and Innovation; Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Immanuel Kant's claim that morality is a matter of rational judgment is perhaps the apotheosis of a tradition within ethical philosophy that sought certainty with regards to how one ought to live or what one should to do in any given situation. Although this strand still lingers in various guises in contemporary moral philosophy, pragmatism has set itself up as a response to this quest for ethical certainty. Yet, with its anti-absolutist commitments, pragmatist approaches to ethics struggle with the articulation of a prescriptive moral philosophy. Virtue ethics, however, with its focus on the general dispositions of agents, suggests itself as a viable model for a normative pragmatist moral theory. Moreover, in moving away from the view that moral progress is a form of knowledge-acquisition, pragmatist ethics opens the door for a host of possible influences for our ethical development. In this dissertation, I argue that aesthetic experience, as elicited by the work of art, can significantly inform our ethical lives by cultivating in us what I consider to be the cardinal pragmatist virtue, *openness*. For, not only does this disposition, which John Dewey describes as a "hospitality towards the new" and a "willingness to be affected by experience," prove salutary in regards to the pursuits of individual flourishing and social melioration, but one can also construct a system of norms and values upon it while not

contradicting pragmatism's anti-absolutist commitments. Engagements with art can help

foster this virtue, I argue, because the work of art helps unsettle the conceptual systems of

interpretation we often over-rely on in moral inquiry and thus expands our horizons of

possibility for human meaning and action.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Aaron A. Rodriguez

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, Philosophy, 2014, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, Philosophy, 2011, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy and Psychology, 2006, University of New Mexico

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Ethics and Moral Philosophy
Aesthetics
Pragmatism

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, 2008-2014

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2008-2014

Oregon Humanities Center Dissertation Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2013

Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship Honorable Mention, National Academy
of the Sciences, 2012 and 2013

George Rebec Prize for Outstanding Graduate Essay, Department of Philosophy,
University of Oregon, 2011

Paideia Prize for Outstanding Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of
Philosophy, University of Oregon, 2010

Promising Scholars Fellowship, Graduate School, University of Oregon, 2007

PUBLICATIONS:

Rodriguez, Aaron. 2013. Review of *American Philosophy: The Basics*, by Nancy
   Stanlick. *Teaching Philosophy* 36: 440-4.

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   Potential of Aesthetic Experience." *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 9: 27-39.
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To Sage, for his wisdom, and to Sol, for his light.

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UNCERTAIN MORALITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO A

PRAGMATIST APPROACH TO ETHICS

> [H]e looked out to where the grass was running in the wind
> under the cold starlight as if it were the earth itself hurtling headlong
> and he said softly before he slept again that the one thing he knew
> of all things claimed to be known was that there was no certainty to any of it.
> - Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*

Introduction

In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera articulates his philosophy of writing, which is framed in large part by a rebuke of dogmatism and self-certainty in literature, criticism, and life itself. In the midst of this critique, Kundera notes, "[t]he *agélastes*, the non-thought of received ideas, and kitsch are one and the same, the three-headed enemy of the art born as the echo of God's laughter, the art that created the fascinating imaginative realm where no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood" (Kundera 1986, 164).[1] In mentioning the *agélastes*, Kundera is paying homage to François Rabelais, who used the term to refer to those who do not laugh. The rhetoric of Kundera's criticism is also inspired by a Jewish proverb: "Man thinks, God laughs." Kundera interprets this proverb as God laughing in the face of the hubris we exhibit with respect to our intellect, our thinking. Those who do not laugh, then, have themselves never heard God's laughter, and think that human thought somehow gets in touch with absolute truth. It is easy to see how such a mindset would lend itself to the non-thought of received ideas, and the kitsch, by which Kundera means an aesthetic

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[1] All of the citations in this dissertation are made in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style, except for citations of Dewey, which are made according to *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*.

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which denies the uncertain and misanthropic realities of existence. As I hope to show, this three-headed enemy is also the antithesis of an approach to ethics fashioned within the philosophical tradition of pragmatism, an approach which also contains many artistic tropes. Genuine art, according to Kundera, is born from the recognition of human limitations and vulnerability; though this realization does not disquiet. Indeed, for both Kundera and pragmatists, embracing the uncertainty of experience opens us up to the wealth of possibilities for living a human life.

This dissertation will focus on two seemingly distinct concerns: (1) taking into consideration its anti-absolutist assumptions, how can a pragmatist approach to ethics put forth anything resembling a prescriptive ethical philosophy?; and (2) what significance, if any, can an encounter with a work of art have for our ethical lives? However separate these concerns may seem on the surface, it is my contention that the two are actually closely related. Indeed, as will be shown, a pragmatic conception of ethics, one that draws heavily on classical American pragmatists such as William James and John Dewey, contemporary neopragmatist Richard Rorty, as well as the "continental pragmatist" Friedrich Nietzsche, leads one away from searching for ethical guidance in absolute principles, universal systems, or dogmatic rules, and towards our lived experience itself. In particular, within such a pragmatist framework, the moral import of art, and specifically visual art, itself gains a renewed respect.[2]

In attempting to erect a bridge between his Second (1788) and Third (1790) *Critiques*, Immanuel Kant might have been the first to suggest in some detail the moral implications of aesthetic experience in his proclamation that beauty is the symbol of

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[2] Although certain strands of moral philosophy employ a distinction between "ethics" and "morality," I will be using the terms interchangeably to connote the basic normative questions of how one *ought* to live and what one *should* do in a particular situation.

morality.[3] Roughly a century later, Leo Tolstoy, in his "What is Art" (1896) argued that the primary criterion for judging a work of art ought to be how infectious the moral feelings it evoked are (not to mention that those moral feelings should line up with Tolstoy's own Christian commitments). And, in his own writings on art in the early to mid-20th century, Heidegger himself averred that a work of art informs and reflects a historical community's sense of what *is* and what *matters*. Heidegger also, however, recognized, echoing G. W. F. Hegel, that art's station within society is in decline, and that instead of giving "to things their look" and giving "to humanity their outlook on themselves" (Heidegger 2002, 21), art is being reduced to mere entertaining distraction, frivolous ornamentation, or status symbols for the upper class.

Peruse any art gallery, museum, or art show and Hegel and Heidegger's dour verdict on art may very well be thought vindicated. Moreover, with many school district and city budgets feeling the pinch of the global economic crisis, the dramatic decrease in public funding for arts programs and public arts projects illustrates the devaluation of art within present-day American society. Difficult and uncertain times such as we are now in typically bring to light the unsaid priorities of a given society and, as such, the depreciation of art has come into relief.

It is hard to deny that we are indeed in a time of drastic transition on a world-historical level. The global economic crisis, the unrelenting and exponential growth of

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[3] For the purposes of this dissertation, an aesthetic experience refers to the human encounter with a work of art. Much of what will be said regarding art's significance for ethics may very well apply to the appreciation of nature as well, yet the difference between the two seems substantial enough to warrant a much more detailed treatment of nature's aesthetic value – a treatment I unfortunately do not have the space for here. Additionally, in subsequent chapters it will become clear that I am electing to focus on the visual arts in particular. The aesthetic theory with which I will be working, I believe, accommodates all forms of art. One reason for this choice, then, is simply to avoid having to engage the subtleties of each art form. Also, much has already been written on the ethically-transformative potential of music, tragedy, and literature. Visual arts, on the other hand, especially when not thought of as carrying with it a "moral" or as propaganda, has not really been considered as being morally-salutary.

technology, concerns about human overpopulation, intense geopolitical changes, and other such instabilities have bred an air of uncertainty. Within our own society, this uncertainty has seemingly led to a retreat to convention, as we lack the conceptual resources necessary to think through the novel problems we are now facing. Experience has no doubt become rather complicated, yet we are all too ready to simplify this complexity by appealing to outworn systems of thought comprised of traditional ideas about such concepts as freedom, personhood, good/bad and right/wrong. Instead of searching for ways to remap and transform human experience, we are shoddily attempting to patch the crust of convention so that we have something supposedly stable on which to meander into the future.

Within ethical and moral philosophy, this retreat to the traditional and conventional is likewise apparent. Although normative ethics are reappearing in certain guises, the basic Socratic question of how one *ought* to live has been relegated beneath metaethical projects, applied ethics' pursuit of incorrigible guides to action, and the descriptive analysis of moral concepts. Offering up novel suggestions for how we might navigate the ambiguity and complexity of our situation, in a way that does not retreat to the comfortable confines of tradition, does not seem to be of prime concern for many contemporary philosophers.

During a similar period of uncertainty, one manifested in the philosophical world by the growing skepticism concerning the notion of "Truth," G. E. Moore and other analytic philosophers elected to focus on the conceptual analysis of ethical terms. Dewey, however, despite writing during a time of radical economic, political, demographic, and technological transformation within the United States and living

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through such destabilizing events as the American Civil War and both World Wars, held

firm in his belief that the abandonment of an Archimedean point in ethics did not

necessarily lead to the abandonment of normative and practically-applicable ethical

theory. Rather, Dewey's thought, which resonates in many ways with Nietzsche's, and

which was significantly influential for Rorty, can be best understood as a philosophy

dedicated to helping us craft *flexible* guides for living and action; ones which do not

disregard the fundamental precariousness of our world. In fact, looking at Dewey's

ethical project in general, we can see how the two distinct concerns mentioned at the

outset are perhaps not as separate as first thought. That is, holding together Dewey's

normative ethics and his aesthetic theory, a theory which gives pride of place to art within

our human experience, specific ways in which an encounter with a work of art can inform

our moral development emerge.[4] Indeed, in this dissertation, I will argue that a

pragmatist approach to ethics provides a viable prescriptive moral philosophy that not

only embraces the uncertainty of our ethical lives, but also reminds us that art can be a

powerful, ethically-transformative force by fostering a certain orientation towards

experience – an orientation crowned by the virtue of *openness*.

Pragmatism's supposed immaturity

Despite its recent resurgence through philosophers such as Rorty, Hillary Putnam,

Joseph Margolis, and Richard Bernstein, pragmatism still remains on the fringes of

mainstream American and European academic philosophy. In its various attempts to

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[4] While Dewey certainly plays the lead role in this inquiry into the ethical significance of artistic
appreciation, Nietzsche and Rorty are worth singling out as the other key inspirations for this project.
Throughout the course of this dissertation, I hope to show how, instead of fussing over their various
disagreements and divergences, holding them together in conversation supplements each thinker's views in
a way that particularly illuminates the value that art can have for our ethical lives.

undermine the conventional notions of truth, objectivity, and representationalist models of experience which have dominated much of the western philosophical tradition, pragmatism clearly cuts against the grain. This supposed heresy committed by the pragmatists against the golden idols of Plato, Descartes, and Kant, coupled with a superficial understanding of just what pragmatism is all about, has led to the almost out-of-hand dismissal of most its proposals. Nowhere is this chilly reception on the part of mainstream philosophy more apparent than in pragmatist approaches to ethics; for, in echoing Nietzsche and denying a God's-eye-view perspective of reality, and hence the possibility of absolute foundations for knowledge and morality, pragmatists often get branded with the scarlet letter R.[5] This disdain for moral relativism lies in what Rorty thinks is those critics' belief that "unless there is something absolute, something which shares God's implacable refusal to yield to human weakness, we have no reason to go on resisting evil" (Rorty 1999, xxix).

One of my former professors, who is rather representative of the more mainstream analytic moral philosophy currently dominant in the Anglophone world, first brought to my attention this disdain for the philosophical worldview arising out of the basic commitments shared by the likes of Nietzsche, James, Dewey, and Rorty. In hearing this professor blithely belittle what he considered to be an extremely watered-down ethics coming out of pragmatist thought, one could easily get the impression that pragmatism is simply an immature philosophy, appealing to the postmodern, ironic relativism rampant amongst the current generation of American undergraduates. On this same point, Rorty notes: "Pragmatism is often said to be a distinctively American philosophy. Sometimes this is said in tones of contempt, as it was by Bertrand Russell. Russell meant that

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[5] That is, for *relativist*.

pragmatism is a shallow philosophy, suitable for an immature country" (Rorty 1999, 23). In other words, at a certain point in life, one should realize that the embracing of contingency and the worldview that follows from that acceptance can no longer be taken seriously. With maturation comes a fixity of belief, and, according to this way of thinking, that is what growing up is all about. Moreover, without something utterly foundational and immune to revision, this professor would always rhetorically ask, "What will the ironists be willing to die for?"

Despite the fundamentalist undertones of such a query, there is something telling about this interpretation of pragmatism, and it illustrates why pragmatist approaches to ethics, in particular, are not seen as credible alternatives to current traditional, mainstream moral philosophy. That is, despite its explicit attempts to unsettle the conventional concepts and distinctions which have been passed down from philosophical generation to philosophical generation, pragmatism still finds itself caught in the logic of those traditional conceptual frameworks, whereby the absence of unshakeable foundations is thought to necessarily entail some form of capricious subjective or cultural relativism.

The quest for ethical certainty

This entrapment is most apparent when contextualized within a pernicious either-or that, by my lights, continues to dog not only more everyday ethical inquiry, but also much of the landscape of moral philosophy. This either-or consists in the belief that *either* ethical prescriptions must be justified by some ahistorical, absolute foundation, such as an essential human nature, Divine Law, or transcendental Reason; *or* we are

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doomed to some form of moral skepticism, nihilistic relativism, or at the very least, the impossibility of a prescriptive ethics As Rorty disparagingly sees it, within this context, then, the aim of ethical theory should be to gradually unravel the veil of appearances occluding our moral vision in order to see moral Truth in all its magnificent and uncomplicated splendor.

The story Rorty spins of this mindset's origin is worth retelling, as it lines up nicely with Nietzsche's own history of otherworldly metaphysics, as well as Dewey's critique of the quest for certainty that has plagued the philosophical tradition of the West.[6] One of the widely accepted interpretations of the birth of philosophy in ancient Greece nearly 2500 years ago describes how philosophers, as opposed to the poets such as Hesiod and the rhetorically-gifted sophists, attempted to ground their descriptions about what *is*, as well as their prescriptions about how things *ought* to be, in rational justifications. In other words, what Plato sought was an indubitable justification for Socrates' argument against Thrasymachus that justice is not merely the will to power of the strong over and against the weak. What was wanted was something certain, a justification underlying belief that was as incorrigible as the geometer's proof that the sum of the angles of any triangle is equal to 180 degrees. Regarding Socrates' seemingly simple question of how one ought to live, however, such verification proves much harder to provide.

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[6] In what follows, I will be discussing the relatively standard and mainstream interpretations of the Platonic-Christian-Kantian tradition. I do acknowledge that Plato does not have to be read as a Platonist, that there are forms of Christian morality that are not absolutist, and that some do not see Kant as the metaphysician *par excellence*. My reason for using the Nietzschean narrative about this tradition is that it is the reading of that tradition to which pragmatism is directly responding. Furthermore, as noted, especially with regards to Christian morality, these are the mainstream interpretations of these approaches, and, as such, they are the ones that have had the most profound effect on our common sense views of morality.

There does, though, seem to be a nagging desire among humans for an unwavering beacon to guide us through the inescapable complexities and ambiguity of our situation. We want to *know* that we are doing the right thing, that we are living the right way. We want to somehow discover the one correct answer to the Socratic question mentioned above. As Nietzsche and Dewey both observe, we yearn for something stable, universal, and absolute to redeem the impermanence, contingency, and perspectivism inherent in human existence. Thus arose the various conceptions of the "True World," which Nietzsche sketched out in a polemical dig at otherworldly metaphysics, that were supposed to be the home of our ethical guiding light – a home beyond the vagaries of our world of mere shadows and appearances that could allow for the certainty we so desired (Nietzsche 1976b, 485).

According to Nietzsche, however, this appeal to a redemptive "True World" which transcends our earthly abode did not die out with the replacement of Platonism by Christianity within the movement of western thought, but rather transformed itself from the Platonic realm of the Forms into God's Kingdom of Heaven. As the Divine Law has been appealed to by numerous moralists as the very source of the deepest intuitions of our conscience,[7] the influence that Christian morality had, and continues to have, on ethical philosophy cannot be understated. And, needless to say, such an omnipotent source of moral direction placates that longing for certitude mentioned above.

But, as the story goes, with Newton's science spurring on the Enlightenment, reason replaced God as the guarantor of moral judgment. Yet, this shift only bolstered the ambitious pursuit of unshakable foundations for ethics; the acme of which is found in

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[7] C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* (1952) is but one example of such an appeal. Moreover, the traction his ideas gained evince the allure of this approach to explaining conscience.

the work of Kant. With his categorical imperative, Kant proposed to explain, as he did

concerning scientific judgments about nature, how it is possible to have certainty

regarding how we ought to live. It was pure practical reason that Kant leaned on for this

demonstration of objective moral judgment, and through explaining its workings, he

attempted to show how absolute moral principles could be generated *a priori*. So, while

this approach to morality may have replaced God with the supreme faculty of Reason as

the source of our conscience, it nonetheless removed empirical considerations from the

realm of the ethical.

The tie that binds these standard interpretations of the prescriptive ethics of Plato,

Christianity, and Kant, then, could thus easily be described as the attempt to drastically

simplify the complexity of experience and provide people with the reassurance that they

are living *the* one right way or doing *the* right thing in any situation. Such a guarantee

was said to come from the fact that the *good* person was indeed actualizing her essential

human potential by getting into contact with some ideal, non-human reality, whether it be

the Form of the Good, the Kingdom of Heaven, or the supersensible, noumenal realm of

Morality. And, again, only with such absolute, ahistorical underpinnings could humanity

be sure that they were headed in the right direction and avoiding evil. Yet, according to

Dewey, subscribers to this black-and-white view of morality are driven by an urge for

"certainty," an urge that is "born of timidity and nourished by love of authoritative

prestige," and which "has led to the idea that absence of immutably fixed and universally

applicable ready-made principles is equivalent to moral chaos" (MW 14:165).

Admittedly, much of the story I have been telling is also gleaned from Rorty's

reading of the western tradition's view of moral progress; that is, as something akin to the

acquisition of knowledge through reason's gradual dismantling of appearances. As

noted, within such an understanding, there is not a lot of grey area in the realm of ethics

and morality. Right is right, wrong is wrong, good and evil are absolute and certain.

Hence we are faced with the dilemma mentioned above: either morality is articulated and

justified in terms that are universal, eternal, and necessary, or it is merely as relative and

subjective as, to use Kant's parlance, a judgment of the agreeable.[8]

A pragmatist ethics, then, is best understood as a response to this tradition; a

tradition which has undoubtedly found footing within our everyday view of morality.

One of the most distinguishing features of pragmatism is that it embraces the changing

and contingent nature of our experience. This leads pragmatists to stress the contextual

aspects of our moral lives, thereby rejecting the black-and-white view just described.

Yet, despite the common misunderstanding, pragmatists are not anti-theory, and do want

to say something positive about how we might live our lives in a way that promotes

human flourishing. A positive pragmatist ethical philosophy, then, will not seek to

propound any fixed principles, empty formalist moral theories, or absolute conceptions of

the *summum bonnum.* Instead, ethical prescriptions become, within this pragmatist

framework, matters of comportment. That is, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty, for instance,

put forth normative ethics that come in the form of a sketch of an ideal orientation

towards experience. In lieu of providing incorrigible action-guidance, pragmatists tend to

focus on the sorts of character traits a person should have so as to equip them to deal with

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[8] Now, to be fair, there certainly have been exceptions to this view of ethics that have appeared throughout the history of philosophy. David Hume, for instance, actually took a much more naturalistic approach to morality in proclaiming it to be rooted in the emotions and, therefore, he argued that moral progress was a matter of cultivating certain sentiments. Within the traditional framework just discussed, however, emotions and our passional nature are the very things that must be overcome in ethical conduct, as they arise from the animalistic side of us, "rational animals," and only obscure the truth from our moral vision.

the particular contexts of a situation in an ethically-responsible fashion.[9] As will be seen,

pragmatism redescribes ethical deliberation as a form of problem solving. There are

problems that arise with respect to how we care for ourselves and our individual pursuits

of flourishing, and there are problems that arise because of the ineluctable interpersonal

dimension of experience. The basic Socratic question of how one ought to live, thus

conceived, could potentially be thought of as the question of how we can become better

problem-solvers.

Nietzschean, Deweyan, and Rortian pragmatism

Before ariculating some of the central commitments underlying the basic

understanding of human experience shared by Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty, it seems

appropriate to at least mention the metaphilosophical approach I am taking in holding

these three together in dialogue under the umbrella of "pragmatism." There is a tendency

among the relatively small cohort of scholars working within American pragmatist

philosophy to focus intensely on picking apart the various differences between the

classical pragmatists such as James and Dewey, neopragmatists such as Rorty and Robert

Brandom, and those European authors sometimes associated with pragmatist thought

such as Nietzsche and Heidegger. There are also those, such as Rorty himself, who

recognize the fruitfulness of synthesizing the various ideas held together by the cluster

concept "pragmatism." For instance, Rorty thinks it is helpful to understand Nietzsche

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[9] I will be using the admittedly vague descriptor of "ethically-responsible" as a term of praise and the hoped-for goal of the view of moral development I will be articulating. What exactly it entails should become apparent over the course of my dissertation, but for now, I will say that it has to do with being *response*-able; that is, responsive to the various complexities and concerns involved in our moral decision-making. It is a comportment that is characterized by thoughtfulness, reflection, and consideration of one's conduct and how any significant choice will affect the well-being of oneself and others.

"as the figure who did the most to convince European intellectuals of the doctrines which were purveyed to Americans by James and Dewey" (Rorty 1991, 2). And, he further suggests that "Nietzsche was as good an anti-Cartesian, antirepresentationalist, and antiessentialist as Dewey," along with being "as devoted to the question 'what difference will this belief make to our conduct?' as Peirce or James" (Rorty 1991, 2). This is not to ignore the obvious differences between these thinkers. I have simply chosen to follow the spirit of Rorty's syncretism and play each thinker off of one another, using them as supplements and correctives to one another, which seems to provide a more comprehensive perspective of just what a pragmatist ethics entails, and, moreover, how art can be of service for our moral lives.[10]

One obvious similarity between Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty that has already been implied is that the ideal ethical comportment is one which not only respects but embraces the *uncertainty* inherent in our situation. As will be discussed later, promoting the ability to deal with the flux inherent in our human reality is one of the clear advantages a pragmatist ethics has to offer. As Colin Koopman argues, pragmatism might be best thought of "as a philosophical mode that takes as its central concern the process of transitioning." "Transitions are," continues Koopman, "those temporal structures and historical shapes in virtue of which we get from here to there," and "[a]ccording to this transitionalist interpretation, pragmatism's most important philosophical contribution is that of redescribing the philosophical practices of thought, critique, and inquiry such that these practices take place in time and through history"

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[10] Much has been made of the split between the classical pragmatists' emphasis on experience and the neopragmatists' turn to language. I happen to follow those contemporary pragmatists, such as Colin Koopman, who are advancing a "third-wave" pragmatism which seeks to overcome this rather unpragmatic schism and show how exclusively taking experience *or* language as the fundamental field of inquiry is a reductive step in the wrong direction.

(Koopman 2011, 2). Situating its methodology within the temporal flow that both conspicuously and inconspicuously shapes human existence is crucial for a pragmatist ethics. That, as mentioned, we seem to be in a time of rather drastic social and world-historical transition only offers itself as further support for what pragmatism might be able to bring to ethical philosophy. Thus, one way of thinking about the advantages of a pragmatist ethics is that it attempts to articulate certain traits of character that, as mentioned, will help individuals cope with the transitory and contingent character of our existence in an ethically-responsible manner.

Despite the glaring differences in the political views of Nietzsche, on one side, and James, Dewey and Rorty, on the other, the fact remains that for all these thinkers ethical development is not about learning a creed or even employing our rational faculty to guide us to the certain "Good" or "Right." So instead of moral progress being defined by a convergence model similar to that of how science was once believed to advance, pragmatists conceive of moral progress more as a matter of imagining ever new possibilities for human life so as to promote individual and communal flourishing. The critical implication of this shift is that ethical development is not a matter of acquiring theoretical knowledge, but is a matter of imagining what our experience could be like.[11] In reference to Dewey's ethics, Gregory Pappas writes, "The most important learning a person accomplishes in a situation is not amassing information, but the cultivation of habits which are going to affect the quality of future situations" (Pappas 2008, 189). This

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[11] Another way of thinking about a pragmatist approach to ethics is that it, like naturalized approaches, rejects "top-down" theories of morality, where ethical prescriptions are thought of as *descending* from some ideal realm. Within such a theory, the objective of moral inquiry is to simply acquire *knowledge* of said principles. In emphasizing the emergence out of the primary level of our engaged existence of our conceptual tools, our three protagonists could actually be seen as presenting "bottom-up" approaches to our ethical considerations.

sums up the understanding of how one acquires their ethical comportment shared by

Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty, and it is a notion that underlies my entire dissertation.

That is, once ethical development is seen in a pragmatist light, a host of influences

become validated as sources of moral guidance and inspiration. Again, my thesis is that

aesthetic experience, as elicited by a work of art, can greatly inform our ethical lives by

helping cultivate a certain orientation towards experience – one which involves what

Nietzsche calls, "an artistic conception of the world" (Nietzsche 1995, 21).

Why a Pragmatist Ethics

Simply stating that a pragmatist approach to ethics grants art a significant ethical

function is clearly not an argument for the advantages of adopting such an approach. As

mentioned, despite its recent resurgence over the last quarter of a century, pragmatism is

still not seen as a viable alternative to other more mainstream discourses within ethical

theory. Much of this reluctance to grant pragmatism validity has to do with it not playing

by the rules of these more accepted approaches. Simply put, pragmatism is seen as

"thin," in the same way virtue ethics is within much of contemporary ethical philosophy,

by not being able to provide antecedent action-guidance or strict codifiability of actions

already performed. Moreover, absent a set of fundamental assumptions shared with more

traditional strands of thought, pragmatist arguments tend to not carry much weight.

Consequently, instead of specifically arguing *against* some of these traditional

contemporary moral theories, I will follow Rorty's tack and simply attempt to make a

pragmatist approach to ethics sound as appealing as possible. Therefore I will now lay

out some of pragmatism's most basic commitments and highlight the merits of their

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ethical implications. In responding to the moral tradition which pined for certainty,

pragmatism presents a view of human reality and practice that is (1) anti-representational,

anti-foundational, and anti-essentialist, as well as (2) oriented towards the future, (3) has

a respect for the contingent and naturalistic constraints on inquiry, and (4) is deeply

committed to our pluralistic society.

Pragmatism's "anti-'s"

In his book, *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political

Tradition* (2011), which discusses Barack Obama's political ascendency, James

Kloppenberg presents the 44th president as a pragmatist of sorts, and focuses primarily on

his avoidance of rigid ideology and absolutist thinking. Typically this eschewal of

absolute truth is one of the first things that comes to mind when thinking about

pragmatism. While this take is not mistaken, in explicating pragmatism's anti-absolutist

stance, it is helpful to separate three distinct, yet thoroughly interrelated, commitments

underlying it: (1) its anti-foundationalism (with regards to knowledge and truth), (2) its

anti-essentialism (with regards to nature and the self), and (3) its anti-representationalism

(with regards to experience). In elucidating these commitments it is important to start by

looking at the last of these "anti-'s," insofar as the view of experience put forth by the

classical American pragmatists, and echoed by Rorty in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of

Nature* (1979), gives rise to the other two major negative commitments of pragmatism.[12]

In both James's radical empiricism and Dewey's antidualism, the idea that reality

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[12] This is not to say that there are not important differences between Dewey's and Rorty's views on
experience, or, more specifically, what can be said of experience. Although both reject the
representationalist model of experience, Dewey believes that "generic traits" of our primary interaction
with our environment can be mapped out. Such an attempt is seen by Rorty, however, as a regrettable lapse
into materialist metaphysics.

consists in the experience of an autonomous, isolated subject standing against an independent world of objects with which the subject will interact, and hopefully, get to know through accurate representation, is rejected. In this traditional conception, *experience* serves as a "screen" of sorts between the individual subject and the world. Depending on the particular philosophical school of thought, the "Real" (as unchanging and absolute) is either conceived to exist in the mind of the subject, or in the external world against which that subject stands. For pragmatists, however, experience is construed as a much more dynamic and transactional process of an individual organism coping with her environment. Experience is reality. There is thus a privileging of a more intimate, qualitative, level of engaged existence out of which representational and conceptual thought emerges. One can thus already begin to see why aesthetics (in the general sense of the felt, sensual aspect of our experience) might be pivotal within a pragmatist ethics.

Because it stems from this anti-Cartesian understanding of experience, let us now take a cursory look at pragmatism's anti-foundationalism and its attendant ethical significance. Although known primarily as an epistemological view, foundationalism also has bearing on moral theory as well. Very generically, foundationalists hold that what justifies a belief is its relation to a basic, unshakable source, or foundation. These sources of justification range from the Divine word of God to clear and distinct ideas to brute sense data, and to others, but most importantly these foundations are thought to be completely independent of human interpretation. Once a belief is vouchsafed by linking itself to one of these foundations, it is granted the status of "truth." The validity of a moral belief about how to live or what to do, within this framework, then, is gauged by

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the strength of the connection between it and some absolute guarantor from which it is thought to be derived.

Pragmatists renounce the classical correspondence model of truth, where the degree to which a belief or proposition is true, or justified, is measured by how closely it corresponds to reality independent of human interpretation, or The Way Things Really Are. This renunciation is illustrated in Rorty's constant recitation of the Nietzschean claim that truth is simply a mobile army of metaphors, as well as his adherence to James's tenet that the true is what is good in the way of belief. Dewey himself often skirted the question of truth completely and opted for the more vague and banal concept of "warranted assertability." This attempt to destabilize an eternal conception of truth is, according to Joseph Margolis, one of pragmatism's foremost advantages. For, as he notes, "[b]oth analytic and continental philosophy are obviously tempted by one or another form of Eleatic invariance: the analytic, by the excessive economies of scientism and reductions; the continental, by the extravagances of extranaturalism. (Margolis 2010, 136). Thus, Margolis believes that pragmatism lines itself up with "the dawning sense that the a posteriori forms of the a priori will never capture, and have never captured, Kantian necessities or universalities (Margolis 2010, 137).

Every pragmatist has a different argument for why absolute truth is chimerical, but, in short, it rests in the notion that human interpretation, specifically as it is colored with desires, practices, needs, etc., can never be stripped away from our descriptions or understandings of the world, so the idea of capturing Reality as it is in-itself is simply non-sensical. Regarding morality, then, the idea that there is *the* right way to live or *the* right thing to do (rightness that is always already embedded in the nature of reality and

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that it is simply our duty to recognize) cannot be sustained. Ethical certainty is simply

not attainable as long as experience is forever subject to change. Therefore, justification,

within a pragmatist framework, has nothing to do with getting in touch with a non-human

reality, but actually has to do with coherence of belief and intersubjective agreement.

Pragmatism's anti-foundationalism really amounts to the charge that there be no final

words in any inquiry, no Aristotelian axioms from which an order of reasons can be

derived, and so one must give pride of place to the particularity and context of a given

situation over an *a priori* ideology.

So, one of the major ethical implications of pragmatism's anti-foundationalism is

a staunch rejection of fundamentalist or dogmatic thinking. While the dangers posed by

religious fundamentalism are quite clear, any form of dogmatic thinking is viewed by

pragmatists as morally detrimental. In drastically reducing one's horizons of meaning

and possibility, dogmatism impedes inquiry. Although more explicit in Dewey,

Nietzsche and Rorty also place a strong emphasis on experimentation within one's

attempt to cope with experience. Experimentation, though, requires an ability to discard

previous descriptions of the world in order to accommodate redescriptions more apt to

one's current situation. Therefore, one must at least be willing to question preconceived

beliefs in the name of individual and societal growth and progress. Yet, this is not to say

that pragmatists ignore the fact that we draw on habits and prior experiences in regards to

present and future conduct, but simply that whatever we might formulate as *a priori*

guides to action must remain faithful to the *a posteriori* of experience.

As its rejection of foundationalism rests significantly on foundationalist

thinking's hindrance to inquiry, and thus hindrance to the ability to flexibly adapt to the

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ever-changing dynamics of experience, pragmatism's stance against essentialism also has to do with the rigid fixity so often bound up with essentialist thought. Pragmatism's anti-essentialism is rooted in the idea that seeking something like Nature as it is in-itself, or the essential character of an individual, is a non-starter. Because our inquiries always already take place amidst a host of cultural practices, and proceed through the medium of language, there simply is no way of separating our interpretations of an object of inquiry from that object as it is "in-itself" so as to determine if we stand in an adequate enough relation to it to know its essence. Rorty also denounces the idea that we could have anything like what Bertrand Russell called "knowledge by acquaintance," proclaiming that "[a]ll our knowledge is of the sort which Russell called 'knowledge by description'" and, furthermore, this knowledge "is under descriptions suited to our current social purposes" (Rorty 1999, 48).[13] All we have are our descriptions of the object, descriptions that relate the object to other descriptions of objects, beliefs, or states of affairs. Nietzsche's claim that a thing is merely the sum of its effects (Nietzsche 2007, 252), along with Dewey's redescription of essences as "gists" (Dewey, 1934: 305), clearly inform Rorty's own anti-essentialism, and, as such, all three stress the mutability of experience and our understandings of the world and ourselves.

Perhaps this anti-essentialism's most crucial ethical implication regards how we understand the human self. As Rorty notes regarding essentialist versions of selfhood espoused in various forms throughout the western metaphysical tradition:

> They (the metaphysicians) were going to explain to us the ultimate locus of power, the nature of reality, the conditions of the possibility of experience. They would thereby inform us what we really are … They would exhibit the stamp which had been impressed on *all* of us. It would not be a matter of chance, a mere

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[13] Put very simply, for Russell, knowledge by acquaintance is foundational knowledge that exists when there a direct cognitive relation to that object, without any filter of linguistic description.

contingency. It would be necessary, essential, telic, constitutive of what it is to be human. It would give us a goal, the only possible goal, namely, the full recognition of that very necessity, the self-consciousness of our essence (Rorty 1989, 26).

Essentialism, then, comes in two forms – one involving the structure of nature and the "objective" world, and one positing that each individual has a true self rooted in a universal human essence which it is their ethical obligation to try and realize. As a child of God, one must heed His law. As an intelligible self, one must heed the call of Reason. Pragmatism's main concern with this view is that it is rigidly and narrowly telic; meaning there is only one possible destination to end up if the Good is what you seek, not to mention only one possible path. Counter to this view, the pragmatist replies that the self is in-process, that who we are is something that we become through the situations and experiences we encounter. There is, then, no preset path for us to walk if we are to be "ethical," but rather many possibilities for what might be "right." This shift causes us to think about self-correction (a primary concern for the western ethical tradition since its inception) as creative rather than a process of discovering something that antecedently determines one's existence. This alteration has a deep ethical significance which will be discussed in detail in Chapter III, as the acceptance of this anti-essentialist view of the self raises a host of questions concerning authenticity, autonomy, and care of the self.

Much of what has just been said is a recapitulation of the pragmatist's abandonment of the quest for certainty. So what exactly are the ethical implications of such abandonment? In giving up any assurances that how one is living or what one is going to do is *right*, a pragmatist ethics is clearly fallibalistic. What this entails, as a virtue, is a form of critique that is always ready to ask whether or not a certain way of doing things is the only or the best way. In renouncing the idea of a convergence theory

of moral progress, whereby progress is based on supposedly coming closer and closer to the truth, pragmatists substitute hope for knowledge. This hope is based in the belief that, because of the flux of history, things can always be different, and, as such, we as humans can always strive for better. Things can only be different and possibly better, however, if we are willing to give up the ideals of the tradition which takes Eleatic truth as its ultimate goal – where the "Right" thing to do is foundational, essential, and changeless.

Orientation towards the future

In his penetrating book, *Pragmatism's Advantage: American and European Philosophy at the End of the 20ᵗʰ Century* (2010), Joseph Margolis contends that one particular area where pragmatism diverges in a positive way from contemporary analytic and continental philosophy is in its wholehearted acceptance of the flux of reality. Margolis cannot help but see vestiges in these two traditions of the strain running from Parmenides to Kant which takes only the changeless and *a priori* as real. In certain analytic strands of thought, this assumption is manifested in the form of scientific or logical reductionism, and in certain continental thinkers, it is carried out in the form of some appeal to the extranatural. Pragmatism's naturalism, coupled with its commitment to historicity and the fluidity of culture (which will be discussed shortly), however, necessitates this abdication of such a pursuit for the eternal.

Taking this flux seriously, pragmatists orient themselves towards the future in a way different from other traditions. For, in giving up the idea that we could uncover the conditions for the possibility of experience, and thereby construct an absolute moral system built on *a priori* principles of action, pragmatists jettison the search for fixed

antecedent criteria for attaining the "Good," whether on the individual or societal level. As James notes, the pragmatist orientation is the "attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories', supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts" (James 1981, 29).

This is not to say, however, that we should not draw upon prior experience to inform our present projects and moral decision-making. Instead, what pragmatism advocates is the mindful avoidance of what Dewey refers to as "*the* philosophical fallacy," or "the supposition that whatever is found true under certain conditions may forthwith be asserted universally or without limits and conditions," and where it "is forgotten that success is success *of* a specific effort" (MW 14:124).

It is for this reason I asserted that pragmatism substitutes hope for knowledge when it comes to moral progress. Because the conceptual resources comprising our cultural lives are ever-changing and shifting, the way we, as humanity, inhabit the world can always be different, and again, if it can be different, it can be better. This is why the regulative ideal for a pragmatist ethics becomes rather vague – as in Nietzsche's notion of "self-overcoming" and Dewey's concept of "growth." Such notions are used on both the individual and societal level by pragmatists in articulating their normative ethics. Regarding individual well-being, the ideals put forth by Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty all have to do with continually adapting to the contingent and fluid nature of our environment. And, on the societal level, pragmatist political philosophy often takes the form of a utopian exercise of imagining a more inclusive community among the plurality of individual perspectives.

The pragmatist emphasis on hope is sometimes discussed in terms of James's doctrine of meliorism. Attempting to find a middle-way between two competing doctrines of common sense, James introduces what he dubs meliorism as an orientation towards the future that mediates between the tough-minded pessimism of a scientific reductionist sort and the tender-minded optimism of idealist philosophies, including many religious understandings of reality. Plainly put, meliorism holds that salvation, more fruitfully conceived of as the betterment of humanity's lot, is not a utopian phantasm, nor is it something guaranteed in advance by some extranatural ideal realm. Instead, pragmatism holds that things might not be guaranteed to get better, either through the telic movement of Absolute Spirit or the second coming of Christ, but they *can* get better through human effort and imaginative innovation.

Within metaethical discourse, pragmatism is often counted as contextualist or particularist on account of its emphasis on the shifting dynamics of human existence. Despite not being a radical particularism, in that a pragmatist ethics does have some use (which will be discussed shortly) for principles, a sensitivity to the particularities or context of a situation is undoubtedly a central virtue. Thus pragmatism stands opposed to moral universalism which latches onto principles or courses of action which proved worthy in some specific moral inquiry, yet forgets that those were tools that were successful only within the context of *that* particular inquiry or situation.

The ethical contextualism of pragmatism is meant to loosen the crust of convention that so often hinders progress through experimental inquiry. There are fairly significant ethical implications bound up in an individual or society being overly or blindly wedded to tradition. As John Corvino points out in the context of the debate over

what rights and recognition gay individuals and couples ought to receive, when all

arguments seem to run counter to someone's viewpoint on a particular issue, it is often

the case that tradition will be invoked as the ultimate conversation stopper.[14] The "this is

just the way we've always done things" argument can be heard in America on such

morally-charged issues as the debate over gay rights or over whether or not we should

continue to use capital punishment today in the 21st century, even after discovering the

numerous innocent people who have been put to death. Pragmatists will certainly not

stand for this argument, and, in many ways, an appropriately critical orientation towards

convention and the doxa of one's time is an indispensible disposition for a normative

pragmatist ethics.

Similar to Socrates' famous pronouncement that the unexamined life is not worth

living, a pragmatist approach to ethics promotes a healthy thoughtfulness and skepticism

concerning the way things are being done at any given time. The question of whether we,

as individuals and as a society, might do better is one that can and should always be

asked. Retreating to tradition in the face of the uncertainty brought by the undammed

flow of history is something Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty all denounce. In so doing, all

three instead sing the praises of a courageous experimentalism that utilizes the fluid

nature of human meaning and values in the name of growth and progress.

Clearly within this frame, the imagination is granted a hearty respect. In not

treating reason as some transcendental faculty that can get us in touch with the "Truth,"

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[14] In concluding his chapter "Why Shouldn't Tommy and Jim Have Sex?: A Defense of Homosexuality," Corvino argues that one of the most leaned upon and favorite arguments of those opposed to homosexuality is: "'It's wrong because we've always been taught that it's wrong.'" Corvino then goes on to comment that "[t]his argument – call it the argument from tradition – has an obvious appeal: people reasonably favor tried-and-true ideas over unfamiliar ones, and they recognize the foolishness of trying to invent morality from scratch. But the argument from tradition is also a dangerous argument, as any honest look at history will reveal" (Corvino 1997, 15).

be it scientific or moral, pragmatists, and in particular Dewey, stress the role that imagination plays in our attempts to cope with experience. It is the imagination that reaches forward into the future in order to deal with and enrich our present situation. More will have to be said about what imaginative work exactly does for the human of pragmatist wisdom; but, it is important to keep in mind that the imagination is not to be thought of as some whimsical faculty of fancy, but rather as pushing against the constraints of one's situation in the hope of opening up novel possibilities for meaning and action.

Respect for contingency

The respect for the constraints of one's concrete situation is yet another of the distinguishing features of a pragmatist approach to ethics and is manifest in its historicity, its naturalism, and its conception of selfhood. Hegel's critique of the Kantian transcendental project, specifically the former's emphasis on the historical forces shaping our basic sense of what is and what matters, was influential for both Dewey and Rorty, and this historical sense clearly aligns with Nietzsche's own genealogical method of deconstructing moral concepts and systems.

With the central commitments of pragmatism all interrelated, the ethical implications of pragmatism's historical awareness have already been touched on. In admitting that our basic sense of what is and what matters can change over time, pragmatists cannot appeal to any foundational axioms or eternal principles for normativity. The social construction theories popular in much of post-Nietzschean continental philosophy are in no way foreign to pragmatist thought. "To say that

everything is a social construction," writes Rorty, "is to say that our linguistic practices are so bound up with our other social practices that our descriptions of nature, as well as of ourselves, will always be a function of our social needs" (Rorty 1999, 48). Thus, any ethical theory emerging out of pragmatism remains self-aware of its situatedness within a historical and cultural context. As organisms practically engaged with an environment, an environment that is just as much social as it is physical, any prescriptive ethics is going to be greatly informed by the situation out of which it arises. It is simply bad faith, according to pragmatists, to aver, as the Vatican did in its "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," (1975) that moral principles "in no way owe their origin to a certain type of culture, but rather to knowledge of the Divine Law and of human nature" and that, therefore, "(they) cannot be considered as having become out of date or doubtful under the pretext that a new cultural situation has arisen" (The Vatican 1998, 108).

In its refusal to let transcendental principles and concepts impinge on ethical considerations, pragmatism also resonates with contemporary naturalized approaches to ethical theory. Not only do pragmatists like Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty take seriously the constraints one's situation places on her ethical deliberations, but they also champion the Darwinian narrative describing the evolutionary development of *Homo sapiens*. Margolis indeed argues that pragmatism's brand of naturalism is one of its defining characteristics (Margolis 2010, 31).

Despite his sometimes disparaging tone regarding Darwin, Nietzsche too held a biologically-emergent picture of the human being.[15] It is an understatement to say that

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[15] Nietzsche's reading of Darwin seems to me to be slightly misinformed, in that he often reads him as teleological in spirit. Nietzsche appeared to not be able to quell the fear that Darwinian evolution, and the

Nietzsche was highly skeptical of extranatural accounts of humanity, and deeply despised moralities which sought to tamp down or even extirpate our physiological, or "animal-like," nature. In fact, in his revaluation of values Nietzsche calls for physiology to be the starting point of our understandings of ourselves and our inquiry into how we ought to live. Evincing his author's "inverted Platonism," Zarathustra proclaims, " [T]he awakened and the knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body. The body is a great reason … [a]n instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call 'spirit' – a little instrument and toy of your great reason" (Nietzsche 1976, 146). This privileging of the body is not only significant as an example of Nietzsche's naturalism, but the idea that "the great reason known by the body is simply more primordial epistemologically (than what he might consider conscious, discursive reason)" (Benson 2003, 30) will prove to have important implications for the relationship between *aesthetic* experience and ethical transformation.

Dewey, likewise, opens his ethical treatise *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) by lamenting the way that our embodied human nature has traditionally been viewed *vis-à-vis* morality throughout most of history. "Man's nature," writes Dewey, "has been regarded with suspicion, with fear, with sour looks … [i]t has appeared to be so evilly disposed that the business of morality was to prune and curb it" (MW 14:5). In fact, similar to Nietzsche, Dewey's positive ethics actually advocates for what might be called the "sensual," in making aesthetic and emotional sensitivity crucial areas of focus for ethical education. In an early essay titled "The Aesthetic Element in Education," Dewey

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notion of the good for the species, was a narrative leading inevitably to a herd mentality, the acme of which is embodied in the "last men" upon whom he heaps his scorn (Nietzsche 1976, 129-30).

argues that, "Responsiveness, an emotional reaction to ideas and facts, is a necessary factor in moral character," and so "[w]e need to return more to the Greek conception, which defined education as the attaching of pleasure and pain to the right objects and ideals in the right way" (EW 5:203-4).[16]

While much is often made of Rorty's seemingly disembodied poeticism, one need only unpack his thoughts on language a bit to witness hints of his own naturalistic commitments. Introducing some of the basic thoughts and background ideas underlying pragmatism, specifically its anti-representationalist view of experience, Rorty poses the following rhetorical query: "At what point in biological evolution did organisms stop just coping with reailty and start representing it? To pose the riddle is to suggest the answer," which Rorty himself supposes is "[m]aybe they never *did* start representing it" (Rorty 1999, 269). Echoing Nietzsche and Dewey, Rorty thinks it will be a benefit to ethical discourse to think of humans not as rational animals, where reason is thought of transcendentally, but as animals with incredibly complex behavior that allows for meaningful planning and the coordination of actions. Rorty astutely points out, though, that making this argument is an uphill battle, as much of the western philosophical tradition has relied on a special rational ingredient possessed solely by humanity in trying to spell out how we should live or why our fellow humans are deserving of dignity. Turning this belief on its head, however, Rorty also observes how this special ingredient has been used throughout history to justify discriminatory treatment against marginalized

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[16] Here is an appropriate place to say something about Dewey's naturalized metaphysics, or the part of him that Rorty could do without. I happen to share Rorty's taste for Dewey as historically-aware, cultural critic, but the pragmatic work the latter's naturalism (which gives rise to his pursuit of generic traits of experience and his psychologically-centered approach to ethics) does, cannot be understated. Moreover, the debate this divergence between Rorty and Dewey sparks seems to me to be one of the petty squabbles in philosophical scholarship the former so admonishes.

groups who were thought to possess little, if any, of that essential element. It is Rorty's assumption that such moves reflect a domineering will to power and this fear of totalitarianism spurs his attempt to bring reason, along with language, back down to earth by redescribing them as simply examples of the complex behaviors humans have developed to help them cope with experience and coordinate their projects.

Here it is important to highlight another one of pragmatism's advantages *vis-à-vis* certain contemporary analytic and continental strands of philosophic thought. As mentioned earlier, Margolis sees pragmatism's commitment to the Darwinian narrative of human evolution, and the naturalism that comes with it, as crucial in steering it away from the extranaturalism he finds in many contemporary continental thinkers. In the spirit of mediation that is so distinctive of pragmatism, Margolis sees pragmatism's naturalism as "moderate" in form (Margolis 2010, 136). It is its sincere regard for culture and historicity that Margolis believes insulates pragmatism from the reductionist scientism found in many Anglo-American analysts, a reductionism stemming from a pre-Kuhnian view of science as the paragon of academic rigor and the only discipline that will lead to absolute knowledge. That is, according to Margolis, pragmatism embodies the most significant insights of both Darwin *and* Hegel. For, he claims that pragmatism "Darwinizes" Hegel by removing the extranatural teleology contained in his system while also "Hegelianizing" Darwin's evolutionary theory by emphasizing that scientific concepts and methods are themselves products of our linguistic and cultural practices.

Painting something once seen as natural as itself subject to the ever-shifting dynamics of human history is something the protagonists of this dissertation all did. Picking up from Hegel's historicizing of Kant's categories of the understanding,

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Nietzsche's genealogies of some of our most important metaphysical and ethical concepts bring into relief the ways in which historical contingencies have shaped our basic descriptions of the world and prescriptions for how humans ought to behave. Likewise, Dewey's Hegelian roots betray this commitment to maintaining an historical perspective when engaging in cultural criticism and attempting to construct a conceptual framework with which to promote growth through collective inquiry. And, as noted earlier, Rorty himself is fond of phrasing this thread within pragmatism in terms of social construction. In Chapter III I will go into more detail regarding Margolis's conception of the self, as it is with this idea that he sees pragmatism's moderate naturalism do its most work.

And, as regards the self, before explaining specifically how this respect for factical constraints plays itself out in a pragmatist ethics, it is useful to briefly discuss Rorty's pragmatic appropriation of Freud in his discussion of selfhood. In his chapter "The Contingency of Selfhood" (1989), Rorty writes that "[w]e can begin to understand Freud's role in our culture by seeing him as the moralist who helped de-divinize the self by tracking conscience home to its origin in the contingencies of our upbringing" (Rorty 1989, 30). The Freudian view of moral conscience works against moral intuitionists (e.g., C. S. Lewis and W. D. Ross) who argue that the voice inside our heads guiding our behavior towards the "Good" is something implanted in us from God our Father, or is perhaps an innate transcendental aptitude. Rorty's pragmatic appropriation of Freud presents conscience as something shaped by our own idiosyncratic experiences, under the influence of our familial and cultural circumstances. In so challenging the idea that our moral conscience is something akin to the mark of our maker, Rorty contends that Freud brings into relief the various contingent factors informing our basic ethical orientation

towards experience. Moreover, Rorty also writes that "Freud thus helps us take seriously the possibility that there is no central faculty, no central self, called 'reason' – and thus to take Nietzschean pragmatism and perspectivalism seriously" (Rorty 1989, 33).

But what exactly does it mean that Freud "de-divinized" our understanding of the self? Affirming pragmatism's moderate naturalism and "doctrine of the flux"[17] leads, Rorty contends, to "the point where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we treat *everything* … as a product of time and chance" (Rorty 1989, 22). Put another way, a pragmatist approach to ethics must abandon a notion of the "holy" as a potential source of ethical guidance.

Discarding a concept of the "holy," though, is one of the things that make many skeptical about the efficacy of a pragmatist normative ethics. For, there clearly is no better guarantor of certainty about what we should do or how we ought to live than that which is held sacred. Here, the words of my former professor mentioned earlier come to mind – "Absent something 'Holy', what is the ironist going to die for?" Having gone through some of the most characteristic traits of pragmatism, though, I can now say a bit more about a pragmatist's potential response to this accusatory query.

The ideal mode of experience for most pragmatists is expressed in Dewey's reflection on James's notion of "flights and perchings:"

> William James aptly compared the course of a conscious experience to the alternate flights and perchings of a bird. The flights and perching are intimately connected with one another; they are not so many unrelated lightings succeeded

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[17] "After Kant," writes Margolis, "with the rapid rise to prominence of the concept of historicity and its remarkable penetration of all the seeming invariances of the accepted canon, what may fairly be termed the 'doctrine of the flux' has gained a measure of parity so compelling that the ancient canon has had to look to its own defenses in an entirely new way. Philosophy has been bifurcated ever since in a way that was never possible before. Furthermore, if we divide the post-Kantian tradition along 'pragmatist,' 'analytic,' and 'continental' lines … then pragmatism, nearly alone among the principal movements of our time, has embraced the flux four square, without clinging to subversive loyalties of any kind harking back to would-be older invariances" (Margolis 2010, 131).

by a number of equally unrelated hoppings. Each resting place in experience is an undergoing in which is absorbed and taken home the consequences of prior doing, and, unless the doing is that of utter caprice or sheer routine, each doing carries in itself meaning that has been extracted and conserved. As with the advance of an army, all gains from what has been already effected are periodically consolidated, and always with a view to what is to be done next. If we move too rapidly, we get away from the base of supplies—of accrued meanings—and the experience is flustered, thin, and confused. If we dawdle too long after having extracted a net value, experience perishes of inanition. (LW 10:63)

Striking this balance between projecting precariously into the future through our everyday engagement with the world, and stably reflecting on what meanings might have been gathered through that flight embodies the underlying rhythm of experience. Maybe counter-intuitively, based on what has been said regarding pragmatism's anti-absolutist commitments, it is important to keep in mind that a pragmatist ethics is not (*pace* Rorty) an ethics without principles.[18] A pragmatist's "principles" are best understood in the sense that Arthur Murphy gives when he states that "[t]he ultimate or final things will be those which maintain themselves as genuine and reliable in the light of the most penetrating and comprehensive scrutiny" and that to think oneself as having found anything more secure "in a process in which all claims to finality are and must be partial and in which all partiality is subject to correction as we live and learn would be to reach a state of mind in which both living and learning had ceased to function as sources of wisdom" (Murphy 1994, 59). In other words, the moral principles which guide our action and way of life are simply those which hold up to reflective scrutiny and prove resourceful in everyday doings and sufferings.

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[18] Despite the title of Rorty's essay "Ethics without Principles" (1999), he no doubt understood their unavoidable use as guides for action. His main point in that essay, though, has more to do with critiquing a certain approach to moral principles – that is, moral principles as absolute and derived from extranatural or invariant sources.

Yet, I would assume that nearly all of us have at one time or another felt that principles gathered from previous experience, which had proven their worth, appear ill-suited when confronted with the particularities of a novel situation. They may conflict with other principles, or a sense of obligation, or a state of affairs we hope to realize, but in any case, holding on to the principle *X* for the sole reason that it is a principle is counter-productive to the pragmatist pursuit of progress. Granted, some principles may stand the test of time and flux, such as a basic principle against harming others. However, the overarching point regarding this balance between the stable and the precarious is that pragmatists replace the notion that morality is about discovering antecedently existing principles with the more humble notion that it is simply about coping with experience in an ethically-responsible fashion. So, a principle's worth is not derived from being written in the stars, so to speak, but from its applicability and utility to a particular situation. A pragmatist approach to ethics is not without anything to guide one's ethical life, then, but simply acknowledges the fragility and contingency of these guiding lights.

Thus, in answering the question "What would the ironist die for?," we can appeal to what Rorty calls "the fundamental premise" of his *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*: "[T]hat a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance" (Rorty 1989, 189). In de-divinizing ethics, pragmatism does disavow appeals to the "holy" or the "sacred." Pragmatism's wager, however, is that such appeals do more harm than good. Not only do they often lead down the slippery

slope towards fundamentalism or authoritarianism, but such absolutes often get in the way of progressive inquiry.

Another crucial implication for an ethics that emerges from pragmatism's respect for the situatedness of our experience is a redescription of the notion of freedom. As is well known, the concept of freedom, for better or worse, has a central role in ethical discourse. Indeed Kant's moral system hinges on the very idea that our intelligible selves must be free from the empirical "distractions" of the phenomenal world. Without the luxury of some supersensible realm removed from the movement of history and the constraints of the physical world, however, pragmatists adopt a different view of freedom. In particular, pragmatism will have no truck with something like a radically free will. To Nietzsche, it takes "boorish naiveté" to subscribe to the "famous concept of 'free will'" (Nietzsche 2002, 21), and Dewey laments the "inward turn" taken in moral theory, wherein the habitual nature of experience is denied, and the locus of ethical responsibility is situated within the subject's supposed strength of conscience alone. The rationale behind this rejection of "free will" goes back to the anti-representationalist view of experience espoused by the likes of Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty; for, once the isolated, autonomous subject standing against an objective world is dissolved, the only way to account for something like absolute moral freedom is through metaphysical appeals of the kind that Kant was forced to make. Moreover, such a conception runs completely counter to pragmatism's respect for the various ways our environment, in both its physical and social dimensions, shapes our conduct.

In many ways, the existentialist tradition suffers the same admonishments as pragmatism, in that it is seen as paltry and impotent as a normative guide for action and

conduct. Not coincidentally, an existentialist approach to ethics, in departing from the

traditional model of laying down absolutes, parallels pragmatism in focusing more on

how one comports herself towards experience. In fact, I would like to contend that the

existentialist ideal of authenticity can be appropriated by pragmatists in constructing a

normative ethics. I will discuss this more in Chapter III, but for now it is important to

note that Simone de Beauvoir's ideal of authenticity, for instance, involves *both* affirming

the creative license we have for self-authorship along with recognizing the various

constraints placed on us by our situation. Although some of these constraints are no

doubt shared on a cultural, historical, and biological level, individuals' situations are also

idiosyncratically contingent. In referring to Rorty's poeticized focus on novelty and

redesciption, Kenneth McClelland qualifies: "There are always constraints on our

descriptions, and these constraints are embodied in the norms, mores, and customs of the

cultures/communities we live in … [T]hese cannot be construed as absolute constraints,

but they do impact our descriptions in-so-far as these constraints are themselves

descriptions to which a future description will be relative. We never create *ex nihilo*"

(McClelland 2008, 431). And it is this recognition of the *impact* of these constraints

which gives rise to Nietzsche's perspectivism and the pluralism recognized by the

American pragmatists.

Commitment to pluralism

　　　　Many of the initial claims of pragmatism that I have been surveying thus far lead

up to the last crucial characteristic of a pragmatist ethics that I want to discuss.

Specifically, once the idea that we could become mirrors of nature and attain something

like a God's-eye-view of reality is abandoned, we must take seriously the extent to which individuals' understandings of the world vary. In treating theory as an instrument of practice, pragmatism acknowledges the way in which beliefs and desires deeply shape people's descriptions of the world, themselves, and others. Pragmatism, as a distinctly American movement, is often, and rightly so, painted as an approach to philosophy growing out of a rather nascent American society. Hailing from a country forged out of the desire to allow freedom of belief, one can easily see how some of early America's most influential thinkers embraced pluralism and the promotion of tolerance.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in William James's essay "On a Certain Blindness of Human Beings" (1899). In this essay, James is specifically arguing for the significance of the affective dimensions of our experience. Our judgments about reality are inextricably colored, James contends, by our emotional and passionate responses to certain ideas and experiences. "Our judgments," notes James, "concerning the worth of things, big or little, depend upon the *feelings* the things arouse in us. Where we judge a thing to be precious in consequence of the *idea* we frame of it, this is only because the idea is itself associated already with a feeling" (James 1977, 629). James continues to describe the main thrust of this essay: "Now the blindness in human beings … is the blindness with which we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves" (James 1977, 629). I will discuss James's well-known anecdote he uses to illustrate this point in detail in Chapter IV, but for now it is simply enough to note that because those contingent factors discussed in the previous section, along with each individual's idiosyncratic experiences, differ, the feelings of others, and thus their perspectives on the world, are going to be different as well. Indeed, the pragmatist

commitments described above lead to this inevitable plurality of ways of making sense of and placing value on the various aspects of experience.

Now, this plurality of perspectives extant in our human community would seem to imply a radical relativism in which every individual lives in her own solipsistic universe, detached from others and simply relishing the show going on in her own little Cartesian theater. Yet, we must remember that pragmatism's anti-essentialism advances the claim that what a thing or person is is bound up in relations, either to other things or other people. As I will argue in more detail in Chapter III, an anti-essentialist view of the self works to dissolve the traditional dichotomy in ethical philosophy between egoism and altruism by promoting a recognition of the inextricable web of relations between oneself and others in which one is caught. This is not to say, however, that pragmatism pushes for a homogenization of society or a loss of individual identity, but rather simply that one would be well-served to recognize the interrelationality of human existence. In fact, in defending pragmatism against charges of abnegating our, as human beings, difference from "lesser" animals, Rorty advances the claim that "the pragmatist sees our difference as a greater flexibility in the boundaries of selfhood, in the sheer quantity of relationships which can go to constitute a human self" (Rorty 1999, 81).

One of the ethical implications of pragmatism's commitment to this pluralism of perspectives, then, is a push for greater intersubjective awareness. [19] Without the possibility of a neutral, disinterested standpoint from which to engage experience, we would be wise to cultivate a sensitivity to the fact that others hold particular values,

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[19] Intersubjective empathy, or the ability to recognize others as subjects and not mere objects within our own subjective experience, is a key notion in the ethics emerging out of existential phenomenology, as well as out of the dialogic tradition, specifically as it is embodied in the work of Martin Buber. Moral psychology and naturalized approaches to ethics are also looking at the structures underlying intersubjective awareness, where mirror neurons are gaining prominence as a fruitful locus of study.

interests, and desires which shape their being-in-the-world just the same as we do; yet also with an acknowledgement that more often than not, those values, interests, and desires do not line up with our own.

But in giving up any strong conception of a universal human nature to serve as a metaphysical thread to bind us together and give rise to a sense of duty to others, pragmatism's push for social cooperation seems futile. [20] While intersubjective awareness is certainly key in promoting a sense of solidarity, something additional is needed if a more inclusive society is to be achieved. Dewey and Rorty thus draw on the Humean notion that morality should aim at the cultivation of certain moral sentiments, namely fellow-feeling. Though Dewey admits the Greek model of ethical education might have "over-emphasized the emotional element," he closes "The Aesthetic Element in Education," observing that "we have now gone to the opposite extreme" (Dewey, 1882-1953, *EW* 5: 203-5). Likewise, Rorty describes moral development as "a matter of increasing *sensitivity*, increasing responsiveness to the needs of a larger and larger variety of people and things" (Rorty 1999, 81). In Chapter IV, I will elaborate on the cultivation of this intersubjective awareness and development of inclusive sentiments, especially in regards to how aesthetic experience can help aid these invaluable forms of ethical enrichment.

So, to summarize what has come thus far, a pragmatist approach to ethics can be seen as a response to the tradition within moral philosophy which sought certainty

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[20] Again, a qualification is in order regarding Dewey here. Dewey certainly does put forth the thesis, especially in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922)*,* that a better understanding of human nature and psychology is needed in ethical theory. Yet, this shift in focus has as much to do with freeing morality from the shackles of supernaturalism as it has to do with actually gaining such understanding. Moreover, what Dewey means by "human nature" is in no way limited to merely biological considerations. Dewey's sense of the term leaves room for the cultural element.

regarding models for the "good" life and for action-guidance. This approach to ethics

emerges out of the basic commitments held by the American pragmatists James, Dewey,

and Rorty, as well as by their European counterpart, Nietzsche. What I hope is somewhat

apparent, then, is that any prescriptive ethics coming out of pragmatism cannot propound

a priori principles for action, nor formulate any precise calculus in determining what is

the right thing to do in any given situation. Yet, it should also be vaguely apparent that

pragmatists still want to offer something in the way of suggestions for how individuals

might best prepare themselves to navigate the complexities and uncertainties inherent in

human experience. Instead of rules, though, it is my belief that these suggestions come in

the form of proposals of particular dispositions or character traits, and in this way, a

normative pragmatist ethics bears resemblance to the broad approach of certain virtue

ethicists.

Virtue Ethics and Pragmatism

I should begin by mentioning that in what follows I am in no way claiming to give

an exhaustive account of the landscape of contemporary moral theory and the status of

virtue ethics within it. What I hope to do is give a succinct sketch of the renaissance of

virtue ethics within ethical discourse, discuss some of the more contemporary approaches

to virtue ethics while highlighting some of the common criticisms levied against them,

support my contention that a pragmatist ethics might be best thought of as an approach

that revolves around certain virtues or traits of character, and, finally, articulate what I

take to be the cardinal virtue of pragmatism. G. E. M. Anscombe's "Modern Moral

Philosophy" (1958) is often regarded as ushering virtue ethics into contemporary moral

philosophy as a viable alternative to utilitarianism and deontology. At the time her essay was published, these two models dominated the theoretical discourse surrounding ethics. Anscombe is rather dismissive of utilitarianism, and more generally consequentialism, on grounds similar to those espoused by Bernard Williams, in that focusing solely on the consequences in determining a course of action, utilitarianism might prescribe one to violate her integrity or, worse, the dignity of human life itself. Concerning deontological approaches to ethics, then, Anscombe contends that notions such as "obligation," "morally right," and "morally wrong," notions on which deontology hangs its hat, are empty without an absolute (i.e., theological) foundation from which they could be derived. For the audience to whom she is writing, the belief in such a foundation has been greatly weakened if not outright relinquished, so out of the so-called "big three" moral theories (i.e., utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics), only virtue ethics still seems plausible as a normative system.

Writing on the problematic use of a phrase such as "morally wrong," Anscombe insists, "It would be most reasonable to drop it. It has no reasonable sense outside a law conception of ethics … and you can do ethics without it, as is shown by the example of Aristotle. It would be great improvement if, instead of 'morally wrong,' one always named a genus such as 'untruthful', 'unchaste', 'unjust' " (Anscombe 1958, 8-9). In articulating the failures and incoherencies of the two dominant moral theories of her time, many read Anscombe as advancing virtue ethics, with its emphasis on admirable dispositions such as honesty, courage and justice, as the model most appropriate for contemporary moral philosophy.[21]

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[21] There is another way to read Anscombe, one that takes off from her criticism of utilitarianism. That is, Anscombe is sometimes painted as a moral absolutist, a stance supposedly informed by her religious

Similar to Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre, in his *After Virtue* (1984), appeals to Aristotle in the face of what he saw as the dysfunction of contemporary moral philosophy. Like Anscombe, MacIntyre is concerned with what the lack of foundations means for moral theory, but thinks that in lieu of an absolute groundwork for morality, one could find more historically-situated rational criteria to employ in ethical inquiry. MacIntyre, thus, wants to guard moral philosophy against not only nihilistic relativism, but also against overly-emotivist responses to the collapse of transcendental conceptions of reason. Hence his theory relies heavily on Aristotelian teleology in advancing a renewed conception of moral reason.

Yet, this is not to say that virtue ethics cannot place an emphasis on sentimental considerations. Two more contemporary thinkers, Annette Baier and Martha Nussbaum, have advanced, albeit different, arguments in favor of a more virtue-based approach to ethics that nonetheless underscore the central role emotions play in our moral lives. Baier, in particular, is heavily influenced by David Hume, and lauds his "de-intellectualizing and de-sanctifying the moral endeavor" (Baier 1985, 147). This praise comes from Baier's own commitment to the centrality of sentiment within morality, as well as the fact that Hume's ethics situated humans within a naturalistic context.

In similar fashion, relatively recent work in contemporary virtue ethics by Phillipa Foot (2001) and Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) is set within the framework of what the latter calls "ethical naturalism," a framework which "hopes to validate beliefs about which character traits are virtues by appeal to human nature" (Hursthouse 1999, 193).

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beliefs. Indeed Anscombe does not go into any sort of detail concerning what is seen as her support of a return to Aristotelian virtue ethics (and also openly questions the possibility of coming to a clear understanding of concepts key for such an approach, including, for instance, human "flourishing"), and so one may read her argument as actually calling for a return to a theologically-based moral theory. For a brief account of this alternative reading, see Hursthouse 2010.

These naturalized approaches are not meant to be rigidly reductive, however, nor do they claim to have articulated the one "True" path to *eudaimonia*. Indeed, as pointed out by David Copp and David Sobel, Hursthouse is cognizant that "the circumstances of human life are too variable for any … generalization to be acceptable" (Copp and Sobel 2004, 530), and so one of the advantages of her proposal is that she presents the virtuous life (as she defines it, appealing to naturalistic terms) as merely the "best plan" for attaining flourishing.

This gets us back to the quest for certainty that I discussed earlier. Despite recognizing the advantages of Hursthouse's tentative explication of the connection between virtue and well-being, Copp and Sobel's review of selected works on contemporary virtue ethics[22] brings to the fore the lingering effects of a tradition which understands humans primarily as "knowers," and which derides moral theories that do not provide justification for moral decision-making. One of the most common charges levied against virtue ethics is its failure to provide definitive guides for action. Despite even the defenders of utilitarianism and deontology slowly starting to accept the difficulty of trying to situate moral intuitions about right action within a system of universal principles (or one universal principle), as Hursthouse writes, "the complaint that virtue ethics does not produce codifiable principles is still a commonly voiced criticism of the approach, expressed as the objection that it is, in principle, unable to provide action-guidance (Hursthouse 2010).

This is indeed the thrust of Copp and Sobel's review, as the majority of it is critical in tone, primarily for the reason that virtue ethicists are not able to codify conduct

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[22] Copp and Sobel focus primarily on Michael Slote's *Moral from Motives* (2001), Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics* (1999), and Foot's *Natural Goodness* (2001).

sufficiently enough for action-guidance. Seemingly trapping virtue ethicists within the logic of consequentialist/deontologist debates, Copp and Sobel continually flaunt virtue ethics' failure to provide action-guidance in regards to various far-fetched moral dilemmas. It is true that if you are searching for certainty regarding these situations, a virtue-based approach to ethics will not provide it. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle himself notes that "every discourse that concerns actions is obliged to speak in outline and not precisely," as matters involved in actions "have nothing rigidly fixed about them" (Aristotle 2002, 23). Copp and Sobel, however, take it for granted that "[i]t is a feature of the moral experience all of us share that we want to *know* what to do, and this calls for ... not merely an assessment in terms of this or that virtue (Copp and Sobel 2004, 544, emphasis added). Yet, Copp and Sobel never question the origin, or even value, of this intuition. Yes, we might like to have certainty with regards to how we *should* live our lives and what we *ought* to do, but as Dewey argued, that quest for certainty has done nothing but lead us to numerous philosophical dead ends and inertia within the domain of moral discourse. Moreover, to arrive at ethical certainty one must overly simplify the complexity and richness of our lives. In so doing, though, we sadly narrow the horizon of possibilities for human thought and action.

Pragmatism's approach to virtue ethics

It is my contention that a pragmatist approach to ethics is best seen as a response to this tradition which sought to arrive at definitive guides for action. Following MacIntyre's insight that virtues are excellences, or admirable traits of character, arising out of a specific historical context, a pragmatist version of virtue ethics is conscious of

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the situation now being one in which many individuals, for one reason or another, are starting to accept the possibility that such "instruction manuals" for living are chimerical. Part of this shift in thinking is no doubt due to the growing acceptance of a naturalistic understanding of moral deliberation. Thus, a pragmatist virtue ethics would be sympathetic to the proposals of Foot and Hursthouse, where the aretaic quality of any virtue has to do with it aiding its possessor in achieving certain "naturalized" ends.[23] It is hard not to see the framework within which they arrived at this conception of virtue as akin to Dewey's own understanding of experience as the transactional relationship between an organism and environment. Yet, what must be kept in mind is that human beings' behaviors are made incredibly more complex, and, I would contend, irreducible to mere biologistic factors by the implications of language and culture. To recall one of Margolis' arguments for pragmatism's advantage, pragmatism propounds a "moderate" naturalism, one which skirts the threat of materialist determinism through its unwavering emphasis on the "second-nature" in which humans are inextricably bound (i.e., the linguistic and cultural circumstances that are themselves environs with which we cope).

So, with all of this said, how exactly do pragmatists conceive of "virtue?" As already noted, within contemporary moral discourse, pragmatism is often labeled as consequentialist in its theoretical orientation. But, as Copp and Sobel themselves point out, "There has never been any doubt that consequentialist theories could accord to the virtues a … moral significance" (Copp and Sobel 2004, 515). Perhaps, in the grand

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[23] While Hursthouse and Foot acknowledge the gulf in sophistication between humans and lesser animals, they aim to draw connections between how we evaluate the "goodness" of sophisticated social animals and how we might think about human virtue. The four criteria that they believe we look at in evaluating these non-human animals are: (1) the individual's survival, (2) the continuance of the species, (3) the individual's characteristic pleasure or enjoyment/characteristic freedom from pain, and (4) the good functioning of the social group" (Hursthouse 1999, 200-2).

scheme of compartmentalizing various moral theories into one of the "big three," pragmatism may very well fit best in the consequentialist camp.[24] Yet, if what we are after is a prescriptive ethics, pragmatists' consequentialism does not provide any sort of calculus or procedure for maximizing demand-satisfaction or attaining societal progress. Instead, pragmatists such as James, Dewey, and Rorty give subtle hints about the types of characteristics their ethical exemplars would possess.[25]

In presenting Dewey's normative ethics, as "not incompatible with the broad concerns of virtue ethicists," Pappas states that "[p]hilosophical hypotheses about an ideal self and its virtues are no more than sophisticated ways of preparing the agent for what each situation requires" (Pappas 2008, 185). Pragmatism's ethical contextualism is what leads Pappas to describe pragmatic virtues as tools for dealing with particular "moral" situations in which an agent is inquiring about the best way to go forward. One must keep in mind, however, that "[f]or a pragmatist there is no automatic criterion by which we can distinguish, once and for all, a virtue from a vice" (Pappas 2008, 187). Although, summing up a central theme of this account of a pragmatic approach to ethics (i.e., normativity can exist *sans* absolute foundations), Pappas writes:

> But the abandonment of the notion of a single criterion does not entail that any disposition is as good as any other or that there is no point in inquiring into reasons why certain dispositions might be worth approving, cultivating, and trying out. After all, the issue is a matter of forced choice. One can wait to arrive at the single criterion if one likes, but meanwhile our characters are being formed in one way or another. (Pappas 2008, 187)

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[24] James's essay, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (1891), indeed supports this claim, especially when he equates the good with "demand satisfaction." Yet, *how* one is best able to approach the moral life this way seems to be more a matter of character, and less a matter of definitive calculation.

[25] This too harkens back to Aristotle's claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the right thing to do in any given situation can be determined by simply asking what the person of practical wisdom would do (Aristotle 2002, 29).

It is my contention that pragmatists can indeed extol certain virtues, virtues that are "contextual, instrumental, pluralistic, and experimental" (Pappas 2008, 186). Yet, underlying these virtues is what I consider to be the cardinal pragmatist virtue, *openness*.

While a pragmatist cannot appeal to any teleological account of human nature in justifying once and for all the virtue of openness, they can attempt to show why this is worth "approving, cultivating, and trying out." Here this attempt consists in the idea that without absolute certainty regarding our normative practices, we would be well-served to ground our beliefs and values upon this realization. Openness, then, can be seen as a type of comportment towards experience that proves to be incredibly useful within the pragmatist worldview sketched out above.[26]

In listing the characteristics he sees as constitutive of Dewey's ideal moral self, Pappas himself begins with openness. Pappas believes that "open-mindedness," as he refers to it, has been given short shrift in ethical philosophy, as it is often regarded as pertaining solely to epistemological concerns. "To be open," writes Pappas, "is to be free from rigidity and fixity … It is to welcome new experiences, but in the strong sense of a *willingness to be affected* by participation with the new" (Pappas 2008, 188). In short, this attitude involves primarily a "*hospitality towards the new*" (Pappas 2008, 188). This hospitality, however, requires a certain vulnerability, for one must always be ready to revise, or even reject, some of their most deeply held beliefs if those beliefs are no longer proving to be of service in coping with experience. It might be easy to see why, then, certainty, especially within the realm of ethical inquiry, is so alluring. The values that

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[26] As noted, Pappas qualifies that pragmatist virtues must be "contextual, instrumental, pluralistic, and experimental." Openness, I believe, meets these qualifications. Moreover, openness, and the virtues which hinge on it, are virtues solely because of their utility in navigating experience. This is important because Dewey's reluctance to explicitly endorse virtue ethics was based on his wariness that an over-emphasis on character would alienate agents from their actions in a way similar to what existentialists call "bad faith."

guide our lives and moral decision-making are some of the things that give our lives the most weight, and treating them as potentially vulnerable to revision can render us feeling adrift in the sea of experience.

In the next chapter I will approach this still rather opaque virtue from a slightly different angle in the context of the work of art, and in subsequent chapters will hope to add substance to it through discussing how it manifests itself in our everyday lives. I would now like to present a brief argument for why I consider openness to be the cardinal virtue of a pragmatist ethics. Regarding cardinality, Mark Alfano writes: "The notion of cardinality has about a long pedigree. From the Latin *cardo*, meaning 'hinge', a cardinal virtue is a trait on which its bearer's life turns" (Alfano, 2012: 10). As such, I contend that the pragmatic cardinal virtue of *openness* is more than just a simple virtue, but is a matter of orientation, "a trait on which its bearer's life turns."

Although my central thesis here has been that a pragmatist approach to ethics seeks to propound a prescriptive ethics without appeal to absolute foundations, there is a sense in which openness serves as the bedrock for any detailed ethical theory which emerges out of the pragmatist tradition. This "foundation," though, is nothing more than the realization that there are no ultimate foundations upon which ethical prescriptions or systems can ground themselves. With that said, taking openness to be the cardinal pragmatist virtue, we can say that it serves this "hinge" function mentioned above in that it gives rise to, and undergirds, other virtues that a "human of pragmatist wisdom" would possess.[27] That is, if one truly possesses this virtue, other virtues come to light as useful, if not required, for the attainment of individual flourishing and the pursuit of social

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[27] This moniker is simply a nod to Aristotle's "Human of Practical Wisdom." If space had permitted, I would have tried to illustrate just how important ethical exemplars are for not only virtue ethics in general, but also for the specific, pragmatic, brand of virtue ethics I have been attempting to articulate.

melioration. These virtues, however, do not necessarily give rise to openness. Some of these virtues include (but are certainly not limited to): *care* (so as to not lapse into apathy in the face of pragmatism's anti-absolutism), *imagination* (so as to be capable of engaging the wealth of possibilities for meaning and action contained beneath our current way of understanding things), *sensitivity* (so as to be attuned as possible to the various contingencies making up the context of any given situation), and *empathy* (so as to not just tolerate, or "let be," the pluralism of our society, but actively try to understand others' perspectives in the name of societal progress). One can possess any of these virtues without necessarily being open. But if one is open, these virtues reveal themselves as auxiliary dispositions worth attempting to cultivate.

In Chapters III and IV, I will be attempting to show how encounters with works of art help to develop openness, and provide substance to this virtue by highlighting its aretaic quality with respect to the prime ethical concerns of care of the self and social melioration. But before discussing why I believe that openness is such a good tool to have at one's disposal while navigating the landscape of our current historical situation, let us now turn to a discussion of the work an artwork can perform, and how exactly that work can be ethically-transformative.

CHAPTER II

OVERCOMING THE MUSUEM: AN ENCOUNTER WITH

THE WORK-ING OF ART

> Mountain peaks do not float unsupported;
> they do not even just rest upon the earth.
> They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations.
>   - John Dewey, *Art as Experience*

The Forgotten Significance of Art

Dewey opens his seminal work on aesthetics, *Art as Experience* (1934), by purporting to be enlisted in a "task to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience" (LW 10:10). An attempt to restore continuity implies a divorce of some sort, and another way of phrasing what is motivating Dewey's inquiry into aesthetics is that art seems to be separated in some way from our everyday lives, our very being-in-the-world. This divorce is captured in what Dewey refers to as the "compartmental conception of fine art" (LW 10:15). Richard Shusterman succinctly describes this conception in noting its "compartmental institutionalization and elitism, its separation from life and praxis, its distance from ordinary people and their experience" (Shusterman 1992, 140).

Dewey does not believe, however, that art has always been disconnected from our lives in such a way. Even the ancient Greek understanding of art as *mimesis*, Dewey believes, "did not signify that art was a literal copying of objects, but that it reflected the emotions and ideas that are associated with the chief institutions of social life;" thus he proclaims that art was "an integral part of the ethos and the institutions of the

community" (LW 10:15).[1] Yet, art, according to Dewey, has become increasingly compartmentalized, and within this situation we fail to see that artworks emerge out of our ordinary day-to-day activities. As Tom Alexander notes, this is problematic in leading us to "fail to see how the works we encounter in museums (likewise in galleries, concert halls, and classrooms) have actually grown from those common conditions in life" (Alexander 1998, 5-6). In segregating art to its own autonomous realm, we thus also "fail to see how the artists' success in making expressively meaningful, intrinsically fulfilling objects from the raw material of life can be applied across the whole spectrum of human existence" (Alexander 1998, 6). In other words, we are failing to recognize the power art has to transform our lives.

Dewey cites one explicit cause of this schism between art and life, and hints at another. The one historical force leading to this depreciation of art that Dewey names outright is the rise of capitalism. For one, this has led to a fetishization of art collecting and the appropriation of art by the wealthy as a sign of their affluence. "Generally speaking," writes Dewey, "the typical collector is the typical capitalist" (LW 10:15). Moreover, capitalism is, according to Dewey, inextricably linked to increasing industrialization, which he contends is pushing art further and further away from our basic being-in-the-world through its over-mechanization of human labor. One can see how the monotony of factory work could potentially occlude the artistic-aesthetic dimension of labor. Under the influence of these related forces, Dewey concludes that art becomes nothing more than the "beauty parlor of civilization" (LW 10:347).

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[1] Heidegger, in discussing the ancient Greek temple in "On the Origin of the Work of Art" (1935-36), makes almost the same point in noting that it reflected this historical community's sense of what *is* and what *matters* (Heidegger 2002, 20-1).

Yet, there is another factor Dewey sometimes hints at regarding the devalued station of art, one which is gestured at in the passage cited above from Alexander regarding our failure to recognize how the fruits of aesthetic experience can be "applied across the whole spectrum of human existence." Martin Heidegger's thoughts on art are helpful to bring in here, for, just as Dewey did not see the museum conception of art as an isolated phenomenon, Heidegger too recognized the "aestheticization of art" as bound up with more a sweeping cultural transpiring. The basic historical force underlying this take on art is, according to Heidegger, the growing human desire to achieve complete mastery over our environment. In our modern age, where the goal of inquiry is "aimed at bringing each being before (the judging subject) in such a way that the (subject) who calculates can be sure – and that means certain – of the being," we are involved in a "mode of human being which occupies the realm of human capacity as the domain of measuring and execution for the purpose of the mastery of beings as a whole" (Heidegger 2002, 66 & 69). This lines up with Dewey's own critique of the quest for certainty, and what this points to regarding our collective ignorance to the intimate relationship between art and life is that scientific inquiry, and with the "objective" knowledge it is purported to provide, has come to be seen as the paradigmatic human activity. Thus art's value is now thought to reside solely in its ornamental, entertaining, and status-signifying purposes; for, like Plato thought, if it cannot provide knowledge, it cannot possibly be of any use to us besides mere frivolity, and, worse, it is potentially a corrupting distraction.[2]

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[2] Plato does seem to recognize the transformative potential of art, in that he recognizes it has a power over people. This, however, is Plato's concern, for its power does not lie in leading people to the life of knowledge, but actually the opposite. The poet is merely *inspired* when creating a work and is actually taking us further into the realm of appearances and, thus, farther from the Real.

Implicated in this quest for certainty and the attendant depreciation of art is, according to Dewey and Heidegger, a mistaken and pernicious view of experience, one which posits a divide between the subject and object as metaphysically antecedent to any interaction between them. In the spirit of Dewey's critique of the museum conception of art, Heidegger laments how, in our day and age, "works are shipped like coal from the Ruhr or logs from the Black Forest" from one exhibition to another (Heidegger 2002, 3). The view that an encounter with a work of art is the experience of a judging subject apprehending an *object*, wherein there is a metaphysical gulf between the two, is exactly what Dewey seeks to overcome with his distinction between an art product and the *working* of art. As with other emergent phenomena Dewey thinks have become reified, he wants to recuperate an understanding of the work of art as a verb (not a noun), in order to illuminate its situatedness in and emergence out of the embodied and temporal quality of our existence as organisms engaged in constant transaction with our environment. In spelling out Dewey's account of aesthetic experience (and, in using Heidegger as a supplement to it), I will hope to bring into relief art's ability to cultivate the pragmatic orientation towards experience articulated in the previous chapter.

But before that, the following note is in order. Although I believe that Dewey's aesthetic theory lends itself to discussions across various media, for the purposes of this dissertation I am going to focus primarily on the visual arts. Much has been written on literature's role in our ethical development and the cultivation of moral sentiment, as well as on the transformative effects of music. Yet, the visual arts seem to be somewhat forgotten in the discussion of art's ability to transform the way we inhabit the world. While it is true that the use of visual art for propaganda has undeniable import within

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moral discourse, for purposes that will become apparent, I am electing to focus more on the non-ideational character of painting in particular to highlight Dewey's and Heidegger's phenomenologies of aesthetic experience – phenomenologies that, I believe, help reveal an oft-ignored function of art as it relates to ethics.

The Dynamic Movement of the Work of Art

Let us begin by first looking at how both Dewey and Heidegger understand an encounter with the work of art. The "edifying" (to use Rorty's sense of the term[3]) character of both thinkers' aesthetic projects places them in opposition to more traditional and mainstream theories of art. In holding our practical engagement with the world as the ground out of which our theoretical descriptions of existence emerge, Dewey and Heidegger actually see present theory as a potential hindrance to having a genuine aesthetic experience elicited by a work of art. Dewey observes that more often than not, regarding traditional philosophical attempts to explain aesthetic experience, "it is shown that the system in question has superimposed some preconceived idea upon experience instead of encouraging or even allowing aesthetic experience to tell its own tale" (LW 10:280). It is indeed this intrusion of philosophical biases that motivates Heidegger's own phenomenological attempt to simply describe the experience that is an encounter with the work so as to allow the work to tell its own tale.

Through such a phenomenology of aesthetic experience, it will be shown how art "represents" something about our basic engagement with the world. In articulating how

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[3] In contrast to mainstream "systematic" philosophers, "edifying" philosophers are "peripheral, pragmatic philosophers" who "are skeptical primarily *about systematic philosophy*, about the whole project of universal commensuration." Rorty claims that, "In our time, Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are the great edifying, peripheral, thinkers" (Rorty 1979, 368).

art is grounded in our primary experiential engagement with our surroundings, both thinkers hope to show how misguided understandings of art compartmentalize the aesthetic and place art in an autonomous domain separate from our lived experience. In other words, in focusing on what happens within the *work* of art (again, as a certain kind of *working* rather than merely an art "product"), as opposed to defining the necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience of the beautiful, or the formal qualities of art objects, or the mechanics of the art world,[4] Dewey and Heidegger attempt to disclose the very reasons why art's significance for life must be recuperated.

The "work" of art and Dewey's conception of experience

Dewey opens *Art as Experience* by raising the paradoxical claim that "[b]y one of the ironic perversities that often attend the course of affairs, the existence of works of art upon which formation of esthetic theory depends has become an obstruction to theory about them" (LW 10:10). Dewey here is using the phrase "work of art" in our rather commonsense understanding of it as synonymous with the "objective," physical painting, novel, sculpture, song, etc. that is being perceived. As he does with so many other philosophical concepts and problems, however, Dewey seeks to reshape our understanding of the *work* of art. Dewey's sense of the "*work of art*" is thus employed not only to show how rich and dynamic an aesthetic experience actually is, but also to highlight its emergence out of the basic materials of our lived experience. Therefore,

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[4] Iain Thomson contends that a "more contemporary example of this theoretical approach to art is found in the area of cognitive psychology and neuroscience. For, once aesthetics reduces art to intense subjective experience, such experiences can be studied objectively through the use of EEGs, *f*MRIs, MEG and PET scans (and the like), and in fact aesthetic experiences are increasingly being studied in this way. At the University of New Mexico's MIND Institute, to mention just one telling example, subjects were given 'beautiful' images to look at and the resulting neuronal activity in their brains was studied empirically using one of the world's most powerful functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging machines" (Thomson 2010).

understanding what Dewey means by the *work* of art is crucial to grasping his account of art's transformative potential, in particular with regard to our ethical comportment.

So, where is art? An obvious answer would be that art resides in galleries, museums, art shows, the homes of the wealthy, and other similar abodes. As just mentioned, art is typically associated with the novel, sculpture, painting, sonata, drama, or elegantly designed building; that is, with the object we encounter that gives rise to our aesthetic experience. Following suit, many theories of art have honed in on art objects and attempted to spell out the nature of art through an account of their essential characteristics. Formalist theories, for instance, while acknowledging the effects an art product has on the judging subject, focus fundamentally on the particular formal qualities of a painting or a musical arrangement in explicating what differentiates art from other things we encounter in our "objective" world. This approach, however, also reinforces the idea that we are metaphysically separate from that world. Moreover, it is the epitome of the view that art is radically distinct from our normal, everyday modes of experience. Kant, for instance, in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), worked out a detailed account of an encounter with the beautiful that stripped the experience of any of its transactional, qualitative richness. According to Kant, in making a pure judgment of taste, the judging subject brackets any subjective considerations (be them conceptual or emotional) and focuses solely on the object's pure form.[5]

Clive Bell, whose book *Art* (1914) represents the acme of post-Kantian formal aesthetics, goes so far as to claim that:

> If the forms of a work are significant its provenance is irrelevant … It is the mark of great art that its appeal is universal and eternal. Significant form stands charged with the power to provoke aesthetic emotion in anyone capable of feeling

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[5] That is, the play of shapes or intuitions in time.

it. The ideas of men go buzz and die like gnats … only great art remains stable and unobscure. Great art remains stable and unobscure because the feelings that it awakens are independent of time and place, because its kingdom is not of this world (Bell 1995, 109-10).

Historical and cultural context, along with the idiosyncrasies of the perceiver, are clearly of no concern for Bell, as the significant form of the art object is the sole locus of his theory of art. Bell is certainly not alone in making such a move, though, as a central thrust of analytic aesthetics is this emphasis on the art product. Even concerning the creative process, this tradition tends to treat the art object as the be-all and end-all of aesthetic experience and, as Thomas Leddy has pointed out, within such theories of art, the "product is prior to process" to such an extent that the active processes of creation and appreciation are ignored (Leddy 1994, 1).

Dewey, on the other hand, employs a Hegelian-inspired organicism in regards to art, whereby the creative process, the appreciative encounter, and the art object are all intimately related. Dewey indeed distinguishes mere art products from the work of art. Consider, for instance, Georgia O'Keeffe's *Ranchos Church* (Figure 1). The locus of a Deweyan analysis is not the 24 1/8 x 31 1/8 inch, oil on canvas painting hanging in whatever exhibition it is currently residing, but is rather the dynamic, transactional experience involving the live creature and that particular encounter with its environment.

Recall from Chapter I that one of the central commitments of pragmatism is an anti-representationalist view of experience. In Dewey's writings on traditional metaphysics and epistemology, he opposes what he refers to as the "spectator theory of knowledge." The underlying premise of the spectator theory is that there is an unbridgeable separation between the apprehending subject and the objective world independent of human interpretation, a separation which is metaphysically and

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temporally-antecedent to our everyday being-in-the-world. Within this theory, espoused

in various forms throughout the history of western thought, this divide is the primary

context of our experience. The aim of inquiry, be it scientific or moral, is thus to bridge

this gulf so as to arrive at *certain* knowledge. Dewey, however, sees the subject-object

divide to be the result of treating the conceptual resources gleaned from reflection as

somehow immutable manifestations of The Way Things Really Are. In other words,

instead of treating our conceptual systems as derivative from a more primary level of

experience, we have fallen into the trap of taking our tools of reflection (i.e., concepts) as

metaphysical givens resting beneath (or swooping in from above) the ground of our lived

experience.[6]

Figure 1. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Ranchos Church* (1929).

This hypostatization is akin to "the philosophical fallacy" discussed in Chapter I,

and Dewey's rich notion of experience not only lies at the heart of his attempt to

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[6] Nietzsche makes a similar observation in one of his earliest, yet perhaps most lucid, reflections on experience and knowledge in his essay "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (1873). In short, Nietzsche's own take on this reversal is that the abstractions and discriminations we derive from our basic interaction with the world become hypostatized and then insert themselves into our experience in a way that obscures the very fact that they are merely abstractions and derivatives.

overcome this fallacy, but is also key to understanding his theory of art. While there are numerous passages, chapters, essays, and even books devoted to explicating what Dewey means by "experience," for our purposes here, a substantially abridged version should suffice. Experience, according to Dewey, arises out of the *transaction* between an organism and its environment. We are not isolated, autonomous subjects passively receiving brute sense data from the external world, nor are we isolated, autonomous subjects bestowing meaning and values on an inherently meaningless and blank canvas beyond our subjective horizons. Instead, we are complex animals engaged in a much more intimate relationship with our world. Clearly, our environment transcends the merely physical, for it incorporates the interpersonal, social and cultural context as well. Our beliefs, desires, past experiences all tinge and shape our experience of the world, yet the world pushes back, delimits *and* expands our horizons of meaning. Therefore, the ground-level, so to speak, of our experience is not an intricate architectonic of conceptual schemas, but is this basic, primordial transaction between an organism and its environment. Dewey thus seeks to undermine the spectator theory of knowledge and experience, along with the inertia-inducing "problems" it generates, by illuminating for us this primary level of engagement, or direct experience, out of which our conceptual systems emerge.

More will be said about this notion of primary, or direct, experience later, as it plays a significant role in both Dewey's and Heidegger's understandings of what art is uniquely capable of "representing." For now, I only note that both see the interpretation of an aesthetic experience in which the judging subject is separated from the art object as not only misguided, but also as inhibiting our ability to truly fathom the richness and

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dynamism of an encounter with the work of art. Yet, as noted, this view of aesthetic experience is rather intuitive and uncontroversially commonplace. Amidst our collective understandings of art, how else are we to think about our experience of an artwork other than as the perception of an art product possessing aesthetic value?

The main clue to how we might reshape this commonsense perspective is found in Dewey's pronouncement that "there is a difference between the art product (statue, painting, or whatever), and the *work* of art," and that while "[t]he first is physical and potential; the latter is active and experienced" (LW 10:168). Staying true to his anti-reductionist tendencies and his Hegelian-inspired organicism, Dewey avoids isolating any one particular feature of aesthetic experience as more privileged than the rest. However, lest one think, then, that Dewey disregards art products completely, in the vein of theories of artistic expression such as R. G. Collingwood's,[7] the former contends that expression must transform material, that is, become manifest in the physical, if it is to be properly considered art. Although my focus here is primarily the phenomenology of artistic appreciation, this emphasis on transforming matter in creative expression is important, because without an actual art object to be experienced by an audience, there is no *work of art*.

Because the work of art exists within the intimate transaction between a perceiver and the art object, the work is best thought of as a dynamic movement through time. Now, with arts such as poetry, literature, drama, and music, it is clear that our appreciation of them involves a beginning, middle, and culmination. For Dewey, however, it could be said that all artistic appreciation takes place in such a

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[7] R. G. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* (1938) puts forth the rather extreme view that the work of art is purely an expression of an idea in the artist's mind. That is, regarding music for instance, "the work of art is not the collection of noises, it is the tune in the composer's head (Collingwood 1995, 150).

chronologically-unified fashion, because life itself unfolds temporally. So, although the object itself might be static, Dewey's transactional conception of experience highlights the fact that any aesthetic experience is going to happen in and through time.[8] As will be seen, one of the crowning values of aesthetic experience is that it embodies an ideal movement through time by holding together the past, the present, and future in one organically-unified experience. As Dewey himself states, "The real work of an artist is to build up an experience that is coherent in perception while moving with *constant change* in its development" (LW 10:58, emphasis added).

This segues nicely into Dewey's argument for the central role of art in life, as it begins with his account of everyday experience. "Experience occurs continuously," writes Dewey, "because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living" (LW 10:43). Yet, Dewey goes on to say that "[o]ftentimes … the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into *an* experience. There is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we get, are at odds with each other" (LW 10:43). During such experience, we can easily feel frustrated and estranged from our world, and this can readily devolve into a forgetfulness of our primary, transactional engagement with our environment.

There are, however, those times in our lives where we genuinely *feel* at home in the world, and where experience hangs together in a way that overflows with meaning. It might have been *that* first date with your future spouse, or *that* presentation at the

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[8] This view lines up with Nietzsche's remarks on Friedrich Schiller's claim that the act of creation is preceded by a *musical mood* (Nietzsche 1967, 49). We obviously think of music as a "temporal" art form, but within this Deweyan view all art is granted a temporal dimension in the very basic sense that it fundamentally involves a movement through time. Interestingly, Dewey himself cites the same claim by Schiller in *Art as Experience* (LW 10:196-7).

philosophy conference, or *that* encounter with Van Gogh's painting of a peasant's shoes, or even *that* time you got stranded in a blizzard atop the Sandia Mountains. It is the ability to label these experiences with the distinguishing "*that*" which marks these off from the inchoateness regularly found in the flow of life. "We have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment," writes Dewey, and "[i]n such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues … flow is from something to something … An experience has a unity that gives it its name, *that* meal, *that* storm, *that* rupture of friendship" (LW 10:43-5). Note that it is not a "happy ending" that demarcates *an* experience from others, but rather that there is a unity, a single pervasive quality underlying the various elements, imbuing them with a heightened sense of meaning and aesthetic import. I say aesthetic here, in the broad sense of *aesthesis*, because as we will see, *an* experience, whether it is discriminated in reflection as practical, intellectual, moral, etc., is something that first and foremost is *felt*.

So, what does all of this have to do with the work of art? First it should be noted that in lumping an aesthetic experience (as elicited by a piece of visual art) in with these other consummatory experiences, Dewey is already making strides towards overcoming an elitist and isolated conception of art. It does not seem far-fetched to say that most individuals of a certain age have had *an* experience, an occurrence within the flow of life that stands out from the rest and whose parts all hang together in a way that provides a felt sense of unity and significance. A work of art is *an* experience – a qualitatively unified and consummatory experience: "[A]rt … unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an

experience" (LW 10:55). Art's "material" (as manifested in its transformed matter) is, according to Dewey, the basic qualitative relations found in our primary engagement with the world.[9] In other words, art is a concentrated example of not just experience in general, but of *an* experience, in that what it evokes "is experience freed from the forces that impede and confuse its development as experience; freed, that is, from factors that subordinate an experience as it is directly had to something beyond itself" (LW 10:279).

Let us now flesh out the details of how exactly Dewey understands the work of art and just what happens in our appreciation of it. With the aim of this inquiry into the relationship between aesthetic experience and ethics focused on the non-conceptual or non-ideational characteristics of art, let us look at the movement of the work of art as experienced in an encounter with a graffiti mural by the artist known as "Zephyr" (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Zephyr, *Zephyr* (date unknown).

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[9] Qualitative relations essentially make up the "moods" that accompany our pre-reflective experience. They are the subject matter for secondary reflection and analysis. The artist uses these qualitative relations, described in reflection with such words as "balance," "harmony," "rhythm," proportion" etc. (along with their opposites), to create a work. These *aesthetic* terms of relation, however, are, according to Dewey, the basis of all thought. This is similar to Heidegger's own conception of moods and how they are felt at a primordial level of existence.

As with any temporally-unified movement, an aesthetic experience has a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning of this consummatory experience is what Dewey sometimes refers to as the moment of seizure or inception, wherein the artwork as a unified whole strikes you with its pervasive, underlying quality. "The total overwhelming impression comes first," writes Dewey, so that the elements "fuse in one indistinguishable whole" (LW 10:151). Thus "[t]here is an impact that precedes all definite recognition of what (the painting) is about" (LW 10:151).[10] The actual journey, however, begins once we get lured into the work via one of its more striking elements. What first becomes focal may very well be different for different people, especially when perceiving a painting. It is true that some paintings possess very striking images, colors, lines or other elements that catch the eye more than others, but because perception for Dewey is always funded by past experience and our storehouse of meanings and values, different elements may stand out more than others, and so there might be various points of departure for an aesthetic experience.

The particular piece I am going to discuss in terms of the aesthetic experience it may elicit is a painting on a wall in New York City of the artist's name. The mural is small enough to take in the whole of it from a distance, and so one will be able to have that Deweyan moment of seizure. As for the development of the work, one of the more eye-catching features of this piece is the elegant swirl that stands in the center of the piece, and many may very well become captivated with the piece because of it. As the process of discrimination ensues, the vibrant color combination of sun-yellow letters with

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[10] Although it seems that with actual "temporal" media such as music, literature, and poetry, we do not get a sense of the whole at the moment of inception, Dewey seems to think we get a *feel* for the whole right at the start of our experience, and that *that feel* pervades and is reinforced throughout the journey. Dewey's emphasis on the unanalyzed qualitative totality of the work, however, might betray the reason why he focuses primarily on painting in his writings on art.

deep crimson outlines on a slate blue background is perhaps more than enough to draw

one into a more careful appreciation of the piece. Regardless of what it is that lures one

into such appreciation, once one is engaged in the encounter with this painting,

perception, rather than mere recognition, is taking place. This is an important distinction

within Dewey's theory of art, as it emphasizes the creative and active aspects of artistic

appreciation.

In contrast to more contemplative theories of art, such as Kant's, where the

judging subject is construed as a rather passive conglomerate of psychological faculties

that, once in the presence of the pure form of an object deemed beautiful, goes through

the mechanics of the "harmony in free-play" of the understanding and the imagination,

Dewey wants to make it clear that, when immersed in an aesthetic experience,

"receptivity is not passivity" (LW 10:59). Passive recognition is, according to Dewey,

"[p]erception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely," and involves us falling

back "upon some previously formed scheme" (LW 10:60). Such recognition, though, is

disconnected from the particularities of the context of our primary engagement with the

world. In recognition, we thus commit the philosophical fallacy through an over-reliance

on our conceptual systems of interpretation, as we lazily try to fit the square peg of

experience into the round hole of our pre-conceived general ideas.

Genuine perception, on the other hand, while it does involve receptivity, is "an act

of the going-out of energy in order to receive" (LW 10:61). There is an aesthetic

sensitivity to the qualitative contours of the situation in such active engagement, thus

allowing the perceiver to be much more open and flexible to the ever-changing dynamics

of experience. Effort and care are indispensible requisites for aesthetic experience, for a

quick glance at the "Zephyr" piece will not *work* in the way art needs to in order for its transformative potential to be actualized. One must attend to the experience that is being afforded by the painting, bringing to bear one's storehouse of meanings and interest gathered from previous experience.

This "*working*-through" of the piece on the part of the perceiver helps Dewey connect the act of artistic expression and doing with the aesthetic appreciation and undergoing of the work. Constructing a bridge between the act of creation and the audience's perception of the created work has proven to be a tenuous enterprise throughout the history of aesthetics. Consider Kant's Third *Critique* and the numerous attempts that have been made to unify the thesis of the Analytic of the Beautiful with his discussion of artistic genius in the Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments.[11] The Deweyan view of perception avoids this problematic, because "to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent" (LW 10:61). This appreciative creation means that the perceiver must simplify, clarify, abridge, and condense according to her interest (LW 10:61). Thus there is an imaginative, but *real*, reciprocity between the artist and the perceiver.

As the active appreciation of the "Zephyr" piece gets underway, the stimuli of the painting are not imposing themselves on one's faculties as if impressing upon wax, but rather the perceiver is creating her experience of it through the way she organizes the various elements according to her interest. One might be drawn to the arrows bracketing the piece, or the swirled figure in the center that is repeated throughout the whole. The

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[11] Mark Johnson attempts to spell such a unification in his "Kant's Unified Theory of Beauty" (1979). Brent Kalar also engages this issue in his *The Demands of Taste in Kant's Aesthetics* (2006).

complimentary colors of deep yellow and crimson create a harmonious tension, and the final outline in light blue fades into a cloud-like background of slate which not only frames the piece and obscures the wall on which it has been painted, but also gives it and emergent and transitory quality. Furthermore, there is a movement in time experienced in the work. Yet, it is not just a movement from left to right, reading, as it were, the artist's name. Indeed, while the conceptual content of the name "Zephyr" is certainly intriguing, even one who was not well-versed in reading graffiti, if carefully attending to the work, will move through the shapes, lines, colors, and shadings, as through a maze of varying emotional hues and intensities.[12]

While Dewey does discriminate, for discussion's sake, three separate phases of an aesthetic experience, there is a thorough interrelationality between these parts. The movement from inception, through development, and to fulfillment is one of a continuous flow, where these elements can only be differentiated upon reflection. In describing the moment of inception and Dewey's distinction between the type of perception that occurs in a consummatory aesthetic experience and mere recognition, the development of such experience's movement has already been introduced. In noting the activity, the going-out of energy, involved in the appreciation of a work of art, Dewey is able to introduce his version of a "golden mean" as it relates not only to his aesthetic ideal, but his ideal

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[12] The conceptual content that I refer to is "zephyr," meaning "a mild breeze." Indeed, graffiti is an art form rather fitting for a Deweyan analysis, as it is literally out of the museums and galleries, and graffiti artists are by no means ignorant of a piece's transitory status (being that even on legal walls, there is a strong chance it will get covered over by another artist's work). It is also a form that captures the spirit of Nietzsche and Dewey's insistence on the enigmatic quality of all "good" art. If the aim of graffiti artists was simply to spread their name and reputation, they could simply write their names in a more legible fashion. The deciphering of a piece is one of the most interesting facets of graffiti, and as such, graffiti pieces lend themselves quite nicely to Dewey's conception of active appreciation. Moreover, the fact that the overwhelming majority of people, most who have no real experience with or interest in graffiti, ignore or are even repulsed by its presence seems to illustrate the museum conception of art against which Dewey is fighting. "If it is not in a gallery or museum, it cannot possibly be art" seems to be the mindset working here.

experiential orientation as well. Dewey states, "Rigid abstinence, coerced submission,

tightness on one side and dissipation, incoherence and aimless indulgence on the other,

are deviations in opposite directions from the unity of an experience," and surmises that

"[s]ome such considerations perhaps induced Aristole to invoke the 'mean proportional'

as the proper designation of what is distinctive of both virtue and the esthetic" (LW

10:48). These two poles line up with Dewey's insistence that an artistic-aesthetic

experience is a dynamic balance between *doing* and *undergoing*.[13]

What is typically taken to be simply an undergoing – the passive reception of the

artwork – is, for Dewey, something that also implies action. The energy that is exerted

on the part of the perceiver primarily involves a concern for the qualitative relations

embedded in our temporal existence. Again, one's storehouse of accrued meanings and

values has an unavoidable influence on one's encounter with a work of art by

contributing to the interest that guides the organization of its elements. Yet another

dimension of one's past experience, along with one's anticipations towards the future, are

implicated in Dewey's conception of the ideal mode of experience, the mode exemplified

by a consummatory aesthetic experience.

Dewey laments that, for the most part, we find ourselves in a state sadly

comparable to that of a stone rolling haphazardly down a hill. That is, "in much of our

experience we are not concerned with the connection of one incident with what went

before and what comes after" and thus "we drift" and "yield according to external

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[13] It should be noted that Dewey continues his trope of bridging distinctions with a hyphen (literally, *hypo hen*, or "under one") with regards to *artistic* doing and *aesthetic* undergoing. Thus, the more proper way of describing the work of art is that it is an *artistic-aesthetic* experience. That is, Dewey posits a rich reciprocity between the artist and the perceiver, whereby the artist is constantly taking the role of the perceiver, and the perceiver, as already mentioned, is engaged in a creative act. Thomas Leddy (1994) discusses this point in regards to a pragmatic theory of artistic creativity which privileges the entire creative process (including relations between the art product, the artist, the audience, and the host of environing factors in the background) over the mere art product.

pressure, or evade, and compromise" (LW 10:47).[14] Though, in working out his general

conception of the *aesthetic* and how it is bound up with his notion of consummation

(which will be discussed shortly), Dewey asks us to hypothetically reconsider the

tumbling stone, albeit with a few imaginative additions to the story. So, added to the bare

facts that "the stone starts from somewhere and moves … toward a place and state where

it will be at rest – toward an end," Dewey suggests we add:

> The ideas that it looks forward with *desire* to the final outcome; that it is
> interested in the things it meets on its way, conditions that accelerate and retard its
> movement with respect to their bearing on the end; that it *acts* and *feels* toward
> them according to the hindering or helping function it attributes to them; *and that
> the final coming to rest is related to all that went before as the culmination of a
> continuous movement*" (LW 10:47, emphasis added).

Looking forward, desiring, bringing one's interest to bear on her experience,

acting and feeling, are the *doings* involved in aesthetic perception. While Dewey is

certainly a staunch critic of formalist aesthetic theories, it is clear that he is concerned

with the organization of the work of art. Again, though, the work is not the static art

product, but exists within the transactional relationship between the perceiver and the art

product. The organization of the artwork, then, is always temporal, and the relations

Dewey seeks to describe have to do significantly with the present moment's connection

to the past and future.

As just mentioned, one's accrued storehouse of meanings and values (i.e., their

perspective, in the Nietzschean-Jamesean sense discussed in Chapter I), ineluctably shape

one's experience of the work of art, and embracing this fact (as opposed to ascetically

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[14] In other words, time because a completely linear sequence of events wherein the dynamic interplay of the past, present, and future is neglected.

attempting to arrive at a Kantian state of disinterest[15]) will only be conducive towards

richer and more meaningful encounters with art. Yet, there is another, perhaps more

subtle, way that the past influences the present within a consummatory aesthetic

experience. As I tour the painting, each element of the work, each shading, each color,

each line and figure, all take turns at the foreground of my embodied experience,[16]

though are not forgotten as they are replaced by another. Moreover, the qualitative

content of each element is carried through the experience and intensifies, mutes,

illuminates, etc., the rest, and while each element maintains its integrity, there is a

pervasive unity holding the experience together. Drawing an analogy, Dewey writes, "A

river distinct from a pond, flows. But its flow gives a definiteness and interest to its

successive portions greater than exist in the homogenous portions of a pond" (LW 10:44).

The pervading flow is what provides the richness of meaning within experience, yet that

fact is often obscured by the two main enemies of the aesthetic, "[r]igid abstinence,

coerced submission, tightness" and "dissipation, incoherence and aimless indulgence"

(LW 10:48).

The pervasive quality of an aesthetic experience is one of the more important

concepts within Dewey's theory of art. It is indeed the pervasive quality that makes *an*

aesthetic experience consummatory. Dewey contends, somewhat counter-intuitively, that

although the work of art proceeds in the form of a journey through inception,

development, and fulfillment, the conclusion of the journey is a whole that was felt

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[15] Technically, Kantian "disinterest" involves the beholder's indifference towards the existence of the object. Yet, his theory can also be said to be disinterested in the sense of scientific disinterestedness, whereby any "subjective" factors (e.g., emotions) are supposed to be bracketed when making a judgment.

[16] As Dewey points out in chapters such as "The Varied Substance of the Arts" from *Art as Experience*, even though painting is a "visual" media, the pervasive quality underlying our experience of a painting involves more than just the eye. It is a felt quality that engages our whole body. Only after the fact do we discriminate the various senses employed in our perception of the work.

throughout. This is what it means that "the final coming to rest is related to all that went before as the culmination of a continuous movement" and that "[t]he experience, like that of watching a storm (at sea) reach its height and gradually subside, is one of continuous movement of subject matters" (LW 10:45-6). In a consummatory aesthetic experience, the future is not perceived as foreboding and uncertain, but as a quiet anticipation drawing us through the work. The future is not "ominous but a promise" and "consists of possibilities that are felt as a possession of what is now and here" (LW 10:24).

Recalling some of pragmatism's central commitments, however, it might be difficult to fathom how Dewey would appeal to what seems like such a teleological and idealistic view of aesthetic experience. Richard Shusterman, though, qualifies Dewey's use of consummation:

> The unity of aesthetic experience is not a closed permanent haven in which we can rest at length in satisfied contemplation. It is rather a moving, fragile, and vanishing event, briefly savored in an experiential flux rife with energies of tension and disorder which it momentarily masters. It is a developing process which, in culmination, destructively dissolves into the flow of consequent experience, pushing us forward into the unknown and toward the challenge of fashioning new aesthetic experience, a new moving and momentary unity from the debris and resistance of past experiences and present environing factors. (Shusterman 1992, 32)

Furthermore, as Shusterman notes, "[f]or Dewey, the permanence of experienced unity is not only impossible, it is aesthetically undesirable" (Shusterman 1992, 32). It is also important to keep in mind that this unity does not mean the dissolution of conflict and tension within the work. Indeed, Dewey even contends that artists in the creative process do not avoid the breakdown of order, but actually "cultivate (moments of resistance and tension) … for their potentialities" (LW 10:22). More about this conception of unity and

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its allowance, even demand, for tension and conflict will be discussed in Chapter III with respect to the pursuit of a unified narrative self.

Returning to the graffiti example, then, at that moment of inception, of seizure, the organic unity of the work offered a subtle promise of just how my journey through the perceptual interaction with it would be fulfilled. There is the sense that this piece is a singularity. Moreover, the experience of it is likewise marked off as *an* experience, as opposed to mere experience. Again, its fulfillment is no permanent harmony, and as randomly as the experience might have gotten underway, the experience will, and should, be fleeting. For, as Dewey, notes, "The time of consummation is also one of beginning anew. Any attempt to perpetuate beyond its term the enjoyment attending the time of fulfillment and harmony constitutes withdrawal from the world" (LW 10:24). One of the more interesting items of note regarding graffiti is that, as Shusterman notes in reference to aesthetic experience in general, "[I]ts own sparkling career projects the process of its dying as it lives" (Shusterman 1992, 33). From the graffiti artist's point of view, this is an obvious and unavoidable fact. As the artist Zephyr himself states, "99% of this (his work) doesn't exist anymore" (Zephyr 2013). Artists like Zephyr implicitly consent to Dewey's definition of art as experience in electing to create their work in a milieu that makes it not only illegal and subject to deletion at any time, but also left exposed outside the confines of the gallery or museum.[17]

Dewey's emphasis on the transitory nature of aesthetic experience reinforces the understanding of the *work* of art put forward throughout this discussion of his aesthetics. The work of art exists within the transactional relationship between the art product, the

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[17] It is also worth mentioning that many graffiti artists choose train-cars as their canvas. While this gives their work a sense of being on a touring exhibition, there is no way of keeping track of where their piece is or where it is going.

perceiver, and the context of the experience. The temporal organization of a

consummatory aesthetic experience sets it apart from the regular flow of life, in which

mechanical, habitual rigidity or slack dispersion and incoherence occlude the aesthetic.

Hence the sense of *felt rightness* had in the way that the various elements of the artwork

hang together, a way that allows the undefined whole, the pervasive qualitative

dimension of our primary engagement with the world, to shine forth.

Now that we understand what Dewey means by the work of art, we should

explore in more detail why Dewey ascribes such a privileged status to art and aesthetic

experience. It should first be noted, however, that the motivation behind many traditional

aesthetic theories' attempts to describe the significance of art with reference to something

other than mere aesthetic enjoyment (e.g., as providing knowledge, as putting us in touch

with the noemenal, etc.) was an understanding of pleasure as something base and

removed from the sterile domain of high art. Dewey does not hold this same ascetic view

of pleasure, and even laments the way pleasure and the emotions in general have been

understood by traditional morality. For Dewey, there is nothing inherently wrong with

the desires and emotions of the body, and, as has already been mentioned, he goes as far

as to advocate for a Humean cultivation of sentiment in his writings on education and

ethics. So, besides the pleasure to be had in an aesthetic experience,[18] the other part of

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[18] "Pleasure" here is used loosely to denote the "felt rightness" of an aesthetic experience. In discussing the generic notion of a consummatory experience, Dewey uses the example of a job interview and notes that it can still be consummatory, can still have that sense of felt rightness, without one getting the job. That is, consummation is not to be conflated with the happy ending associated with an encounter with the beautiful. Dewey also discusses a storm at sea as having this sense of felt rightness – a move that seems to free up theoretical resources to discuss the sublime or works of art meant to be jarring, unsettling, or simply not "beautiful" (in the very narrow sense). This is also a point that reinforces the need for education, in the form of more experience, with regards to various types of art. Dewey does not deny that background knowledge can inform and enrich experience, and this is no doubt true in regards to aesthetic experience. Richard Shusterman's detailed analysis of a hip-hop song is a striking embodiment of Dewey's understanding of the role of the critic (Shusterman 1992). The critic, according to Dewey, does not simply

the answer to why Dewey values art so highly is captured in his bold assertion that, "[t]o esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is" (LW 10:279). Experience elicited by the dynamic *work* of art is "experience freed from the forces that impede and confuse its development as experience, freed, that is, from factors that subordinate an experience as it is directly had to something beyond itself" (LW 10:279). In other words, the strong, sometimes overwhelming, sense of the pervasive, qualitative whole underlying the work of art, and indeed underlying all of our discursive reality, unsettles what Dewey sees as a pernicious and stunting inversion extant in much of our experience and reiterated in the theories of the traditional western philosophical canon. To "subordinate an experience as it is directly had to something beyond itself" is, according to Dewey, to read too heavily into our direct, primary engagement with our environment elements of our secondary experience (our conceptual apparatuses, not limited to, but certainly including many of the bothersome distinctions that have dogged western thought). Art, then, could be said to lessen the prescription on our conceptual lenses by putting us in touch with the primary level of our experience as an intimate transaction between organism and environment.

What is being buried here, however, is that art's foremost significance, by Dewey's lights, seems to lie where it intersects with ethics. Throughout *Art as Experience*, Dewey drops hints that he, like Tolstoy, Kant, Schopenhauer, and various others before him, takes seriously the influence artistic appreciation can have for how one lives her life. In the closing pages, for instance, Dewey avers that "art is more moral than moralities" (LW 10:351). This is because moralities "either are, or tend to become

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say what the meaning of the work is, but, rather, attempts to *show* how aesthetic experience can emerge out of a particular engagement with an art product.

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consecrations of the *status quo*, reflections of custom, reinforcements of the established order," while "[a]rt has been the means of keeping alive the sense of purposes that outrun evidence and of meanings that transcend indurated habit" (LW 10:351).

With the pervasive quality of the work of art being so strongly felt within our embodied experience, we come to feel, and thus understand, that our concepts and discriminations rest on an enveloping, emotional, qualitative background. For, "In the discussion of the qualitative background of experience … we are in the presence of something common in the substance of the arts" (LW 10:206). Again, "the undefined pervasive quality of an experience is that which binds together all the defined elements … making them a whole" and "the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience" (LW 10:199-200).

Another way of putting this point is that in an encounter with a work of art, we come to realize that our conceptual systems do not exhaust their source. Our ways of understanding the world, ourselves, others, and the various ways these are interwoven and related are not fixed in some eternal heaven, but are creations themselves – created to help us not only survive, but find meaning, value, and happiness, along with ways to increase the social good. Yet they are created out of fabric that is much more extensive and inclusive than we might ever fathom, and in this way Dewey seems to put forth an *ecstatic* theory of art's effect on us:

> A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live … We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experience. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. (LW 10:200)

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Art has the capacity to take us out of ourselves and our idiosyncratic perspectives – in a way that is not unsettling – allowing us to feel a part of a bigger whole. Recognizing the interrelations between us and our environment, in both its social and physical aspects, helps not only cultivate the wider self, that, as will be seen, is key to Dewey's normative ethics, but also helps us feel more at home in the world – a world that does not always present itself to us in the most hospitable fashion.

So despite his disdain for appeals to the transcendent and extranatural, Dewey does think that the value of art rests in its ability to put us in touch with the ideal. Yet this ideal, offering us a redeeming "answer" to our earthly problems does not come "by way of anodyne or by transfer to a radically different realm of things" (LW 10:286). What this means is that Dewey's conception of the ideal mode of reality is not extranatural, but exists in the potentialities of present experience to realize new meanings and stabilities. Such transformation is potential because of the wealth of possibilities afforded by direct experience – possibilities often glossed over by the hypostatization of the conceptual tools gleaned from secondary, reflective experience.

The attainment of this ideal thus calls for a (re)grounding of our secondary, discursive experience in our basic level of engaged existence. As romantic as it might sound, this involves a (re)connection with "nature," or the primordial, qualitative rhythms of our transaction with it. Bertram Morris has indeed gone as far as to argue that Dewey's account of art contains a strand of the ultra-traditional mimetic aesthetic theory propounded most famously by Plato. But, regarding *mimesis*, as Plato "was probably thinking about the kind of fore-shortening that Apollodorus discovered in making a two-dimensional bunch of grapes look like a three-dimensional bunch," Morris contends that

"what Dewey actually means is that art sets up rhythms in man, rhythms which are also found in nature" (Morris 1971, 190).

So, as opposed as Dewey is to Kant's bland formalism and extranaturalism with respect to his theory of art, there is a similarity between the two that highlights Dewey's stance with respect to the transformative potential of aesthetic experience. That is, art helps us to feel at home in the world by giving us a sense that we are not alienated from it, that we seem fitted for it in a way that allows for the experience of meaning. With Kant, this fit involved a rigid faculty psychology, and it is supposed to buoy our rational faith in the Kantian moral Ideas of God, Freedom, and Immortality. For Dewey, this fitness lies in the fact that our intelligence and ways of making meaning emerged out of our intimate intercourse with the world. What this does, then, is expand our horizons of meaning and possibility by making us aware that there is more to our lives than our conceptual systems of interpretation would have us believe.[19] Our various ways of carving up the world, or of describing ourselves and others, in no way exhaust the possibilities available to us, and so what art gestures at is that things can be different – and so things maybe can be better.

Heidegger, art, and contingency

I would now like to briefly discuss Heidegger's aesthetic theory to reinforce and perhaps illuminate some of the points just made concerning Dewey's conception of the transformative potential of art. Heidegger provides an insightful and supplemental

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[19] I see this as Dewey's take on a rather recurrent idea found throughout the history of aesthetics. Kant himself presented the view that the genius of the artist lied in her ability to manipulate and express aesthetic ideas – "ideas" or experiences that cannot be captured by concepts. Nietzsche follows suit in contending that "many stimuli and entire states of stimulation which cannot be expressed in language can be rendered in music" (Nietzsche1995, 47).

conversation partner here because (1) as noted above, Dewey and Heidegger both lament the depreciated status of art in contemporary society and have similar views on the root cause of that status, (2) both articulate phenomenologies of aesthetic experience which attempt to show how the dynamic work of art (which, for both, exists in the encounter between the art product and the perceiver) puts us in touch with the primary level of our engaged existence, and, finally, (3) both believe there are important ethical implications involved in being put in such a *ecstatic* mode of experience.

However, it is first worth mentioning a few caveats concerning this syncretic exercise. First of all, it might be argued that while there are some superficial similarities between Dewey and Heidegger, if one wants to hold the former together with a continental thinker, there are better options, most notably Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[20] I am certainly not claiming that Heidegger and Dewey are the best possible match if what you are looking for is a closer philosophical family resemblance (indeed, I would argue that Nietzsche and his emphasis on the physiological dimensions of experience might be closer to Dewey's philosophical project than Heidegger's). My point rather is simply to buttress my interpretation of Dewey's aesthetics by bringing a different, yet sympathetic, perspective on the issue at stake. Furthermore, I should also make it clear that my treatment of Heidegger's aesthetics is meant only as a supplement to my overarching discussion of Dewey's understanding of the work of art. I am in no way supposing that I am putting forth a comprehensive account of Heidegger's theory of art (or even Dewey's

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[20] Joseph Margolis makes just this claim in his essay "Dewey in Dialogue with Continental Philosophy" in Larry Hickman's (ed.) *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation* (1998). Margolis' main point is that the extranaturalism found in Heidegger's divinization of Being and language is incompatible with Dewey's own naturalist commitments. While I grant this, the similarities between Dewey and Heidegger on the point I am trying to make about art's transformative potential are too striking and informative to pass up.

for that matter).[21] My aims are geared towards the end-in-view of this project: highlighting the significance that the appreciation of art can have for a particular conception of ethics.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, Heidegger, like Dewey, sees the quest for certainty, for technological and epistemic mastery over all that is, as the primary factor contributing to the degradation of art within our collective mindsets. In fact, the very idea of "aesthetic experience" is a notion Heidegger wants to challenge. What he means by "aesthetic experience," though, is actually an example of the aestheticization of art, whereby "The artwork is posited as the 'object' for a 'subject,' and this subject-object relation, specifically a relation of feeling, is definitive for aesthetic consideration" (Heidegger 1979, 78). Within this understanding of our encounter with a work of art, one which is couched within the same representationalist model of experience pragmatism eschews, the idea is that an external object, *ein Gegenstand*, stands opposed to a human subject and, either *compels* that subject to recognize its inherent meaning or is an inherently meaningless object upon which the judging subject projects her own meanings and values.

It is the latter of these two possibilities that Heidegger primarily discusses, as this aestheticized approach to art emerges out of and reinforces the subjectivism with which he is so concerned. As Iain Thomson describes, subjectivism is "the 'worldview' in which an intrinsically-meaningless objective realm ("nature") is separated epistemically from isolated, value-bestowing, self-certain subjects, and so needs to be mastered through the relentless epistemological, normative, and practical activities of these subjects"

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[21] Heidegger's discussions on art are scattered throughout many of his writings, both early and late. But, for my purposes here, I will only be looking at some of his general ideas on art as gleaned primarily from two essays, "The Age of the World Picture" (1938) and "On the Origin of the Work of Art" (1935-36).

(Thomson 2010). This worldview lines up with the view of experience and quest for certainty against which Dewey rails, and also posits and entrenches the same subject-object divide that he attempts to dissolve in not only his aesthetics, but his epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical projects as well.

So what does art have to offer *vis-à-vis* this problematic worldview? Thomson proposes that Heidegger's phenomenology of the work of art, as exemplified in the latter's meditation on Van Gogh's painting of a pair of shoes (Figure 3), is meant to illuminate a "more fundamental level of experience, a primordial modality of engaged existence (*zuhandensein*) in which the self and world are united rather than divided" (Thomson 2010):

> [I]n what begins as an ordinary aesthetic experience of an object – Van Gogh's painting of a pair of shoes – that stands opposite us, we notice and carefully attend to the way these shoes take shape on and against an inconspicuously dynamic background, a background which is not nothing at all but, rather, both supports and exceeds the intelligible world that emerges from it … Our phenomenological encounter with Van Gogh's painting shows us that its meaning is neither located entirely in the object standing against us nor is it simply projected by our subjectivity onto an inherently meaningless work; the work's meaning must instead be inconspicuously accomplished in our own engagement with the work. Through our engagement with Van Gogh's painting … we lucidly encounter the negotiation by which we are always-already making sense of the world. (Thomson 2010)

Van Gogh's painting is a paradigmatic work of art in that it represents how art itself works. With its rich texturing, shading, and the play of light and shadows, the painting of a pair of shoes offers a hint at the possibilities for meaning contained in experience. It does so by emphasizing the fragility of form, as inchoate shapes and figures offer themselves up for Gestalting, while simultaneously retreating into the background. For Heidegger, the phenomenological encounter with *Pair of Shoes* reveals the strife between our intelligible "worlds" and the "earth. So, it is not just that art

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presents us with a world of intelligibility in which to inhabit, but it does so without neglecting or occluding the dynamic background, the earth, out of which that world emerges. Thus, one of art's highest functions is how it "represents" the basic idea that our conceptualized, secondary experience, with all of its discriminations and distinctions, rests on a more fundamental level of experience where there is a dynamic and intimate engagement between the self and the world. In sum, like Dewey, Heidegger believes that art reflects an ideal mode of experience; one where our secondary, reflective ways of structuring our intelligible worlds are intimately entwined with and thus informed by the primordial, qualitatively-rich universe of which we are a part.

Figure 3. Vincent van Gogh, *Pair of Shoes* (1886)

The Ethical Stakes of the Work of Art

Through engagements with works of art, then, "we can learn to approach the humble things that make up our worlds with care, humility, patience, gratitude, even awe" (Thomson 2010). We are clearly now involved in a discussion of the ethically-transformative potential of an encounter with a work of art. The next two chapters, then,

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will explore (1) how two of the central concerns of ethics (i.e., care of the self and care for the other) are redescribed within a pragmatist framework, and (2) how, following such redescription, the significance that the visual arts can have for these two concerns comes into relief. In concluding this chapter, it will be helpful to reintroduce the basic premise of this dissertation, and sharpen the point I am making in regards to the work of art's transformative potential.

Despite focusing more on the literary arts as they inform our ethical lives, Rorty is quite helpful in synthesizing Dewey's and Heidegger's aesthetic theories in the name of spelling out one of art's more significant moral functions. The main claim being made here is that a pragmatist ethics involves, as a most basic requirement, embracing the central commitments of pragmatism laid out in Chapter I. To remind ourselves, those commitments are: (1) its anti-representationalism, anti-foundationalism, and anti-essentialism; (2) its orientation towards the future; (3) its respect for the contingent constraints on inquiry and our being-in-the-world; and (4) its deep commitment for pluralistic perspectivism. The ethical imperative of a pragmatist ethics involves cultivating a certain type of character that is responsive to these, and its crowning virtue, I claim, is *openness*. Now, I would like to try and fill in some of the details regarding this disposition by drawing slightly on the views of art previously discussed.

In making his case for the pragmatist tendencies found in Heidegger, Rorty offers an interpretation of the former's notion of "letting beings be," one which sheds light on this virtue of openness and what it is exactly art can do for how we live. In seeking to explain the normative sense Heidegger has for "primordiality" and the ability to "let beings be," Rorty suggests the following: "an understanding of Being is more primordial

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than another if it makes it easier to grasp its own contingency" (Rorty 1991, 43).

Heidegger's (and perhaps Nietzsche's) admiration for the Presocratic Greeks is due to the

belief that "their understanding of Being in terms of notions like *arche* and *physis* was

less self-certain, more hesitant, more fragile, than our own supreme confidence in our

own ability to manipulate beings in order to satisfy our own desires" (Rorty 1991, 43).

This idea, coupled with Heidegger's tenet that un-concealing is always necessarily a

concealing, leads to the prescription that "the best you can do is to remember that you are

not speaking the only possible language – that around the openness provided by your

understanding of Being there is a larger openness of other understandings of Being as yet

unhad. Beyond the world made available by *your* elementary words there is the silence

of other, equally elementary, words, as yet unspoken" (Rorty 1991, 46). Heeding this

suggestion, while not catering to our seemingly innate desire to get things right and

certain, does help us inhabit our pluralistic universe in a way that keeps our horizons of

meaning and possibility for action *open* by clueing us into the ineluctable reality of our

existence. That is, there is nothing necessary about our description of ourselves, of

others, of the world, nor the relations between. So, if need be, in the name of individual

flourishing or social amelioration, we can transform and redescribe things as needed. For

both Dewey and Heidegger, art, more so than any other cultural phenomenon, opens our

eyes to the fact that "there are no *a priori* or destined limits to our imagination or to our

achievement" (Rorty 1991, 48) towards the overarching goals of a liberal morality.

Obviously, Heidegger would rue this last claim by Rorty, as, following Nietzsche,

he took the tenets of liberal morality as validating the tyranny of *das Man*. Moreover,

Heidegger thought of pragmatism as the acme of power-driven humanism and calculative

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thinking. I follow Rorty, however, in seeing Dewey's project as evidence that one can do justice to both poetry and inquiry. That is, Dewey's conception of inquiry is not reducible to the drive to attain mastery over nature and make humanity the measure of all things. Inquiry, in the scientific sense, is just one possible way of coping with experience, of expanding our horizons of meaning and possibility, of making the world a better place. Art and imagination, according to Dewey, are just as valuable in this regard. And, the key to understanding this sometimes ignored facet of Dewey's thought lies in his brief discussion in *Art as Experience* of "negative capability."

For all of his praise of science and inquiry, Dewey undoubtedly adheres to the Socratic dictum that human wisdom will forever be finite and thus limited. As seen in the discussion of the pervasive qualitative background of experience above, there is an excessiveness to human existence that cannot be captured in propositions or concepts, and Dewey believes art is evidence of this. But art also teaches us that this excessiveness, and the resultant limits placed on what we can know, is not to be feared, but rather, embraced. Drawing on letters written by the English Romantic poet John Keats, Dewey argues for the importance of "negative capability," or the ability to accept "life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge" (LW 10:42). This is in contrast to Keats' contemporary Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who the former believed "would let a poetic insight go when it was surrounded with obscurity, because he could not intellectually justify it" (LW 10:40).

This is strikingly similar to Nietzsche's critique of Euripides's tragedies. Euripides, Nietzsche supposes, despised the tragic works of Aeschylus and Sophocles on account of their ambiguities and obscurity. This led to the death of the tragic art form

Nietzsche so admired, as Euripides brought the quest for certainty and clarity onto the stage. For both Nietzsche and Dewey, there is a sense in which art is meant to be inherently vague. Euripides, according to Nietzsche's interpretation, disdained that in Aeschylean tragedy he "observed something incommensurable in every feature and in every line, a certain deceptive distinctiness and at the same time an enigmatic depth, indeed an infinitude in the background," for, "[e]ven the clearest figure always had a comet's tail attached to it which seemed to suggest the uncertain, that which could never be illuminated" (Nietzsche 1967, 80). And, in claiming that poets, in particular, exploit this indefinite phase of art, Dewey makes a similar point in noting that "Poe spoke of 'a suggestive indefiniteness of vague and therefore spiritual effect,' … and the poets' belief "that every work of art must have about it something not *understood* to obtain its full effect" (LW 10:199). Yet in staying true to his tenet that art emerges out of everyday life, Dewey asserts that "[a]bout *every* explicit and focal object there is a recession into the implicit which is not intellectually grasped" (LW 10:199, emphasis added). It is only in reflection that we would take this implicitness to be somehow negative. This seems to be why both Nietzsche and Dewey see as one of the highest functions of art the communication of experiences, meanings, and values that cannot be wrought into a neat discursive form. Keats's take on Coleridge and Nietzsche's on Euripides with respect to their discomfort in the face of "uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge" speaks to the existential discomfort we feel upon realizing that there is nothing *necessary* about how we describe the world and prescribe our lives.[22]

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[22] As will be discussed in the following chapter, this is not to say that there are not any constraints on our experience. As discussed in Chapter I, pragmatists respect the natural and cultural constraints shaping our being-in-the-world. This claim is simply meant to convey the idea that there are always possibilities open to us for how we make sense of experience.

It is my contention that one of the underlying themes of Dewey's aesthetic theory is that aesthetic experience as elicited by a work of art cultivates in us such a "negative capability." Such a capacity allows one to take all of the vagaries of human existence and turn "that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities – to imagination and art" (LW 10:42). On this view, openness and "negative capability" go hand-in-hand, in that instead of lamenting the fact that we are not speaking the only possible language, and thus not living the one right way or doing the one right thing, we relish the artistic and imaginative license thereby granted to us regarding these ethical concerns. In the next two chapters, I will explore how this cardinal virtue of openness plays itself out in the context of care of the self and care for the other, with its cardinality lying in how it illuminates the need for supplementary virtues that include (but are certainly not limited to): *care* (so as to not lapse into apathy in the face of pragmatism's anti-absolutism), *imagination* (so as to be capable of engaging the wealth of possibilities for meaning and action that exist beyond our current way of understanding things), *sensitivity* (so as to be attuned as possible to the various contingencies making up the context of any given situation), and *sympathy* (so as to not just tolerate, or "let be," the pluralism of our society, but actively try to understand others' perspectives in the name of inclusivity and societal progress).

CHAPTER III

HANGING BY A NARRATIVE THREAD: CARE OF THE SELF

AS AESTHETIC SELF-CREATION

> It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion;
> it is easy in solitude to live after our own;
> but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd
> keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude
> - Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

Care of the Self

In our common vernacular, "ethics" or "morality" is typically associated with a set of rules, precepts, and principles that will govern one's relations to others. Yet, in *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (1998), Alexander Nehamas contends that altruistic considerations have not always been, nor need be, the central focus of ethics. "Morality," Nehamas writes, "is not exhausted by our relations to others, by codes of moral behavior that govern the interaction of various individuals and groups with one another. It also concerns the ways in which individuals relate to and regulate themselves" (Nehamas 1998, 179). Nehamas, following the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault, contends that this promotion of caring for oneself is the underlying motive of Socrates' entire philosophical mission. Philosophy, according to this relatively standard interpretation of Socrates' thought, is not simply a matter of propounding doctrines about truth, justice, and beauty, but is first and foremost a way of life. One of Socrates' famous proclamations from the *Apology* captures this very spirit: "For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul" (Plato 2000, 32-3).

Platonic-Christian-Kantian care of the self

This care for the soul can be taken synonymously with the care of the self I am discussing when we consider what exactly such care involves. Nehamas, again drawing on Foucault, states that *caring* "suggests not the surveillance of prison guards but the solicitude of parents" (Nehamas 1998, 160). A significant feature of Socrates' mission, then, as illustrated in the passage from the *Apology* quoted above is "to attend to his fellow citizens like a father or an older brother in order to show them that what is important is not money or reputation but the care of themselves" (Nehamas 1998, 165). In this light, philosophy as a way of life, as well as ethics as care of the self, is a matter of self-correction. Socrates' call to live the examined life consists in constantly trying to better oneself through the testing of one's supposed "knowledge" in the name of purging oneself of false belief.[1]

While there are various competing interpretations of Socrates, one of the more standard ones takes such testing itself to be the most important part of this care. This clearly involves a critical orientation towards the commonly received opinions of one's day. But self-correction also implies the existence of a criterion by which to gauge whether one's beliefs are in need of revision. The ancient Greek conception of humans as rational animals, employed by both Plato and Aristotle, served as this benchmark, leading both to privilege reason over sense, the mind over the body, and knowledge over mere opinion. As such, self-correction, or care of the self, involved bringing the "lower" part of our nature under the rule of our God-like faculty of *logos*.

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[1] For Socrates, this was not a mere epistemological concern, but had deep ethical significance. If one *knew* the good, they would *do* it.

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One does not have to go back all the way to the ancient Greeks, though, to witness the centrality of self-care in various moral traditions. Let us consider here two: Christianity and Kantian deontology. There is a *prima facie* take on Christian morality that regards it as solely concerned with altruistic thought and conduct. Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" and "Parable of the Good Samaritan" no doubt illustrate Christianity's commitment to neighbor-love. Moreover, there is also, as Nietzsche rightfully pointed out, an inversion of "noble" Greco-Roman virtues such as pride and greatness of soul within Christian morality, where such self-centered traits become regarded as sinful distractions. Paradoxically, they are distractions from working on the *self*. Within this worldview, adherence to Church doctrine and partaking in various ascetic practices are the primary ways in which one ought to care for oneself and they are the means of purifying one's soul in order to actualize their essence as a child of God.

Similarly, despite its emphasis on duties owed to others, Kantian ethics also advances a proper concern for the self, and again we see a common theme emerge as it relates to the idea of self-correction. Our essence, who we really are, according to Kant, is our intelligible, rational self. Our earthly, embodied, and empirical self is simply our manifestation within the sensible, phenomenal world. Thus, caring for the self involves heeding our rational essence and overcoming "the dear old self" and its crude emotions and desires. For instance, Kant's third example in the "Four Illustrations" from his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) goes so far as to condemn those who do not labor to better themselves and does so on the grounds that, *qua* rational being, one could not possibly will such indifference to one's betterment to be a universal law.

In looking at these examples from the Platonic-Christian-Kantian tradition's understanding of care of the self there is a similarity that emerges. That is, care of the self is about self-*discovery* in the name of well-being and flourishing. It is about discovering your essence and deducing from that the only possible route towards actualizing the potentialities contained therein. As already cited in Chapter I, Rorty claims that those writing out of this tradition are under the impression that they can "inform us what we really are, what we are compelled to be by powers not ourselves. They would exhibit the stamp which had been impressed on *all* of us … It would be necessary, essential, telic, constitutive of what it is to be human. It would give us a goal, the only possible goal, namely, the full recognition of that very necessity, the self-consciousness of our essence" (Rorty 1989, 26). The criteria used for self-correction in these various approaches are thus something beyond the vagaries of social practices and historical circumstance.

Yet, one of the central commitments of the pragmatist worldview I have attempted to explicate so far is its anti-essentialism, especially as it relates to selfhood and human nature. I say selfhood *and* human nature here to convey the idea that, for pragmatists, there is neither an underlying human essence, nor such a thing as one's individual "true self." Both forms of essentialism, species-specific and individual-specific, posit that self-correction is simply a matter of *finding* out who one really is. Pragmatists, however, in eschewing such essentialism, can echo Rorty's praise of Nietzsche in that the latter "rejected that this tracking (of finding out who one *really* is) was a process of discovery. In his view, in achieving this sort of self-knowledge we are

not coming to know a truth which was out there (or in here) all the time. Rather, he saw self-knowledge as self-creation" (Rorty 1989, 27).

In sum, pragmatism's denial of an essential self or human nature means that selfhood is not given to us in advance. Who we are, then, is a process of becoming. As we will see, care of the self, within this framework, is about taking control of this process, and actively attempting to form and shape our sense of who we are. Foucault, who was deeply influenced by Nietzsche, and who, as noted, greatly informed Nehamas's conception of care of the self, might have said it best when he averred: "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 … Couldn't everyone's life become a work of art: Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?" (Foucault 1994, 261).

Pragmatism's Conception of the Self

Before exploring what exactly goes into shaping one's life into a work of art, it will be helpful to explain in more detail the conception of the self held by Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty. All three radically break from the traditional view of the self as "ready-made" in strikingly similar ways and paint a picture of selfhood that readily lends itself to an ethics of aesthetic self-creation. Let us now look briefly at each thinker's critique of the traditional view of the self in order to get a sense for the general pragmatist conception of selfhood.

Nietzsche's "regulative fiction"

"What separates me most deeply from the metaphysicians is," writes Nietzsche, "I don't concede that the 'I' is what thinks. Instead, I take the *I itself to be a construction of thinking …* in other words to be only a *regulative fiction …* However habituated and indispensable this fiction may now be, that in no way disproves it having been invented: something can be a condition of life and *nevertheless be false*" (Nietzsche 2003, 21). In his *Meditations*, Rene Descartes affirmed the certainty of the *cogito*, the "I think," as the foundation of his edifice of knowledge. According to Descartes, the self is the unshakable core at the center of human being that dictates existence. In no way is it fragile or in-process – in fact it even comes equipped with the mark of its maker so as to expand the scope of clear and distinct ideas from just the "I" to facts about the external world.

Nietzsche, however, refutes this stability of the self. Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) is actually, according to Nietzsche, *cogitare ergo sum* (thinking, therefore "I" am). Contrary to popular belief, the self is not the *source* of thought, but is a *product* of thought. But thought, for Nietzsche, is a phenomenon that emerges out of our basic, embodied interaction with the world. "Everything which enters consciousness is the last link in a chain, a closure," writes Nietzsche, and "[b]elow every thought lies an affect" (Nietzsche 2003, 60). Our "I" is not given to us in advance. We are animals trying to cope with an environment who have come to possess complex ways of planning and coordinating action. A part, albeit an important one, of this complicated process is an awareness of the self – our self-image. Sentient beings, by their nature, are affective. As humans, we are simply able to associate those affects with an abstraction, our "self."

The self is merely another one of the ways we cope with the flux of experience by stamping a relatively stable concept of "being" onto our world of becoming. And, though he proclaims the self a fiction, Nietzsche actually endorses editing this fiction, so to speak, in the name of creating a coherent narrative. Indeed as we will later see, he, along with Dewey and Rorty, redescribes self-correction as the artistic creation of an organically-unified self. The point here is simply that who we are is not something that is given to us in advance, either through a universal human essence or a predetermined individual character. In order to get around in the world we need to have a sense of stability regarding our identity, which comes in the form of one's self-description, yet we must keep in mind that, at bottom, there is nothing necessary about the way one is describing oneself at any given time.[2] So, it is this understanding of the self that allows one to become who one is – or, in other words, shape one's identity through the process of aesthetic self-creation.[3]

Dewey's "self-in-process"

There is a resounding similarity between Nietzsche's view of the self and that of Dewey. Dewey opens his chapter "Nature, Mind, and the Subject" of *Experience and Nature* (1925) by stating, "Personality, selfhood, subjectivity are eventual functions that emerge with complexly organized interactions, organic and social. Personal individuality has its basis and conditions in simpler events" (LW 1:163). In order to fully grasp

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[2] There are certainly aspects of one's existence that are inextricable parts of their self-description, and, thus, "necessary." But when these "necessities" (e.g., aspects of our biological makeup as human animals) enter into the realm of description and communication, the words we use to account for them are up to us.

[3] Nietzsche advises: "We should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power [of arranging, of making things beautiful] usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life" (Nietzsche 1974, 299).

Dewey's conception of selfhood, and to fill in some of the details of Nietzsche's view, it is helpful to bring in the former's distinction between primary and secondary experience. As Nietzsche argues so plainly and effectively in his early essay "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873), our conceptual tools are metaphorical abstractions gleaned from a more intimate entwinement between us, as embodied creatures, and our environment. That is, our concepts are not written into the fabric of the universe, but are derivatives of a pre-discursive level of existence. In secondary, reflective experience, then, we make distinctions in experience; distinctions that organize, give meaning, bestow value, and make sense of the primordial and qualitative level of existence which is the antecedent of all thought and reflection.

One of the most significant of these distinctions is our sense of self. In describing ourselves, we are giving meaning to our embodied existence in the form of an identity. We use language to communicate who we are to other people, and, as such, our sense of selfhood is always already embedded within a matrix of social practices, roles, labels, types, etc. The self, then, emerges out of a situation involving a developing, growing organism interacting with a dynamic physical and social environment. Dewey thus rails against the "dogma of the unity and ready-made completeness of the soul," and endorses the view that "selfhood is in the process of making," whereby there exists "the relative fluidity and diversity of the constituents of selfhood" (MW 14:97).[4]

Like Nietzsche, Dewey takes it to be more than reasonable that "any self is capable of including within itself a number of inconsistent selves, of unharmonized dispositions" (MW 14:97). Contra Descartes, the self is in no way certain, but rather is fragmented and in a state of flux. This opens the door for an understanding of self-care

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[4] For Dewey, these constituents consist in the habits of thought and action that make up our character.

not as a matter of discovery, but as the creative endeavor to establish a relative stability of selfhood in order to flourish.[5] Dewey notes that the key difference between his conception of selfhood and the traditional one is "between a self taken as something already made and a self still making through action." The latter, Dewey continues, is "an adventure in discovery of a self which is possible but as yet unrealized, an experiment in *creating* a self which shall be more inclusive than the one which exists" (MW 14:98).

Our sense of self, Dewey contends, has the potential to flexibly adapt to novel situations and is intimately bound up with its actions and conduct. What is important to keep in mind is that, even though the self emerges out of a more primary level of engaged existence, it can still have a transformative effect on that basic existential level. That is, our secondary, reflective distinctions we make, such as our sense of self, can indeed transform our very being-in-the-world. As will be argued, the story we tell ourselves and others about who we are has a significant impact on our conduct and how we live.

Rorty and the contingency of selfhood

Rorty's own view of selfhood is very much influenced by Nietzsche and Dewey, as well as by Freud. All three, Rorty contends, helped de-divinize the self by refuting the traditional metaphysical view of the self as wholly-contained and non-relational. Such de-divinization involves substituting "a tissue of contingent relations, a web which stretches backward and forward through past and future time, for a formed, unified, present, self-contained substance, something capable of being seen steadily and whole"

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[5] Here is a worthy place to qualify what is meant by human flourishing in this context. Dewey's regulative ideal of "growth" is often criticized for its vagueness, and, moreover, for seemingly conceiving of "growth" as the only inherent good. Growth, in itself, is not necessarily always good, though (e.g., cancer, overpopulation, etc.). "Flourishing," thought of as *healthy* growth," seems to be a better descriptor for what Dewey had in mind.

(Rorty 1989, 41). In employing this strategy, pragmatists are often charged with robbing humanity of that special ingredient that distinguishes us from the animals; for, the core that supposedly accounts for the unity of the self is commonly thought of as something akin to the soul or divine spark of Reason. As already mentioned in Chapter I, Rorty contends that "the pragmatist's best defense against this sort of charge is to say that she too has a conception of our difference from the animals," but it is simply a difference in "a much greater flexibility in the boundaries of selfhood, in the sheer quantity of relationships which can go to constitute a human self" (Rorty 1999, 81).

In other words, what distinguishes us from the "lower" animals is our ability to transcend, through our use of language and our embeddedness in a complex of pre-established social meanings, the here and now, and therefore have a heightened awareness of our existence as a self. We can tell stories about ourselves not only to ourselves, but to others, as a way of navigating the social landscape and making sense of experience. Considering Rorty's poeticism, with its neopragmatic focus on language, it is no surprise that his view of selfhood and aesthetic self-creation is one of narrative description and redescription. The "I" is simply the protagonist of one's narrative life story. The "I," or sense of self, is not Descartes' unextended substance, but is rather an abstraction, a symbolic narrative construction, that can be redescribed and transformed.[6] One's "essence," then, on this Rortian view, is the narrative that they use to make sense of who they are, which itself depends on the vocabularies they use to describe themselves, others, the world, and the relations between them all.

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[6] In his book *I am a Strange Loop,* contemporary cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter makes essentially the same point about the "I" being a self-referential symbol. The thesis of this book is captured in his claim: "In the end, we are self-perceiving, self-inventing, locked-in mirages that are little miracles of self-reference" (Hofstadter 1997, 363).

Pragmatism's advantage as regards the self

In summing up this pragmatist conception of the self, let us look again at Joseph Margosis's *Pragmatism's Advantage: American and European Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century* (2010), where he advances the argument that one of pragmatism's primary benefits to philosophical discourse is its understanding of the human "self" as an emergent artifact. In many ways, Margolis articulates in an overarching fashion the most salient features of the three conceptions of the self discussed above. While Nietzsche understands the "I" to be a "conceptual synthesis," he takes it to be a function of a more general "self" – that is, the body. The "[s]tarting point (for inquiry)" writes Nietzsche, is "the *body* and physiology: why? – what we gain is the right idea of the nature of our subject-unity – namely as rulers at the head of a commonwealth, not as 'souls or 'life forces'" (Nietzsche 2003, 43). Similarly, Nietzsche argues:

> The belief that regards the soul as something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an atomon; this belief ought to be expelled from science! … But the way is open for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as "mortal soul," and "soul as subjective multiplicity," and "soul as social structure of the drives and affects" want henceforth to have citizens' rights in science. (Nietzsche 2002, 14).

Nietzsche clearly wanted us to get back to a naturalized understanding of the human self. Whatever self-conception or self-descriptions we employ, they cannot be disconnected from the complex of biological instincts and drives beyond our ken that have developed as a part of our ongoing interaction with the environment. But, what is important to keep in mind is that because there is such an entwinement between our sense of self and our

physiology, our self-descriptions can indeed be used to transform facets of our embodied

being, specifically our habits of action.[7]

Likewise, Dewey emphasizes that ethics as a whole, including considerations of

self-correction, need to pay heed to the insights afforded by a naturalistic approach to

human being. As he writes at the outset of *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), "A

morals based on the study of human nature instead of upon a disregard for it would find

the facts of man continuous with those of the rest of nature and would thereby ally ethics

with physics and biology" (MW 14:12). Regarding selfhood, then, which has profound

ethical implications, Dewey situates the conceptual tool known as the "self" within a

much more complicated organization of habits formed in the interaction between the

human organism and its environment. Thus, the process of self-creation cannot be

severed from our embodied existence.

Yet, however naturalistic Nietzsche and Dewey's conceptions of the self might

sound, it is difficult and disingenuous to classify either as reductionist. This is because

both thinkers constantly remind us of the profound effect that sociolinguistic factors have

on our identity. Beyond presenting genealogies that de-hypostatize many of the concepts

once thought to be absolute and eternal, Nietzsche is deeply concerned with questions of

authorship and authenticity. In *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985), Nehemas presents

the thesis that how one becomes who one is, how one gives style to one's character, for

Nietzsche, is through an interpretative and creative process akin to the crafting of a work

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[7] While I do not have the space here to give a full treatment of it, the psychotherapeutic process of cognitive restructuring supports the claim being made that thought and language can transform our physiological being. For instance, cognitive restructuring is used by psychiatrists as a way of correcting maladaptive thoughts, such as those connected with various anxiety disorders, addictive behaviors, and depression. Although these disorders are rooted in a person's neurological and biological makeup, the underlying premise of cognitive restructuring is that linguistic practices such as inner dialogue and redescription can have a salutary effect on embodied habits of thought and action.

of art – in particular, literature. This is what underlies Nietzsche's decree that we should

become "the poets of our life" (Nietzsche 1974, 299). Through the language and web of

meaning provided to us by our culture, we can artfully reinterpret even features of our

physiological "first nature." I will have to forgo the details of how this process occurs

until later, as for now I simply want to make the point that Nietzsche sees the human self

as grounded in naturalistic considerations, yet not reducible to those considerations, on

account of the transformative potential granted by our cultural and linguistic practices. It

is through such practices that we can write the story of our lives and, thus, alter our

conduct and way of being-in-the-world.

>Dewey's similar non-reductive view is evinced in such declarations as:

>Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful. That things should be able to pass from the plane of external pushing and pulling to that of revealing themselves to man, and thereby to themselves; and that the fruit of communication should be participation, sharing, is a wonder by the side of which transubstantiation pales. When communication occurs, all natural events are subject to reconsideration and revision; they are re-adapted to meet the requirements of conversation, whether it be public discourse or that preliminary discourse termed thinking. Events turn into objects, things with a meaning. (LW 1:133)

Our reality consists of our interaction, as organisms, within an environment that is both

physical *and* social. Language and culture, then, are granted the power, within Dewey's

view, to actually transform reality. So, countering the individual who holds fast to the

idea that human nature and our native instincts are the unalterable determinants of our

being, Dewey claims, "He is ignorant … that the human being differs from the lower

animals in precisely the fact that his native activities lack the complex ready-made

organization of the animals' original abilities" (MW 14:78). Dewey continues on to

rebuff "[t]hose who argue that social and moral reform is impossible on the ground that

the Old Adam of human nature remains forever the same." The "permanence and inertia" they see as belonging to human nature, Dewey concludes, "in truth belong only to acquired customs" (MW 14:79).

It is this social constructionist vein in both Nietzsche and Dewey with which Rorty is most sympathetic. As has been noted by numerous commentators, Rorty is unabashed in his disregard for the facets of Nietzsche's thought that have to do with our embodied existence, as well as for what he thinks is Dewey's overstated confidence in psychology and the scientific method.[8] The notion that our culturally-situated language has the potential to shape and reshape our reality through reinterpretation is one of the central tenets of Rorty's neopragmatism. Thus, as noted, regarding his treatment of the self, Rorty focuses entirely on *narrative* self-creation. Who we are is something that can be transformed through altering the story that one tells about oneself, redescribing our relations to the various other descriptions making up our reality.

In straightforward fashion, Margolis articulates the common thread running through Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty regarding the self, and presents pragmatism's treatment of the human person as the most compelling account currently around.[9] To remind ourselves, Margolis frames pragmatism as having Darwinized Hegel, through the

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[8] Daniel Conway makes this point in his essay "Diembodied Perspectives: Nietzsche contra Rorty," in claiming that Rorty's view of self-creation through the reinterpretation of one's perspective is not only paltry, but that it misses the basic thrust of Nietzsche's own perspectivism (which is a condition for the possibility of narrative self-creation) which is that idiosyncratic affects undergird any perspective and so the constraints of our embodied existence rule out the "free-floating" act of redescription Rorty seems to be advocating. I disagree with this interpretation for reasons I will spell out later in this chapter.

[9] As I have tried to make clear throughout, I am in no way discrediting the sometimes stark differences between these thinkers. The most common of these differences trotted out has to do with Rorty's critique of Dewey found in his essay, "Dewey's Metaphysics." This essay, along with the other aspects of his thought, does not, I believe, preclude Rorty from being "naturalistic" in his account of selfhood. Rorty's main point of criticism against Dewey's naturalism is not that our embodied existence should be completely disregarded, but rather that we should not fool ourselves into thinking we can say anything absolute about human nature that would allow us to formulate something like "generic traits of existence," which we could use, once and for all, to erect a systematic philosophy.

abandonment of the teleology of the Hegelian system, and as having Hegelianized Darwin, by observing that the conceptual resources of science (and, hence, Darwinian theory) are themselves human constructs. In his discussion of the human self, Margolis employs a distinction between what he refers to as "internal *Bildung*" and "external *Bildung*." The former, Margolis claims, is the process by which an individual is enculturated into a society by means of education. The latter, then, refers to "the long evolutionary process that accounts for the emergence of the unique primate gifts (of *Homo sapiens*) that bridge … the advanced forms of primate communication and their transformation into true speech." This process, Margolis continues, "entails the original formation and continually evolving transformation of the artifactually 'second-natured' site of linguistic and cultural competence – the being that we call a self or person" (Margolis 2010, 11).

Thus, the self is a hybrid artifact – it is emergent out of natural evolutionary processes, yet is not reducible to purely biologistic or physicalist terms. Moreover, the self, who we are, is "prone to cultural transformation by way of the contingent penetration of its own natural competences" (Margolis 2010, 87). In presenting this conception of the self, Margolis does justice to the more naturalistically-grounded projects of Nietzsche and Dewey, as well as the sociolinguistic-centered approach of Rorty. Furthermore, as illustrated in the previous quotation, Margolis holds that selfhood includes, "as in painting and architecture, parts of mere physical nature transformed, made hybrid by one or another form of human 'utterance'" (Margolis 2010, 88). On the ontological status of the "self," Margolis harkens back to Nietzsche in hinting that the "site" of selfhood may very well be a grammatical placeholder (i.e., a "fiction"), yet it is

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a placeholder that is a phenomenological reality (Margolis 2010, 87-8). That is, for better or worse, we experience the world from a first-person perspective. I would also imagine that this is not a phenomenon exclusive to humans, but that, again, we are able to employ the tools we have gleaned from culture and language to tell a story, varying in degrees of complexity, about that perspective.

In conclusion, Descartes was correct in recognizing the internal sense of self that we all possess. Where he went wrong, however, was in taking it to be something stable, unified, and isolated from the vagaries of our empirical existence. Pragmatism takes the self to be an emergent phenomenon, with natural and cultural factors shaping its growth. Nietzsche and Dewey work to unsettle the notion of a ready-made self, and in lieu of such a notion, both present the self as something that is in-process – a process involving the intimate entwinement and interaction between the human organism and its environment. This is not merely a physical process, but is one that is subject to the formative influence of culture and language. Yet, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty, in their positive ethics, all give credence to the idea that there is also room for individual authenticity – that is, all three urge us to embrace the fragility of our selfhood in the name of not merely following convention, but taking the artistic license such fragility affords us human beings and creating a work of art out of our lives.

Care of the Self as Aesthetic Self-Creation

In discussing the so-called "aestheticization of ethics," Richard Shusterman nicely captures the main theme of this chapter. Shusterman claims that those advancing an ethics of aesthetic self-creation begin with the premise that because "who we are is not

there to be definitively discovered," who we are is "open to be made and shaped and should therefore be shaped aesthetically" (Shusterman 1992, 242). In Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty one can find similar accounts of just what such a process entails, and in briefly introducing their suggested approaches to self-fashioning, it should come to light how the work of art, in cultivating the virtue of openness and expanding our horizons of meaning and possibility, can serve as a model for how we might create ourselves.

Nietzsche's "Dionysian free spirit"

Recall that within the pragmatist framework there is no essence residing within us that certifies the unity and stability of the self. Instead, the self is conceived as unstable, fragmented, and vulnerable to the ever-changing dynamics of experience. Nietzsche thus advocates an approach to self-creation, then, that is about *attaining* a coherent unity regarding one's self. There must, however, be a pre-existent individuality that is fragmented. As mentioned earlier, this substratum upon which our self-creation will take place is, for Nietzsche, the body. We are a collection of competing drives, instincts, wants, desires, and thoughts, and phenomena such as *akrasia*, whereby we are unable to act according to some preferred judgment, signals that, as Nehamas writes, "competing habits, patterns of valuations, and modes of perception are at work within the same individual" (Nehamas 1985, 186). In other words, there is no monolithic unity of the bodily self.

With this in mind, let us consider Nietzsche's conception of care of the self, which is perhaps best summed up in the following passage from *The Gay Science*:

> *One thing is needful* – To "give style" to one's character – a great and rare art! It
> is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature

and fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime … In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small … For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. (Nietzsche 1974, 232-3)

This passage, along with Nietzsche's vague and difficult prescription that one ought "to become who one is," neatly encapsulates his understanding of care of the self. However, self-correction as the practice of becoming who one is can be misconstrued in two common ways, so it is worth sharpening what exactly Nietzsche means by such a suggestion. First of all, it does not mean that there is some true self lying beneath one's being, which it is her duty to somehow discover and actualize. Secondly, it is also important to keep in mind that this process of becoming who one is is a never-ending one. That is, at no point in one's life will she be able to proclaim that she has finished her work and that she is done *becoming*.

So, what exactly does it mean that one ought "to become who one is?" It is helpful to note that the end-in-view of this process is "attaining satisfaction with oneself," or, as Nietzsche elsewhere describes as having "peace of soul," or "the expression of maturity and mastery in the midst of doing, creating, working, and willing – calm breathing, *attained* 'freedom of the will' " (Nietzsche 1968, 489). This satisfaction is derived from the feeling that one's self is no longer a conglomerate of contingent happenings, habitual patterns of thought and action, and unconscious drives, but rather is a cohesive and authored whole. As Nehamas puts it, "The creation of the self therefore appears to be the creation … of a higher-order accord among our lower-level thoughts,

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desires, and actions (Nehamas 1985, 188). In order to attain this higher-order accord these aspects of one's embodied being must be manipulated. Yet, to do so, one needs to have a sort of narrative blueprint for how such reconstruction might take place and what exactly it will involve.

With this plan in mind, one will be on their way to becoming "Dionysian." While the "Dionysian" aspect of existence meant, for early Nietzsche, the unordered flux of nature underlying our structures of intelligibility, his later writings suggest a more prescriptive dimension to the meaning of "Dionysian." This is exactly Walter Kaufmann's contention, and he explains that the "Dionysian man is … one who gives style to his own character … (he) is able to redeem his every impulse and to integrate into the sublime totality of his own nature even 'the ugly that could not be removed,' assigning it a meaning and redeeming function" (Kaufmann 1974, 282).[10] Furthermore, as Kaufmann contends, the Apollonian form-giving force, which was opposed to the Dionysian in Nietzsche's early writings on the birth and death of Greek tragedy, is folded into Nietzsche's later conception of the ideal "Dionysian man." So, what we have as the basis of Nietzsche's ideal approach to selfhood is a form-giving force that will arrange the various aspects of one's existence into an organically-unified whole *without* the pretense that there is anything absolute about that narrative form; for it affirms the Dionysian reality that all form is contingent and transient. This self-unity, however, is also not homogenous. Much like Dewey's contention that the organic unity of a work is not at all without tension and strife, the goal of self-creation is not to do away with conflicting habits, drives, thoughts, and desires. Rather, it is to craft a self where such

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[10] I cannot help but think this is a regulative ideal to which we can strive, but never actually attain. With this end-in-view, however, we have a model for how to proceed in crafting a cohesive "self."

conflict does not get in the way of one's pursuit of individual flourishing and is therefore a self one can wholeheartedly affirm.

The Dionysian human, in creating herself, gives style to her character by artistically forming the various givens constituting her existence. We develop traits of character that we may have no conscious control over. We are born into familial, social, cultural, and historical situations we did not choose. We have made choices in the past that cannot be undone. We are clearly not radically free to make of ourselves whatever we so like, but this does not mean that who we are is causally determined. Indeed, Nietzsche's (and as we will see Rorty's) notion of authenticity is based around an artistic model. Not only are artists constrained by their particular medium, but also by the traditions in which they are either conforming to or revolting against. Our existential constraints should not be the cause of pessimism, though, and this is why Nietzsche so often refers to his "Dionysian" ideal type in artistic terms. Through the creative acts of "selection, reinforcement, and correction," Nietzsche avers that the "tragic artist is no pessimist: he is precisely the one who says Yes to everything questionable, even to the terrible – he is *Dionysian*" (Nietzsche 1968, 464).

Therefore Nietzsche's take on self-correction is not about conforming to a pre-established blueprint regarding what it is to be human or who one Really is, but is about unifying into a cohesive whole the various facets making up one's existence. Being unencumbered by preconceived notions of who they supposedly "Really" are, Nietzsche's ideal type is a "free spirit." And, despite emerging out of the "greater self" that is one's body, the story one tells about who they are can, Nietzsche believes, help shape and transform their embodied being-in-the-world. While self-correction, for

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Nietzsche, certainly involves working on one's embodied being, that work is not done capriciously. One must have an "artistic plan" in mind when attempting to weave together the various aspects of their existence. This plan is our self-description, and like any artistic vision, it is subject to constant reinterpretation in the name of attaining Nietzsche's regulative ideal – *amor fati*, or the love of fate.[11]

Dewey's "ideal moral self"

Dewey similarly takes language and communication to be a powerfully transformative force within our basic experience of the world. It is social communication through language and the growth in meaning it engenders that Dewey believes can literally shape and reshape reality. Recall that, for Dewey, our self-description is merely one of many conceptual apparatuses that have been fashioned in the mill of reflective, secondary experience. Through language, we are able to give ourselves a self-description that gives a depth of meaning to our basic embodied existence. In this way, the "self" is a tool we can use to work with and possibly transform our first-order habits of action, desire, and thought.

Before going on, it is important to again try and make clear what exactly I mean by the "self" involved in self-fashioning. As we saw with Nietzsche, the "self" as a concept is emergent out of the "self" that is our embodied existence. For Dewey, this embodied self consists in our biological impulses, drives, and the interpenetration of habits. But in the former's writings on self-creation and the latter's on language, the importance of one's narrative self-description, the story they tell about themselves to

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[11] "I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati:* let that be my love henceforth!" (Nietzsche 1974, 276).

themselves and to others, becomes apparent. While there is undoubtedly an intimate entwinement between these two selves (i.e., one's embodied existence and their self-concept), I am focused more on the level of the narrative self with regards to the virtue of openness. There is a sense in which our physical make-up can be made into a work of art, but before that can happen, one must have a plan. For instance, in *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey captures the interplay of these two senses of self in his discussion of a man who wants to improve his posture. Dewey's point is that the man cannot simply alter his posture by wishing it, but that he must actually practice sitting in positions that will improve his posture so as to make them habits. This is crucial to note, as I want to make it clear that self-fashioning cannot just occur in one's head. If one wants to form the matter of their existence into a work of art, including altering one's bodily drives and habits, one must actually enact their narrative self. Yet, the thought to alter one's posture, or one's bodily self, is something that occurs at the level of narrative. When one wants to make a change with respect to their body, their thought, or their attitude, it begins with an act of authorship. In short, the narrative self is my concern as regards aesthetic self-creation. Although, as already emphasized, it is simply bad faith to neglect that such a process involves a complex interplay between the one's bodily being and their conceptual self-description.

So, in terms of care of the self as self-creation, we can say that for Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty, our self-narrative is where we can work on crafting a higher-level unity among our lower-level drives and habits, not to mention the various contingencies making up one's life. Yet, Dewey is constantly on guard against the hypostatization of this self. Indeed, much of what I have to say about Dewey's understanding of care of the

self is simply my best guess at what he would say about such a process. This is because, similar to why he balks at many agent-based ethical theories, Dewey thought such a focus on selfhood, on what type of person one is or is trying to become, could easily alienate one from their actions within the realm of our everyday existence. "The key to a correct theory of morality," claims Dewey, "is recognition of the essential unity of the self and its acts" (LW 7:288).

As previously discussed, narrative self-creation is not a project disconnected from our embodied being-in-the-world. The story we tell about ourselves cannot be removed, and indeed must be one with, our actions here on Earth. For Dewey, this is not so much due to an insistence on authenticity (although authenticity, as we will see, can prove to be a useful regulative ideal for a pragmatist ethics), but has more to do with his contention that the primary locus of ethical deliberation is an indeterminate and problematic situation. As Pappas notes, however, this focus on concrete action does not preclude Dewey from presenting hypotheses about what type of approach to selfhood is going to best equip one to deal with the particularities of any given situation.

As with other habits and modes of experience Dewey endorses, one can employ his "aesthetic ideal" to articulate the sense of self that he takes to be the most useful towards the amelioration of an indeterminate and problematic situation. One of the ways Dewey explains this ideal is that in the aesthetic, the precarious and the stable traits of existence are brought into a harmonious balance:

> The doings and sufferings that form experience are, in the degree in which experience is intelligent or charged with meanings, a union of the precarious, novel, irregular with the settled, assured and uniform—a union which also defines the artistic and the esthetic. For wherever there is art the contingent and ongoing no longer work at cross purposes with the formal and recurrent but commingle in harmony. (LW 1:270)

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Keeping the focus on action, it is nearly impossible to deny that who we are, the story we tell ourselves about ourselves, has a significant effect on our conduct. Because the self is in-process, and, as such, is fragile and vulnerable, the fragmentation of the self is an ever-looming threat. This fragmentation is to be avoided because it leads one into the type of discontinuous mode of experience where meaning is impoverished and intelligent conduct is hampered. Moreover, self-fragmentation is often a root cause of the indeterminate situations Dewey is so concerned with helping us navigate. Competing drives and habits disrupt the flow of experience. As Nehamas writes, "*Akrasia*, the inability to act according to our preferred judgment, is a clear sign that unity [of self] is absent" (Nehamas 1985, 186).

If we think about the self, as Nietzsche did, as a political body comprised of competing drives, interests, and concerns, then we might be able to get a sense for what this sense of unity means. If we think about these various facets as delegates within this body, a lack of unity is akin to a government that lacks the ability to compromise. Any one drive dominating the collective is tyrannically, and while it might provide a sense of "unity," it does so by suppressing other drives and interests. This can lead to phenomenon such as *akrasia*, where we might have a preferred course of action in mind that gets stifled by another drive. There is also the possibility that these drives and interests are completely at odds with each other to the point where purposeful action is stagnated (similar to the political climate in America today). The ideal, then, exists when these various competing drives, interests, and concerns can be melded together in a self that can move confidently forward.

With pragmatism's emphasis on practicality, one of the foremost criteria to be mindful of when fashioning a self is its instrumentality in helping us navigate these indeterminate situations. As Dewey points out, we are thus well served to avoid any sort of self-fragmentation on account of the temporality of our existence. When engaged in practical inquiry, we need to be able to draw on our past experiences as guides for present action. Dewey notes, however, that the temporal nature of our being can often hamper our experience: "Most mortals are conscious that a *split* often occurs between their present living and their past and future. Then the past hangs upon them as a burden; it invades the present with a sense of regret, of opportunities not used, and of consequences we wish undone. It rests upon the present as an oppression, instead of being a storehouse of resources by which to move confidently forward" (LW 10:24). In order to get the most out of the storehouse of resources that is our past we need to recognize that our "past selves," even those we would like to ignore, are indelible facets of who we presently are.[12] This appropriation of the past, though, often involves an act of reinterpretation, whereby the past is transformed within the narrative that is our present self-description. The past does not come to us as bare facts. There is always room to reinvent the past in order to enrich the present. The onus of regret is often one of the biggest hindrances to meaningful and intelligent conduct, yet through redescribing those aspects of our past that feel like they belonged to a completely different person, we can work on drawing a narrative thread between our past selves and who we are now.

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[12] I assume that we can all relate to the remembrance of things from our past that seem as though they were of a completely different self from the one we presently feel ourselves to be. Yet, as Nietzsche notes, "However vigorously a man may develop and seem to leap over from one thing into its opposite, closer observation will nonetheless discover the *dovetailing* where the new building grows out of the old. This is the task of the biographer: he always has to bear in mind the fundamental principle that nature never makes a leap" (Nietzsche 1986, 359). It is our task, as the *auto*biographers of our own self, to act on the same principle if we are to achieve the sort of dynamic unity most conducive towards individual flourishing.

The sense of stability Dewey prescribes regarding self-correction can thus be thought of as the cohesion of one's habits and drives, their various social roles, as well as the narrative self-description that links the past with the present and projects forward into the future. The sense of self that emerges out of our more primordial level of engaged existence can be used towards the end of this stability, but it is important to note that this stability must remain only relative. One's sense of self cannot become too rigid, as such inflexibility would actually make selfhood a less effective tool. It is less effective because it can all-too-easily alienate one from her actions. It is simply acting in bad faith (or inauthentically – to borrow ethical concepts from existentialist ethics) for one to hold that the self-creative process has an absolute terminus, or that one has completely inalterable components of her existence. The excuse "That's just who I am" stems from a premise that Dewey explicitly rejects whenever he discusses the self; that is, the fallacy that who we are is fixed in certain ways that will forever resist reinterpretation and transformation.

To create oneself in an aesthetic manner, then, one must be hospitable towards the new and possess a vulnerability that will allow one to redescribe and thus reconstruct who they are in ways that might end up being more useful as we navigate the flux of experience. Our narrative self-description can be reinterpreted and used to reshape our habits and revitalize the past. Because our self is always already emergent out of our embodied being, it is always going to involve so-called "natural" elements (e.g. our genetic makeup), not to mention other contingent factors related to our socio-historical situatedness (e.g., class, race, gender, etc.) In other words, the creation of a self is never *ex nihilo*. The process that is the formation of a self is going to be delimited, but this is

not to say that we cannot mold the givens of our existence into an authentic, individual life.

Mark Johnson tackles this very issue in the context of how we "experience ourselves as 'in process' rather than as fixed metaphysical entities with unchanging identities" (Johnson 1993, 162). Johnson asks us to consider "the situation of an Afro-American woman in the American South of the 1950s" (Johnson 1993, 162). This woman is, Johnson rightly notes, incredibly constrained by her situation. She is a female. She has black skin. Those are facets of her existence that she cannot change. She also exists within a shared network of meanings and values which marginalize and oppress her on account of those very inevitabilities. "For her," writes Johnson, "the idea of radical freedom is a joke" (Johnson 1993, 162).

But, "she is not without the resources to transform her situation and her identity in ways that reveal the measure of her modest freedom" (Johnson 1993, 162). Johnson goes on to explain the range of imaginative possibilities open to her for "what she can experience and who she can become" (Johnson 1993, 162). When enacted, these possibilities can manifest in the way she comports herself in interpersonal relations, or how she might push back against the socially-constructed limits placed on her. Thus Johnson concludes that "this woman is constituted by forces, institutions, and historical circumstances beyond her control, and she simultaneously constitutes her identity by certain sorts of restrictedly free acts. That is the kind of limited, situated freedom we all possess" (Johnson 1993, 162).

Her use of this restricted freedom exists within a plan that she has for the type of person she is and wants to become. Therefore, this individual's story is going to be a tool

used to transform experience. When in a moment of secondary reflection about how best to go forward within the context of the present situation, one of the tools drawn on most heavily is a sense of self. As just noted, however, *context* cannot be forgotten, so it is crucial to have an orientation towards one's "self" that is flexible to the ever-changing dynamics of experience, as well as being willing to learn from that experience going forward.

Rorty's "poetic ironist"

As stated, allthough Nietzsche and Dewey take care to articulate the physiological starting point of selfhood in the form of bodily drives, habits, and desires, both seem to implicitly endorse a narrative view of selfhood. That is, while both take selfhood to be an emergent function of a more engaged level of embodied existence, the starting point of actual *self-care* is at a level of reflection, or more precisely, at the level of narrative. The story we tell ourselves about who we have been, who we are, and who we are going to become is the locus of aesthetic self-creation, as it is this story that we can reinvent and use to unify, modify, and transform our embodied character. An important caveat is in order, however, which is that such transformation demands that objective conditions, either in the world or in our physical character, be reconstructed as well. In other words, self-creation is not a process that is "all in the head." Yet, as I have been gesturing at, we need to have a plan for self-work if we are to be mindful of what we are doing or why we are doing something with respect to fashioning a self. Without the ability to use the tools of language and culture to work on our "natural" selves, who we are would be just as ready-made and reductionist as if we had been implanted with an essential human nature.

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If we are to actualize Nietzsche and Dewey's ideal of self-care as the creation of a work of art, then we should keep in mind the latter's claim that art occurs "when the natural and cultivated blend into one" (LW 10:70).

I mentioned before that Rorty is sometimes accused of making self-creation a completely disembodied, linguistic affair. Unlike Nietzsche and Dewey, Rorty has very little to say about our physical, embodied existence. It is not entirely accurate, though, to say that Rorty's view of self-creation is completely disembodied or that he is not painting the same emergent portrait of selfhood found in Nietzsche and Dewey. As with Rorty's distaste for Dewey's talk of "experience," it is not that the former denies there being a level of existence that is pre-linguistic or that we are embodied creatures. He simply does not think anything can be said about either that somehow captures the *truth* about that pre-linguistic field of experience or our physiological being. But, Rorty does insist that his liberalism is grounded in the belief that cruelty is an absolute evil. And, when discussing this regulative belief, while Rorty also grants that cruelty, for us humans, can come in the rather pernicious form of humiliation, whereby someone's deepest values and beliefs are belittled, he also means simply brute, physical pain. Furthermore, Rorty's conception of selfhood is heavily influenced by Freud, in that it was Freud who carefully detailed the various elements of chance that shape our unconscious desires, beliefs, and concerns. The process of self-creation is thus always occurring at a level that is grounded in a less-conscious background of culturally-shared and idiosyncratically-variant meanings. These meanings, however, are not all in the head, but are rather experienced at an embodied and felt level of existence. "Anything," Rorty writes, "from the sound of a word through the color of a leaf to the feel of a piece of skin can … serve to dramatize

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and crystallize a human beings sense of self-identity" (Rorty 1988, 37). Rorty does not deny that the meaning contained within these bodily phenomena has a profound effect on one's perspective and very being-in-the-world.

So, while it is easy to fuss over the differences between these three accounts of self-care, there is enough of an overlap to hold them together in a fruitful dialogue. The central theme running throughout is that the self is fragile and often fragmented, pulled apart by temporality, chance, and competing desires. Without something like a soul or transcendental psyche holding our sense of self together, we are left with the self as an artifactual construct fashioned out of an amalgam of contingencies.

Are we, though, supposed to be content with this sense of who we are, or does Rorty also prescribe some form of self-correction? Dewey's ideal model of the self as a balance between the stable and the precarious does, in fact, fit Rorty's own model quite well. This balance is not so apparent, however, as Rorty is often accused of focusing solely on the precarious, or novel, within the process of self-creation. Shusterman, for example, contends that Rorty "confuses the aesthetic with the radically novel, just as he conflates artistic creation with unique originality" (Shusterman 1992, 253).

In rebuking the view that selfhood is about following some pre-conceived blueprint, Rorty does make the rather strong suggestion that care of the self should be a matter of describing oneself in a *new* language. More will be said about the nuances involved in such suggestions, but it is clear that Rorty elects to focus more on the precarious and novel when discussing self-fashioning. He is proud to highlight that the ironist, the ideal citizen of his liberal utopia, is one who "has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses" (Rorty 1989, 73). By "final

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vocabulary," Rorty means "a set of words which (individuals) employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and … [t]hey are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives" (Rorty 1989, 73). He continues:

> A small part of a final vocabulary is made up of thin, flexible, and ubiquitous terms such as "true," "good," right," and "beautiful." The larger part contains thicker, more rigid, and more parochial terms, for example, "Christ," "England," "professional standards," "decency," "kindness," "the Revolution," "the Church," "progressive," "rigorous," "creative." (Rorty 1989, 73)

The ironist, then, has realized how chance has tinged and helped shape those very vocabularies, and it is the healthy skepticism bred by this realization that Rorty is constantly trying to advance. And, although these influential "parochial" words are supposedly "more rigid," his overarching point is that there is nothing *necessary* about how we describe ourselves, and, thus, who we are.[13] They are only "final" in the sense that they are used to justify one's life, but they themselves lack any noncircular justification.

But, the ironist *does* have a "final" vocabulary through which to tell the story of her life. Rorty never proposes that we try to do away, once and for all, with such a stability. It is simply our orientation towards this stability that Rorty seeks to transform. For the sake of our attempt to cope with experience, Rorty, like Nietzsche and Dewey, acknowledges the significance of trying to establish coherence with regards to one's sense of self, so that one's self-identity can be carried forward into the uncertain and precarious nature of our existence. For Rorty, this unity of self is achieved by constructing a poem out of one's life. Rorty, though, acknowledges that this analogy can

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[13] Rorty would not deny that there are certain designations that capture necessity, particularly those that relate to our embodied being (e.g., "one who breathes," "one who needs food," etc.). Yet, Rorty would probably deny that these necessities do much work as regards aesthetic self-creation.

be taken two ways. A poem can be seen as something with a fixed and static sense of unity and meaning, as captured in the naïve belief that every text has just one "true" interpretation. Critics of this view, which is sometimes associated with new criticism, however, understand the dynamic nature of the poem, and, to recycle a quote Rorty presented earlier, see it as "a tissue of contingent relations, a web which stretches backward and forward through past and future time" (Rorty 1989, 41). Rorty clearly prefers this latter take on the poem, and, as such, his poetic approach to care of the self involves giving up the idea that aesthetic self-fashioning can even be completed because "there is only a web of relations to be rewoven, a web which lengthens every day" (Rorty 1989, 43).

Rorty does, then, have a place for stability within his account of selfhood. The very act of "reweaving" the set of relations comprising our life's narrative implies that a fragmented self is less than desirable. But Rorty's almost tiresome emphasis on contingency also points to another facet of his view that seems to undercut those who see him as privileging only the radically novel as it relates to self-fashioning. In his most focused treatment of the issue of selfhood, Rorty indeed criticizes Nietzsche for the latter's hope that the highest human life would be one of complete novelty: "[O]ne may say that there can be no fully Nietzschean lives, lives which are pure action rather than reaction – no lives which are not largely parasitical on an un-redescribed past" (Rorty 1989, 42). Although he hyperbolizes the novelty he advocates for in regards to self-creation, Rorty realizes that there is no self-creation *ex nihilo*. This is because who we are is always going to be something cast into our interactions with others, and so in self-creation we are always going to be working from roughly the same background network

of words, values, meanings, etc., as anyone else in our society. Rorty's point is that, all-too-often, we take that network to be somehow written into the fabric of the universe and thus impervious to any attempts to redescribe it. This is the view that there is only one way to be a "man," "woman," "father," "lover," "student," "professor," etc. There are always adjustments that can be made to these pre-established roles, and thus always alterations that can be made to who one is, the story that one tells about themselves to themselves and to others. Admittedly, Rorty probably should not have used such strong language when describing self-creation, as it has led to a misunderstanding that obscures the main idea he is attempting to convey. That idea seems more aimed at simply calling for us to not take the "old" language for granted.

Such minor adjusting might not seem like the radical self-creation Nietzsche had in mind, but as Rorty argues, "What makes Freud more useful and more plausible than Nietzsche is that he does not relegate the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals. For Freud's account of unconscious fantasy shows us how to see every human life as a poem … He sees every such life as an attempt to clothe itself in its own metaphors" (Rorty 1989, 35-6).[14] More than anything, Rorty just wants us to realize that we often have more artistic license than we typically imagine in regards to our identity. On this view, the devout Catholic who understands that her worldview and conception of herself is only one perspective among many other possible ones is going to be living a more poetic life than the believer who has never critically scrutinized her way of carving

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[14] Rorty does qualify that certain lives (i.e., those handicapped in one way or another, either from birth, accident, or societal oppression) may not possess the full capability to engage in genuine self-creation. This, like the concept of *freedom* within existentialist ethics, can be used to critique entire societal structures which may hinder one's possibilities for self-creation. More importantly, though, Rorty's liberal principle against doing any harm would preclude him from ignoring the dignity of those who will never be able to engage in the process of self-redescription,

up the world. We must avoid falling into the trap of simply describing ourselves in pre-conceived terms, and, rather, conceive a self of which we can take ownership. Such a poetic approach to selfhood is preferable within this pragmatist framework for a few reasons which I will now discuss.

A Justification for Aesthetic Self-Creation

Up to this point I have attempted to illustrate Nietzsche's, Dewey's, and Rorty's suggestions for how one ought to live, especially regarding how one fashions a self, in light of the fact that there is no essential, absolute, fully-defined self to be found (or even created). Two pressing issues remain to be addressed: (1) the question of why aesthetic self-creation should be of any concern to ethical theory, and (2) how aesthetic experience can be salutary with respect to this process. The former is linked to the larger question about how a normative pragmatist ethics can be justified while the latter is concerned with the basic focus of this dissertation, the intersection of art and ethics.

Let us first, though, summarize this chapter's discussion thus far. The main thread tying these three conceptions of selfhood together is the disavowal of what Dewey calls the "ready-made" self. Such a complete and certain sense of self, however, is undeniably alluring. Who would not like a definitive answer to the question of "Who am I?" with which to navigate the complexities of experience and render them more secure and predictable? The notion of a "soul" distinct from the body (as we get in the *Phaedo*, Christian metaphysics, and Descartes' *Meditations*), the idea of a "true self" lying behind a fluctuating existence as an unshakable essence, and even the thought that we can create

something like a fixed self through fully actualizing some inherent, always already there, potentials are motivated by this same desire.

Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty all deny that this is a good way to think about selfhood. It is detrimental for the typical pragmatist reasons, in that it forgets the context of experience, it reinforces the *status quo*, and discourages the experimental mindset so vital to growth and progress. We become who we are, yet this is a process of becoming which only ends in death. But, before filling in some of the details concerning what these thinkers believe is the upshot of such an approach, it will be useful to address the question of what, if any, import art, specifically the visual arts, can have for this process.

If anything, as Rorty and Nehamas contend, it seems it is literature that has the most significance regarding the process of *narrative* self-creation. However, the virtue of openness that I claim is cultivated through genuine encounters with *any* work of art is an absolutely crucial prerequisite for accepting aesthetic self-creation as an adequate and even preferred approach to the care of the self that I argue is at the heart of ethical philosophy. Recall that openness, as I have described it, relates to our orientation towards our conceptual systems, our ways of carving up experience so as to make sense of it. And, as we have seen, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty all take our sense of who we are, our self-description that no doubt greatly influences our conduct, to be nothing more than just another one of our conceptual tools, emergent out of our embodied interactions with a contingent and ever-shifting environment. This self-description is, though, a rather complex concept, or better yet, a narrative system of interrelated concepts, which allows us to tell a story about where we have been, where we are, and where we are

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headed. So, the virtue of openness in this context is about our orientation towards this self-description.

Within this framework, care of the self, or self-correction, becomes a matter of creating a work of art out of one's life. Put differently, it is about "giving style to one's character" by doing all of those things that Nietzsche prescribed in the passage from *The Gay Science* quoted earlier in this chapter. This includes cultivating aspects of one's so-called "second nature" (perhaps through education, or experience itself), as well as working to mold one's deep-seated habits and drives so as to achieve coherence among the plurality of competing "selves."[15] But, while this self-work is always going to be rooted in our embodied being, I have been trying to illustrate how creating a work of art out of one's self begins with the story one tells about who they are and who they want to be.

If care of the self is about self-correction, and this self-correction involves forming one's self into a work of art, it is fair to ask by what standard are we to judge one's most intimate work. I have been hinting throughout this chapter that Dewey's "aesthetic ideal" might be a fruitful way to approach this question. Rorty would no doubt balk at the very idea of coming up with such a criterion, but let me just say that, in keeping with the pragmatist spirit underlying this dissertation, I am by no means claiming this to be the only possible criterion. Rather my hope is that this discussion will provide a useful way of thinking about aesthetic self-creation and its relation to artistic appreciation, so as to bring into relief a previously neglected function of works ranging

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[15] It is important to keep in mind that this unity in self-coherence does not equate to a homogenization of the plurality of "selves," drives, and patterns of thought and action that make up a person. For pragmatists, the attempt to weave order out of the chaos making up our life is "that of ordering the diversity of experience into a unity without slighting variety" (Seigfried 1990, 112).

from Cassatt's *The Bath* to an anonymous boxcar graffiti mural to Frank Lloyd Wright's

Robie House. By my lights, there are two ways in which artistic appreciation can inform

self-fashioning. The first way might seem obvious, but is worth mentioning here as it

intimately relates to the ideal approach to self-creation we are working towards. So,

recall that one of the definitions of what I am calling Dewey's "aesthetic ideal" presents

the aesthetic as a mean between the stable and precarious features of existence. There is

a sense in which every work of art, for it to be *that* work, is a stability. There is

something that holds the various elements of the work together in an organic unity.

Nietzsche and Dewey both endorse, in ways that transcend their discussions of just art, an

ability to weave order out of chaos. For instance, Nietzsche praises the ancient Greek

creation of a beautiful order (through their Apollonian spirit) "out of the chaos that was

the plurality of foreign, Semitic, Babylonian, Lydian, and Egyptian forms and concepts"

(Nietzsche 2001, 122). This is to say that, within this framework, the mark of beauty, or

even aesthetic merit in general, is the forming of the various elements of the work into an

organic unity in which each element plays off of one another and enriches the qualitative

value of each other and the whole of which they are a part.[16] Recall from Chapter II that,

on Dewey's view, the experience of the work of art is a model of dynamic organization.

The dynamic unity of aesthetic experience provides us with possibilities for how we

might organize the contingencies of our existence into an aesthetically-shaped *self*. That

is, how might we take the seemingly muddled matter of our existence and form it into a

self that will help us feel at home in experience?

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[16] Works that are meant to be jarring or unsettling are no objection to this, as their elements are also bound together in a way that makes it *that* work. That is, again, Dewey's notion of consummation is not synonymous with a "happy ending." To reiterate, what defines such consummation is simply the various facets of the experience hanging together in a way that *feels* "right."

Yet, with respect to selfhood, our common sense conception of it seems to imply that attaining *stability* is not necessarily a problem. Most of us take for granted that there is something called the "self" which underlies our existence and is the source of our actions, thoughts, beliefs, and desires. Whether or not one believes in something like a soul or transcendental psyche, popular opinion seems to hold that, save for those with certain mental disorders, the self comes neatly packaged and unified. It is the idea that the self is actually an emergent creation, that it is fragile and oftentimes fragmented, that Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty all want us to recognize. Indeed, while all three stress the need to weave a cohesive self-narrative that will hold the various aspects of one's life together, they also spend a considerable amount of time critiquing overly stable, essentialist conceptions of the self. In the end, it is about grounding one's sense of self – that undoubtedly needed stability – on a flexible footing. While this makes it merely a relative stability, it is *open* to experience in a way that rigidly fixed conceptions of the self are not. It can be altered, transformed, reworked, in order to better deal with the contingencies the future and the ever-growing past will thrust upon us. It is a self that is stable enough to help us organize our competing habits, drives, social roles, and varying temporal "selves" into a coherent unity, while at the same time is loyal to the precariousness of our situation.

So, in Nietzsche, this aesthetic ideal can be thought of in terms of the harmony between the form-giving Apollonian force and the precarious Dionysian undercurrent of existence. This concordant discord, Nietzsche believes, was at the heart of what he considered the pinnacle of artistic endeavor: the tragic dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Those tragedies, he claims, somehow gave form to and made communicable

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the Dionysian reality that all form is transitory and incapable of capturing the excessiveness of existence. This ideal translates into Nietzsche's view of the self, as he does not eschew giving form and unity to oneself, but rather advocates for a sense of self that is aware of its fragile and transient nature. This awareness allows for one to reinvent herself when need be in the name of Nietzsche's regulative ideal of life-affirmation. The cornerstone of Nietzsche's ideal type is the ability to affirm one's life in its totality, including those events, choices, and moments of our past that we might want to reject. How one might incorporate a regretful part of their past into their present in a way that establishes a beautiful unity is exemplified by Nietzsche himself. As Nehamas points out, Nietzsche's academic career began in philology, a field with which he eventually grew discontent. Yet, instead of ruing that initial choice he made and distancing himself from Nietzsche the philologist, Nietzsche found a way to make use of his philological training by incorporating it into his burgeoning philosophical interests. Nietzsche's penetrating genealogies of our moral concepts and values is but one example of how one might unite a past "self" with their current self-narrative in a way that is not only therapeutic, but productive going forward in experience.

In Dewey, the ideal approach to self-fashioning involves crafting a self that is stable enough to serve as a useful tool for navigating our physical and social environment, but fully respects that selfhood is not insulated from the flow of experience. To be a useful tool, our self-description should be temporally-unified, in that it draws readily on past selves, as well as projects into the future; both in order to serve the present. This self must also be grounded in the network of socially-established meanings and values so as to allow one to cast her "self" into the social world and connect with

other people. In this way, Dewey disparages Romantic views of the self that disregard the profound ways in which custom and tradition set the stage for any sense of individuality. That is, like the work of art, Dewey's conception of the ideal mode of selfhood is one that has enough footing within the shared community of meanings and values to have an effect on the audience, while at the same time is not a mere replica or copy of a pre-established form. As such, it is poised between the stable and the precarious.

Rorty's preferred model of selfhood also captures Dewey's aesthetic ideal, in that, despite being enthralled by the possibilities opened up because of this precarious nature of the self, Rorty too seems to believe that one of the foremost purposes of the self is as a means of social engagement. The creation that is our self is, to some degree, an exercise in a sort of metaphorical poetry in that it involves the transformation of literality in order to suit one's own idiosyncratic purposes. But, Rorty asserts:

> [N]o project of self creation … can avoid being marginal and parasitic. Metaphors are unfamiliar uses of old words, but such uses are possible only against the background of other old words being used in old familiar ways. A language which was 'all metaphor' would be a language which had no use, hence not a language but just babble … (Languages are) media of communication, tools for social interaction, ways of tying oneself up with other human beings. (Rorty, 1989, 41)

Rorty's ideal approach to selfhood demands that we avoid falling into the trap of allowing one's identity to be dictated by some preconceived blueprint. We must use the freedom we have regarding our narrative self to describe and redescribe ourselves in our own terms. Failing to put one's own gloss, however small, on the web of literality we are always already immersed in neglects the mutable quality of our existence. But, as seen in the passage cited above, our self-creation will be woven out of the shared network of

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meanings binding our society. The self must, then, if we are to engage in any sort of communicative praxis, have not only the stability of self-coherence, but also be one that can be cast into our interpersonal environment. Though, as should be clear, our self is ours, and we would do a disservice to the complexity of thought and action granted us by our evolutionary legacy if we did not take up the call to author that self in whatever small way we can.

As I see it, art can be of great service towards this end in two ways. For one, art presents us with a model for how to form a dynamic and organic cohesiveness out of component parts. Instead of line, color, figure, and space, we use the contingencies of our existence to paint a narrative self that will help us feel at home and flourish in the world. But, more importantly, in cultivating openness, aesthetic experience will help us become more comfortable with the wealth of possible ways to live a human life and form a "self."

The pragmatist redescription of authenticity

In concluding this chapter, I would like to say a bit more about why we should concern ourselves with self-fashioning in the first place. I believe there are two compelling reasons for why ethical theory should bother with aesthetic self-creation: (1) it promotes authenticity, while guarding against blind conformity; and (2) it combats the pernicious effects of *ressentiment*. Concerning authenticity, we should first get clear about what exactly it means to live an "authentic" life and how this notion manifests itself within the pragmatist framework I have been constructing. The authentic, in our common understanding, denotes the genuine, or that with an undisputed origin.

Originality typically implies being free, in some respect, from the constraints of tradition and custom. Thus we can think of an "authentic self" as one which is founded on a certain freedom of thought and choice regarding how one describes oneself, or who one is.

As such, Socrates can be read as one of the first advocates of living an *authentic* life. Challenging the *doxa* of his time, prompting individuals to think for themselves and examine their inherited beliefs and value systems, was the cornerstone of Socrates' mission – the mission to get individuals to care for themselves through the process of self-examination and correction. Such a mission presupposes that individuals possess some level of distance from which they can assess their acculturated beliefs. When Socrates defends his incessant questioning of his fellow Athenians' beliefs about such topics as justice, love, piety, and knowledge by proclaiming that what he seeks is a revaluation of their ends (e.g., to not care more about wealth, honor, and fame, than for the best possible state of their souls), one can read him as advancing a version of authenticity which demands that individuals not blindly follow custom and tradition and the preconceived hierarchy of ends handed down by them.

However, it was not until the middle 20th century that authenticity, as an ethical concern, really wedged itself into the western intellectual discourse. In their works on existentialist ethics, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir hold up authenticity as the cardinal moral virtue.[17] Similar to the pragmatist line of thought, both Sartre and Beauvoir deny any ontologically-grounded status to the "ego," or self. As per Sartre's own well-known example from his essay, "Existentialism is a Humanism," unlike the

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[17] Again, similar to the pragmatist ethics I have been fleshing out, existentialist ethics move away from articulating moral rules and principles for action-guidance and focus more on one's general disposition, her being-in-the-world.

paper-knife, whose essence and purpose is preconceived and formulaic, "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards" (Sartre 1946, 348-9). As referred to earlier, attempting to excuse one's behavior with the claim "That's just the way I am" is a paradigm case of inauthenticity. But inauthenticity can also stem from neglecting to acknowledge the incorrigible facets of one's situation, or believing that one can be anything they want to be simply by wishing it.[18] To existentialists, both forms are types of self-deception whereby we are not accepting the inherent ambiguity of human existence.

Beauvoir opens her *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) by articulating the "tragic ambivalence" of our condition: "(Man) asserts himself as a pure internality against which no external power can take hold, *and* he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things" (Beauvoir 1996, 343). Thus, authenticity within this existentialist (and, I would argue, pragmatist) framework is achieved by affirming the anti-essentialism of the self in the name of continually striving to transform the factical givens encountered in experience. In other words, it is about living within this ambivalence, using our artistic license to create a self out of the "thingness" of our condition.

Put slightly differently, when discussing his pragmatic conception of authenticity, Rorty draws on Martin Heidegger. According to Rorty's reading of the Heideggerian hope for authenticity, which is "the hope to become one's own person rather than merely the creation of one's education or one's environment," to achieve authencitity:

> [Is] not necessarily to *reject* one's past. It may instead be a matter of reinterpreting that past so as to make it more suitable to one's own purposes.

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[18] Such factical constraints include the physiological, physical, socio-economic, cultural, historical, familial, and idiosyncratic aspects that make up one's situation.

> What matters is to have seen one or more alternatives to the purposes that most people take for granted, and to have chosen among these alternatives – thereby, in some measure, creating yourself. (Rorty 2010, 476)

So, again, I do not see Rorty as espousing the approach to self-creation often ascribed to him, one that is all about radical novelty. Self-care, according to Rorty, is not about rejecting one's past, one's situation, or any of the other circumstances beyond her control, but is about using these contingencies as the matter she will imbue with form in order to create a self. Granted, education and experience are important for this project. We need to be made aware of the fact that there are many different ways to live a human life. But, what is important to note about Rorty's account of authenticity is that, *contra* Shusterman's reading of him, Rorty seems to believe that one can live an authentic life that is, in many respects, still somewhat "traditional."

In his chapter "The Contingency of Selfhood," Rorty lauds Nietzsche for his role in getting us to think about selfhood as a process of creation rather than one of discovery. Although, as already touched upon, Rorty ends up turning a critical eye towards Nietzsche's "inverted Platonism" and "his suggestion that a life of self-creation can be as complete and as autonomous as Plato thought that a life of contemplation might be" (Rorty 1989, 43). Obviously, electing to focus on language in the process of self-creation, Rorty takes up Wittgenstein's claim that there are no private languages as a way of pointing out that narrative self-creation is always going to take place against a backdrop of pre-established meanings and values (i.e., "literality").

In other words, as previously noted, even Rorty, champion of the precarious, discredits the idea that creating a radically novel self is desirable or even possible. The view of creation that we get in Dewey's aesthetics clearly lines up with Rorty's account.

Recall that for Dewey, creation is always a matter of transforming material, whether it be the poet's manipulation of the stock of shared meanings contained within our language, or Michelangelo's careful bringing forth of *David* from a block of marble. Dewey's theory of expression is quite clear about this, as, *contra* expressionist theories of art which deny the need for physical manifestation (e.g., that of R. G. Collingwood mentioned in Chapter II), he holds that expression is the act of transforming material given by the "world" in order to inject "new" material in an expressive way back to the public in the form of a "new" art object. Again, as noted above, Rorty seems to believe that authenticity is achieved by simply recognizing that there is nothing necessary about one's sense of self, that the tool of self-redescription is always available for use in our attempts to cope with the contingencies and factical givens of our situation. We will then come to understand that self-creative praxis is a tool readily at our disposal and we will feel the "unconscious need everyone has: the need to come to terms with the blind impress which chance has given him, to make a self for himself by redescribing that impress in terms which are, if only marginally, his own" (Rorty 1989, 42-3).

Care of the self, traditionally conceived within the framework which takes the self to be ready-made, involved reason as the tool of self-discovery. On the pragmatist model I have attempted to explicate, self-correction is a matter of *imaginatively* reshaping and transforming who one is. Thus authenticity is about taking ownership of one's self-description. While I am presenting this as the pragmatic conception of *authenticity*, it could also be considered a redescription of Kantian *autonomy*. If care of the self, self-correction, is about affirming the creative license one has to craft a self that is aptly suited to navigate the complexities of our dynamic experience and be a tool in action-guidance,

then one should be giving the law to herself. How one should live and what one ought to do are not, however, laws handed down from some transcendental, intelligible self, but are bound up in the story one uses to describe who they are, where they have been, and where they are going. Such autonomy not only adds a depth of meaning to experience by presupposing an enlarged horizon of possibilities for selfhood, but also leads to a healthy sense of empowerment. One can view who they are not as the mere product of genetics or socialization, but as a work of art they had a hand in forming.

This pursuit of autonomy also has significant implications with respect to moral reflection as well. Rorty sees one's self-narrative as one of the most important tools one has at their disposal when deciding what to do. The vocabularies we use to construct our self-descriptions help us, Rorty believes, by being the "terms one uses when one tries to solve moral dilemmas by asking 'What sort of person would I be if I did this?'" (Rorty 1999, 155). Rorty acknowledges that this is not the only question one asks when deciding what to do, but thinks that this question and the answer to it give substance to other considerations one might have when engaged in ethical deliberation. Thus Rorty argues that the richer the vocabulary one has to employ in such problem-solving the better. One of the chief virtues Rorty thinks aids us in attaining a richer vocabulary to use for our projects of self-creation is a "desire to embrace more and more possibilities" (Rorty 1999, 154).

In praising Freud, Rorty notes that the conceptual resources he provided "helped us think of moral reflection … as a matter of self-creation rather than self-knowledge" (Rorty 1999, 155). Again, there is a tie, then, between so-called "moral reflection," inquiry into what to do with ourselves, and our narrative selves. To reinforce a point I

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have been trying to make throughout this chapter, Rorty contends that the narratives we spin about who we are and where we are at are "the best tools to use in tinkering with ourselves" (Rorty 1999, 163). What the virtue of openness contributes to this, as it does with all of the tools of moral inquiry, is a heightened sense of when such tools need to be adapted to fit the contexts of new experience.

The avoidance of "ressentiment"

Yet, this might not have been enough to answer why treating one's self as a work of art rather than the realization of some metaphysical essence is actually beneficial, on an individual *and* societal level. In concluding this chapter and transitioning to the next, I would like to briefly introduce Nietzsche's conception of *ressentiment* and how care of the self as aesthetic self-creation should not be thought of as Martha Nussbaum sees it, as a "repellently narcissistic ideal" (Nussbaum 1999, 33). While I will discuss most of those benefits in the next chapter, exploring the issue of *ressentiment* seems apt to address here, as it and its relation to self-creation were hinted at in the passage from Nietzsche, "One Thing is Needful," quoted above. *Prima facie*, Nietzsche seems to be saying that the *one* thing that is needful is for a human being to give style to herself. Though, later on in that passage, Nietzsche qualifies this by stating that what is actually needful is for an individual to attain satisfaction with herself and that creating herself, giving style to her character, is the foremost means of doing so.

Without delving too deeply into some of the thornier issues of Nietzsche's philosophy (i.e., the eternal recurrence), it is safe to say that his regulative ideal is captured in his notion of *amor fati*. As Kaufmann points out, one who has achieved the

love of fate characteristic of Nietzsche's Dionysian ideal is free from any sense of *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment*, the French for "resentment," lies at the crux of many of Nietzsche's polemics against such targets as Christianity and romanticism; for, Nietzsche believes some of the central tenets of the Christian worldview were created not from a feeling of strength and love of life, but from weakness and woe. This resentment, or internalized hostility, arises from a sense of inferiority or weakness – in short, by self-dissatisfaction. *Ressentiment* precludes one from achieving the life-affirming love of fate, but moreover, it can prove to be a source of a vicious attitude towards others in that, according to Nietzsche, those suffering from *ressentiment* are constantly seeking out a scapegoat for their self-loathing.

Although Nietzsche is often thought of as propounding a version of ethical egoism, his intense concern with *ressentiment* evinces a more nuanced view. Indeed, why should one attain satisfaction with oneself via self-creation? Because, Nietzsche notes, "Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims" (Nietzsche 1974, 233). To bring this lofty diagnosis down to earth somewhat, upon reflection, I am sure most of us are familiar with the unfortunate phenomenon whereby we make others suffer on account of our own personal suffering. Similarly, while an account of Nietzsche's theory of the will to power is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is worth pointing out that he believes that it is those lacking power who are most likely to use crude and cruel ways to exhibit influence over others.

This sense of resentment, the inability to say "Yes" to life, stems, Nietzsche seems to think, from a feeling of helplessness in regards to who one is. While it takes a certain amount of resolve, Nietzsche wants us to never lose sight of the fact that we

always have a hand in shaping who we are. While he extols us to love fate, this is not synonymous with a stoic resignation. For, according to Nietzsche, we are not bestowed with an essence upon birth, nor is there a predestined *telos* for us to achieve. If one is therefore not satisfied with herself, she should be reminded that she always has at her disposal a degree of artistic license with which to reconstruct her "self."

Thus, at bottom, care of the self as aesthetic self-creation is about self-correction in the name of individual flourishing. The pragmatist wager is that viewing the self as something that is in-process rather than ready-made is more conducive towards this end. It is more conducive because it appropriates the fragility of the self towards gaining a sense of ownership over one's life and allows one to be adaptive and flexible in their attempts to cope with experience in an ethically-responsible fashion. Moreover, pragmatists want people to attain this sense of self-satisfaction so as to avoid the pernicious effects of *ressentiment*. While not everyone must be a Raphael in the creation of their life, the pragmatist ideal regarding selfhood involves at the very least realizing the creative freedom one has in determining who they are.

To return to Nehamas' claim that "ethics is care of the self," we can understand how the pragmatic redescription of self-correction as aesthetic self-creation can be considered a central moral concern with an appeal to the self-help cliché that you cannot love others until you love yourself. As Dewey notes, though, "Many a person is unhappy, tortured within, because he has at command no art of expressive action." (LW 10:72). Again, for Dewey, to be expressive is to have a grasp on the world, to be able to transform matter, and thus experience. That material includes the givenness of our lives – our past, along with the various other contingencies making up our existence. Not only

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does art provide us with a model for how we might unify these various elements into a cohesive, dynamically-organized self, but it also cultivates an open comportment in regards to that process. This openness allows us to embrace the simple fact that we are selves in-process and that there always exists the possibility of self-transformation through reconstructing facets of the work that is our life.

CHAPTER IV

ALLEVIATING A CERTAIN BLINDNESS:

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND PLURALISM

> If you don't know the kind of person I am
> And I don't know the kind of person you are
> A pattern that others made may prevail in the world
> And following the wrong god home
> We may miss our star.
> - William Stafford, "A Ritual to Read to Each Other"

An Ethics of Self-Creation and Liberal Morality

As I noted in the last chapter, those advancing an aestheticized ethics of self-creation are often accused of propounding a narcissistic ethos devoid of any considerations of others. Although I began to try to assuage this concern by gesturing at the wider societal implications of projects of self-fashioning, one might take the organization of my discussion as evidence that a pragmatist ethics is still bound up in the logic of the traditional egoism vs. altruism debate in morality. For the purposes of highlighting the significance of art, and visual art in particular, for ethical development within a pragmatist framework, I have separated my discussion into the previous chapter, which was concerned with care of the self, and this current chapter which will explore how the cardinal pragmatist virtue of openness manifests itself in regards to a concern for others. From this, one might assume that there is no relation between the considerations pertaining to self-creation and those related to treating others fairly, and that there is an entirely separate set of "altruistic" virtues needed to keep self-creators in check.

Yet, Gregory Pappas notes:

From a philosophical perspective the preoccupation with the egoism vs. altruism issue is a consequence of the same starting point in ethics that created the being vs. doing debate. If the self is a fixed subject, then any object of one's interest is always external to and a mere means for the self … The same Cartesian starting point that in epistemology leads to the problem about epistemic states of other knowers, leads in ethics to the problem of accounting for emotional, direct, and genuine interest for other things – including other persons – that are outside the self. (Pappas 2010, 213)

In other words, the logic behind moral theory's preoccupation with the egoism/altruism debate takes for granted the same ready-made self that pragmatism rejects. Because the self is inextricably tied to its actions, interest is always going to be a factor in conduct. And, where else can this interest reside than in the self as agent? But we should not confuse acting *as* a self with acting *for* a self. While all actions are done by a self, not all actions are "egotistical" in the pejorative sense. That is because, as we saw in the last chapter, a large part of narrative self-creation involves how you weave your relations to others into your own sense of self. What I want to suggest is that there is going to be overlap between the ethical considerations involving ourselves and others. Indeed, I hope to show how the virtue of openness which is cultivated through engagements with works of art can prove to be salutary for not only projects of self-fashioning (as discussed in Chapter III), but also for the pursuit of a thriving democracy and social melioration.

Sketching a bridge between the public and the private

It is true that Rorty wholeheartedly endorses the strict separation between the public and private spheres of our lives. He even states that "there is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory" (Rorty 1989, xiv). In light of this, one might be skeptical of the aim just mentioned (i.e., articulating how openness serves both the quests for private autonomy and public solidarity). Although some have claimed

that Rorty's public/private split is an impenetrable barrier, I think it is more accurate to refer to it as a functional separation. With respect to his emphasis on maintaining a separation between the public and the private, Rorty notes that his "point was not that there is a barrier, but that there is often irrelevance" between these spheres (Rorty 2010, 21). We may like to think that the fruits of our private pursuits of meaning and purpose have relevance for establishing a better society, and indeed sometimes "public" causes such as the promotion of justice and solidarity help individuals feel at home in the world. But how justice and solidarity are conceived can be incredibly varied, thus we cannot simply hope that eventually individuals' conceptions of these concepts will just converge. For Rorty, a champion of liberal morality, the establishment of a better society is something that is achieved through discourse, dialogue, compromise, hard work, and luck. The irrelevance that Rorty notes regarding the private sphere's effect of the public is, in itself, often harmless. What is more his point is to warn us of that overzealousness which leads individuals to employ their private purposes (and perhaps conceptions of justice and solidarity) as justification for prejudice and hatred, and which can also go so far as to try to legislate the private lives of others.

Rorty, however, in a rare moment of explanatory theorizing (albeit not theorizing that will have any sort of predictive function), also suggests that "poetic, artistic, philosophical, scientific, or political progress results from the accidental coincidence of a private obsession with a public need" (Rorty 1989, 37). Innovation, by its nature, must break to some degree from the common sense of the public sphere and it is when such breaks prove more useful than the old way of thinking that we get progress. And, in order to promote such occasions, we individuals need the space to experiment with

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different possibilities of human thought and action; hence, public policy should do what it can to respect the freedom of the private sphere.

A totalitarian public, on the other hand, is one that swallows up the private and discourages breaking from the collective *doxa*. In looking at just these two cases (i.e., individuals bringing their private pursuits of meaning into the realm of justification with respect to the treatment of others and the public space of governance interfering with those private projects) it should be clear why Rorty is so adamant about maintaining a buffer between the public and the private.

But, as we just saw, societal and cultural progress depends upon the possible interaction between these spheres. Yet, for a new way of thinking about some facet of experience, one generated through one's private attempt to make the world her home, to gain any traction beyond its author, there is a sense in which the public sphere must itself be open. That is, the crust of convention that holds society together should be flexible enough to accommodate novel and progressive ways of thinking about human experience. Thus the spirit of openness, which again is best thought of as a hospitality towards the new or a willingness to be affected by experience, that is crucial for the project of self-creation also lends itself towards a healthy democracy. Such openness not only tolerates a plurality of reasonable conceptions of the good, but is also willing to consider a variety of different ways individuals can live a meaningful life, and, on a more local scale, act in any given situation.

The virtue of openness, then, binds aesthetic self-fashioning (something of which Nietzsche is often seen as being the champion) and the democratic way of life so central to Dewey and Rorty. Jarold Abrams identifies the spirit of experimentation as the key to

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reconciling the seemingly disparate concerns of private autonomy and democracy. Abrams draws on the work of Stanley Cavell, who takes up the charge of defending self-creation against charges such as the one mentioned in the last chapter levied by Martha Nussbaum – that is, that an ethics so concerned with self-care is insufferably narcissistic and negligent with respect to issues of social justice. On the contrary, Abrams insists that self-fashioning, or moral perfectionism, is actually central to the development of robust democratic citizenry, and, as such, is an exercise in social responsibility. (Abrams 2002, 188-9).[1]

Abrams argues that, "perfectionism generates multiple hypothetical models of characters, for studying and critiquing, especially as democratic perfectionism (here) is fractured – with many different models of how to live rather than just one" (Abrams 2002, 188-9). Richard Shusterman's own defense of an ethics of self-creation resonates with this view. "[P]erfectionism," writes Shusterman, "serves the democratic search for better life and greater justice by offering three related resources: an inspiring example of untiring meliorism, specific hypotheses about how best to live, and critique of such hypotheses" (Shusterman 1997, 102). A society which promotes projects of self-creation is going to be one in which there exists a plurality of ways to live a human life – essentially leading to a multitude of "laboratories" exploring how best to achieve individual well-being. Moreover, the drive to continually try to better oneself through projects of self-fashioning easily translates into the melioristic spirit Shusterman believes is indispensible for a flourishing democracy.

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[1] Moral perfectionism is simply another term used to describe the practice of care of the self discussed in detail in the last chapter.

All of this is meant to reinforce the claim I made at the end of the last chapter that care of the self as aesthetic self-creation is important for promoting the pragmatist redescriptions of authenticity and autonomy, while at the same time discouraging blind conformity. These moves are clearly aspects of a healthy and fruitful democracy, and as Abrams notes, "Shusterman and Cavell … seem to see self-creation as a conversation starter because it stimulates the pragmatic dynamic of inquiry with hypotheses and critiques thereof" (Abrams 2002, 189). It is difficult to imagine Rorty disagreeing with the overarching idea here that experimentation in the private sphere can be conducive to experimentation in the public sphere. Again, it seems most appropriate to take Rorty's insistence on the public-private split as merely a functional distinction that helps prevent authoritarianism.[2]

Dewey's "wider self"

Before getting to the main point of this chapter concerning how aesthetic experience can help us navigate our society's pluralism in a more ethically-responsible fashion, it will be useful to go back one more time to the pragmatist conception of selfhood to see how the process of self-fashioning, of creating an artwork out of one's life, is always going to be inextricably tied up with others, and, that as such, we should strive to be mindful of this fact. As discussed briefly above, Dewey, as per his usual, is keen on dissolving what he saw as a pernicious dualism within the history of ethical

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[2] Koopman gives a nice account of this: "What is crucial to see here is that, for Rorty's purposes, the failure to make distinctions between … the private and the public, is tantamount to an open invitation to authoritarianism in its subtlest and most insidious forms. If we fail to distinguish the public from the private, for instance, then it is not clear how we can collapse these two together without opening the door both to those fanatics who are eager to railroad their morality down everyone else's throat and to those other fanatics who are all too eager to give up on shared public conceptions as hopeless illusions" (Koopman forthcoming, 7).

philosophy. Dewey's criticisms of the egoism/altruism debate were discussed above in the context of his rejection of a fixed self, but they are also predicated on what he sees is a fundamental fallacy underlying it. This fallacy "consists in transforming the (truistic) fact of acting *as* a self into the fiction of acting always *for* a self" (MW 14:96). As organisms interacting with an environment, we are always going to be acting from the standpoint of that organism which we are. This does not mean, however, that all of our actions are self-centered, or that we cannot have interests emanating from our "self" that concern others and our relations to them. In fact, Dewey is trading on common sense here. When we define who we are, when we tell the story of our lives, we obviously do so through our relations to objects in the world, to institutions, but probably most significantly, through other people. We are "mothers," "sons," "teachers," "friends," etc., and while these descriptions and how we play these roles out certainly come from us as "selves," they are not even conceivable facets of our identity or conduct *sans* others. As Pappas observes, for Dewey, "The self lives through and by social relations" (Pappas 2008, 216).

Moreover, recalling the anti-essentialism of Nietzsche, we are defined in and through what we affect and what affects us. Thus, our self-image is going to be crafted out of nothing more than our relations in the world, most specifically, through our relations to others. This has important ethical implications for how we might think about the process of aesthetic self-creation. In his meditation on what he feels we can learn from the writings of Vladimir Nabokov, Rorty suggests that our private projects of self-creation should not be taken as removed from the lives of others.

Rorty believes that there are two types of books that can help us "reconcile private irony with (liberal) hope" (Rorty 1989, 141). Books such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Les Misérables* are, Rorty contends, beneficial in helping us see the pernicious effects societal structures can have on individuals. There are also books, though, that help us "see the effects of our private idiosyncrasies on others" (Rorty 1989, 141). According to Rorty, the work of Nabokov is incredibly poignant in regards to the latter. Characters such as Humbert Humbert of *Lolita*, Rorty claims, "[D]ramatize … the particular form of cruelty about which Nabokov worried most – incuriosity" (Rorty 1989, 158). While engulfed in his own attempts to cope with experience and find meaning in aesthetic and sexual bliss (as evinced by his treatment of Lolita as a mere character in *his* story, not as someone with *her* own story), Humbert completely neglects to notice the effects of his private pursuit on others, in particular young and vulnerable Lolita. As Rorty notes, "*Lolita* does have a 'moral in tow'. But the moral is not to keep one's hands off little girls but to notice what one is doing, and in particular to notice what people are saying. For it might turn out … that people are trying to tell you they are suffering." And, if one is mindlessly obsessed with the private aesthetic or sexual subplots within *his* project of self-fashioning, "people are likely to suffer still more" (Rorty 1989, 164).[3]

People will also suffer, though, when their attempts at creating a self are stifled by government censorship, or are greatly hindered by unjust economic structures. Regardless of how much one desires to fashion an artwork out of their life, if their sexual

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[3] It is crucial here to note that openness and curiosity go hand-in-hand. Indeed thinking about their relation reflects the cardinality of openness. That is, one may be curious, but not open, not willing to let what they discover through their curiosity genuinely affect them. But, when one is open, they possess, to some degree, curiosity about the new. Again, though, the degree to which one is curious – how active they are in seeking out the new – is going to vary from person to person. In advocating for openness, the hope is that those who do not actively seek out the new will still, at the least, be hospitable towards it when it strikes them.

orientation is deemed illegal, or if their entire allotment of psychic energy is spent worrying about where their family's next meal is going to come from, such a project will seem impossible. This appears to be one of Rorty's main reasons for his extreme distaste of any form of authoritarianism. Under an authoritarian societal structure, one's horizons of possibilities for private self-creation are narrowed and dictated by a public sphere which is guided by fundamentalist ways of thinking.

So, we can bring together Dewey's dissolution of the egoism/altruism dichotomy with Rorty's thoughts on how the private and the public spheres of our lives are intimately entwined (in both positive and negative ways) to illustrate how our projects of self-fashioning do not exist in a vacuum. I have, in various ways, attempted to show how the material we imbue with form in creating a self is taken from the public, but we have also seen how elements of those creations transcend the individual organism. While it is easy to get lost in solipsism while self-fashioning, we must be mindful of Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty's emphasis on relationality and recognize that our stories are inextricably bound up with others' stories. In doing so, not only might we be careful to avoid causing unnecessary suffering or humiliation, but we might also recognize that others are on the same journey of trying to make a self out of the various contingencies making up their existence.

Perspectivism, Pluralism, and the Problem of Myopia

In the opening sentence of "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," (1891) William James succinctly lays out the guiding idea behind a pragmatist approach to ethics: "[T]here is no such thing possible as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up

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in advance" (James 1977, 610). While James clearly has a few motivations in mind with respect to this short, yet effective, articulation of his moral theory, one of the foremost seems to be to explain why there cannot be an *a priori* ethics. This is an explanation most lucidly articulated by James in the form of a thought experiment.

In attempting to answer what he calls the "metaphysical question" of ethics, or the inquiry into the meaning of the words "good" and "obligation," James points out that in a world devoid of sentient beings, talk of ethics or moral relations is absurd. This is because, according to James, the good exists only within consciousness. So, once there exists at least one thinker, moral considerations come into play. In this moral solitude, however, a thinker's valuations and ideals could only possibly be at odds with one another. In other words, there is no sense of *external* obligation. But, James continues, "If now we introduce a second thinker with his likes and dislikes into the universe, the ethical situation becomes much more complex, and several possibilities are immediately seen to obtain" (James 1977, 615). For brevity's sake, let us even suppose a plurality of thinkers, but assume that they are indifferent to one another's hierarchies of values, ideals, and demands. James, though, contends that this is "the kind of world with which the philosopher, so long as he holds to the hope of a philosophy, will not put up with" (James 1977, 615).[4] Nor, because of the simple fact that we live in a shared world and the pursuits of our ideals are, more often than not, at least indirectly in contact with others' such pursuits, is this a universe that is even possible. And, to complicate matters

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[4] James seems to think that one of the essential functions of the philosopher is to critique ideals through the determination of which ones possess "more truth or authority" (James 1977, 615). "Truth" and "authority," it must be remembered, are not, on this pragmatist view, measured by their correspondence with a non-human Reality.

even further, we live in a society which evermore so is pluralistic in regards to the ideals that guide individuals' conduct.

In short, once we come to realize that the pursuit of our own ideals may very well, and usually does, come into conflict with others' pursuits, we necessarily take interest in their demands. Maybe we attempt to keep our ideals away from them, maybe we can find a way to get along with them, or maybe we actively seek to change, or failing that, destroy the other's ideals. If we all had the same set of values and, thus, more uniform perspectives of the world, this would not be a problem. But this is simply not the world in which we live. As James eloquently puts it, "The wars of the flesh and the spirit in each man, the concupiscences of different individuals pursuing the same unshareable material or social prizes, the ideals which contrast so according to races, circumstances, temperaments, philosophical beliefs, etc., – all form a maze of apparently inextricable confusion with no obvious Ariadne's thread to lead one out" (James 1977, 619). It seems safe to say that with the world ever shrinking and the continuing dissolution of meta-narratives which would trump the various discrepancies between cultures, groups, and individuals, we do find ourselves in such a labyrinth.

So, what exactly are we to do if we want to progress towards the social melioration James hints at when he defines the "good" as demand-satisfaction and avers that the "ideal universe would be the most inclusive realizable whole" (James 1977, 628)? Now, admittedly, his pragmatist disciples, Dewey and Rorty (not to mention his European contemporary, Nietzsche), would probably distance themselves from what seems to be the underlying thrust of "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life." That is, while James puts forth a humanistic ethics that seems more than feasible, especially

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considering the difficulties posed to inclusivity by supernatural religions, he makes the rather extreme claim at the end of his essay that the "moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands" (James 1977, 628). In the end, James simply does not think that a purely humanistic approach to morality will provide enough motivation for us to strive for a better society. To James, a humanistic ethics is merely a matter of prudence and the alleviation of present ills, whereas a divinely-sanctioned morality will keep awake in us the strenuous mood that will give us the courage and endurance to continually fight life's evils.

Needless to say, within the framework I have explicated, this solution will not hold sway, as it is predicated on the idea that the plurality of demands in our incredibly diverse and globalized world can be reconciled if we all just find the one true source of Good. I want to suggest that James's view does not necessarily require a transcendent ground of value. As mentioned, I do think that James hints at a more naturalistic answer to how we might be able to achieve a more inclusive society that maximizes the range of reasonable ideals and demands that are met.[5] As will be discussed in more detail later, if we are trying to satisfy as many demands as possible, it is first requisite to have a sense for what those demands might be. From what set of beliefs and values do they emerge? Although presented in a thought experiment, the moral solitude James describes is all-too-often a reality for some, whereby their demands are the only ones in existence. Whether out of a lack of social interaction or concern, this solipsistic orientation is not

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[5] I qualify here that these demands and ideals must be *reasonable* only to highlight the obvious point that ludicrous demands which are completely idiosyncratic and based on justifications that no reasonable person could accept are clearly not worthy of consideration. The ideals and demands I am speaking of are those that, while we might disagree with them, we can at least acknowledge their reasonableness as a society. What counts as reasonable is obviously fluid, but that should not discredit the point being made here.

going to contribute to the pursuit of "the most inclusive whole." However, educating

ourselves to the value pluralism extant in society by accepting the limits of our own

perspectives, as well as coming into contact with others and experiencing their

perspectives, can help foster such inclusiveness. Before I elaborate the details of how we

might take strides towards forging this more inclusive society, it will be helpful to revisit

the pragmatist worldview that gives rise to this respect for pluralistic perspectivism in the

first place, and, more importantly, bring into relief the problems that this perspectivism

can cause with respect to social cooperation.

Pluralistic perspectivism

James notes in "A Pluralistic Universe" that "a man's vision is the great fact about

him" (James 2004). One's unique perspective on experience holds such weight because,

as noted in Chapter I, the pragmatist worldview out of which the ethical approach I am

articulating arises is one that rejects the idea that one can ever wholly escape that

perspective. While such transcendence, in traditional models of epistemic and ethical

inquiry, might have been hoped for, pragmatists eschew this aim. As Kant rightly

pointed out, experience makes sense to us because we filter it through our categories of

understanding and catalog of concepts. But, where Kant thought that this process was

part of some inherent human nature and relatively the same for all humanity, Hegel

introduced the idea that this process and the concepts used within it fluctuate with

history. Going a bit further, thinkers such as Nietzsche and the American pragmatists

made the, what now seems commonplace, observation that this interpretative work can

differ even among individuals. This is because the various contingent and idiosyncratic

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factors that have shaped our descriptions of the world, of ourselves, and of others, are just

that – incredibly and increasingly variegated.

Even in his earliest works, Nietzsche disparages the belief in something like an

objective and disinterested view of the world. As noted last chapter, in "On Truth and

Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," (1873) he opines on the arbitrariness of language and our

conceptualizations in chastening the belief that we can have knowledge of reality-in-

itself. It is simply the inevitability of these media for making sense of the world that

leads him to this conclusion. As his thought develops, this veil of language becomes the

broader veil of perspective in general that prevents us from obtaining absolute, objective

knowledge. But, even this language of "veiling" is somewhat misleading, as it might

give one the impression that if they are just rigorous or pious enough then they might be

rid of the veil and gain access to The Way Things Really Are. Predictably, Nietzsche

scoffs at such a belief: "[A]s if a world would still remain over after one deducted the

perspective!" (Nietzsche, 1968, 305). Fittingly, Nehamas analogizes Nietzsche's

perspectivism with painting:

> There is no sense in which painters, even if we limit our examples to realistic
> depictions of one's visual field, can ever paint "everything" that they see. What
> they "leave out" is in itself quite indeterminate, and can be specified, if at all, only
> through other paintings, each one of which will be similarly "partial."
> Analogously, Nietzsche believes, there can be no total or final theory or
> understanding of the world. On his artistic model, the understanding of
> everything would be like a painting that incorporates all styles or that is painted in
> no style at all – a true chimera, both impossible and monstrous. (Nehamas 1985,
> 50-1)

Again, the reason for this is because we simply cannot avoid our conditional relations to

any object of "knowledge." We are complicated physically and socially-constructed

organisms in an ongoing interaction with our environment. In the context of the above

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quotation, we have a unique "style" that has been wrought by our biology, by our family, by our culture, by our time, and by numerous other contingencies. While this perspective is malleable to some degree, it inevitably delimits our experience.

The perspectivism espoused by Nietzsche, while having profound implications for morality and his various polemics against traditional moral systems, seems at bottom to be an epistemic matter. And, although the American pragmatists, in their most traditionally "philosophical" moments, justify their own versions of perspectivism with appeals to epistemological concerns, the very fact that they were writing in a still relatively nascent America should not be ignored. America was established upon a concern for religious freedom and a more general freedom from the often oppressive pursuit of uniformity practiced by the British Empire, and, as such, the founding ideals of our nation included a respect for pluralism.[6]

There is a sense in which the respect for a plurality of reasonable conceptions of the good present in the Founders' minds also evinced an awareness that the fate of the world was not fixed *a priori.* In this way, they foreshadowed James's favoring of pragmatism in the contest between it and rationalism: "The essential contrast is that *for rationalism reality is ready-made and complete from all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future.* On the one side the universe is absolutely secure, on the other it is still pursuing its adventures" (James 1981, 151). The revolutionary spirit of the early Americans was seemingly spurred by a belief in what James would later dub *meliorism*. While a melioristic orientation can be used to approach various concepts, it is helpful to illustrate it with respect to salvation,

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[6] I will grant that American history provides us with many tragic reminders that such ideals are not always realized. Yet, it must be said that we have been and remain one of the more tolerant cultures with respect to the varying ways people find meaning and purpose in their lives.

and James allows that you "may interpret the word 'salvation' in any way you like, and make it as diffuse and distributive, or as climacteric and integral a phenomenon as you please" (James 1981, 128). So, one way to take "salvation," then, can simply be in terms of overall societal progress with respect to individuals' well-being and flourishing. Pessimism is thus the grim and deterministic doctrine that believes such "salvation" is impossible to secure and, as such, is not worth striving after. Optimism, on the other hand, takes this social melioration as inevitable, being guided by the hand of God or Spirit. "Midway between the two," writes James, "there stands what may be called the doctrine of meliorism," which "treats salvation as neither necessary nor impossible. It treats it as a possibility, which becomes more and more of a probability the more numerous the actual conditions of salvation actually become" (James 1981, 128). A significant implication of this doctrine is that moral progress towards a better society is possible, but can only be realized through human effort.

The metaphysical and epistemological assumptions underlying this doctrine might not have been in the consciousness of these early Americans, but they are assumptions that Nietzsche and other European thinkers back to Kant articulated in eloquent and compelling ways. The basic idea is that reality is in the making. Our reality is a human reality, and interpretive praxis is always already at work. Our experience is inextricably linked to our socio-linguistic tools, and we filter the phenomena of our environment through our conceptual lenses and value systems not only in order to plan and predict, but also to enrich with meaning, bestow value, and communicate our hopes, beliefs, and desires to our fellows – all of which can help us reconstruct the actual conditions of experience.

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The belief that the world does not come to us wholly intransigent and ready-made is bound up with pragmatism's respect for pluralistic perspectivism in that there is no invariant "True World" with which our perspectives must align. Yet, while many might agree with the seemingly harmless belief about our changing reality, perspectivism is not often received with open arms. To many, perspectivism is synonymous with relativism – that oft demonized attitude which purportedly grants validity to any and all ways of life. But, as Nehamas puts it, "The fact that other points of view are possible does not by itself make them equally legitimate … Perspectivism, as we are in the process of construing it, is not equivalent to relativism" (Nehamas 1985, 49). In its most basic sense, holding a relativist stance, if it does not preclude one from making evaluative judgments regarding the beliefs, attitudes, and overall worldviews of others, at least makes such evaluations incredibly difficult. Nietzsche, though, certainly has no qualms about judging what he considers to be "better" and "worse" perspectives (e.g., perspectives relying on a supernatural justification are, for Nietzsche, *not* legitimate). In other words, one can acknowledge the partiality of all perspectives while not abandoning the pursuit of normative claims regarding "better" and "worse." While the criteria for evaluating certain perspectives are, at least within democratic societies, fluid and themselves continually up for re-evaluation, perspectivism does seem to give rise to at least one important prescription; that is, one must be aware that his way of making sense of the world and his attendant hierarchy of values is not the only story. Yet, while perspectivism is not relativism redescribed, there are seemingly inherent features of human experience which, when situated within the context of a pluralistic society, present problems for the pursuit of social cooperation and amelioration.

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The difficulties posed by pluralism

Part of the reasoning behind putting my discussion of care of the self before this present chapter on concern for the other is the simple fact that we experience life from a first-person, agent point of view. Margolis notes this in describing the way pragmatism approaches selfhood. Whether or not there is a metaphysical entity we can call a "self" which lies at the base of all thought and action, we certainly, from a phenomenological standpoint, experience life as a "self." Likewise, and with reference to Hilary Putnam, Rorty claims that Dewey's pragmatism was "an insistence on the supremacy of the agent point of view" (Rorty 1999, 88). Whether it is a cultural artifact or a natural proclivity built into human behavior, the reality is that we experience life in the first person. Although this point might seem trivial, James is keen to observe that this phenomenological reality leads us to treat our own experiences as somehow truer than others'. "[W]herever there is conflict of opinion and difference of vision," writes James, "we are bound to believe that the truer side is the side that feels the more, and not the side that feels the less" (James 1977, 630). Because I, as an individual self, feel my own experience more than anyone else ever could, I am inevitably going to grant epistemic privilege to my perspective and experience – thus believing that my account of a situation somehow corresponds to the supposed "Reality" of it. At its worst this phenomenon can lapse into a sort of fundamentalist way of thinking whereby we only grant validity to or, at least, *strongly* privilege our own perspective. It is as if our way of life, our own description of the world and prescriptions for how things ought to be, is the Right way, the only way.

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This is indeed the very point of James's poignant anecdote from his essay, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings." Although I introduced this story in Chapter I, it is worth revisiting, as it illuminates what is probably the most pernicious aspect of pluralistic perspectivism. James describes a journey he took through the mountains of North Carolina where he passed by a number of forest coves in which the settlers there had forged a life for themselves by clearing the forest, building cabins, raising livestock, and growing corn. James notes that the "impression in (his) mind was one of unmitigated squalor" and "was a mere ugly picture on the retina" (James 1977, 630-31). Upon hearing from the mountaineer who was leading him on this journey that the cultivation of these coves is what provided their inhabitants with a sense of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment, James becomes aware that he "had been as blind to the peculiar ideality of their conditions as they certainly would also have been to the ideality of (his), had they had a peek at (his) strange indoor academic ways of life at Cambridge" (James 1977, 631).

The point of this story is to illustrate that when judging another's perspective or way of life, "The spectator's judgment is sure to miss the root of the matter." This is because the "subject judged knows a part of the world of reality which the judging spectator fails to see, knows more while the spectator knows less" (James 1977, 630). This pronouncement goes back to the central pragmatist commitment that the traditional dichotomy between thought and feeling, reason and passion, is ill-conceived. All thought, according to Nietzsche, James, and Dewey, is pervaded by feeling and affect. This affective dimension is clearly shaped in some degree by the same factors that have

forged one's own perspective of the world. These factors, however, vary widely between people on account of different familial, cultural, and idiosyncratic circumstances.

Thus, the issue is one of dogmatism. What pragmatists hope to highlight through emphasizing the pluralism of perspectives extant in society is that one must remain cognizant that their own preferred way of describing themselves, others, and the world is but one possible way. While I noted that the criteria we might use for weighing perspectives against one another are always going to be fluid and relative to a particular historical situation, there does seem to be one overarching guideline that serves as prescriptive within this pragmatist worldview. That is, treating one's perspective as though it is either the convergence of all possible perspectives, or is no perspective at all and is an accurate representation of the facts and values written into the fabric of the universe, is perhaps the cardinal sin within a pragmatist approach to ethics.

Such myopic obstinacy is the germ of the authoritarianism which so worried Rorty. This is the attitude that stops inquiry, once and for all. It is also the attitude that prompts one to speak rather than listen.[7] As such, one is much more ready to hold that their way of seeing things is the only possible way of seeing things. This manifests itself in the belief that there is only one way to be a "man," a "woman," a "father," a "professor," a "reader of Dewey," etc. This is a comportment that runs completely counter to the cardinal virtue of openness discussed in previous chapters. To be hospitable to the new and willing to let experience change you, you must also be willing

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[7] Dewey's aesthetic ideal of doing and undergoing once again appears to be useful in thinking about navigating our world in an ethically-responsible fashion. Dogmatists are all-too-ready to speak, or at least, not willing to listen to views contrary to their own. We obviously need perspectives, comprised of our beliefs, desires, valuings, etc., but we also need to treat those perspectives with less self-certainty. Genuinely listening to another and reaching out to understand them is one powerful way of helping curb dogmatism.

to "*listen*" to others' perspectives and to accept the possibility that there might be more than one way to live a life or act in any given situation.

All of this is to say that one of the more painful realities James lays bare in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" seems not only unavoidable, but more complicated than we might imagine. As pointed out in the last chapter, individuals often have competing ideals within their very makeup. As James notes, "Every end of desire that presents itself appears exclusive of some other end of desire. Shall a man drink and smoke, *or* keep his nerves in condition?" (James 1977, 622). Despite the rather simplistic binary posed here by James, his point remains. That is, experience forces us into choices whereby certain habits of thought, action, and desire exclude the actualization of other habits of thought, action, and desire. Moreover, in our dealings with others, it is often the case that our end of desire and/or the means to achieve it are somehow at odds with theirs. James, though, also defines the essence of the good to be demand-satisfaction, or the satisfaction of one's ideals with respect to any given situation. Hence we are faced with the "tragic situation" that "[s]ome part of the ideal must be butchered" (James 1977, 622).

The benign example of deciding whether or not to donate money to charity highlights this clash of ideals. The charity obviously has its interests in mind in soliciting donations – fighting poverty, feeding the hungry, helping disaster victims, etc. Now, one may very well share these ideals, but suppose she is also deeply committed to providing for her family, including her two young children. To make this example a bit more complex, assume that the family is feeling the effects of the weakened economy and disposable income is virtually non-existent. The issue then becomes one of alleviating

the conflict. In this case, one could simply bracket one of the sets of ideals by either exclusively deciding to donate money or not. But, one could also attempt to forge a way forward that allows for both ideals to be pursued. For instance, maybe in lieu of a donation, this individual decides to donate time towards the charity's cause.

There are also more profound examples that capture the moral tragedy of competing ideals. Suppose a fundamentalist Christian's son announces to his family that he and his same-sex partner are getting married and asks for his father's blessing. The ideals this father holds with respect to his religion no doubt give his life meaning and purpose. Yet, the love he should have for his son is also an extremely significant factor. What will this man do? Will he disown his son, or, at the least, turn his back on the marriage? Will he embrace his son and abandon his Christian faith full-stop? Perhaps, though, he might take a more nuanced approach. Maybe he will find the psychic energy needed to bracket his faith and the intuitional disdain he has for homosexuality in the name of maintaining a relationship with his son. He might also, after serious and strenuous reflection, even be able to draw out the Christian ideals that did indeed give his life meaning and meld them with the love he has for his son. I will explore how openness factors into this example later, but for now it is enough to simply notice just how difficult the conflict of ideals can become.

Ideals guide our decisions, on the micro and macro scale, both in regards to what we should do in any given moral dilemma and in regards to the larger question of how we ought to live. Sometimes our own ideals come into conflict with one another, and sometimes the ideals of others come into conflict with our own. In such conundrums, James advises us to target the more inclusive side, but is quick to point out that this side

is one that lacks any sort of finality. Moreover, it is one that cannot be established *a priori*, but only through healthy experimentation. So while there might not be a calculus for determining which act will satisfy as many demands as possible, there are certain dispositional considerations that might help one achieve this balancing act. Our own demands are pretty easy to consider and take stock of, but what about those of others? It is here where we see why some pragmatists contend that tolerance is simply not enough to help us navigate our social environment in a more ethically-responsible fashion. The thought here is that tolerance simply amounts to a passive "letting be," whereas the more active disposition of inclusivity is one that strives for something more. This is perhaps one reason why James's suggestions for forging a more cooperative society are preferable to what sometimes seems like Rorty's call for mere tolerance. As Koopman notes, "Inclusiveness does not merely aim to let another be but furthermore aims to reach out into another to understand them" (Koopman forthcoming, 17). Once we come to understand another's way of seeing things, to whatever small degree, we will be in a better position to conduct ourselves in a manner that is more sensitive to their hopes, dreams, and ideals, and on a path towards that more inclusive side.

Alleviating a Certain Blindness

One might rightly say that such a pluralism of individual ideals has existed throughout human history, so this is not a novel problem elicited by our contemporary situation. Indeed, there has always been recognition of the differences in beliefs and desires held by people even within the same society. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that one's own experience and perspective has not always been privileged to some degree

over and against those of others. Thus, the question of social cooperation has long been central to ethical philosophy. That is, how might we encourage moral progress and social solidarity among individuals who often hold competing perspectives on the basic questions of what is and what matters?

It is in the approach to this pluralism, however, that the differences between much of the western philosophical tradition and pragmatism come to light. "The traditional way of spelling out what we mean by 'human solidarity'," writes Rorty, "is to say that there is something within each of us – our essential humanity – which resonates to the presence of this same thing in other human beings" (Rorty 1989, 189). In other words, the traditional approach to prescriptions against cruelty and for a sense of solidarity involved an appeal to a common human essence that would be binding and give rise to obligation; for example, an obligation to respect others. Kant is certainly one of the most important figures in this tradition, as he attempted to entirely strip "empirical" considerations from moral reasoning. Respect for *Reason*, which is, according to Kant, the essence of human being, is all that is needed to give rise to moral duty.

But notice that thinking about overcoming the pluralism of society in such a way attempts to dissolve, or at least gloss over, that very pluralism through replacing it with a common human essence. That pluralism of ideals and desires is wrought by the idiosyncratic and contingent factors of each individual's being – that is, aspects of what Kant would consider to be our "empirical self." So, on this view, the pursuit of moral progress in the form of increased solidarity and decreased cruelty is a matter of helping

people *discover* their essence as a human being and be able to recognize that same essence in their fellows.[8]

Within a pragmatist ethics, though, no such appeal to a universal humanity can be made. Therefore, Dewey and Rorty actually appeal to just those "empirical" considerations (i.e., the desires, beliefs, values, and concrete demands of other people) in trying to encourage people to at least consider how their demands may affect the possibility of others' demands being met. This is why James claims that "the best act … makes for the *best whole*, in the sense of awakening the least sum of dissatisfactions" (James 1977, 623). In making decisions about how to live or what we should do, it is not a common humanity that we should necessarily take stock of if we want to be ethically-responsible, but rather it is the concrete demands of others that should factor into our moral inquiry.

This is why Rorty's ideal moral self, the liberal ironist, is someone whose sense of human solidarity is "a matter of imaginative identification with the details of others' lives" (Rorty 1989, 190). For pragmatists, one's "empirical self" is all we have, so, to go back to a common theme running throughout this articulation of a pragmatist ethics, human solidarity and social melioration (i.e., finding the more inclusive way to act, live, and think) is not about knowledge-acquisition, but is about finding creative ways to identify with others and experimenting with ways to achieve James's "best act." The former involves interacting with others in a way that draws out and brings into relief the details of the perspectives of all involved, as with James's epiphany on his journey

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[8] Social contract theory does seem to offer an account of social cooperation that does not necessarily hinge upon there being a universal human essence. Hobbes, however, speaks in terms of "laws of nature" and essential "human nature" in making his case, while Rousseau acknowledges that his version of the ideal societal set-up is one that is really only applicable to small city-states where the general will is virtually uniform.

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through the mountains of North Carolina. The latter way of achieving more inclusivity is about fostering an experimental mindset that can be of use in trying to solve conflicts between ideals; for, as James contends, "The course of history is nothing but the story of men's struggles from generation to generation to find the more and more inclusive order. *Invent some manner* of realizing your own ideals which will also satisfy the alien demands, – that and that only is the path of peace!" (James 1977, 623).

It is worth noting, however, that these alien demands should not be considered that foreign. They are alien in that they are demands not originating from one's own self, but in even thinking about other's demands we should be reminded of certain commonalities that bind humans to one another. The pragmatist's anti-essentialism does not prevent her from talking about such commonality. As we saw in Chapter I, Dewey simply seeks to redescribe essences as gists, or socially-agreed upon patterns related to facets of experience, not as metaphysical things-in-themselves. If we are going to actually respect the concrete demands of others and pursue the more inclusive path through life, we do have to find an entry point into our imaginative identification with them.

One generic way we can go about doing this is to remain aware that, at a certain point once basic survival needs are met, we are animals who strive to find/create meaning in our lives. Nietzsche was keen to observe that even when those basic needs are met, we continue to will, desire, and strive – all in the name of giving meaning to our lives. After realizing the sense of fulfillment achieved by the mountaineers in cultivating a plot of land, James is quick to analogize their strivings with his own that differ only in that they exist in his "strange indoor academic ways of life at Cambridge." The simple fact that

we humans derive meaning and fulfillment from things not directly tied to our most rudimentary biological and physical necessities is thus one tie that pragmatists will point out binds humanity and can be used to engender solidarity.

To sharpen this point of commonality more, Rorty is adamant that the ability to respect and empathize with others comes not from the recognition of some grand and shared essence of human being, but from being able to identify with them on a more parochial level, as "a fellow Jutlander, or a fellow member of the same union or profession, or a fellow bocce player, or a fellow parent of small children" (Rorty 1989, 190-91). People take up these identities in fashioning a self-narrative that will help guide them through existence, gain a foothold in their society, and find a sense of purpose and sometimes simply joy.

Aesthetic experience, openness, and the pursuit of inclusivity

To return once again to the central claim of this dissertation, in eschewing the quest for moral certainty, pragmatists also reject the idea that moral development is a matter of learning absolute principles, inviolable rules, or coming to discover the essence of human being. While these forms of ethical erudition are appealing in their easy transmission and for the simplifying filter they provide for what is oftentimes actually a rather complicated social environment, pragmatists worry about their purported ability to codify actions and ways of life, as well as their seeming inability to do justice to the richness of human experience. As discussed in the previous three chapters, within a pragmatist approach to ethics, a host of potential sources of ethical enrichment are granted legitimacy. For instance, we saw in the previous chapter how aesthetic

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experience can provide not only a model of organic unity which one can draw from in organizing the various contingencies of her life into a cohesive whole, but also how, in cultivating the cardinal pragmatist virtue of openness, it spurs the pursuit of authenticity and fosters an experimentalism that embraces the ever-expanding possibilities for human thought and action. We can now turn to, as I have laid it out, the second main concern of ethical philosophy – concern for the other – and explore how aesthetic experience as elicited by the visual arts can be of service in the pursuit of social cooperation and inclusivity.

By my lights, there are two interrelated ways in which this service occurs: (1) by reminding us of the wealth of possibilities for meaning and value available to us in experience (thus subtly gesturing at the idea that there is more to experience than our individual perspectives can capture), and (2) catalyzing conversation, through its inherent ambiguity, that brings to the surface the interpretative work in which we are always already engaged, as well as the plurality of ways such work can occur.

Regarding this first way aesthetic experience can be of service to us with respect to our interactions with others, much of what I will say was discussed in detail in Chapter II. Recall that, for Dewey, one of hallmarks of aesthetic experience is that, when so immersed, the pervasive quality underlying any particular experience is felt in a profound way. The undefined whole that binds together all of the elements of the dynamic work of art points to a "world beyond this world" (LW 10:200). Yet this is not some transcendent, supernatural heaven, but is simply that which transcends our own little world of concepts and values that we use to navigate our day-to-day lives. Dewey insists that this world is a "more inclusive one" in which the intimate relations between us and

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our environment, in both its physical and social dimensions, powerfully reveal themselves.

What the work of art also brings into relief is the wealth of possibilities for making sense of experience contained within the present. In normal experience, habits of thought and action often occlude these potentialities for meaning and value. Through taking us out of our neat, tidy, and ready-made conceptual world, art thus puts us in touch with the transitory and uncertain nature of our existence. In Chapter II, this characteristic of art was described in the context of Dewey's discussion of "negative capability," which allows one to embrace the inherent uncertainty in experience and utilize it to enrich meaning through imagination and art. As I argued, this capability goes hand-in-hand with the virtue of openness, in that the latter necessarily presupposes a lack of self-certainty in regards to one's perspective. This allows for a respect for a different type of pluralism than we have been discussing thus far – that is, the plurality of values, qualities, relations, and possibilities for being that reside in any given situation. But, this pluralism is indeed very much tied to the pluralism of individuals' perspectives present in society, in that it can have the humbling effect of reminding one that their way of describing and valuing the world is not the only way.

Such a reminder primes one for genuine engagements with others, where there is a willingness to learn from their beliefs and values. And this notion actually ties into the second way aesthetic experience can be of service towards social melioration: engendering discourse that can make us starkly aware of the certain blindness of which James warned us.

In the epigraph to this chapter from William Stafford's, "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," one might very well be reminded of Nietzsche's polemics against the herd mentality, or Dewey and Rorty's disparagement of thoughtless conformity. A pattern that others made is simply the *status quo*, and blindly following it might have less than desirable consequences. To avoid this, Stafford seems to suggest that we get to know one another, dialogue and discourse, hear what gives another's life weight, and find out more about one's private attempts to cope with experience.

Imagine for a moment those experiences you have had when at a gallery, in front of a public sculpture, or walking by a mural, accompanied by another. It is hard to deny the uncanny ability art has as a conversation starter. But why is it that art sparks such intense and oftentimes thoughtful interactions between people? One possible answer was hinted at in Chapter II in unpacking the aesthetic theory underlying this dissertation. That is, aesthetic experience brings to the fore the interpretative praxis in which we are always already engaged when making sense of the world. In what might be crudely considered our normal, everyday experience, pervaded by routine and literality, we often forget the ways in which we are simplifying, arranging, filtering, emphasizing, in short, interpreting, reality. There is a practicality to this, in that it undeniably helps us navigate our environment, both physical and social, in a more stable and efficient manner. As I have emphasized, however, it is important to be reminded from time to time that there are a variety of possibilities available to us regarding the ways we make sense of ourselves, others, the world, and the relations between them all.

It is my contention that even the visual arts can be exemplary in serving as such reminders. For one, as has been widely noted, art trades in the non-propositional. Even

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Kant himself recognized this feature of art in describing artistic genius. One of the

hallmarks of genius, according to Kant, is the ability to convey "aesthetic ideas," or those

facets of our experience which cannot be represented through concepts.[9] Furthermore, as

Heidegger argues, art is not merely about presence, but somehow "represents" the strife

between what he calls the "world" and the "earth." This amounts to saying that art not

only affords us a world of presence, be it through the colors, shapes, and lines of a

painting, or the forms and texture of a sculpture, but also illuminates for us a sort of

"absence" – the inchoate ground out of which all presence emerges.

Recall from Chapter II that for both Nietzsche and Dewey, the work of art

possesses an inherent ambiguity and reminder of the inextricable uncertainty and

unfathomable nature of experience. Yet, it also enacts for us possibilities for meaning

and value. As for how this translates into our own lives, habitual and routine ways of

thinking and acting often dull the richness of experience and, consequently, the various

ways any situation can be described and evaluated. One of the crowning features of art,

then, is its ability to present us with something that "makes sense," to some degree, while

remaining ambiguous enough to keep alive the various possibilities for what exactly the

work "means."

This is not to say, though, that the work of art is inherently meaningless, and only

gains meaning through the subjective projection of a perceiver. For the artist's, or in

Rorty's parlance, the "strong poet's," creations to gain traction, they cannot be complete

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[9] "In a word," writes Kant, "an aesthetic idea is a presentation of the imagination which is conjoined with a given concept and is connected, when we use imagination in its freedom, with such a multiplicity of partial presentations that no expression that stands for a determinate concept can be found for it. Hence it is a presentation that makes us add to a concept the thoughts of much that is ineffable, but the feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers and connects language, which otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit" (Kant 1987, 185).

nonsense, but must "speak" in some way.   In discussing a work of art, whether it is something as bizarre as Tilda Swinton sleeping in a glass box at the Museum of Modern Art or as simple as a Japanese woodblock print, conversation is only going to be possible within the context of at least some shared network of meanings and values. In looking at Van Gogh's *A Wheatfield with Cypresses* (Figure 4), it is hard not to have thoughts of organic movement or wind rustling through leaves and long grass. Moreover, the dance of the clouds is something I imagine we have all encountered, where we actually notice that they are not static features plastered upon the sky but are moving and changing.

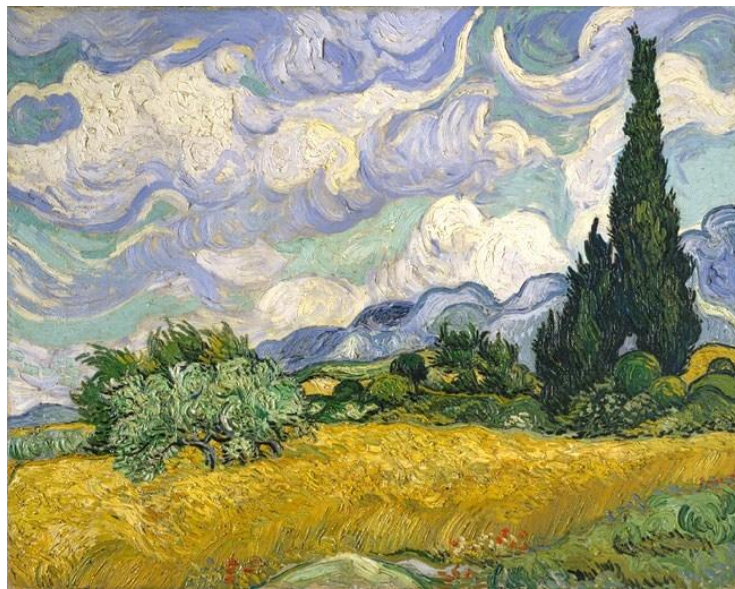**Figure 4**. Vincent van Gogh, *A Wheatfield with Cypresses* (1889).

This is clearly an affordance that is made possible by a shared experience that transcends even cultural variation. Some works, on the other hand, reflect a common ground that might be more specific. Without even knowing the title of Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (Figure 5), it is difficult for those even slightly familiar with

urban life not to have images of city street maps conjured up when they lay eyes on the grid of yellow lines interspersed with various sizes of blue, red, and yellow rectangles. And, lest one think that this rectilinear description of the painting lends itself to a static interpretation, it is difficult to deny that the vibrant colors and non-uniform composition engender feelings of a bustling, pulsating, and alive downtown urban center such as Broadway, New York City – all of which happens to be so neatly captured in the musically-inspired title. So, while we might not even be conscious of it, dialoguing about works of art, with their characteristic ambiguity, reveals in various degrees the shared background of meaning that makes communication possible.
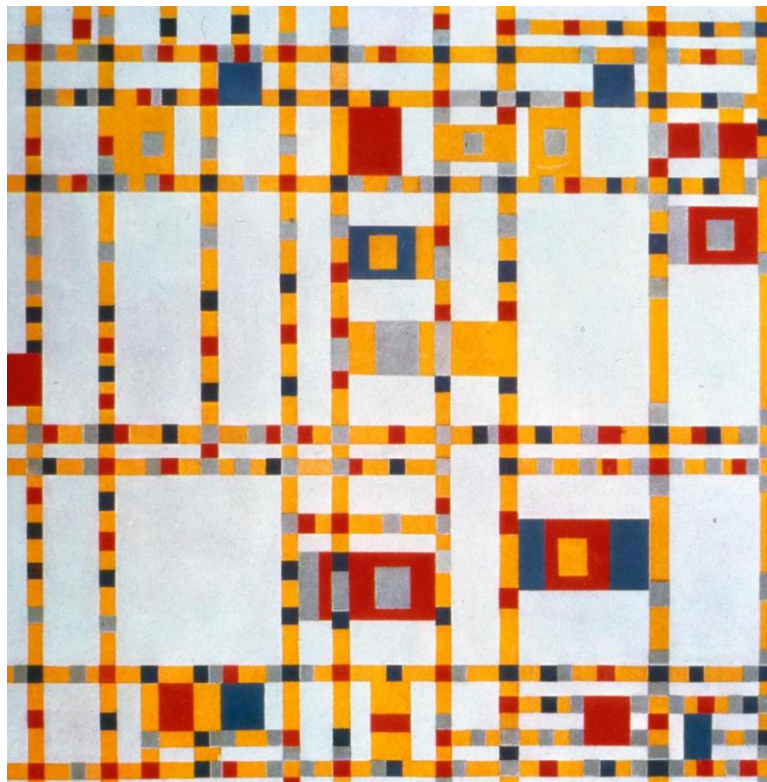

Figure 5. Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (1943).

It is perhaps this aspect of aesthetic experience that Dewey has in mind when he describes how art helps establish continuity within our human environments:

> All friendship is a solution of the problem (of discontinuity). Friendship and intimate affection are not the result of information about another person even though knowledge may further their formation. But it does so only as it becomes an integral part of sympathy through the imagination. It is when the desires and aims, the interests and modes of response of another become an expansion of our own being that we understand him. We learn to see with his eyes, hear with his ears, and their results give true instruction, for they are built into our own structure … Instruction in the arts of life is something other than conveying information about them. It is a matter of communication and participation in values of life by means of the imagination, and *works of art* are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living. (LW 10:340)

Works of art can connect people at such a deep level because their raw material is taken from nothing more nor less than human experience – the structure of which, at a very basic level, is something we all share. We are all organisms with certain biological similarities transacting with an environment that is both physical and social. Aesthetic experience, for Dewey, is thus *ecstatic* in the sense that it engenders an imaginative identification with meanings, values, and beliefs that transcend what we consider to be our own.

Yet, as Dewey himself notes:

> [I]t is also true that (the poem) exists in unnumberable qualities or kinds, no two readers having the same experience, according to the "forms," or manners of response brought to it. A new poem is created by everyone who reads poetically – not that its *raw* material is original for, after all, we live in the same old world, but that every individual brings with him, when he exercises his individuality, a way of seeing and feeling that in its interaction with old material creates something new, something previously not existing in experience. (LW 10:114)

In other words, although collective engagements with works of art can highlight the commonalities that bind us together, the disagreements that can, and almost certainly do, arise when thoughtfully discussing a work of art with another are perhaps even more

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instructive in regards to the pursuit of social cooperation and inclusivity. That different

elements of a painting might give rise to different points of inception with respect to the

temporal movement of an aesthetic experience, and thus entirely different aesthetic

journeys, brings into relief the fact that unique and latent values and emphases shape the

very way we make sense of the world. In Van Gogh's *A Wheatfield with Cypresses*, one

may very well be drawn to the shorter tree in the foreground or the tall and slender tree

that is in the background; both leading to different journeys through the work. There can

also be expressions of different comportments through discussions catalyzed by the work

of art. Looking at Ansel Adam's *Moonrise over Hernandez* (Figure 6), for instance, one

might take the black and white photograph capturing a barren desert town's cemetery to

be a reflection on human mortality. One might, though, have a somewhat lighter

response and be drawn to the scenic beauty of the photo, and the moon as an almost God-

like presence watching over the earth.

Figure 6. Ansel Adams, *Moonrise over Hernandez* (1941).

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The point here is that aesthetic experiences, when shared and discussed, awaken

us to the blindness we so often have to the inward significance of others' lives, and thus

we are made aware of in a powerful and *felt* way the pluralism of values and perspectives

existent in our society. Indeed, James himself, in "On a Certain Blindness in Human

Beings," uses first-person poetry from Wordsworth and Walt Whitman to highlight the

fact that we are often so caught up in our own personal pursuits and routine that we

simply cannot recognize certain aspects of existence which might give meaning and joy

to another. To return to a point made earlier, if we take into account James's

commitment to the "more inclusive side" in regards to this plurality of ideals we should

be careful not to misconstrue the attempt to overcome this blindness as simply being a

matter of tolerance. Again, as Koopman points out regarding James's moral philosophy,

it is fruitful to differentiate between mere tolerance and inclusiveness. Tolerance, that is,

can be satisfied by just being aware that others' might hold different perspectives and

then letting them be. Striving for melioristic inclusivity, on the other hand, involves

something more. Koopman states:

> The "more inclusive" path is not that of merely putting up with ideals which one
> is blind to the value of, but is that of working to form new ideals as yet
> nonexistent which can bridge across otherwise contradictory claims. I take this to
> be James's key contribution to moral philosophy. The potential tragedy of moral
> pluralism is best avoided by way of an energetic moral inclusiveness that works to
> innovate more capacious moral ideals than what we had previously dreamt of in
> our philosophies and practices. (Koopman forthcoming,18)

It is appropriate here to finally expand upon what is meant by "ideals" in this

discussion of James's moral philosophy. Unfortunately, I think the term is often

conceived of in a restrictive sense. Ideals do not have to be grandiose projections of

perfection, but can also be rather banal. A fruitful way of thinking about "ideals," then, is

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that they are simply that which guides our conduct. They are ideas we have about what we ought to do in order to attain a certain better state of affairs in the world. To refer back to the examples given earlier regarding the possible reconciliation of competing ideals, we can see what it might mean to "innovate more capacious moral ideals." The father who, after exhibiting the virtue of openness and becoming aware that the love his son shares with his partner is no different from the love he feels for his wife, and found (created?) a way to reconcile his Christian ideals with those of his son, has thus crafted a more capacious moral ideal that will help him navigate future experience in a more inclusive manner. It should be clear that this is not necessarily an easy process, and the more dogmatic he is to begin with, the more difficult it is going to be. Again, there is a certain vulnerability that goes along with being hospitable towards the new and willing to change with experience. Adapting one's religious beliefs can be a very painful process. In the end, if he cannot make such an extreme adaptation, perhaps he may still possess at least some degree of openness and at least slightly embody Dewey's regulative ideal of growth. That is, if he is only able to tamp down his intuitional disdain for his son's gay relationship, and somehow hold together his traditional Christian views with the love he has for his son, he has at least showed a willingness to allow the movement of life to affect him. This seems to me to be more than mere tolerance, though, assuming that he will not simply let his son and his husband just be, but will continue to struggle to make them a part of his own life story.

While this example trades on a father's paternal interests, it could be extended to cover our interactions with non-family members or even strangers. The point is that one is not committing the sin of incuriosity Rorty mentioned in discussing *Lolita's* moral

import. The motivation to be curious about the ideals of others might be stronger with regards to one's closest kin, but this does not invalidate it as a significant factor in building a more inclusive society. For, curiosity into the inner significance of others' lives is, as Koopman states, done not "for egoistic reasons of psychic health so much as for heteronomous reasons involving being a better citizen, a kinder friend, a more generous lover, a more capacious human being in the midst of our socialities" (Koopman forthcoming, 17).

In other words, the pursuit of a kinder and gentler society demands more than mere tolerance. This is not to diminish the importance of tolerance, for it is hard not to agree with Rorty's sentiment that "communities which encourage tolerance of harmless deviance should be preferred to those communities whose social cohesion depends on conformity" (Rorty 1999, 86). Granted, those opposed to gay marriage, for instance, often insist that the "deviance" of gay marriage is actually harmful to the institution of marriage. While the tide seems to be shifting regarding the actual validity of this argument, there are certainly other controversial issues, such as abortion, which complicate Rorty's claim here. It thus might be more fruitful to simply glean from Rorty's point that a society which encourages an experimental mindset is preferable to one that discourages it.

Indeed it is this liberal orientation which leads him to aver that the "best single mark of our progress toward a fully fledged human rights culture may be the extent to which we stop interfering with our children's marriage plans because of the national origin, religion, race, or wealth of the intended partner, or because the marriage will be homosexual rather than heterosexual" (Rorty 1999, 86). On this view, the father who

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even begrudgingly attends his son's same-sex wedding and supports him regardless of his sexual orientation is clearly preferable to the one who disowns his son because he is in love with a man.

Yet, the cardinal pragmatist virtue of openness that I contend is cultivated through engagements with works of visual art involves something more. As defined as a hospitality towards the new, openness can easily be understood as a hospitality towards the different. But it also means a willingness to be affected by experience, so we can say that openness, as it relates to our relations to others and how we deal with the pluralism of perspectives in our human environment, is about a willingness to listen to the beliefs, values, and ideals of others and allow those to expand our horizons of possibility for how one might live a human life. As Pappas writes in discussing the aesthetic dimension of the democratic idea, "The role of openness in democratic communication should be obvious. A community of people who are merely tolerant but not open-minded has built up internal barriers to the fullness of discussion. They may be able to compromise and bargain, but will not learn from each other" (Pappas 2008, 235). In short, this virtue of openness is about having a welcoming imagination with respect to the various ideals and values that shape a human life. So, in the hierarchy of this syncretic ideal of liberal inclusiveness, the father who listens to and seeks to learn from the worldviews of his son and son-in-law is himself preferable to the merely tolerant father mentioned above.[10]

In closing, I think an important caveat is in order. While I have attempted to be careful with the language I have used in discussing openness, I want to make it clear that openness does not equate to the radical acceptance of all ideals and ways of life. The

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[10] This is not to say that just because they are the worldviews of a same-sex couple they are inherently different than a heterosexual couple's. The point is that there is something more happening than just a simple "letting-be," but a reaching out in the name of growth.

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mother who is open does not have to, nor should, accept the views of her son who comes

to her with plans for a suicide bombing. In being open, she is merely willing to

genuinely listen to the rationale of her son. In so doing, she might very well be able to

dissuade her son from going through his plans, or at least spark a moment of reflection

that might shake him out of his entrenched ways of thinking about things. Openness is

merely a condition for the possibility of learning from others through a genuine attempt

to understand the rationale behind their hopes, dreams, and beliefs. Furthermore, it is

important to keep in mind that the line which an individual will not cross with respect to

possibly adapting their own perspective after dialoguing with another is going to vary.

Openness is always going to be a matter of degree. But, as the cardinal pragmatist virtue,

openness is a trait on which the bearer's life turns and, as such, even a hesitant hospitality

towards the new will have a significant effect on inquiry into how one *ought* to live or

what one *should* do in any given situation.

An Artistic-aesthetic culture

It should be clear, then, how developing this sense of openness is critical to

establishing a more understanding and inclusive society. In concluding this chapter, I am

going to take a brief excursion into the sort of utopian politics which Rorty himself is so

keen on advancing. In the spirit of this dissertation promoting the ethically-

transformative potential of, specifically, the visual arts, as opposed to the literary arts, I

will be redescribing Rorty's "literary culture" as an "artistic-aesthetic" culture. Before

articulating Dewey's rich meaning of the "artistic-aesthetic" mode of experience, it will

first be worthwhile to give a short sketch of Rorty's literary culture.

I agree with Rorty that within a pragmatist framework, a utopian approach to socio-political philosophy is the most appropriate tack. It is not that pragmatists are completely against theory, but similar to James's belief about the impossibility of an *a priori* ethics, pragmatists, especially Rorty, are skeptical of attempts to articulate detailed conditions for the possibility of a more just society. Yes, we can offer hypotheses for how to attain such a utopia, but formulating an end-in-view that will stimulate imaginative descriptions of what such a society would look like is thought by Rorty to be a more effective strategy than spelling out a comprehensive theory for how we can attain it. Pragmatists can thus "praise movements of liberation not for the accuracy of their diagnoses but for the imagination and courage of their proposals" (Rorty 1998, 214). In terms of moral and social progress, then, pragmatists "abandon the contrast between superficial appearance and deep reality in favor of the contrast between a painful present and a possibly less painful, dimly seen future" (Rorty 1998, 214).

Rorty's own utopian exercise comes in the form of his portrayal of what he calls a "literary culture." One way of understanding what this means is captured in his claim, one that touches directly on the Nietzschean account of "objectivity" as the ability to entertain a number of possibly divergent perspectives, that what "novelists substitute for the appearance-reality distinction is a display of diversity of viewpoints, a plurality of descriptions of the same events … [w]hat (the novelist) finds most heroic is not the ability sternly to reject all descriptions save one, but rather the ability to move back and forth between them" (Rorty 1991, 74). This utopian vision is gleaned from Milan Kundera's claim that "it is precisely in losing the certainty of truth and the unanimous

agreement of others that man becomes an individual … (The novel[11]) is the territory

where no one possesses the truth … but where everyone has the right to be understood"

(Kundera 1986, 159). Thus Rorty's democratic utopia "would be a community in which

tolerance and curiosity, rather than truth-seeking, are the chief intellectual virtues" (Rorty

1991, 75).

Moreover, members of this culture do not seek what Rorty calls "redemptive

truth" in some certainty-guaranteeing relation to Absolute Reality (in the form of God or

The Way Things Really Are), but in "non-cognitive relations to other human beings,

relations mediated by human artifacts such as books and buildings, paintings and songs."

"These artifacts," Rorty avers," provide a sense of the alternative ways of being human"

(Rorty 2010, 478). This is because, in this culture, "redemption is to be achieved by

getting in touch with the present limits of the imagination (Rorty 2010, 479). As I have

been arguing, engagements with works of art not only expand our horizons of possibility,

but can also reveal in a poignant way the very fact that people describe and value the

world in different ways; and both of these phenomena can provide us with such limit-

experiences. Indeed, as Rorty points out with his varying examples of human artifacts

that serve as catalysts for imaginative growth, I would propose a more fitting name for

his utopia is an *artistic-aesthetic* culture.

This hyphenated term comes out of Dewey's theory of art, but also gestures at his

ideal mode of experience. In our common sense usage, when we talk about being

artistic, we are usually referring to the doing or making of art. On the other hand, when

we talk about having an *aesthetic* experience, we mean undergoing or perceiving a work

of art. But, as discussed in Chapter II, for Dewey, the creation of a work of art, as well as

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[11] Or, Rorty's utopia.

the perception of it, involves a delicate balance between doing *and* undergoing. The artist takes the role of the perceiver in creating her work, and the perceiver actively engages the work in a process similar to what the artist went through in organizing the elements of it.

If we translate this reciprocity to how members of this utopia might navigate their social environment, then we might say that individuals in this culture are artistic in that they are using their imaginations to weave together the various contingencies making up their existence, and thus creating new ways of being. They are also artistic in that, to refer back to James's conception of accommodating sometimes competing ideals, they creatively craft modes of interacting that are more inclusive. Yet, they are aesthetic in that their interactions with others are not governed by shallow and stereotyped responses. This goes back to Dewey's distinction between reception and perception. As opposed to simply letting others be and foisting one's preconceptions upon them, members of this culture will seek to actually listen to and understand others. This is essentially the pragmatist redescription of intersubjectivity, whereby we acknowledge the creative agency of others who are engaged in their own struggle to fashion a self.

To extend this analogy, as discussed earlier in this chapter, in artistically creating our self through our private projects of self-fashioning, we must keep our "audience" in mind. This is Rorty's point in his discussion of *Lolita*. But, maintaining an awareness of one's "audience" will also help curb self-deception. Because of the emphasis on autonomy in the process of aesthetic self-creation, it seems that the coherence of the self could be achieved through nothing more than wishing oneself to be a work of art. But, as Nehamas points out, such wishing would only give the *feeling* of unity, not unity itself.

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We must remember, then, that "the notions of style and character are essentially public" and that because we lack "any special access to knowledge of ourselves, such questions (involving one's self-cohesion) are finally decided from the outside" (Nehamas 1985, 186). In other words, the work of art that is my "self" is at the mercy of its audience, just as others' self-creations are at the mercy of theirs.

So, to reiterate, as perceivers in this Deweyan sense, we need to be aware that others are creating their own works of art through the process of self-creation. While different people might be doing this in varying degrees, the point is that we must remain cognizant of the fact that others are selecting, simplifying, emphasizing, valuing, and organizing experience in their own unique ways, similar to how we are selecting, simplifying, emphasizing, valuing, and organizing experience in our own unique way. In so doing, we just might have found a prescription for how to at least somewhat mitigate the certain blindness James warned us of.

This prescription involves practicing and cultivating the virtue of openness; for the blindness James observes often manifests itself in myopic and closed-minded ways of going through life. This myopia, in turn, shows itself in negative, unfair, and rigidly preconceived judgments of others. It also shows itself in the pernicious form of incuriosity – that incuriosity which Rorty, with reference to Nabokov, highlights as an all-too-common cause of suffering. It is negligence with respect to the values, beliefs, and purposes of other people. As I argued, aesthetic experience healthfully reminds us of the limits of our own perspective and thus the wealth of possibilities available for meaning and value. At the very least, such a reminder primes us to genuinely engage with and *listen* to others. At best, it can serve to spark curiosity into the various ways

individuals make sense and meaning in their lives. While these are not necessary *and* sufficient conditions for building a more inclusive society, they certainly seem at least *necessary* to such a melioristic pursuit.

CHAPTER V

ART IN EDUCATION – AND EDUCATION IN ART:

THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF AN

ARTISTIC CONCEPTION OF THE WORLD

> I won't stop painting 'til the world looks the way it should
> I'm on a mission to make heaven look like my neighborhood
> - Qwel, "Manhattan Project"

"Artistic" Utopias

Throughout this discussion of a pragmatist ethics and the role that aesthetic experience can play with regards to our moral development, I have suggested that in focusing on "last things, fruits, consequences," the political philosophy coming out of pragmatism can be considered utopian in kind.[1] Although it is difficult to accept Rorty's conclusion that socio-political progress is something that happens more by chance than by anything else, especially an *a priori* moral theory, pragmatists are typically reluctant to give detailed prescriptive theories about exactly how to make the world a better place. In lieu of such theorizing, pragmatists are more concerned with fostering a spirit of experimentation that will give rise to a variety of hypotheses about how to get along with each other and thrive as a collective. As I have claimed, a key aspect of this project involves articulating the traits of character most appropriate to this experimentalism. In this way, pragmatists align themselves, in some degree, with the tradition of virtue ethics which stretches all the way back to Plato and beyond. Indeed, for Plato, these virtues

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[1] In the following discussion, we can take politics in the very general sense of relating to our lives as members of a public. By "utopian politics," I mean a certain approach to political theorizing that focuses more on hoped-for results (i.e., what an ideal polity would look like) than on arguing from assumed first principles.

were thought not only to lead individuals to *eudaimonia*, but would also give rise to an ideal society, one captured so famously in the *Republic*.

Plato, however, attempted to give detailed justifications for his utopia. As hinted at in Chapter I, he wanted to provide theoretical *proof* that his way was *the* only logical way to structure an ideal society. Pragmatists eschew such attempts to ground political stances in *a priori* foundations. For, as Rorty claims, "[S]uch (political) stances can be justified only by pointing to results of actual or imagined social experiments" (Rorty 2004, 274). Thus they are more concerned with offering up suggestions for how we might become a better society, and evaluating those hypotheses with regards to the actual consequences they afford. This is why utopian politics is the form most suited to their aims. Social and ethical progress, for the pragmatist, runs on imaginative fuel. Hypotheses about how a certain prescription might help an individual flourish and/or society grow push the limits of imagination and occasionally bring into relief new possibilities that had been latent in experience. Such forward-looking does not, though, preclude pragmatists from drawing on former successes and gleaning from those possible resources with respect to ethical inquiry.[2] As Dewey argues, we cannot reduce such inquiry to any one consideration, be it past principles, intended or real consequences, or even specific virtues, and, so to exclude a potentially relevant consideration is a form of dogmatism.

Rorty often describes the pragmatist attitude as one devoted to the question "what difference will this belief make to our conduct?" (Rorty 1991, 2). In terms of socio-political policy initiatives, then, pragmatist proposals often come in a hypothetical form.

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[2] Rorty's argument for privileging liberal democracy as the best societal set-up currently around is based on nothing more than the simple fact that it seems to work in establishing more peaceful societies.

In other words, they ask us to imagine what experience might be like if we held a certain set of beliefs. Indeed, my project in this dissertation has attempted to embody this spirit. For, it asks us to imagine what might change if the ethically-transformative potential of art, specifically the visual arts, was taken seriously. For one, asking this very question already presupposes an understanding of ethical development that breaks in many ways from traditional conceptions. Furthermore, we can also explore how art education might be transformed in light of this view of aesthetic experience and we will see an example of such transformation shortly in looking at how arts appreciation is being integrated into the training of future doctors. Yet, before that discussion, I would like to say a bit more regarding the utopian endeavors of Nietzsche and Dewey in order to highlight the centrality of art within their ethical projects, as well as to give some substance to what it might mean if we were to achieve Nietzsche's "artistic conception of the world."

What is important to keep in mind regarding pragmatism's approach to utopian politics is that, contra Plato, the ideals used to guide the construction of such a utopia are not given in advance of actual experience. This approach therefore also stands opposed to Kant, who attempted to make the case that nature is amenable to our ideals, and that these ideals are not the stuff of empirical reality. On quite the contrary, pragmatists actually stress that our ideals need to be amenable to the facticity of our lived experience. There is a sense in which the epigraph to this chapter expresses this pragmatist approach to ideals. It is a strange claim – that painting, and specifically, in the context of the song from which the quotation is taken, graffiti, can make heaven look like one's neighborhood. At first glance, one wants to rearrange the syntax, so that what one is really trying to achieve through art is making one's neighborhood look like heaven. But,

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that would take our ideals to be removed from the scene of our everyday lives. What the

artist is suggesting, on the other hand, is that through art we can build a heaven out of

what we have at our disposal, in our neighborhoods.

       This aligns with Dewey's own view of ideals. As is sometimes mistakenly

thought, Dewey is not averse to ideals *per se*, but simply demands that our ideals emerge

from inquiry as it transpires in our lived experience. This can be expressed by thinking

of traditional idealist theories as working "top-down," in that ideals are thought to exist in

some extranatural "heaven" to which we need to be responsible so that they will manifest

on earth. Pragmatism's approach, however, is "bottom-up." Our ideals emerge within

our lived experience, as real possibilities for how our world might possibly be. This

means, though, that our ideals will forever be vulnerable and malleable. But as we saw in

discussing James's moral philosophy in the previous chapter, that is the point. We have

the artistic license to forge new ideals, which again are just those ideas that guide our

ways of thinking and acting, along with our ways of interacting with others and the world

around us.

       The renowned street artist, Banksy, in concluding his recent residency in New

York City, accompanied photographs of his last piece, which were posted on his website,

with an audio clip that, besides espousing a Deweyan-like disdain for the

institutionalization of art, asks the audience to consider what it might mean to "live in a

world made by art, not just decorated by it" (Banksy 2013).[3] Although rather romantic,

there is a sense in which this gets at one of the central themes underlying this dissertation.

That is, what would things look like if we did indeed live in a world "made by art?" In

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[3] See banksy.co.uk for more detail regarding this project, this specific piece, and the accompanying audio
guide.

other words, how might our experience be different if an "artistic conception of the world" was more prominent in our collective mindset?

Again, part of the reason why I am putting Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty together under the same intellectual tent is the fact that for all three art plays an absolutely crucial role in their thought. In discussing Richard Bernstein's criticisms against him, Rorty acknowledges that the former is right in pointing out the dominance of the aesthetic in Rorty's later thought (Rorty 2010, 473). Although Rorty attempts to distance himself from the term "aesthetic" and replace it with the "literary," he does so by referring to the "aesthetic" as a "Kantian notion for which (he has) little use" (Rorty 2010, 474). I think that Rorty, however, is too easily dismissive of the term "aesthetic," even as it used by Kant.[4] Rorty is obviously keen on literature and what it can do in terms of expanding the horizons of human possibility. But, as noted in the previous chapter, he explicitly mentions a host of human artifacts that can "provide a sense of alternative ways of being human" – including even paintings (Rorty 2010, 478).[5]

A large part of what Rorty is getting at with respect to his utopian "literary culture" is that it is one in which art and aesthetic experience will play as important a role in our moral development, in our figuring out what to do with ourselves, as learning about other cultures, about environmental degradation, about Kantian deontology, about Jesus' teachings, etc. In fact, in this culture, art will slowly start to eclipse these other

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[4] For Kant, an aesthetic judgment is by definition subjective, which means that it is based solely on pleasure and displeasure. Rorty's dismissive quip is probably just a function of his wider disregard for Kant's taxonomy of judgments in general.

[5] Here is a good place to note the usefulness of holding Nietzsche, Dewey, and Rorty together in dialogue regarding their views on art. Nietzsche focuses almost solely on music, Dewey on painting, and Rorty on literature. What they have to say about the relationship between art and life, though, overlaps nicely. What Rorty has to say about the transformative effects of literature and Nietzsche about music seem just as valid with respect to the visual arts. Likewise, what Dewey has to say about painting translates, I believe, across aesthetic experience in general.

sources (especially the last two) of ethical edification just because art does not clothe itself in absolutism.[6]

I would like to now touch on some aspects of Nietzsche's own utopian aspirations, along with providing a bit more explication of Dewey's reconstructed society, and, in particular, his conception of education within it. My hope is that both brief discussions will illuminate the central role that art plays with respect to both thinkers' normative projects and how their views can carry us further than Rorty's attention only to the literary arts.

An "artistic conception of the world"

Regarding Nietzsche's positive ethics, it is true that what he puts forth is primarily concerned with the care of the self discussed in Chapter III. In fact, within the discourse of political philosophy, Nietzsche is sometimes viewed as apolitical. It certainly is the case that when he does talk about politics it generally takes the form of a polemic against the political programs of his time. It is worth noting, though, that these critiques usually have to do with public policy's stifling of the individual and fostering of a herd mentality that hinders genius. Overarching political systems, Nietzsche believes, provide a sense of comfort by means of encouraging conformity and convention, and they trade on the trepidation we often exhibit with respect to the precarious side of existence. This trepidation, again, is the result of what Nietzsche thinks is an engrained dissatisfaction with the inherent flux of experience. As noted in Chapter I, Nietzsche sees the western

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[6] For art to be able to fulfill this function, a certain amount of arts education/arts literacy is required. This is part of Dewey's point – art now either does not educate, or does so in ways that are completely misguided (e.g., the thought that art carries with it ahistorical and absolute values).

intellectual tradition as, for the most part, engaging in theoretical gymnastics for the sake of relegating that flux to some sort of apparent or less "real" facet of existence.

Nietzsche believes that this obsession with discovering the Absolutely Real through theoretical knowledge began with Socrates, or more correctly, what he terms "Socratism."[7] The Presocratic Greeks, on the other hand, were more than willing to let art and myth help them feel at home in the world. Within this context, it is understood that tragedy "represents existence more truthfully … and completely" than theoretical knowledge" (Nietzsche 1967, 61). Moreover, for these Hellenes, art was a "saving sorceress;" for she "alone knows how to turn (the) nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live" (Nietzsche 1967, 60). This culture, Nietzsche contends, embraced the idea that whatever it is that underlies our human reality is a dynamic and unpredictable process that is indifferent to our human pursuits of meaning and fulfillment – and this embracing is evinced in their tragic art.

Nietzsche's nostalgia for this culture rests in his desire for us to recognize that the ideals that give our lives meaning and purpose are illusions. For Nietzsche, "[W]e live only by means of illusions – our consciousness only scratches the surface. Much is hidden from our gaze" (Nietzsche 1995, 19). This is somewhat misleading, however, as it makes it seem like these "illusions" are somehow warped representations of reality. Nietzsche's point is that our reality is all "apparent" in that we will never be able to construct a language that will map onto whatever noumenal realm might exist apart from our human reality. In other words, we dwell in the world of our experience, as natural beings in a natural environment. This is why Nietzsche balks at those philosophers who

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[7] This rather hubristic conception of the human intellect vis-à-vis the world consists in "the unshakeable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even of *correcting* it" (Nietzsche 1967, 95).

think that they are uniquely poised to found a culture that is somehow in touch with the absolute. Rather, Nietzsche often claims that it is the artist who creates culture by imagining new ways of being human and a new world for these new humans to inhabit.

Thus, Nietzsche charges us to develop an "artistic conception of the world" (Nietzsche 1995, 21). That is, we need to be aware that all of our tools for getting around in the world are "illusions," in that they are human *creations* and not somehow manifestations of the True Nature of Reality. Yet, a caveat is always in order here, as this is not to say that all illusions are equal – there is still room for evaluating better and worse illusions.[8] What Nietzsche hopes to convey, though, is that we must become comfortable with the fact that no one has purchase on the Real, and thus must proceed as such.

These so-called "illusions" clearly help us navigate our moral lives, and in his 1886 Preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claims that he seeks to "move, to demote, morality into the realm of appearance." But, he continues, "not merely among 'appearances' or phenomena … but among 'deceptions', as semblance, delusion, error, interpretation, contrivance, art" (Nietzsche 1967, 22-3). An artistic conception of the world, therefore, calls for the development of a certain comportment towards the concepts that make up and inform our ethical bearing, and, for Nietzsche, art is crucial for this development. Bruce Ellis Benson captures this idea nicely in discussing what he terms Nietzsche's "musical *askesis*" (Benson 2007, 28). By *askesis*, Benson simply means the type of care of the self discussed in Chapter III, and he is careful to draw a distinction between this care and the asceticism, or denial of bodily passions, that

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[8] As discussed in Chapter I, the main standard that Nietzsche uses to evaluate these "illusions" is their self-awareness that they are indeed mere "perspectives" and not somehow in touch with The Way Things Really Are.

Nietzsche finds abhorrent. This care, according to Benson, will help one move from a decadent disdain for the uncertain and contingent nature of existence to something closer to Nietzsche's "yes-saying" ideal of *amor fati*. Benson contends that Nietzsche's musical *askesis* involves one learning to listen, to be swayed by life's music, to sing, and to dance. Without getting into the details of what each of these components means metaphorically, Benson's main claim is that engaging with music and dance cultivates something strikingly similar to the virtue of openness I have been championing. By listening, for instance, Benson takes Nietzsche to mean that the appreciation of music can "remove the wax from one's ears." "Taking the wax out of one's ears," writes Benson, "symbolizes that one is no longer attempting to silence the music and thus deny aspects of life that one might rather not acknowledge" (Benson 2007, 37). One of the foremost of those aspects is the dynamic flow of experience and the uncertainty that it inextricably brings.

Furthermore, Benson believes that this musical *askesis* helps us "learn to sing new songs" (Benson 2007, 39). By this, he means that music can help push us towards self-overcoming, a concept of Nietzsche's that is essentially a willingness to be affected by experience and to grow with and adapt to novel circumstances. I contend, however, that this *askesis* should not be limited to the appreciation of music, but includes the appreciation of art in general. As we saw in Chapter II (note 8), both Nietzsche and Dewey refer to Schiller's contention that all art begins with a musical mood. Nietzsche and Dewey interpret this to mean that all artistic creation (and I would argue aesthetic appreciation) begins with and is pervaded by an inchoate feeling as opposed to a rigidly preconceived blueprint. Thus, aesthetic experience, as elicited by even the visual arts,

can aid us in becoming better listeners (in Benson's sense) and to be comfortable, and even eager, to "sing new songs." The appreciation of art is therefore central to Nietzsche's understanding of how we might develop into individuals less concerned with absolute knowledge and certainty, and more willing to approach the values and beliefs that guide our lives with a greater sense of humility. This perhaps gives substance to Nietzsche's esoteric pronouncement that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*" (Nietzsche 1967, 52).

Education and art in Dewey's reconstructed society

Like Nietzsche, aesthetics is central to Dewey's entire philosophical enterprise. Indeed Thomas Alexander asserts that the "aesthetic dimension of experience" is "the central, guiding thought in (Dewey's) philosophy" (Alexander 1987, xiii). Yet, equally crucial to Dewey's thought is his attempt to redescribe "experience." These guiding ideas, however, are intimately interrelated. Dewey believes that we get the richest, "purest" sense of his conception of "experience" in the experience of art. These aesthetic experiences present us with a model for how our own, everyday experiences might be art. "The art of life," avers Alexander, "is the goal behind Dewey's ethics, his philosophy of democracy, and his theory of education. To treat life artistically is to exercise both imagination and reflection toward the exploration of the possibilities of the present" (Alexander 1987, 269).

I do not have the space here to do justice to Dewey's rich account of education and his views for how we might reform it for the better. But, as his work attempted to grapple with concrete problems and work on transforming society for the better, it should

not be a surprise that he was deeply invested in issues pertaining to education. Indeed, he actually sees philosophy as being intimately entwined with education. He even claims that, "If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined *as the general theory of education*" (MW 9:338).

If education, then, is about forming traits of character, and, as I have argued, a pragmatist ethics is best thought of as a type of virtue ethics – in that the main point of emphasis is on suggesting just those dispositions that might helps us orient ourselves "towards nature and fellow men" in a way that is more ethically-responsible – then it would seem that Dewey is explicitly endorsing an approach to education that takes seriously its ethically-transformative potential. Furthermore, since Dewey also believes that art and aesthetic appreciation should be at the forefront of our pedagogy, it follows that aesthetics becomes integral to our ethical comportment. Indeed, in a diagram of the ideal school in his book *The School and Society* (1899), Dewey locates the museum in the very center (MW 1:53).

In Dewey's utopia, or at least in his hope for a reconstructed (and better) society, art would not be removed from our everyday lives. It would not be mere decoration, distraction, or entertainment. It would, in fact, be central to education, conceived not simply a matter of the transmission of knowledge, but rather as the forming of habits of thought and action that are conducive towards his regulative ideal of growth. I would say, then, that education, by Dewey's lights, is paramount to developing more authentic individuals (in the sense discussed in Chapter III), as well as to fostering a healthier

democracy (as gestured at in Chapter IV). Let us now look at how Dewey thinks arts

appreciation might be crucial to this cause.

Art in Education – and Education in Art

As we saw in Chapter II, Dewey is concerned about how the intimate relationship

between art and our everyday lives is now, at the least, opaque, or, at the worst,

completely ignored. Although written seven years before *Art as Experience*, "Art in

Education – and Education in Art" (1927) presages the concerns he will raise in his later

treatise on aesthetics. For, in this essay, Dewey laments the fact that art, and specifically

painting, is not taken seriously within education.[9] According to Dewey, this devaluation

arises from both our conception of education, as well as our conception of art.

Foreshadowing a theme from *Art as Experience*, Dewey notes that we have unfortunately

set "art on a pedestal, making of it something apart from the constant needs of everyday

man" (LW 2:114). The institutionalization of art, though, is also a result of what Dewey

thinks is an increasingly compartmentalized worldview, wherein the desire for stability

has led to an impoverished system that divides human experience into neat and tidy

domains.

Indeed Dewey goes even further in his critique of contemporary society in citing

how "modern preoccupation with science and with industry based on science has been

disastrous" because "it strengthens the tendency to professionalism, or the setting of

minds in grooves" in regards to education. It is also highly problematic because "it leads

men to take abstractions as if they were realities" (LW 2:113). It might be unclear how

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[9] Again, by "education" here, we do not mean any specific age or grade range. Education, when conceived of in the way that Dewey does, is something that truly never ends. As we will see later, this can mean education for K-12 students, the training of medical students, and perhaps even the public at large.

Dewey is connecting these various concerns, but he offers a hint, one that also happens to highlight a central theme of not only Dewey's thought, but of pragmatism in general. Dewey states that this overly scientistic approach to experience is disastrous "because it has fixed attention upon competition for control, and possession of, a fixed environment rather than upon what art can do to create an environment" (LW 2:113).

This misguided conception of education as the inculcation of knowledge is thus bound up with the quest for certainty that Dewey and other pragmatist thinkers are challenging, and this is why art plays such a crucial role in Dewey's reconstruction of education. Remember that, for Dewey, art helps us cope with the inherent uncertainty of existence and empowers us to use that uncertainty to expand our horizons of possibility for meaning and action, and this is precisely what education is all about. In Chapter II, I claimed that this expansion resulted from aesthetic experience's heightened ability to put us in touch with the pervasive qualitative background of all experience. But, Dewey thinks that this ability is not something we can just assume everyone will embody. Such a capacity for understanding the fullness of our lived experience needs to be cultivated through education. We are now coming to see what exactly Dewey might have meant when he says that "paintings do not educate at present till we are educated to … realize their educative potentialities" (LW 2:114). The educative potentiality of aesthetic experience, as I am presenting it here, is the cultivation of openness, that virtue that loosens us from the rigidity and fixity that routine and custom engender, and that allows us to grow with experience. However, we need to be educated in advance to be sensitive to the pervasive qualitative background.[10] Again, this pervasive quality is the glue that

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[10] I should mention that this education is not about getting a perceiver to have the "right" mood *vis-à-vis* a certain work. There is not a "right" or "wrong" reaction to a work. I think what Dewey has in mind here is

binds all of the elements of an aesthetic experience together, eliciting a sort of mood that transcends our conceptual systems of interpretation. "To be educated for the educative function of paintings," writes Dewey, "is thus to learn to see this integration in the whole and in its every part" (LW 2:115). So, in order to unlock the educative and ethically-transformative potential of aesthetic experience, Dewey thinks that we need to be primed for our encounter with the qualitative unity the work of art affords. This priming would involve a heightened degree of care, which is conveyed in Dewey's conception of perception (as an active and creative process) as opposed to mere recognition. As we will see later, curricula employing what are known as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) do in fact call for students to carefully engage with paintings in just the way that Dewey was proposing, specifically by encouraging students to bracket their preconceptions and expectations and just attend to a particular work (as a singularity).

Dewey also thinks that we need to be educated to recognize how a work of art sometimes captures an ideal balance between the stable and the precarious. For the growth and enrichment of experience, we need both a measure of stability in and continuity with prior situations, practices, and values, but we also need creative transformation of experience in light of changing conditions. In regards to the stable, Dewey calls for educating individuals to recognize "a continuing tradition which works in the individual artists" (LW 2:115). That is, we should be able to make connections between different works of art. What, for instance, ties together the impressionist painters, the New York graffiti scene (as opposed to the Chicago scene), or Native American sculpture? Yet beyond being educated to make these connections, Dewey is

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a heightened sensitivity to the relationality of all of the various elements of a particular piece, and to the "sense" that art makes – even without being propositional.

quick to remind us that "[e]very significant painter in respecting and using the tradition adds something to it from his own personal vision and emotion, and his addition is qualitative, transforming" (LW 2:115). Thus, in carefully attending to a work, we should also be educated to note what makes the piece unique. How is the painting not simply an exercise in what Dewey disdainfully refers to as "academic art?" How does the work bring into existence something new? How does it transform the stabilities of the tradition out of which it emerges?

Coming to understand how a work of art captures this balance between the precarious and the stable is ethically-significant because, as discussed earlier, this balance that is exemplified in art also parallels Dewey's ideal mode of moral inquiry. Experience cannot be simply the blind adherence to the stabilities of custom, routine, and tradition – for that is the definition of a narrowed and closed approach to experience. Yet, experience cannot be pure novelty and precariousness. We are social creatures, and in order to thrive together as a collective, there needs to exist a shared network of meanings and values. Art thus provides a model for how we might navigate our social environment in a way that draws on tradition and previous experience, but is not hindered by dogmatic preconceptions. Art provides a model for how we might intelligently transform and reconfigure experience in ways that retain some continuity with past traditions and practices, but is not rigidly bound by them.

Sensitivity to the pervasive and unifying quality of a work, along with this recognition of how art brings together the stable and precarious facets of experience, are two things Dewey explicitly states we should emphasize in arts education. Doing so, Dewey believes, will help unlock the educative, and ethically-transformative, potential of

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art. When this happens, art's intimate connection with our everyday lives and experiences will hopefully start to come into relief. Art will no longer be treated as a superfluous luxury within education, but as central to the development of dispositions that will help us navigate experience in a more rich, meaningful, and ethically-responsible fashion. This returns us to the underlying premise of my dissertation: that aesthetic experience can help cultivate what I consider to be the cardinal virtue of a pragmatist ethics – openness. This premise is captured eloquently by Dewey when he writes: "Such refreshments (aesthetic experiences), themselves transient, yet discipline the inmost being of man … since they shape the soul to a permanent appreciation of values beyond its former self" (LW 2:113). That is, art can help us grow.

Illustrations

Art and medicine

Admittedly, this belief in the power of art to transform individuals for the better might sound rather idealistic and out of touch with how people actually develop their moral comportments. Yet, current movements within medical school curricula seem to support my central claim and show the applicability of this artistic approach to ethical development. Moreover, these movements are themselves responses to problems within the field of medicine that bear a resemblance to some of the deeper societal issues that Dewey thinks have played no small role in the depreciation of art, as well as the problematic state of the educational system. In reviewing various articles discussing this growing trend in medical schools, wherein students are encouraged or even required to take arts appreciation courses, a recurring theme can be found regarding the current state

of medical care and the almost algorithmic approach doctors are forced to take.[11] The

belief is that the pressures doctors face in the name of efficiency has actually been to the

detriment of their care, as they rely on assumptions, preconceptions, and seemingly

mechanistic methods in diagnosing and communicating with their patients.[12]

So, as noted, there is a growing push in medical school programs to get medical

students to take arts appreciation courses. The rationale behind this is in part to combat

the detrimental effects just mentioned and improve doctors' overall care. Medical

schools at Yale, the University of New Mexico, Harvard, Northwestern, the University of

Alabama in Birmingham, and McMaster University, for example, are all introducing arts

appreciation into their curricula. At Yale's School of Medicine, first-year students are

required to take such a course, and it was faculty there that pioneered this conjunction

between art and medicine. In a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical

Association*, Yale professor Irwin Braverman and colleagues researched the experiences

of the first groups of students to have gone through this course and found a nearly 10%

improvement in observational tests.[13] As noted in the study's commentary, "The use of

representational paintings capitalizes on students' lack of familiarity with the artworks.

The viewers search for and select all of the details in the paintings because they do not

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[11] I think it is interesting that one can easily find a number of news articles discussing this trend. In a Deweyan utopia, it would certainly not be newsworthy that art was being used to train practitioners in what we consider to be a quintessentially "objective" field such as medicine.

[12] H. G. Wright's book, *Means, Ends and Medical Care* (2007), provides a much more detailed analysis of these ills plaguing our overall approach to healthcare, and proposes a more Deweyan approach to medical inquiry where the ends of such inquiry are not presupposed.

[13] Braverman, Irwin M., Jacqueline C. Dolev, and Linda Krohner Friedlaender. 2001. "Use of Fine Art to Enhance Visual Diagnostic Skills." *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 286, No. 9: 1020-21. This study and a more general discussion of Yale's implementation of this arts-based training are the subject of the *Yale Times* article by Daniel P. Jones and Karen Peart on April 10, 2009, "Class Helping Future Doctors Learn the Art of Observation." http://news.yale.edu/2009/04/10/class-helping-future-doctore-learn -art-observation.

have a bias as to which visual attribute is more important than another," and this "lowered threshold of observation has direct application to the examination of the patient" (Braverman, Doley, and Friedlaender 2001, 1020).

The methodology utilized by many of these medical school arts appreciation courses is heavily influenced by a program known as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). The VTS program was designed by Abigail Housen, a Harvard-trained psychologist interested in the cognitive processes underlying aesthetic experience, and Philip Yenawine, a former Director of Education at The Museum of Modern Art. The pedagogy behind VTS is rather straightforward. While engaging a work of art, most usually a painting or photograph, students are asked three open-ended questions: (1) What is going on in the picture? (2) What do you see that makes you say that? (3) What more can we find? During this discussion, facilitators are encouraged to paraphrase their own comments neutrally, keep the focus on the actual work by pointing at the area being discussed, and attempt to frame and link student comments so as to establish somewhat of a coherent narrative. The students themselves are encouraged to look carefully at the works, talk about what they observe, back up their ideas with evidence, listen to and consider the views of others, and discuss multiple possible interpretations.[14]

Now, one of the central claims made by advocates of these medical school arts courses is that such courses hone doctors' diagnostic skills and improve their ability to detect important details. In looking at the techniques employed in VTS, this sharpened diagnostic acumen certainly seems like it would be a primary benefit. Yet, in noting the open-ended, interpretive questions used in VTS, as well as considering some of the

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[14] For more information regarding VTS, please see the website at http://vtshome.org.

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anecdotal evidence found in the articles discussing these arts appreciation courses, it is hard not to see an even broader transformation occurring in the medical students.

For instance, in an article titled "Learning Medicine by Looking at Art," Sharon Levine, a professor of medicine at Boston University, praises the inclusion of arts appreciation courses in medical school on the basis that such training encourages a fluidity of thought and an increased ability to deal comfortably with ambiguity. She notes, "If you don't deal with ambiguity, you will make mistakes. If you become fixated on one thing and don't think about other possibilities … then you do yourself and your patients a disservice."[15] This resonates with an account given by a medical student participating in one of these classes who notes, "In this case, the patient's health and personal story become the painting, and like analyzing the patients, *there is no right or wrong answer,* just the patient perspective, which allow you to understand their concerns and better treat the illness."[16] These views also align with the inherent uncertainty that both Nietzsche and Dewey claim is characteristic of a work of art, and recall that it is this engagement with art's ambiguity that is crucial to cultivating openness. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that Levine makes a rather Deweyan (and Heideggerian) point in contending that this need to carefully consider a horizon of possibilities is becoming more pressing, as doctors are now too often overly reliant on technological tools in diagnosing patients.

As gestured at by Levine, and emphasized by the Yale study on these arts appreciation courses in medical school, the central rationale behind this trend is that

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[15] Pekow, Suzanne. 2012. "Learning Medicine by Looking at Art." *WGBH News,* August 22. http://wgbhnews.org/post/learning-medicine-looking-art.

[16] Steinberg, David. 2010. "Art Helping Open Eyes of Medical Students." *Albuquerque Journal*, January 3. (emphasis added).

taking such courses will sharpen doctors' diagnostic skills and make them better able to properly diagnose a patient. Yet, as mentioned, I contend that there might be something more going on with the arts-based education these medical students are receiving, and it ties into my claim that openness is the cardinal pragmatist virtue. That is, a more sharpened and careful approach to diagnosing patients is not separate from the development of openness, and may in fact be an ancillary effect of becoming more open. In being open, one will consider a wider range of possibilities for thought and action, and in so doing, they will not let preconceptions and assumptions dictate their practice.

In other words, I believe that these arts appreciation courses are cultivating the virtue of openness in medical students, and in looking at some of the testimonials given with respect to these programs, we can see more concretely just how this virtue manifests itself in the everyday lives of individuals. Another one of the claims made by advocates of this trend in medical schools is that taking these arts appreciation courses helps doctors in their interactions with patients. In the examples discussed in the last chapter, those who are open are more willing to listen and even attempt to understand the reasoning behind the opinions and perspectives of others. Even if one is not going to necessarily accept another's views, openness can be measured by the degree to which one tries to at least understand the rationale behind those views.[17]

Such an attempt to understand another begins with a simple recognition of the other as a person, as a subject, not simply an object within one's own experiential narrative. Yet, the quest for efficiency discussed above with respect to medical care seems to even encourage such objectification, for when the "object" of inquiry is treated as such and not as a human agent involved in a complex of relationships, it is much easier

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[17] Again, openness does not amount to radical acceptance of the novel or different.

to fit that "object" into a preconceived diagnostic and treatment schema. It is this privileging of efficiency over actual ethical and comprehensive care that this push to integrate art into the training of medical students is meant to combat. In a *New York Times* article, "At Some Medical Schools, Humanities Join the Curriculum," which explores this arts-based training at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Dr. David Muller, in praising these programs for training "better" doctors, states, "To make a better doctor means to me … one who sees the *person* and not just the patient, not just an organ system that is screwed up."[18]

The idea that arts appreciation can help bolster intersubjective awareness is further supported by Dr. Joyce Zazulak who observes that as a family physician who is responsible for treating a multitude of people, "[I]t can be easy to make assumptions about a patient."[19] But through art appreciation courses for family medicine residents at McMaster University, she explains that the aim is to try "to train our residents to look deeper, to really understand the patient's experience of illness and to improve their understanding of the complex nature of human beings." In the article in which Zazulak is quoted, it is also noted that the Harvard Medical School implemented an arts appreciation course into their curriculum in order to "hone (students') observational, analytical and *communication* skills."[20] The idea here is that bringing less preconceived assumptions to bear on interpersonal interactions will aid in communication, and that arts appreciation helps one become less reliant on such assumptions.

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[18] Kennedy, Randy. 2006. "At Some Medical Schools, Humanities Join the Curriculum." *The New York Times*, April 17. http://nytimes.com/2006/04/17/arts/design/17sina.html.

[19] "Using Fine Art Appreciation to Help Family Doctors Practice Better Medicine." 2010. *McMaster University News*, September 22. http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/main/news_2010/medicine _and_art.html.

[20] Emphasis added.

This open communication is no doubt an asset in medical care, as it is tied to the sense of compassion of which those seeking such care are usually in need. "Most medical schools," notes Dr. James Woodruff, the Associate Dean of Students at the University of Chicago's Pritzker School of Medicine, "now recognize the responsibility to train compassionate doctors."[21] An integral part of such training, Woodruff contends, is engagement with the arts and humanities. And, in supporting my claim that the movement to integrate arts appreciation into medical school curricula is not just about sharpening future doctors' eyes, Woodruff goes on to state, "There's a sense that society is not satisfied with doctors who just make good clinical decisions, but with those who put their patients first and treat them with empathy, clarity and sensitivity to cultural diversity." Dr. Ellen Cosgrove at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, in discussing the art appreciation courses students there are encouraged to take, echoes this sentiment in pointing out that physicians who have taken such courses are perceived by their patients as being more empathetic.[22]

In sum, what I want to propose is that it is not just a keener eye that is being trained in these medical students participating in art appreciation courses, but that their engagements with works of art is helping develop openness. They are becoming more hospitable towards the new, a hospitality that presupposes the comfort with ambiguity discussed above. They are also being trained to allow the actual experience of a patient to direct their practice and not just use assumptions and preconceptions to direct their interaction. This also involves not just passively observing the patient as an object for

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[21] Pevtzow, Lisa. 2013. "Humanities Courses Help Aspiring Doctors Provide Better Care." *Chicago Tribune*, March 20. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-03-20/health/ct-x-medical-school-arts-20130320_1_doctors-students-humanties.

[22] "Art Helping Open Eyes of Medical Students." 2010.

diagnosis, but actively treating them as a human subject. At this point, it is fair to ask if

we just want doctors to inhabit the world in such a way, or if these are qualities that we

might want to try to foster in society in general. And, if art can help such development,

why is it seen as merely "the beauty parlor of civilization," and not something more?

Art and medicine: An account

Before articulating what exactly I am proposing in regards to our orientation

towards art, and addressing possible counter-arguments or objections to my view, it

might be worthwhile to reinforce the story told above regarding the ways in which the

appreciation of art could have bearing on the development of more ethically-responsible

doctors. In what follows, I will be giving an account of an interview I conducted with Dr.

Gabriel Monthan, M.D., a psychiatrist who is also an aspiring artist in various visual

media. This conjunction between the oft-thought divergent worlds of medicine and art is

one of the foremost reasons I inquired with Monthan regarding these art appreciation

courses in medical school, as well as the issues that such courses are meant to address.[23]

First off, Monthan admits that the "modern stereotypes (regarding doctors)

involve knowing all the answers, which are frequently obtained via extensive diagnostic

work-ups" and that "[t]his might be described as 'cookie-cutter' diagnostics." Monthan

acknowledges that much of his medical education emphasized such systematic and

technologically-dependent diagnostics, and that as a result "algorithms surface which are

geared toward streamlining a medical work-up" which he willingly notes "provide an

excellent framework for medical decision making."

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[23] The following responses were to an open-ended email query I sent Dr. Monthan asking for his thoughts
about the articles referenced above regarding medical students taking arts appreciation courses. Monthan
Gabriel, email message to author, August 9, 2013.

Yet, Monthan is quick to point out that these diagnostic algorithms "can also become barriers to critical thinking as they merely require you to follow a forking path to the answer." This testimony seems to align quite well with the cultural criticisms Dewey levies against the over-enthusiasm surrounding technology-dependent efficiency and how this has transformed education for the worse. In Monthan's field, psychiatry, he observes that "the diagnostic answers tend not to be absolute but exist on a spectrum instead." Monthan implicitly endorses one of the fruits of pragmatism when he explains that there "are many more paths to consider when absolutes are removed. It can be a disservice to the patient to simply follow a forking path to the answer, because often, there are no definitive answers." This can clearly be expanded to cover all of moral inquiry. Often, there is not a definitive answer as to what the right thing to do is. In such cases, absolutism seems to be more of a hindrance than a help with respect to a thoughtful and responsible consideration of the situation.

Monthan's account of how he avoids falling into algorithmic engagements with his patients also seems to support the rationale behind the medical schools' art appreciation courses described above. In his response, Monthan, more than once, extols the virtue of *creative* critical thinking. This involves him "imagining (himself) in the patient's circumstance," so that he "can attempt to feel some of the stresses that fracture them," and that this makes him more equipped to treat them. In concluding, Monthan expresses his belief that art appreciation can indeed help develop this imaginative approach to the doctor-patient relationship and the anti-absolutism he sees as being salutary for his medical practice.

To return to this idea of an artistic conception of the world, within such a worldview how we think about even what might be considered one of the archetypes of "objective" inquiry, medicine, can be rethought. In order to train more discerning, compassionate, and *open* doctors, these art appreciation courses for medical students work under the premise that encounters with works of art can help cultivate certain traits of character. I suggest, however, that the value of these traits transcends the field of medicine. Within certain discourse concerning law school curricula, there has been a recent push towards integrating more of the humanities, including arts appreciation, under the assumption that this would help foster a greater sense of compassion among future lawyers.[24] And, even more generally, looking at the objectives and outcomes related to arts appreciation in K-12 education, one can see that there is a subtle awareness of the ethically-transformative dimension to experiencing various works of art.[25]

The ideas underlying this advocacy of arts appreciation perhaps speak to what Dewey had in mind when he says that we need to be educated to art's educative potentialities. Works of art not only teach students about the various techniques and

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[24] See Lauren Marble's article, "Do What's Right: The Secrets of Success," in the Oregon Bar Association's newsletter at http://www.osbar.org/publications/bulletin/10jun/professionalism.html. Indeed there are numerous pushes for integrating a humanistic approach to education, at all its levels and domains. Martha Nussbaum's book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010) is but one impressive example. Also, the strategies discussed above regarding training medical students are also being employed to help train police officers. Fitting the themes raised in looking at the value of arts appreciation courses, the instructor of this course presents the following ground rules: "First, there are two words that are not allowed – 'obviously' and 'clearly' – since what's obvious to you may not be obvious to someone else." She also makes sure that the students know that "there are now judgments and no wrong answers." Hirschfeld, Neal. 2009. "Teaching Cops to See." *Smithsonian Magazine*, October. http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/teaching-cops-to-see-138500635/?no-ist.

[25] The National Standards for Visual Art education for K-4 grade go beyond just making sure students are learning about different artistic techniques, but stress the need for students to understand how different students can have different responses to the same work. The highlighting of this interpretative work seems to me to be a good entry point into a discussion about the pluralism of beliefs and values that exist in every classroom.
http://www.nacdnet.org/education/contests/poster/2009/National_Standards_for_Visual_Art_Link_To_State_Dept_of_Ed.pdf.

practices used in their creation, nor simply about the traditions and cultures out of which they arose, but they also teach us about ourselves, about how we inhabit, or might possibly inhabit, the world. On the level of a private encounter with the work of art, art so often challenges our preconceived ways of describing and valuating the world in which we live. Such unsettling has the ethically-significant consequence of expanding our horizons of possibility for human meaning and action. On the level of collective engagements with works of art, the strategies being employed by those teaching arts appreciation are often geared towards bringing into relief the pre-reflective level of experience that binds individuals together. At the same time, these strategies also underscore the diverse range of perspectives extant among us, and they reveal the certain blindness we often have in regards to these differences. All of these effects, I believe, can be of service in our own individual pursuits of well-being and flourishing, as well as in our communal hope for a more understanding and inclusive society.

Conclusion

Possible concerns

I would like to think that the picture I have tried to paint of a positive pragmatist ethics, as well as my argument for the ethical significance of aesthetic experience within this framework, both evince the general spirit of pragmatism guiding this dissertation. By that, I mean that I am in no way claiming that this is the definitive way to articulate a pragmatist ethics, nor that the account of aesthetic experience underlying my argument is the one and only way to explain our encounters with art. My aim has been to offer up suggestions regarding these topics, and to highlight their advantages *vis-à-vis* our current

situation. I have been suggesting that focusing on this intersection between art and ethics might provide us with a useful vocabulary and grammar for thinking about pragmatism, ethics, moral development, and the relationship between art and our everyday lives.

I want to now address three possible objections that one might anticipate in response to my thesis: (1) a concern with the presumed elitism of the artworld and what this might mean for equal access, (2) the contention that I am committing what William James himself refers to as the "sentimentalist fallacy," whereby an overemphasis on the domain of the imaginary puts us out of touch with the concrete demands of our lived experience, and (3) a more general worry about the virtue of openness and the threat of relativism that many think inevitably accompanies it.

Before addressing the first concern, I want to briefly synopsize one of the most crucial assumptions contained in my argument. Throughout my discussion, I have attempted to show how art is especially powerful in the development of openness. This is not to say that other experiences cannot cultivate this cardinal pragmatist virtue. Our lives, if we are fortunate, afford us numerous moments when the familiar strikes us as fascinating, and we are opened up to the wonder of experience. The beauty and sublimity of the natural world can obviously have this effect, as well as just those everyday surprises when the routine monotony of our day-to-day experience is unsettled in a delightfully refreshing, not disconcerting, way.

Engaging works of art is, for one, intentional. The element of surprise is not a prerequisite for aesthetic experience. Furthermore, and I have tried to highlight this throughout, the ambiguous and non-propositional nature of art lends itself to a certain type of approach. We typically do not approach a work of art looking to somehow

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discover the truth of it. We are already in a state of uncertainty when perceiving a work, and thus primed to engage with the new. This cannot be said for our attitude towards many other facets of experience, moral decision-making included, where we seem to want to get at the truth of the matter.

Returning, then, to possible objections to my central claims, regarding the elitism challenge, I acknowledge that there are certainly aspects of the artworld that can be pretentious and exclusive. Artists seem to only get mainstream recognition when they are eccentric, and the stereotype of snobbery is all too much a part of the popular perception of art. Moreover, specific to the medical school arts appreciation courses previously discussed, we are looking at a select group of exceptional students who have gotten into medical school, and these medical schools have easy access to their universities' museums and the other fruits of culture which others might not be so fortunate to explore. With many public schools dealing with incredibly tight budgets, arts programs (along with other supposedly expendable classes such as physical education and music) are constantly under threat. Thus the aim of making art appreciation a central part of all students' ethical education seems to be hindered by a lack of access.

This is undoubtedly a complicated problem that would need to be approached from various perspectives. The work being done by advocates of these medical school arts appreciation courses, as well as by those educators already employing techniques such as Visual Thinking Strategies, is a small but important step in the right direction. As Dewey noted, art does not currently educate to its fullest because we are not educated to recognize its transformative potential. If more educators are taught the benefits of art appreciation for the development of well-rounded and ethically-responsible students,

perhaps there will be a more vigorous defense of such programs when budgetary questions arise.

Yet, we also need to have our conception of art and the aesthetic expanded. Art should not be restricted to what can be found in museums, galleries, and art history texts. One of the implicit themes of this dissertation has been the "artistic" dimension of our human attempts to feel at home in the world. Within the pragmatist worldview I laid out in Chapter I, how we make sense of ourselves, of our environment, and of the relations between, is akin to the creation of a work of art. As James notes, the world is not ready-made and we have a hand in *shaping* the future. This is perhaps what Banksy meant by his yearning to live in a world "made by art." Such a shift in how we treat the relationship between art and our everyday lives would, hopefully, aid in Dewey's crusade against the institutionalization of art. Art outside of the museum or gallery might acquire a heightened status, and the artistic-aesthetic dimension of human experience in general could be drawn upon to help us in our pursuits of individual flourishing and social melioration. What this all amounts to is that if art is seen as something more than a frivolous luxury, we can perhaps move beyond elitism and exclusionary access to a more comprehensive engagement with the full range of art works and art processes.

This emphasis on the relationship between art and our lives gets at my response to the second concern noted above – that turning to art to help us become better people would be to potentially commit what James calls "the sentimentalist fallacy." This fallacy consists in the tendency "to shed tears over abstract justice and generosity, beauty, etc., and never to know these qualities when you meet them in the street" (James 1981, 103). In other words, there might be a concern that such a focus on art will take one

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away from the concrete demands of the real world. Christopher Voparil has voiced such a concern with respect to thinkers such as Rorty and Martha Nussbaum, who advance a view of moral development which relies on sentimental education, and specifically, sentimental education through literature and narrative. It is Voparil's contention that James's theory on habits can be used to bolster Rorty's and Nussbaum's arguments for sentimental education by grounding them in our concrete lived experience.

Voparil's (and James's) main suggestion for how to avoid the sentimentalist fallacy involves a conscious effort to translate the fellow-feeling that might be fostered through certain types of literature, for instance realist literature and detailed narrative journalism, into action. Only by doing so will one cultivate the morally-responsible habit of imaginatively identifying with the needs and concerns of others. For art, then, to genuinely have a transformative effect on our lives, we must bring what it has taught us into the course of our experience.

While the discussion of the sentimentalist fallacy takes place in the context of specific affective states, the cultivation of openness could fall victim to this worry as well. Through engaging a variety of different paintings, for example, one could become open in regards to being able to appreciate a diverse range of styles and traditions – in other words, to be hospitable to the new. For pragmatists, though, it always goes back to concrete experience. To develop the pragmatist cardinal virtue of openness, this hospitality towards the new must be *enacted* in how one cares for oneself and how one relates to and interacts with others.

One can imagine an art critic, whose entire life is devoted to the appreciation of art, who is yet plagued by the certain blindness discussed in Chapter IV. Perhaps she is

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condescending to her religiously-oriented neighbors, working under the closed-minded assumption that believers are naive dullards. Any openness she has with respect to her art criticism is not the same as the virtue that has been central to this discussion. That openness, as the cardinal virtue of a pragmatist ethics, is going to have its value for life grounded in our concrete everyday lives. Part of what seems to underlie James's warning against the sentimentalist fallacy touches on what is often regarded as the central point of divergence between classical Pragmatists such as James and Dewey, and the neopragmatism espoused by the likes of Rorty; that is, whether experience or language should be the general field of inquiry.[26] As I discussed earlier, Rorty certainly could say more about our embodied existence, and his wariness of falling into a materialist "metaphysics" pushed Rorty away from any sustained treatment of habit.

For Rorty, in order to alter character, one needs to adopt a new vocabulary, a new way of speaking. This might sometimes sound like transformation is "all in the head," but Rorty would acknowledge that this vocabulary must be cast into concrete experience so as to change who one is or how society thinks about a given phenomenon. In other words, these vocabularies must be used. It is the same for openness. Openness must be enacted if it is to be fostered. In James's words, we must "never … suffer one's self to have an emotion at a concert, without expressing it afterward in *some* active way. Let the expression be the least thing in the world – speaking genially to one's aunt, or giving up one's seat in a horse-car, if nothing more heroic offers – but let in it not fail to take place" (James 1950, 126). To be praised for being open, the art critic described above needs to

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[26] As I noted in previous chapters, I do not think fussing over who is right in this debate is itself very pragmatic. Rorty's insights regarding our linguistic practices are a nice supplement to James's and Dewey's discussions of experience, which themselves help Rortian-inspired pragmatists such as myself give a more robust account various aspects of human experience.

open herself to the perspective of her neighbors and reach out to try and get a feel for the inner significance of their lives. In so doing, she might even find that her preconceptions about believers was misguided and that her neighbors have more in common with her than she could have ever imagined.

This brings me to the last of what I consider to be the most common concerns regarding my argument for the benefit that engagements with art can have for our ethical lives with respect to the cultivation of openness. Indeed this concern has to do with the virtuousness of openness itself. As I would not want to restrict this proposal only to those who subscribe to some form of the pragmatist worldview articulated in Chapter I, it is worth addressing what is probably the most commonly rehearsed criticism against pragmatism. In Chapter I, I mentioned pragmatism's less than favorable reputation among other philosophical traditions, particularly those of an analytic bent, wherein it is seen as simply an "immature" or, as Rorty puts it, a "decadent" worldview that leads to a culture "that wishes not to get things right but to make things new," and will thus "be a culture of languid and self-involved aesthetes" (Rorty 2010, 486). This interpretation rests in the belief that pragmatism, in advocating for openness over certainty, amounts to a weak-willed relativism.

Hopefully, the preceding chapters have highlighted the various ways that pragmatists can eschew certainty without giving up the seemingly innate human desire for ethical guidance. We need to have beliefs that can guide our lives. A state of constant and radical skepticism is not what Nietzsche, Dewey, Rorty, or any of the other thinkers sympathetic to the central commitments of pragmatism are advocating. Remember, Rorty cites the fundamental premise of his *Contingency, irony, and*

solidarity, as the idea that "a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought of as worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance" (Rorty 2008, 189).

In championing this open orientation towards experience, pragmatists are not advising us to abandon those beliefs that give our lives order, meaning, and purpose. They are simply asking us to *orient* ourselves in a certain way towards those beliefs, so as to allow us to navigate the novel and changing aspects of experience in a way that helps maximize individual well-being, as well as how we interact with and respond to others. This orientation can, admittedly, come with a degree of existential despair regarding the seeming absurdity of condition once we give up any claims to the certainty. Thomas Nagel, in discussing the notion of the absurd – the tenuous clash between our seemingly unavoidable drive to take our beliefs with the utmost seriousness and the problematic light cast on those beliefs by our ability to reflect on the contingent and ultimately insignificant nature of them – advises us to just embrace this "absurdity" as it comes, and to let that embrace infuse our lives with a sense of irony (Nagel 1971, 727).

Though, as Rorty alludes to, this is not a sort of detached irony where nothing is held to be worthy of guiding one's conduct. Possessing the cardinal virtue of openness is always a matter of degree. How willing one is to be affected by experience, how hospitable towards the new one is, how much one will actively seek not just to tolerate, but also to attempt to understand and grant value to the beliefs of others – these are all abilities one may possess to greater and lesser degrees. But, what remains is that even a little bit of openness is better than none. Perhaps it is helpful to think about openness, then, in contrast to its antithesis, closed mindedness. Openness is, admittedly, a very

difficult concept to articulate, and how exactly it works in one's moral life can be hard to tease out. I have suggested that what aesthetic experience and engagements with the work of art actually do is help loosen the crust of convention that limits our horizons of possibility. It is my claim that art can help us think about ourselves and others in a way that is not so much dictated by rigid and preconceived ideas about what it means to be a "man," a "woman," a "father," an "American," a "professor," a "doctor," etc. I also have contended that in doing such conceptual unsettling, art can help us overcome that certain blindness we have towards others in a way that not only unites us with them, but aids us in becoming more understanding of difference.

Closing thoughts

Another way of approaching openness, then, is that possessing it injects a fallibilism, a willingness to revise one's beliefs, into one's overall comportment. One can have beliefs that they are willing to die for, as long as they are also willing to revise those beliefs if experience shows them to be in some way harmful towards oneself or others. Holding these abilities – profound commitment to certain values combined with a willingness to revise values in light of new experience – together might seem to be a debilitating paradox, and perhaps it is a regulative ideal after which one always strives, but never fully achieves.

Openness also carries with it a spirit of experimentalism that is so crucial to our democratic way of life. Just as artists experiment with the traditions out of which they are working in order to truly bring something new into existence, the ideal comportment within this pragmatist ethical framework I have laid out is one that is comfortable gazing

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upon new vistas of human experience and seeing that landscape as one in which a better society might be forged. While the past will no doubt have influence on our present practices, we must be willing to break from it in the name of progress.

What has been left unsaid until this point is just how much hope this requires. I actually consider this idea to be Rorty's best – the idea that we need to substitute hope for knowledge. As we can readily grasp from current news, our world is changing, and it is changing fast. What hubris it takes to think that we can actually come up with some *a priori* theory about anything that will help us navigate the complexities of this changing world. Therefore, we need to have hope. We need to have hope that we can adapt to the fluctuating tides of history so as to constantly work towards the brightest future imaginable. Openness demands this sort of hope. If one is going to be hospitable towards the new, they must also possess a belief that such hospitality is a good thing. Granted, the novel is not good, *per se*. This is why discourse surrounding the new must remain as open and reflective as possible.

This is the task Dewey saw philosophy having once it abandoned the quest for certainty, for a description of Reality-in-itself. That is, "Philosophy," Dewey insists should, "surrender all pretension to be peculiarly concerned with the ultimate reality, or with reality as complete (i.e., completed) whole; with *the* real object," and he goes on to aver that philosophical inquiry is "[n]ot a contemplative survey of existence nor an analysis of what is past and done with, but an outlook upon future possibilities with reference to attaining the better and averting the worse" (MW 10:39). In closing, then, I would like to briefly discuss how my project relates to the discipline of philosophy in general. Although drawing on various philosophical concepts and jargon up to this point,

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I would like to think that this discussion has not been solely directed at philosophers, but to educators (regarding arts education), to students (regarding the need to take the appreciation of art seriously), and to the general public (regarding the need to rehabilitate art as a central part of human experience). But, with respect to academic philosophy, I would like to summarize my main points.

My central claim is that a normative ethics can indeed emerge out of the central commitments of pragmatism. This prescriptive ethics, however, will admittedly look different than other, more traditional forms. A pragmatist ethics is not going to claim certainty regarding ethical prescriptions via appeals to an essential human nature, a set of supposedly absolute and universal moral maxims, nor a calculus based on maximizing human satisfaction. Humbly, all it can offer are suggestions for how we might become better people, where "better" is a notion simply rooted in where we stand as a democratic society. As Dewey writes:

> Powerful present enemies of democracy can be successfully met only by the creation of personal attitudes in individual human beings; … we must get over our tendency to think that its defense can be found in any external means whatever, whether military or civil, if they are separated from individual attitudes so deep-seated as to constitute personal character." (LW 14:224-30)

This aligns with Rorty's contention that Dewey's aim was to propose hypotheses about how to "create new ways of being human, and a new heaven and a new earth for these new humans to inhabit, over the desire for stability, security and order" (Rorty 1999, 88). With this in mind, I am wholeheartedly endorsing the virtue of openness as the cardinal virtue of a pragmatist ethics. Openness is, of course, not the only virtue we ought to cultivate, but it is crucial to our moral deliberation. With this general attitude in tow, we can even grant that other character traits that might be salutary become apparent.

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To be open requires a certain view of the way things are, and in holding such a view, it has hopefully been brought into relief that other virtues might be worth developing.[27]

Having openness, and its attendant contextualism, as a cardinal virtue, however, allows one to realize that these other virtues might not always be the best tools to use in any given situation. In this way, the pragmatist virtue ethics I have described resonates with Aristotle's vague definition of virtue, specifically here the virtue of charity, as: "[T]o give (money) to the right person, to give the right amount of it, at the right time, for the right cause and in the right way" (Aristotle 2002, 34-5). Extrapolating beyond Aristotle's focus on donating money, we can see openness as a light which helps us see more of the possibilities of a situation and more of the tools for inquiry we have at our disposal. For instance, we have multiple tools for ethical inquiry which relate to past principles, hoped for consequences, and habits of thought and action. In his essay "Three Independent Factors in Morals" (1930), Dewey argues that it does a disservice to inquiry to rely on or overemphasize one of these factors over the rest. What openness does, then, is help us be comfortable with this complexity, and be able to better evaluate which tools will be most appropriate to a given situation.

Granted, a pragmatist ethics does not give us the instruction manual for handling our moral lives that many of us would like to have. Again, the wager here is that the pursuit of such a manual actually does more harm than good as it relates to genuine ethical inquiry.[28] When determining how one ought to live or what one should do in any given situation, blindly following directions can lead to devastating consequences. Sure,

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[27] See Chapter I (pp. 48-9) for a brief list of these virtues.

[28] This is also one of the central ideas of Mark Johnson's book, *Morality for Humans: Ethical Understanding from the Perspective of Cognitive Science* (2014).

sometimes such adherence might lead to the "good." Yet, an open comportment towards experience will not only allow for an appreciation of prior values and principles, but will also allow for ethical possibilities previously ignored. This is what Rorty is getting at when he redescribes "redemption" within the context of his literary culture. Instead of seeking what Rorty terms "redemptive truth" (i.e., the absolute solution to the question of what to do with ourselves), members of his utopia will understand that "the only source of redemption is the human imagination, and that this fact should occasion pride rather than despair" (Rorty 2010, 479).

I have been arguing that the appreciation of art can help us lessen the prescriptions on our conceptual lenses. By this I mean that the fact that art makes sense, that it speaks to us, while being by its nature ambiguous and non-propositional, eases us into an awareness that our conceptual systems of interpretation do not exhaust the possibilities open to us in human experience. Labels such as "good," "bad," "right," and "wrong," along with a whole host of other concepts that we employ in our ethical decision-making, simply do not do justice to the rich complexity of our existence as human organisms coping with our physical and, more importantly, social environment. Art can show us new ways of being a self. Art can help us recognize some of the most basic ways in which we are bound together, as well help us become comfortable and even curious about individuals' diverse perspectives on what is and what matters.

However, as Dewey astutely points out, we need to be educated to see how art can perform this transformative function. As a final thrust of support for what I have been arguing, I feel it is fitting to invoke a very pragmatist tactic. I have mentioned numerous times that the test of any idea for pragmatists ends up being the difference holding such a

belief will have in one's lived experience. I thus conclude by asking the following question: if we think about ethics in the way I have described, if we think about art and aesthetic experience as I have articulated them, and if we think about the relationship between the two in the terms I have suggested, what constructive difference might this make in the well-being of ourselves and others? For one, we have to give up any notion of certainty in regards to our ethical lives. Within the framework I have proposed, we can no longer stake a claim to knowing that we are living the one right way, or doing the one right thing. Furthermore, I have presented self-correction as something that is not as easy as discovering your essence, and, similarly, attempted to show that the pursuit of solidarity and inclusivity requires a bit more imaginative work than we might have previously thought. Moreover, I have tried to show how art and aesthetic experience are intimately entwined with our everyday lives, and thus brought art off of its pedestal as the beauty parlor of civilization.

But what might be gained in thinking about the relationship between art and ethics in the way I have presented? I believe that the pragmatist ethics I have presented provides us with the resources we need to reconcile the skepticism surrounding moral certainty and absolutism with the human desire to make evaluative ethical judgments and to make the world better. We can still say that something is right or wrong, we can still praise and condemn ways of living. Openness simply asks us to treat such judgments in a tentative fashion. As Dewey notes, when engaged in moral inquiry, we would be wise to remember that the option(s) not chosen are not necessarily "bad" (MW 14:194). Thus, this ethical framework opens up possibilities for living a life – for creating a self – that will, ideally, aid more and more individuals in the their pursuits of a meaningful, happy,

and fulfilled existence. This approach to ethics also emphasizes the need to understand

the perspectives of others, and appreciate the plurality of those perspectives, so as to

work towards a more inclusive society that is not a melting pot, but a collective of

differences bound together by the humble commonalities we share. And, as I have

argued, I believe that the appreciation of art needs to be taken seriously as a source of

ethical development within this framework. In so doing, I hope to have captured the

spirit of Nietzsche's, Dewey's, and Rorty's commitments to the intimate relationship

between art and how we live our lives. They, I believe, certainly heard God's laugh

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