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Dewey's Pragmatism and the Great Community

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by

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Dedication

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Abstract

In investigating Dewey's theory of the Great community, it is important to first examine closely Dewey's theory of scientific inquiry and show how it evades the spectator theory of knowledge common to all modern epistemologies as closed systems. Dewey maintained that through controlled experimentalism we engage, and can solve, existential issues facing us for the purpose of expanding human freedom, promoting the democratic way of life and cultivating the institutions which foster these activities. The usage of inquiry to overcome problematic situations therefore stands as one of the first conditions needed to attain the great community.

Since Dewey did not view human beings as isolated and passive spectators he engaged in formulating what it means to become an individual with experimental habits. Dewey envisioned humans as organisms operating in a common cultural environment rather than private entities cut off from one another. We are communal by way of communication. The next condition required to bring about the great community is open communication.

Dewey held that human beings need to operate through the development of such habits that assist them in overcoming obstacles by means of an education that secures the process of cultural growth. This aspect of his theory became the backbone of Dewey's conception of ethical value and his political theory. Members of the Great community must trust and freely associate to accomplish the social growth that Dewey advocates therefore free association is another condition for the achievability of the great community.

As I argue, for Dewey, any way of life which is oriented toward individual growth can be democratic. A democratic way of life is shown to be superior to any other currently pursued. Thus, any community which cultivates democratic practices throughout its culture can become a participant in the great community. By so doing it allows the individuals of that community to flourish as ethical and cognitive agents. Therefore democracy as a way of life requires that individuals participate within the cultivation of themselves and their community and this is the next condition for achieving the great community.

The final condition for achieving the great community is the full integration and usage of individual's potentialities. If these six conditions are met, Dewey held the conditions would be ripe to bring about a great community. He never completed the social task of what the great community would be once attained, but this dissertation will gather together the materials he did provide on it and trace the steps that would be needed to achieve it.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation is a work designed to draw together various strands of thought from throughout the work of the American philosopher, John Dewey (October 20, 1859 – June 1, 1952) and bring them together into a comprehensive whole with a special focus on Dewey's theory of the great community. While Dewey repeatedly claimed not to have a *closed system*, I aim to show, by way of overlap and interplay of intellectual currents, the deep interconnectedness of Dewey's thinking in an *open-ended* system.

Dewey only mentions the great community in two places in his corpus: the first is in the middle chapters of *The Public and its Problems* and the second is in his absentee address to the Conference on Education and Philosophy, University of Illinois, 21 October 1949. In this second citation, a clue is found as to where the idea for the great community originated:

> There is the realization, peculiarly precious at a time of stress and strain such as we live in today, that we all are links in an ever-continuing and out-reaching chain of intellectual and moral continuity. In it each of us is able to give to those who follow because of what we have already received from others. Even in the most trying days there is ground for hope, and more than hope, for confidence, in this

> fact, to which Josiah Royce years ago gave the name "The great community," and which it is an acute satisfaction to know it also The Continuing Community.[1]

The Work by Josiah Royce that Dewey mentioned was titled *The Hope for the Great Community* and was published before the close of the First World War in November of 1916. In it Royce places his finger upon the pulse of the issue upon which this dissertation will expand:

> Some motives which tend to render the genuine Pauline charity, the genuine love of the unity of the great community to which all civilized men may, when enlightened, consciously belong, - such motives, I say, have been furthered by the arts, the industries, the sciences and the social developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as thousands of years of previous human activity have never furthered them.[2]

Royce clearly believed that the advancement of human understanding and association had made possible a society based upon cooperation and civilization. Importantly, Royce was also an idealist and his vision of the great community had more to do with finding the ideal good here on Earth as typified by the statement that "every idealist believes himself to have rational grounds for the

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[1] Introduction to *Essays for John Dewey's Ninetieth Birthday, ed. Kenneth Dean benne and William Oliver Stanley* (Urbana, Ill.; Bureau of Research and Service, College of Education, University of Illinois, 1950) pp. 3-4, from statement read for Dewey at the Conference on Education and Philosophy, University of Illinois, 21 October 1949.

[2] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 38.

faith that somewhere, and in some world, and at some time, the ideal will triumph, so that a survey, a divine synopsis of all time, somehow reveals the lesson of all sorrow, the meaning of all tragedy, the triumph of the spirit."[3]

Royce was not so blinded by his idealism to see that there were forces operating against this fashion, which he compared to the host of Satan's fallen angels in their opposition to God's message. He saw the great community as the culmination of Adam's struggle against the influence of Satan, and the great community is in effect an evolved "Zion" of the Christian church whereby "this triumph of humanity, this hope of all the faithful, this salvation of a community through an universally significant human transformation, without which no salvation of an individual man would be possible, this idea, in terms of which the Apostle Paul universalized the ideal Jerusalem of the early Prophets, this became the most essential and characteristic idea of the Christian Church."[4]

Royce realized that this Heaven on Earth would require some of the forces which were only recently available to humanity, such as "the growth of the natural sciences as well as of the technical industries of mankind,"[5] but he also realized there were blockages to accomplishing Zion coming from such quarters as "confusions of men's tongues, by the mutual hostility of nations, of religions, and of sects, and by the absence of means whereby men might learn to work together."[6] While it may appear odd to see a self-avowed idealist speak of

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[3] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 27.

[4] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 35.

[5] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 38.

[6] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 41.

material means to accomplishing a spiritual community, he held the likeliest means to be the humane arts and the burgeoning sciences.

He also stated that the ideal required humans to "not be merely individual human beings, not yet mere collections or masses of human beings, however vast, but communities of some sort, communities such as, at any stage of civilization in which the great community is to be raised to some higher level of organization, already exist."[7] Additionally, membership within the great community required "loyalty, the devotion of the self to the interests of the community," for "without loyalty, there is no salvation."[8] Yet another issue to be overcome is the "detached individual" for whom enforcement of the law brings about a "war going on in his own members"[9] for he, in seeking individual pleasure, as well as in being a social-being and in feeling restrained by the social order, is at war with himself. Therefore "for the detached individual there is no salvation."[10] In contradistinction to this he states "what saves us on any level of human social life is union,"[11] and he meant by this a conscious unity in a community which the individual members do not feel forced to partake in it, but rather willingly and knowingly are devoted.

A final characteristic which Royce held would be required to bring about the ideal community would be that it be made up of nations, distinct from one

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[7] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 43.

[8] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 45.

[9] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 47.

[10] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 48.

[11] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 52.

another. Political unity would not be the basis of a great community, since "there seems to be some opposition between the political power of a nation and its power to contribute to the ideals of the community of mankind."[12] Royce believed there must be a diversity of nations and races because political unity had the opposite effect upon humane community; in unifying a nation politically, its people are splintered like never before. Therefore "if the ideal is approximately realized, the kingdom will be in this world, yet its servants will not fight, simply because they will be loyally engrossed in much better business than fighting."[13] Oddly, Royce felt the invention of the form of business of insurance proves a Pauline charity is evolving, because "the business of insurance depends upon devices which are, so to speak, essentially unifying, essentially reconciling, essentially such as to exemplify a type of social community,"[14] thereby proving that business could be conducted in such a way as to bring humanity together. I am sure Royce would be saddened by the contemporary practice of insurance which operates more to maximize profits at the expense of individuals, than to unify communities.[15]

It is clear from this discussion of the origin of the theory of the great community that Dewey drew from Royce's conception. However, Dewey had also

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[12] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 57.

[13] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 58.

[14] Royce, Josiah. *The Hope of the Great Community* p. 62

[15] His recommendation to form an international insurance body is likely to meet with similar motivation issues of contemporary insurance companies; I will henceforth avoid further mention of his recommendations in this venture even though they relate as the means he recommended toward reconciling international war and forming a unity of interests. I view his primary recommendation, the formation of an international insurance board, to be far less valuable than what he laid

rejected idealism and Christianity by the time he began utilizing this theory, so he was forced to recast it in a naturalists' mold. It is Dewey's naturalistic reconstruction of the theory of the great community which my dissertation will undertake to discuss and criticize.

That Dewey insisted upon utilizing the most careful and qualified scientific inquiries to guide our cultural, moral and even philosophic endeavors will be taken as a central tenet and will make up the thrust of the second chapter. Exploration will begin by noting Dewey's biting criticism of what he called the "spectator theory of knowing" which he believed most Western philosophers previous to him had suffered under. In place of a passive spectator, Dewey recommended an engaged and active experimental approach to formulating knowing. He held that by way of experimental inquiry it was possible to arrive at solutions for problematic situations that humans faced. This premise will be the back-bone upon which this dissertation proceeds and uses as a methodology for future chapters. By starting with a method for investigating problems and tackling them, progress can be made on the issues that follow. While this chapter appears on its face to be the least connected with the great community, it in fact forms the foundation upon which all other conditions rest. The ability to utilize scientific inquiry to overcome problematic situations stands as the first condition for the possibility of bringing about the great community.

One of the political doctrines Dewey was most critical of, and which he believed was a by-product of adhering to a spectator theory of knowing, was the theory of human nature and political doctrine known as individualism. A

discussion of Dewey's criticism will constitute the third chapter of my dissertation. Where previous thinkers had posited the individual as a ready-made and fully formed entity, Dewey criticized this belief as unfounded and dangerously dogmatic. During Dewey's time at Columbia University he had worked closely with, and been influenced by, the anthropological research of Franz Boas. This research contributed to Dewey's belief in the overwhelming effect of culture upon the formation of independent human organisms and that radical individualism was a cultural development of the widespread influence of personal salvation from the dominant religion of the West, Christianity, and the Western European philosophic tradition rather than some inherent aspect of human nature. The primary evidence Dewey utilized in his rejection of radical individualism is the dependence of human beings upon one another for basic survival. He further rejected radical individualism by exploring the communal nature of cultural practice (i.e. a rejection of private culture) and by indicating the massively communal nature of most current institutions, ranging from universal education to corporate business and team sports. Few aspects of contemporary life are anything like rugged individualism. By establishing the dependence of humans upon one another, the second condition for achieving the great community will be discussed.

The fourth chapter will further explore human nature, experience, habits, and culture, where habits are taken to be the latticework of culture. By exploring how individuals are the locus of activity in experience, how experience is tempered by habits and how culture is an organic unity of habits and structuring

human nature, a base-line will have been reached by which it will be shown that the malleable aspect of individuals is their habits. By establishing the pivot point for change, habits will be the means by which a reconstruction of human conduct based upon scientific inquiry and aimed at the highest freedom through free association and sustainable habits is another condition for the formation of the great community.

Due to the importance of habits in social organization, a further exploration of habit formation, habit activation, the role of impulse in habit activation and the process of habit reconstruction is necessary. In this exploration Dewey's differentiation of impulses from impulsions will be explored in relationship to habit activation. Following this I will explore the consequences of Dewey's theory of habit formation and operation. One of the pitfalls to be avoided with any habit, or behavior is routine and stagnation of habits, especially in activities which are harmful. To complete this chapter I explore the utilization of experimental inquiry in habit reconstruction and show how habit formation and reconstruction constitute educational practices. Having established habit reconstruction toward inquiry as the primary purpose of education, the institute by which habit reconstruction is possible is established and one means by which the great community can be formed is established.

By combining Dewey's theory of habit, culture and inquiry we arrive at one of Dewey's seminal conclusions: the dependence of individuals upon cultural institutions for the cultivation of their own growth potential. In the fifth chapter I will first investigate that Dewey held humans could cultivate themselves by way

of cultural institutions, such as education, to grow and secondly how it was that we utilize inquiry to steer and reconstruct this process. Growth without steady and controlled inquiry would be blind groping or steadfast adherence to dogma; neither of which Dewey believed were helpful, in the long-run, to the development of human potential. Dewey deemed that controlled inquiry and the education of humans to better utilize inquiry in all walks of human life was the path toward individual and cultural growth while maintaining harmony with the environment. This path interpenetrated the individual with the institutions of society thus demonstrating the need that individuals had for a community oriented toward individual growth and how communities of this sort can only arise by way of educational institutions. Therefore a reformed education institution constitutes a central pre-condition for the formation of any sustainable community in general, but also for the great community in particular.

Dewey maintained that a culture oriented toward harmonious growth would be a democratic-way-of-life. He spoke of democracy as a way of life as distinct from a governmental practice of elections, but also suggested that a democratic political environment fostered a democratic way of life. This will be the focus of my sixth chapter. However, Dewey did not believe democracy was a shield or umbrella under which we could retreat to protect us from the ills of the world. Rather, he believed democracy-as-a-way-of-life was something to be worked toward and fostered. By working toward reconstructing cultural institutions to better assist humans in attaining continued personal growth, Dewey held that both community and individual were improved. However, this

way of life does not spring like an oasis ready-made in the desert; rather, democracy must be fostered by restructuring educational practices to better incorporate ways of thinking and acting which are democratic in nature. Democracy as a way of life stands as a requirement that all citizens fully participate to their fullest potential and this is the next condition for the establishment of the great community.

The great community was an ideal which Dewey believed would be neither a fascistic militarization nor a communistic homogenization of culture, but would nevertheless be unified around common understandings publicly available, and engaged by an active and educated public. In some ways he likened this community to the scientific community insofar as it has the unified objective of furthering scientific understanding regardless of its' members individual objectives. In the final chapter I explore how this "public" could embrace democracy-as-a-way-of-life so thoroughly that it would infuse the very fabric of education, politics and community life and in turn lead to fullness and cultivation of true individuals. In this sense Dewey believed individualism was a goal to be achieved and only when conditions were right. Some of the conditions needed to obtain this cultural accomplishment were a) equilibrium brought about by way of intelligent problem solving, b) harmonious existence with environmental conditions allowing for sustainable living and c) unique human organisms living together in concert through a democratic community oriented toward the cultivation of individual growth, thus contributing to the possibility of the great community.

While I am interested in rigorous scholastic investigation into Dewey's thought, it is only for the hope of uncovering applicable, useful and practical instruments for resolving problematic situations currently being faced to better lay the ground for the possibility of the great community.

Chapter Two: The Problem of Knowledge

This chapter will draw heavily from the following works by Dewey: *The Public and its Problems*, *Democracy and Education*, *How We Think*, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* but primarily from *A Quest for Certainty* and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.

Epistemology, as the theory of knowledge, has been the central emphasis of philosophic investigation for the past three and a half centuries. While schools of thought have risen and fallen in this time, no definitive resolution to the epistemic problem of bridging the gap between mind and world as proposed by Descartes has been evident. During his early days in philosophy, Dewey had originally moved closer to Hegelian idealism, very much in line with the Cartesian project. After being exposed to James' psychology and returning to the pragmatic tendencies of his former logic professor, Charles S. Peirce, Dewey decided that rather than tackling the mind-body interaction problem head-on he would instead approach it from a radically different perspective. Rather than seeking root causes to explain the world about him, Dewey embraced pragmatism and turned toward observable consequences. Approached from this perspective, Dewey viewed the epistemic problem to be a pseudo-problem and moved away from models of knowing based upon passivity toward those models which were active in character. This shift allowed Dewey to criticize the epistemological issue and

release the energies of philosophic thought to engage more pressing societal and cultural needs.

By accepting the model of scientific investigation, whereby theories are accepted hypothetically and then tested experimentally, he proposed a theory of inquiry. This theory of inquiry, being itself accepted hypothetically tested by the results of its utilization, is not a claim at verisimilitude or objectivity, but is instead a philosophic method for approaching problematic situations faced by humanity that offers postulations for reconciling these problems. Rather than seeking timeless and absolute truth, Dewey sought for the answers to concrete problems faced by humans; answers to these problems come in the form of resolving the problem and possibly future problems of a similar form. An additional aspect of Dewey's theory is that the object, in being inquired into, is changed through the very process of inquiry. It is perhaps this aspect which marks the greatest divergence between Dewey's own theories and those of the dualistic philosophers.

From Absolutism to Pragmatism

Dewey's original channel of philosophic thought was idealistic in tenor. While there lurked an emphasis upon nature and organic perspectives, these perspectives lay largely unplumbed.[16] His psychological and logical sojourns were heavily colored by the dominant epistemic tradition of his day and he therefore accepted as a baseline a heritage which approached the problem of knowledge by seeking out root causes. A consequence of this idealistic thinking

[16] It is important to note for future chapters that much of Dewey's educational work was completed during his idealistic phase and is therefore colored accordingly. This will become pertinent in later chapters.

was its totalizing and absolutist approach, indicative of Dewey's Hegelian leaning during these early years. But even in Dewey's early years, he had become critical of the speculative project of absolute self-consciousness. The methods by which post-Kantians sought to investigate the absolute suffered from the same fallacious thinking the idealists accused the empiricists of, and Dewey was aware of this failing: if the parts of an entity (in this case absolute self-consciousness) are unobservable, then the whole of the entity "I" is likewise unobservable.[17] Dewey attempted to move away from this problem, while remaining within the idealistic tradition, by moving toward what he called experimental idealism. This transition was half-hearted at best and finally culminated in his rejection of the idealistic project in favor of pragmatism.

The movement away from an idealistic perspective toward a pragmatic one is of central importance regarding Dewey's theory of the great community. Idealistic philosophies, especially those of absolutist stripes, are ultimately trapped in solipsism and unable to escape an epistemic prison. Heirs to Descartes' philosophic systems, even post-Kantian, ultimately had the issue of connecting mind with world. If mind were absolute and ideal, in what way could it transact with a material world of change and flux? While this problem can be traced back to pre-Socratic origins, the issue nevertheless persisted. If a theory is trapped in solipsistic navel-gazing, how could community be possible? Admittance of the existence of an external world is problem enough for this sort

[17] Welchman, Jennifer. "From Absolute Idealism to Instrumentalism: The Problem of Dewey's early Philosophy" *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society*, 1989, Vol. 25, Number 4, p. 414.

of project, much less the admittance of other minds and one's connection to them.

As Dewey slowly drew away from idealistic and absolutist thinking, and toward pragmatic and instrumentalist thinking, he left behind the problems of the existence of an external world and the problem of other minds. In their place, he sought to observe the consequences of theories and actions and utilized this as the foundation for a theory. By the time Dewey rejected absolutism he had abandoned "the search for causes and forces and turn[ed] to the analysis of what is going on and how it goes on."[18] What this process entailed for Dewey was first accepting Bradley's theory that all propositional judgments are hypothetical and suppositional and therefore are in effect an "ideal experiment."[19]

With the publication of *Studies in Logical Theory* in 1903, Dewey had largely moved toward accepting a thin pragmatism, or at least a radical empiricism. This is largely attributed to the effect of James' *Psychology* upon the young Dewey, but an even earlier influence by Charles S. Peirce cannot be ignored. What radical empiricism and pragmatism meant to the early Dewey was a rejection of *a priori* necessity and an acceptance of experimental methodology for understanding what constitutes the "real." Dewey's pragmatic turn had begun and he re-assessed virtually every area of philosophy. Perhaps the most important shift was away from epistemological foundations and toward methodology when he stated that "philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be

[18] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems* p. 21.

[19] Bradley, F. H. *Principles of Logic* p. 86. Whether this was proto-pragmatism or not, I'll leave to debate another day; nevertheless it was movement away from absolutism.

a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men."[20] Rather than continually returning to intractable debates regarding philosophic contents, Dewey hoped to utilize the rigor and tenacity of philosophers to tackle existent social and cultural problems faced by individuals outside of the profession of philosophy. Rather than idly questing for philosophic certainty, Dewey held that overcoming problems by way of scientific inquiry sufficed. Peirce had previously stated that "Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts," and Dewey would have agreed wholeheartedly that certainty is unnecessary when the problem ceases to be of importance.[21]

> All we know about a thing called cause or antecedent is what comes after. We would not be able to make an intelligent statement about it. It is only by seeing and knowing its consequences that we can get any meaning from it as a cause.[22]

By looking toward consequences, as found in observation, rather than seeking hidden causes and forces, Dewey had taken his own Copernican Turn; now idealism would be the theory lurking in the wings rather than naturalism and organic psychology.

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[20] Dewey, John. "The Need for Recovery in Philosophy" 1917.

[21] Peirce, Charles S. "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (1868) 2, 140-157.

[22] Dewey, John. "The Historical Method in Ethics" *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Volume 17, p. 359.

While this move appears innocuous, it took Dewey the remainder of his career to work out the entailments of seeking consequences rather than causes.[23] He had moved away from Peirce's strand of pragmatism which focused exhaustively on the meaning of hard words. Dewey had also moved away from James' pragmatism which focused too narrowly on the success or failure of actions. Although James was originally enthusiastic about Dewey's work, and while Dewey appeared to be enthralled by James' approach during his middle period, eventually both James' and Peirce's influence ended with their deaths. Not long after their deaths, Dewey renounced the moniker of pragmatism and replaced it with instrumentalism. While he had taken Peirce's lead in changing the name of his brand of philosophy, the content did not radically shift in this period. By utilizing empirical observations and seeking consequences within those observations, Dewey was forced to reject much of what had come to him by way of the tradition of philosophy. First among those rejections was the spectator theory of knowledge.

The Spectator Theory of Knowledge

Many traditional theories of knowing, especially the dualistic theories of the Modern period, have at their root the problem of how to overcome the gap between mind and world. This problem stems from the hypotheses inherent in dualistic approaches to knowing insofar as a knowing subject is assumed to be a private and passive spectator of nature. Dewey rejected both of these premises

[23] Seeking consequences in order to understand an object or concept should not be confused with utilitarianism which gauges the success or failure of an action based upon whether it brought pain or pleasure to the largest number of individuals. While similar in tenor, the differences are enormous. Pragmatism is a theory of meaning while utilitarianism is a theory of psychology and human nature.

when he stated that “Mind has not remained a passive spectator of the universe, but has produced and is producing certain results.”[24] Instead he held the assumption that the process of knowing, which he called inquiry, was inherently a public and an active affair. A theory of knowing which begins with these assumptions has no epistemic gap to overcome and instead the issues of knowing are practically problematic (albeit fallible) rather than theoretically insurmountable. In order to arrive at these root assumptions Dewey had to reject the modern interpretation of knowing and he began this rejection by criticizing what he called the spectator theory of knowledge.

The modern tradition’s theories of knowledge are largely the result of Descartes’ philosophic investigations on this subject and to his lasting influence on the modern period. His most lasting influence was, in part, the problem he left behind, as Dewey stated:

> Descartes performed his task of separation. Yet the introduction of the *Deus ex machina* only complicated the problem; it introduced a third factor where two were already too many. What is the relation of God to Mind and to Matter?”[25]

Cartesian epistemology starts from a position analogous to the act of seeing, whereby the passive eye receives an image of the object; likewise the passive

[24] Dewey, John. *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898. Volume 2: 1887, Psychology,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston, EW 2.16.

[25] Dewey, John. *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898. Volume 1: 1882-1888, Essays, Leibniz's New Essays Concerning the Human Understanding*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, EW 1.287.

mind receives perceptions of the object of knowledge. Descartes stated "I term that clear which is present and apparent to the attentive mind, in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly, when being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient strength."[26] The analogy between knowing and seeing is straight-forward. He makes the case again in his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* where he states the case even more clearly by saying "truly we shall learn to employ our mental intuition from comparing it with *the way in which we employ our eyes*."[27] It is evident from these passages that Descartes held the act of apprehension to be analogous to the act of seeing. Said differently, Descartes held apprehension to be a largely passive affair of spectating. An important caveat is that Descartes referred to the "attentive" mind, but since attention is left unplumbed in these passages by Descartes, this caveat does little to save Descartes from the accusation of holding a spectator theory of knowledge.

But rationalists were not alone in holding this epistemology, as the British empiricists were guilty as well. Locke informs us that "the mind clearly and infallibly perceives each idea to agree with itself, and to be what it is, and all distinct ideas to disagree, i.e. the one not to be the other; and this it does without pains, labour, or deduction, *but at first view*, by its natural power of perception

[26] Descartes, Renee. *Principles of Philosophy*, HR 1, p. 237, part I, #XLV.

[27] Descartes, Renee. *Rules for the Direction of the Mind,* HR 1, p. 28 (Rule IX). Italics mine.

and distinction."[28] The mind's power to grasp ideas is likened with the power of visual distinction and perception. A clear similarity between the act of viewing and the mental act of apprehension is made

Locke is not the only empiricist to make such claims, as Hume does so as well. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume describes the relations between objects of knowledge and certainty whereby "three of these relations are discoverable at first sight … when any objects resemble each other, *the resemblance will at first strike the eye*, or rather the mind."[29] No subtlety is attempted to disguise the overt connection between the act of seeing and the act of knowing for Hume. So straight-forward is the comparison that the act of recognition in seeing is directly comparable to the recognition of resemblance by the mind. Passivity and receptivity are the means by which minds come to know for Hume.

But rather than starting from the modern perspective which holds some private and passive knowing subject above the world, and instead of holding the act of knowing to be an act of apprehension analogous to the act of seeing, Dewey began from a Darwinian and biological perspective which held humans to be animals in a world and knowing to be a mode of operation of that animal. He stated:

> [The] doctrine of organic development means that the living creature is a part of the world, sharing its vicissitudes and

[28] Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, Ch. 1, ("Of Knowledge in General") p. 169. Italics added.

[29] Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1, Part III, Section 1: "Of Knowledge", p. 70. Italics mine.

> fortunes, and making itself secure in its precarious dependence only as it intellectually identifies itself with the things about it, and, forecasting the future consequences of what is going on, [and] shapes its own activities accordingly. If the living, experiencing being is an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs, then knowledge is a mode of participation, valuable in the degree in which it is effective. It cannot be the idle view of an unconcerned spectator.[30]

Here Dewey states a direct connection between biology and knowing: knowing is an activity that certain biological entities perform in order to better shape their environment, or adapt themselves to living within it. By starting with biological organisms as the central emphasis, rather than minds or subjects, the pervasive problem of how it is that a mind ever comes to know an external world ceases to be of central epistemic importance. Rather than assuming the act of knowing is analogous to the act of seeing and then being baffled how it is that any of knowing could ever possibly be about the world, Dewey rejects the act of seeing as the analogy for knowing. Instead the act of knowing is the active manipulation of existential material and knowing is an activity which has public effects capable of being replicated and falsified by others. To the degree that it accomplishes the stated goals a thing is known. Instead of being based upon the analogy of seeing, the importance is placed upon how best can an organism adapt or shape

[30] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*, MW 9.347.

its surrounding conditions (or itself) to act intelligently; it is just this shift that is characteristic of Dewey's divergence with dualistic thought.

Therefore Dewey saw both rationalists and empiricists as maintaining an equivalent theory of knowledge which he later called the spectator theory of knowledge:

> The theory of knowing is modeled after what was supposed to take place in the act of vision. The object refracts light to the eye and is seen; it makes a difference to the eye and to the person having an optical apparatus, but none to the thing seen. The real object is the object so fixed in its regal aloofness that it is a king to any beholding mind that may gaze upon it. A spectator theory of knowledge is the inevitable outcome.[31]

It is important to realize for purposes of understanding Dewey's criticism that while these different traditions utilized vastly divergent vocabularies to describe their epistemic grounding, nevertheless their models were the same: passive reception.

Dewey's rejection of the spectator theory of knowledge was due in part to the fact that he viewed the "problem of knowledge" as insoluble by use of the assumptions of the modern period alone:

> All of the rivalries and connected problems [of epistemology] spring from a single root. They spring from the assumption

[31] Dewey, John. *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953. Volume 4: 1929, The Quest for Certainty* ed. Jo Ann Boydston, LW 4.19

> that the true and valid object of knowledge is that which has being prior to and independent of the operations of knowing … once we see that knowledge is not the act of an outside spectator but of a participator inside the natural and social scene, then the true object of knowledge resides in the consequences of directed action.[32]

One of the chief difficulties with prior theories of knowledge was their reliance upon a belief that a knowing mind mirrors a perfect and unchanging nature in the act of knowing. Said differently, the knowing mind "sees" reality and knowledge is a reflection of the thing known. Taken one step further, the object of knowledge is in no way changed by the act of knowing within a spectator theory; the object must remain stable for a correspondence between the mind and the world to exist at all. But Dewey believed this concept of knowledge differed markedly from actual cases where we come to know "things" insofar as we experiment and manipulate things when we strive to understand them. The act of manipulation and experimentation inevitably changes the "thing" as we come to know it. We shake, rotate, scrape, heat, cool and shatter things as we attempt to understand them. It is through the process of actively manipulating things that Dewey believed we came to know them. Dewey stated that

> If the living, experiencing being is an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs, then knowledge is a mode of participation, valuable in the degree

[32] Dewey, John. *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953. Volume 4: 1929, The Quest for Certainty*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, LW 4.196.

> in which it is effective. It cannot be the idle view of an unconcerned spectator.[33]

As animals in an environment, in order to continue living, we must strive to maintain equilibrium and balance. This balance and equilibrium means we manipulate our environment: we push and pull at the factors around us to better suit ourselves. Rather than sitting idly by, Dewey held that knowers are *involved* in their environment as much as their environment is *involved* in them. In this way we are not idle spectators but active participants.

Dewey's rejection of the spectator theory of knowing is therefore a rejection of a model of science which is concerned with detailing the way the world "is" and instead focuses on the way things act:

> The spectator theory of knowledge, which Dewey uncompromisingly rejected, is so pervasive that it is hard not to think in its terms. By this theory, science is thought of as establishing once and for all (by some esoteric and virtually infallible method) what is. For Dewey this is erroneous: science proposes hypotheses which tell us what we can expect to happen under specific circumstances when these hypotheses result from a self-consciously experimental outlook which distinguishes science from other activities. Scientists specifically select data—which are not "given" but taken—and explicitly define the specialized terms for the

[33] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education,* MW.9.347.

> functional purpose of conducting controlled experiments. More importantly, science tries to tell us why things happen the way they do.[34]

While it is easy to confuse "why things happen the way they do" with "establishing once and for all what is" the two are quite different. In the first case this is a description of consequences, behaviors and actions, all available to public scrutiny. In the second case it is an appeal to *a priori* and ontological descriptions available only to the mystics with their totalized visions of the way "things are." The first path, the path of action and consequence, is open and available and is the path recommended by Dewey; the second path, which is passive and private, is the path of insoluble epistemic lock-jaw.

Experimentalism is Active Engagement

Dewey's theory of knowing was based upon a faith in the experimental methods of the scientific method.[35] He believed that science had proven, in a rather spectacular manner, the success of its methods in knowing the world around it.[36] Rather than being paralyzed by philosophic angst over whether knowing is possible at all, the experimental method is an active participant in the world; Dewey's response is the rejection of the spectator theory of knowledge.

> Scientific method replaces the repeated conjunction or coincidence of separate facts by discovery of a single

[34] Webb, James L. "Dewey: Back to the Future" *Journal of Economic Issues, Vol. 36, 2002.*

[35] This faith should not be confused for a faith "in the absence of evidence" but rather a faith in the face of evidence. In this way this "faith" differs markedly from that of religious faith.

[36] An important caveat is that "knowing" is a technical term for Dewey which involves changing and directing more than getting at what it is "in itself."

> comprehensive fact, effecting the replacement by *breaking up the coarse or gross facts of observation in a number of minuter processes not directly accessible to perception*.[37]

Dewey held the scientific method as superior to a merely empirical method due to its ability to actively investigate rather than relying upon passive observation.[38] By breaking the observation into smaller observations and tracking their overlap, Dewey believed the scientific experimentation excelled over a mere observational science. Variables could be isolated with experimentation by controlling other factors and the reason for doing so "is to find out what *special conditions* are present when the effect occurs and absent when it fails to occur. These special conditions are then substituted for the gross fact, or regarded as its principle – the key to understanding it."[39] Where spectator theories rely upon an act of apprehension to come to know a fact, Dewey held that the active experimentation upon isolated variables allowed for "mental inertia, laziness and unjustifiable conservativism"[40] to be avoided by relying upon public inter-subjective data rather than private and subjective data.[41]

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[37] Dewey, John. *How We Think*, p. 149. Italics are in original text.

[38] Dewey held the empirical method to be one of passive observation alone. Merely witnessing the flow of sensory perception is inadequate because it can not control for variables and is just as likely as not to light upon which variable played a part in bringing about the consequence as any other passive method.

[39] Dewey, John. *How We Think*, p. 151.

[40] Dewey, John. *How We Think,* p. 148.

[41] Interestingly enough Dewey even believed the inner-most thoughts of an individual were inter-subjective insofar as they occur in language and can be communicated with language, but obviously only become fully public when shared.

But the scientific method does not always involve existential materials such as tables, chairs or electrons. Even someone sitting perfectly still in a chair can be active in Dewey's term if they are utilizing the potential nature of symbols. Dewey stated that "by means of symbols … *we act without acting*. We perform experiments by means of symbols which have results that are themselves only symbolized, and which do not therefore commit us to actual or existential consequences."[42] The ability to symbolize our involvements with our environments allows us to play with the symbols in a way analogous to experimentation. We can perform operations which manipulate and transform symbols rather than manipulating and transforming existential material. In this way we perform a type of trial and error where the number of trials can increase dramatically without putting our biological organism into possible danger. The manipulation of symbols can range from a scientist working with a physics equation in the hopes of instituting some dangerous experiment so that she may better be prepared for its results, or the manipulation could be as common place as thinking whether it would be best to visit the bank first rather than the grocery store. Either way, this is a form of acting (albeit without existentially acting) and therefore still qualifies as experimental operation.[43]

Dewey held action to be more than just symbolic but existential as well. Existential action is a concert of an organism and its habits, especially in

[42] Dewey, John. *The Quest for Certainty*, LW 4.121. Emphasis mine.

[43] In this way even the "phenomenological" research which deals with "private" feelings and sensations can be communicated by way of symbols and can be experimented upon by way of symbolic manipulation. It is important to note that even while this is analogous, perhaps identical to, existential experimentation, merely symbolic experimentation will never solve existential problems; it will only ever formulate their possible solution.

relationship to a practice in a context, or environing condition, which the organism has mastered. In one formulation of Dewey's he refers to "experienced" as someone who has much exposure (i.e. many previously formed habits) with something, as for instance when discussing someone who has sailing experience who hears a specific loud noise while at sea:

> If, however, the sailor is experienced, the consequences of his prior-tested and verified inferences enter directly into the object of perception; the noise will be, to him, a sail blown out of its bolt ropes.[44]

The noise referred to in this quote does not enter into the experienced sailor's mind as a sonic sensation; it is "experienced" inferentially as a known event of "sail-blowing-its-bolt-ropes." It is unlikely that the experienced sailor would even speak of the specific noise heard and would instead refer to the instance *as* a blown rope.[45]

But "experienced" does not just mean someone who has acquired some special skill; it also refers to anticipations based upon a wealth of past encounters or acquaintance with environmental factors:

> To be acquainted is to anticipate to some extent, on the basis of prior experience. I am, say, barely acquainted with

[44] Dewey, John. *Essays, Reviews, Miscellany, and "Impressions of Soviet Russia,*" ed. Jo Ann Boydston, LW 3.89.

[45] Inference is a touchy subject though, for even the most "experienced" inference can be wrong, where wrong is understood as leading to consequences other than those expected.

> Mr. Smith: then I have no extended body of associated qualities along with those palpably present, but at least some one suggested trait occurs; his nose, his tone of voice, the place where I saw him, his calling in life, an interesting anecdote about him, etc. To be acquainted is to know what a thing is *like* in some particular way. If one is acquainted with the smell of a flower it means that the smell is not just smell, but reminds one of some other experienced thing which stands in continuity with the smell. There is thus supplied a condition of control over or purchase upon what is present, the possibility of translating it into terms of some other trait not now sensibly present.[46]

As is evidenced by this passage, Dewey held that even smelling a flower was an extraordinarily active affair involving not just current sensation but also judgments made in the past based upon prior acquaintance and anticipations of what is expected. Past acquaintance affords a recommendation for an action to take in order to bring about a condition for the possibility of the expected or desired result, but the action *still must be taken* if results are desired. Action is required in order to bring about equilibrium; just symbolizing the act only allows one to consider alternatives not currently present, it does not put into place the conditions to bring them about.

[46] Dewey, John. *Journal Articles, Book Reviews, and Miscellany in the 1903-1906 Period*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, MW 3.111.

For Dewey, experimentation is the only path to bringing about desired results, even in cases of objects which are not directly present, such as distant stars:

> While the astronomer cannot change the remote stars, even he no longer merely gazes. If he cannot change the stars themselves, he can at least by lens and prism change their light as it reaches the earth; he can lay traps for discovering changes which would otherwise escape notice. Instead of taking an antagonistic attitude toward change and denying it to the stars because of their divinity and perfection, he is on constant and alert watch to find some change through which he can form an inference as to the formation of stars and systems of stars.[47]

This demonstrates that even if we do not actively manipulate the object *itself* and instead manipulate its consequences (such as the light rays given off by a distant star) still the only path to knowing is through manipulation and active experimentation (in this case by means of prism and lenses regarding absorption lines). Astronomy toiled for centuries without advance until experimentation of this sort allowed scientists to discover the chemical composition of stars that are

[47] Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, MW.12.145.

so distant (perhaps even possibly dangerous) as to be impossible to directly experiment upon.[48]

It is important to reiterate that merely changing "subjective" interpretations (i.e. beliefs) is not the same as actively changing existential conditions. The only way for problems to be solved, outside of blind chance, is for intelligent *actions* to be taken which result in changes in existential material.[49] It was for this reason that, when Dewey grasped the importance of the recent scientific theory of indeterminacy, he stated

> The principle of indeterminacy thus presents itself as the final step in the dislodgment of the old spectator theory of knowledge. It marks the acknowledgment, within scientific procedure itself, of the fact that knowing is one kind of interaction which goes on within the world. Knowing marks the conversion of undirected changes into changes directed toward an intended conclusion.[50]

By recognizing the act of observation as changing the object observed, scientists had finally grasped an active theory of knowing and thrown off the final vestibules of the spectator theory.

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[48] Reference to chemical composition is by way of absorption lines on light sensitive film.

[49] A common misconception about Dewey's theory of action is equating it to fascist "theories" of pure action. Dewey's theory differs in that he supports intelligent action rather than action for its own sake.

[50] Dewey. John. *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953. Volume 4: 1929, The Quest for Certainty*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, LW 4.163

Inquiry is Experimentalism

Dewey held that the path to intelligent decisions about actions to be taken in order to bring about existential change can be arrived at by way of the methods of science, a process he called inquiry:[51] It is easy to confuse Dewey's high praise for the methods of science with high praise for the specific findings of science. But he was also a fallibalist and held that any one scientific finding is prone to error, therefore Dewey's praise of the methods of controlled inquiry should not be taken as some bare scientism.[52] It is also easy to confuse his recommendation of the usage of the methods of science in other fields as some form of technocracy but Dewey did not recommend utilizing specific scientific findings as ways of overcoming cultural obstacles. Instead he recommended the practice of calm, controlled, active, experimental manipulation of cultural values in order to seek solutions to social problems.[53] This recommendation is made instead of reliance upon intuition, divine intervention or supernaturalism of any stripe. By utilizing observation, postulation, experimentation and judgment based upon cultivated experience, Dewey believed the problems faced could be consummated and solved.

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[51] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, pp. 104-5. "Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is as determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified subject."

[52] Interestingly enough, new data about the speed of light appears to invalidate previous conclusions about the expansion of the universe, thereby validating Dewey's conclusion about how science should not be dogmatic in its conclusions but rather stable in its methodology.

[53] Dewey believed that values were not devoid of "facts" so that by changing the "facts" we could trace what the effects of those value meant in concrete matters. Also, he was not opposed to utilizing specific findings of science; I am only here claiming that he meant the method not the findings when referring to solving social issues by way of science.

But problems do not arise *ex nihilo* and instead arise within a situation. Situations are complex wholes and not a mere aggregate of parts,

> What is designated by the word 'situation' is *not* a single object or event or set of events. For we never experience nor form judgments about objects and events in isolation, but only in connection with a contextual whole. This latter is what is called a 'situation'.[54]

Problems, for Dewey, are not merely psychological, not merely problems of belief, but rather, are pervasive and environmental disharmonies amongst the various aspects of the situation. When the relations amongst those parts are out of balance in some way, a problem has arisen. When problems arise in this way, and if an organism capable of inquiry is one aspect of the problem, the organism either suffers the consequences of the problem or engages in inquiry in an attempt to somehow regain equilibrium. The consummation and solution to problems faced comes about as the consequence of a spatio-temporal process of inquiry. Inquiry is not something humans engage in for mere curiosity's sake but rather because they are faced with obstacles which are insurmountable given the current habits of the individual or culture. While there is no definite pattern to inquiry, insofar as the individual steps of inquiry can be skipped, had all at once or had in no particular order, nevertheless Dewey held there to be a pattern to inquiry, insofar as inquiry always involves some, or all, of these elements.

[54] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry,* LW12:72.

Antecedent Conditions:

The first elements of an inquiry are the "antecedent conditions" which are also sometimes referred to as the "felt difficulties." Dewey states that many, if not most, problems are felt long before they are known; they are unsettled, uncertain or disturbed. This feeling is, on its face, non-cognitive in the sense that they are not the results of inquiry. Case in point these non-cognitive feelings are usually the *impetus* toward inquiry. This felt difficulty is what Dewey, following Santayana, calls a tertiary quality which is experienced as the overriding qualitative experience of the situation.

Disharmony between organism and environment is as much an aspect of the situation as spatio-temporality, color and other qualitative aspects. In this respect the felt difficulty in a situation is existential; they exist in the situation, in that the difficulty exists as a consequence of environmental interplay with organism and not as a mere psychological state. The difficulty exists as an imbalance between organism and environment and in the existence of the difficulty, the feeling of disequilibrium is had. Consider for instance the case of hunger: while it is a feeling, it involves organic transactions which can not be merely willed away. Existential material, in the form of food, is required before the psychological feeling is assuaged. Therefore the felt difficulty is a requirement of organic action in the face of an environing situation. The organism must act to re-acquire equilibrium.[55]

[55] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, pp. 105-107.

Institution of a Problem:

Institution of a problem is actually the first step of inquiry because "to see that a situation requires inquiry is the initial step in inquiry."[56] While the existential conditions are what exist prior to, and are in many ways that which motivates the organism to inquire, they are not themselves steps of the process of inquiry. To distinguish that the antecedent conditions are problematic, in effect to grant that the feeling of disharmony relates to the conditions the organism finds itself in, is the dawn of inquiry. It should be noted that this is not the same as indicating *what* is problematic, merely identifying *that* there exists a problematic situation.[57]

The Determination of a Problem-Solution:

Once it is established that a problem exists the next step is "the determination of a problem-solution." While it may be possible for the determination of what is problematic to co-emerge with a suggestion for its solution, these situations are typically well-worn paths of inquiry; either theoretical formulation of situations similar enough to, or identical to, this one that have been long considered and contemplated, or the organism has been in situations of this sort on prior occasions. Needless to say it is not necessary for both identification of a problem and suggestion of a solution to simultaneously arise. In situations where the two do not co-emerge, formulation of the problem can take a considerable amount of time. Determining just what constituent elements make up this problematic situation is a recommended course of action.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, pp. 107-108.

Regardless of how confusing or indeterminate a situation is, there are generally elements which are determinate: there is a somewhere, a sometime or a something which stands out as pertinent. Discerning settled constituents aids in determining in what or where the problem lies. Observation will be the medium in which settling constituents will occur.

When the constituent aspects of the existential situation are determined enough to formulate a possible solution, it will "present itself" or "suggest itself" as an idea. Dewey defines an idea as "anticipated consequences, forecasts of what will happen when certain operations are executed under and with respect to observed conditions."[58] Here an *idea* is taken as a possible solution, hypothetical in nature, and not taken dogmatically or as anything other than a suggestion. If the constituents of the situation are made more stable by observation then the stronger and more likely a hypothetical solution for the problematic situation becomes.[59] There exists a strong balance between the "facts" of the problem with the proposed solutions to it; a possible paraphrase of Dewey on this issue could read: facts without ideas are trivial and ideas without facts are meaningless.

Reasoning:

When a set of "facts" are accepted as pertinent to the problem at hand, another step of the inquiry is to examine the meaning of these "facts" in virtue of

[58] Ibid.

[59] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, pp. 108-111. This radical redefinition of idea follows logically from Dewey's pragmatic concerns with future consequences rather than correspondence with static reality. Attention should be paid to the similarity of concepts between the formation of an idea in Dewey's theories and the formation of a hypothesis in Charles Peirce's abductive reasoning.

their membership to a system of meanings. As Dewey states "[i]f such and such a relation of meanings is accepted, then we are committed to such and such other relations of meaning because of their membership in the same system."[60] If in the course of an inquiry a specific fact stands out as relevant, and that fact is located within a constellation of other facts, meanings and ideas, then the presence of the first fact commits the inquiry to taking seriously the constellation of ideas as also (indirectly) relevant to the inquiry. An example is in order: imagine that in the course of investigating a stellar phenomenon such as gamma ray bursts, the Astro-physicist measures the potency of the burst and its red-shift on gases between earth and the origin of the burst. At first the Astro-physicist may be alarmed by the sheer magnitude of the bursts; at the distances these bursts are occurring at combined with the power-levels of these bursts; the first conclusion is that these explosions must violate the very laws of physics themselves. Entities so massive as to be physically impossible would have to be energetically exploding in all directions, nearly instantaneously, in order to produce bursts of the magnitude measured. The problem presented itself: either Einstein was wrong, the readings were wrong or there needed to be another explanation for these events.[61] But within the constellation of ideas that is Astro-physics, there exist phenomenon of beaming, where force is directed in narrow channels rather than radiated outward in all directions. If the neutron bursts were

[60] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, p. 111.

[61] Ellis, John and Hagelin, John S. "Search for Violations of Quantum Mechanics," *Nuclear Physics B* Volume 241, Issue 2, 23 July 1984, Pages 381-405.

occurring in beams rather than bursts, the physical laws would not be violated and all of the other relevant facts could be explained.

This example showcases how one piece of relevant information, combined with the contextually relevant information, can lead the inquirer, by way of reasoning, to other pertinent pieces of information to aid in the resolution of the problem at hand. By means of these relevant data the problematic situation can "instigate and direct an experiment that will disclose precisely those conditions which have the maximum possible force in determining whether the hypothesis should be accepted or rejected."[62] Many people draw inferences without even realizing the act of inference itself is distinct from observation.[63]

The Operational Character of Facts-Meanings:

This stage of inquiry is where the observed facts and proposed ideas come together as operational components. The observed facts are operational because no fact acts as evidence on its own; a given fact only acts as evidence within a constellation of facts and meanings which interpenetrate. Dewey stated that "some observed facts point to an idea that stands for a possible solution."[64] The facts *operate* by directing the inquirer to other facts and ideas, by means of its existential relation to those facts. Take an imaginary case of criminal

[62] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, p. 112.

[63] It could be pointed out at this point that what Sir Author Conan Doyle referred to as "deduction" in the "Sherlock Holmes" series was, in fact, reasoning by way of inference and induction as much as deduction. One could also point out that as much abduction, the principle put forth by Aristotle and furthered by Charles S. Peirce, was closer to the principle being used, and is also what Dewey is referring to here.

[64] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, p. 113.

malfeasance where footprints at the scene of a crime indicate boots, and mud on a boot owned by a suspect possibly indicates their presence at the scene of a crime, warranting a follow-up inquiry. The facts can constrain or expand an inquiry by way of their operational character.

Likewise ideas are operational insofar as they function as hypothesis which direct observation in its search for other facts or for formulation of experiments that will confirm facts as relevant to the inquiry at hand. It is important to re-iterate that Dewey held ideas to be hypotheses of possible actions to be taken rather than static copies of antecedent reality. Because both facts and ideas are operational aspects of inquiry, they can co-operate: facts can form an ordered whole to suggest a hypothesis (idea) and ideas can direct the observer to new facts in order to more fully form an ordered whole. Neither facts nor ideas, in themselves, are adequate to solve problems, and even with both ideas and facts in hand it is only by way of experimentation that the problem is resolved.

In the example previously mentioned, now the Astro-physicist has a phenomenon in mind, neutron beaming, to search for (i.e. here it operates as a hypothesis) in order to explain the massive bursts. When it is discovered that collapsing massive stars produce neutron bursts (i.e. additional facts of the matter present themselves) as they form black holes, suddenly the confusing phenomenon of neutron beams of massive magnitudes is explained. It is by way of directing planetary and orbital satellites at collapsing massive stars, and recording the data from such phenomenon, that the hypothesis is “confirmed”

and the initial problem ceases to be problematic: physical laws aren't being violated and now an additional physical phenomenon is explained as well.[65]

Consummation and Warrant

The actions and processes which consummate an inquiry reconstruct the problematic situation and further result in a warranted assertion.[66] The reconstructed situation now has continuity of experience rather than the break representative of a problematic situation. Said differently, whatever experimental action or process that consummated the inquiry brings about a restoration of continuity and the inquirer is now able to craft a sentence (or series of sentences) that sum up the action and processes called the warranted assertion. Contrary to contemporary theories of language, the warranted assertion is not the consummation of an inquiry; rather the *process* which overcame the problematic situation is what consummates and the warranted assertion merely follows like smoke to fire.

That said, the warranted assertion can act as a guide to future inquirers in order to aid them in their own consummation, but the words and language should not be mistaken for the actions taken. When Edison sought a light-bulb, the words "electric current run through a filament, suspended in an inert gas, heats it to a temperature that produces light" does not produce light; the construction of

[65] Dermer, Charles D. and Holmes, Jeremy M. "Cosmic Rays from Gamma Ray Bursts in the Galaxy," *The Astrophysical Journal* 2005, vol. 628 (2), n. 1, pp. L21-L24.

[66] The important aspect of this sentence, pertinent to the discussion at hand, is that action is required to bring about change, mere conceptualization is inadequate, although it will result in a statement (or many such statements) which can be understood by others. Until such time as there is something done to the concrete existent situation though, consummation has not occurred.

an existential device which performs these processes is what produces light and the phrase is the consequence of the actions and judgments made, but can also stand as a road-map for future construction of such devices. Whether the warranted assertion leads an independent inquirer to the construction of a light bulb or the construction of a light bulb leads to the formation of the assertion, the actual construction is what overcomes the problem, not the assertion.

Therefore consummation only comes about when the existential situation is resolved, when the problem which prompted the inquiry dissipates, not just when a statement is made. This aspect of Dewey's theory of inquiry is essential to his system because the practice of manipulating and adapting existential situations rather than focusing exclusively on linguistic practice differs from much of 20th century philosophy. This emphasis places philosophy back into the realm of practice and not merely as a theoretical endeavor.

For purposes of finding the conditions which can make possible a great community, the utilization of inquiry to overcome existent problematic situations, rather than appeal to superstition, magical thinking, intuition or other methods, is the first and most important condition to be met. If a culture does not utilize inquiry to overcome its problems, it will inevitably flounder when faced with problems; it may overcome a handful of situations by pluck and luck, but without controlled inquiry guiding its actions, no culture can remain in harmony with its environment for any great length of time. The entailments of this conclusion on cultural institutions such as education are enormous, especially if a given culture's educational institutions are based largely, or entirely, upon passive

reception rather than experimental inquiry. Even in those communities utilized controlled experimental inquiry when seeking solutions to problems they face, if these conclusions are not acted upon then the problems will continue. Examples exist of cultures which knew of the results of controlled inquiry and did little or nothing based upon the findings since Dewey visited both China[67] and Turkey[68], and made recommendations based upon inquiry.[69] The connection which exists between utilizing controlled inquiry to find solutions to problematic situations and actively pursuing the overcoming of the problems with those solutions will be further discussed in chapter six. Even if the great community remains an unfulfilled quest, the utilization of controlled inquiry in overcoming the difficulties humans encounter should be a goal to be achieved. Were a culture to inculcate the method of inquiry, rather than superstition, intuition or some other equally unreliable method, its members would benefit greatly as they more easily found equilibrium with environing conditions.

Given that the use of inquiry is the first of many conditions to be met in order to bring about the great community, the natural next question is what other conditions need to be met? Once Dewey had taken his pragmatic turn the first major problem that faced him was the question of human nature. The then-

[67] Dewey's two year trip the China is followed in *John Dewey in China: To Teach and to Learn*, by Wang, Jessica Ching-Sze, SUNY Press, New York, New York, 2008.

[68] Dewey traveled to Turkey in 1924 on behest of Sefa bey, Turkish Prime Minister of Public Instruction, assessed Turkey's educational system and recommended changes based upon his findings (Middle Works 15.301-7). A recent study upon this visit is chronicled and discussed in *The Republic, Educational Reform, and Dewey.* Edited by John P. Anton and Pinar Canevi. Forum Istanbul Publication. Bilingual Edition. Istanbul, Turkey, 2007.

[69] A full inquiry into the results of what, and whether the recommendations were followed would divert too much from the main point here, nevertheless examples exist for those interested in seeing the concrete results of the implementing (or lack thereof) of these conceptual apparatus.

popular philosophical heritage held an individualistic belief which was based upon the epistemic conclusions of the spectator theory of knowing. Once Dewey rejected the foundations for the individualistic theory, he was forced to explore an alternative theory of human nature as well.

Chapter Three: The Nature of the Individual

This chapter will explore the nature of the individual and will rely heavily upon the following works by Dewey: *Freedom and Culture*, *Human Nature and Conduct*, *Art as Experience*, *Experience and Education*, *The Public and its Problems*, *Democracy and Education*, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, *Individualism Old and* New but primarily from *The Problems of Men*.

Given that the utilization of inquiry is Dewey's preferred method for overcoming problems, the dominant view of the nature of the individual was one of the greatest problematic situations that Dewey's project faces in its acceptance. Said differently, Dewey believed investigation into human nature constituted one of the most pressing philosophic issues. The dominant cultural view on human nature during Dewey's life had been almost entirely adopted from an idealistic position which had been modified by philosophers of the modern period to apply to cultural upheavals of their time.[70] Dewey's criticisms of the spectator theory of knowing applies equally well against supernatural theories of human nature, as Dewey held them to be roughly equivalent. Where modernistic theories of knowing held the individual to be supernatural, pre-formed, isolated, passive and distinct entity from the world, Dewey's theory of human nature was different insofar as it held the individual to be natural, plastic, continuous, and

[70] For instance John Locke's theory of the human nature and its concomitant human rights as being granted by God as applied to the construction of the Constitution of the United States of America.

active participant of the world. To clarify Dewey's position on the nature of the individual requires first exploring Dewey's theory of human nature as distinct from culture and then exploring how it is that an individual is formed, by way of the powers latent in human nature, within a natural environment.

Overcoming this problem will pave the way toward forming communities, since rugged individualism by definition is in opposition to communal arrangements. Social arrangements, such as social contracts, are done to avoid loss of life, liberty or property, but only ever grudgingly. By Dewey's theory, social arrangements constitute the very possibility of liberty and therefore communal institutions and arrangements are sought willingly.

Human Nature

Whenever there is an aspect of human behavior which is found undesirable or uncomfortable, it is typically the first recourse to blame it on human nature. But

> [i]f we take all the communities, peoples, classes, tribes and nations that ever existed, we may be sure that since human nature in its native constitution is the relative constant, it cannot be appealed to, in isolation, to account for the multitude of diversities presented by different forms of association.[71]

One of the only meaningful constants which can be appealed to is that cultures and habits are acquired and transmitted, and that the biological needs and wants of humanity have not changed, but have only been channeled to new activities in

[71] Dewey. John. *Freedom and Culture,* p. 22.

attempts at satisfying them. If this is the human nature being harangued, then so be it, but I believe it unlikely. More likely individuals are confusing acquired and therefore second nature, with native or first nature. If Dewey's assumption is right, then it is important to distinguish that which is acquired from that which is native, and this differentiation stands as a problem to be overcome by way of inquiry.

Dewey believed that the native equipment, while absolutely essential for understanding the nature of individual behavior, was not as active of a force in human behavior as that which was acquired. In order to proceed one must therefore ask Dewey to enumerate just what he believed was native. To begin would require a short list of needs:

> Needs for food and drink and for moving about, for example, are so much a part of our being that we cannot imagine any condition under which they would cease to be. There are other things not so directly physical that seem to me equally engrained in human nature. I would mention as examples the need for some kind of companionship; the need for exhibiting energy, for bringing one's powers to bear upon surrounding conditions; the need for both cooperation with and emulation of one's fellows for mutual aid and combat alike; the need for some sort of aesthetic expression and satisfaction; the need to lead and to follow, etc.[72]

[72] Dewey, John. *Problems of Men,* p. 18.

These basic needs are unavoidably parts of human nature and, as he notes, will likely not disappear until humans likewise disappear: "[c]ertain basic needs and emotions are permanent. But they are capable of finding expression in ways that are radically different from the ways in which they now currently operate."[73] For a 21st century American reader, what is telling is what is absent from this list. A need for friendship is present but a need for war is absent. A need for societal acceptance is absent but the need for aesthetic expression and satisfaction makes the list. A need for materialistic items and acquisition of money is absent but the need for cooperation is present. Even if no other metric were appealed to than this short list of needs, many present-day cultures would fail to muster as capable of directing their individuals to pursue those activities which would secure and satisfy their needs.

Primarily, humans utilize habits to satisfy these needs; habits are potentials insofar as they lie in wait, ready to be put to use. Even in activity, habits are potential until they are engaged with existential material toward a definite end. Otherwise habits are predispositions to actions to be taken when situations arise which prompt their use; they are, in a word, conditional.[74] Through this observation Dewey makes possible a criticism of thinkers who would claim that war is an essential component of human nature, a potential laying in wait to be unleashed. He states:

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[73] Dewey, John. *Problems of Men*, p. 189. Dewey's admittance to their permanence will be of special interest later, but I have found no definite and exclusive list of the emotions in his work.

[74] This is not to be confused with "conditioned" such as operant conditioning. Dewey was opposed to Skinner's theory because it was so heavily based upon repetition. More will be said on habits in the following chapter.

> I have already said that, in my opinion, combativeness is a constituent part of human nature. But I have also said that the manifestations of these native elements are subject to change because they are affected by custom and tradition. War does not exist because man has combative instincts, but because social conditions and forces have led, almost forced, those 'instincts' into this channel. There are a large number of other channels in which the need for combat has been satisfied, and there are other channels not yet discovered or explored into which it could be led with equal satisfaction.[75]

The potential component of human nature that *is* present in the persistence of war is the need for combativeness. But this need can be actualized based upon cultural and traditional channels. These channels have been determined either by social conditions or environmental needs to be lethal in form, but they need not be. It should be noted that combative needs are reinforced by other auxiliary cultural norms such as the veneration of patriotism, especially in the form of combat for one's nation. As long as patriotism's only expression is war, and as long as the dominant channel for expressing the need for combat is lethal conflict, war will persist. But patriotism needn't be exclusively a war-time activity,

[75] Dewey, John. *Problems of Men*, p. 187.

nor need it be directed solely at promoting one's own nation.[76] Quoting Hinton, Dewey stated that "the only way to abolish war was to make peace heroic."[77]

The confusion of those who believe war is native is that they have confused an impulsion and a habit. Dewey described an impulse by saying that:

> An impulse is specialized and particular; it is, even when instinctive, simply a part of the mechanism involved in a more complete adaptation with the environment.[78]

Impulses are simple and muscular inclinations such as the motivation to flare the nostrils in the presence of a pungent smell. These impulses are direct and immediate in their reaction and the action they compel, but they are simplistic and able to be overridden by habits. Impulses, in virtue of their immediacy, are fleeting. They orient only aspects of the organism. Alternately Dewey describes impulsions whereby

> 'Impulsion' designates a movement outward and forward of the whole organism in which special impulses are auxiliary. It is the craving of the living creature for food as distinct from the reactions of tongue and lips that are involved in swallowing; the turning toward light of the body as a whole,

[76] Since, as stated earlier, institutions are created by humans and were not native but acquired then patriotism can not be a native potential but is rather a cultural expression of other needs such as acceptance by one's peers. In this way patriotism can be re-channeled into activities which incorporate humanity rather than specific nation states.

[77] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 115.

[78] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 58.

> like the heliotropism of plants, as distinct from the following of a particular light by the eyes.[79]

While salivation in the presence of food would be an impulse, the seeking out of food would be an impulsion. An impulsion orients the whole organism and not merely parts of it. These native potentials are ready to be called forth in the presence of environing conditions, but Dewey was loath to refer to these as instincts. Instincts are more complete in their actions, for even impulsions are not as developed as the migratory instincts of birds or the honeycomb building of bees. The human organism requires the cultivation of habitudes in order to achieve the level of completion of activities that animals largely have as instinctual inheritance. It is because of the incompleteness of impulses, and impulsions, that Dewey stated human potential so far outstrips that of other animals.

While Dewey referred to the purposiveness of both impulses and impulsions, he did not equate either to an inborn purpose:

> A genuine purpose always starts with an impulse. Obstruction of the immediate execution of an impulse converts it into a desire. Nevertheless neither impulse nor desire is in itself a purpose.[80]

Impulses and impulsions contribute to purpose but are not in themselves completed purpose. Impulses are more akin to an inclination to act rather than a fully formed act in themselves. Frustrated impulses, what Dewey calls desires,

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[79] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 58.

[80] Dewey, John. *Experience and Education,* p. 67.

are therefore obstructed tendencies; tendencies which have been frustrated. Habits can be called to action by way of impulses and desires, but thinking can short-circuit and override this tendency. But even thinking requires an impulse and a habit to engage. Habits of thought are called by impulses, even when they are done so in order to frustrate another impulse or habit. As Dewey stated, "[i]mpulses are the pivots upon which the re-organization of activities turn, they are agencies of deviation, for giving new directions to old habits and changing their quality."[81] What is left unsaid here is that impulses can also insure rote and comfortable responses, especially if the habit of learning has not been deeply ingrained.

While human needs may not change as long as humans exist, the outlets and channels of the expression of those needs can change by way of habits and actions taken. A need for combat can be expressed by way of competition in sports and industry. A need for leadership can come in the form of emulating the direction of a person's approach without directly copying the specific actions they take. Likewise a need for aesthetic expression can come in the more traditional form of painting, sculpture or literature but can also be found in the clash of athletes of sports or creating new outlets for creative endeavors such as games.

In this way social reform is possible even when it is granted that human nature is fixed and unchanging. Our nature is protean and plastic; our nature is to acquire new forms of behavior and new habits and "those who hold that proposals for social change, even of rather a profound character, are impossible and utopian because of the fixity of human nature confuse the resistance to

[81] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 93.

change that comes from acquired habits with that which comes from original human nature."[82] This may be the one of the most important points for Dewey: most people who oppose social change blame humankind's inability to adjust upon fixed aspects of human nature. Dewey grants that there are fixed aspects of human nature: they are our needs and impulses. While the expression of those needs and impulses *can* change; the difficulty is that habits are recalcitrant to modification. The confusion among opponents of social modification lies in the challenge of adaptation of acquired habits, not in the fixity of human nature. Said differently, the possibility for social change comes by way of interruption of existing habits and reconstruction of those existing habits by way of education.[83]

One aspect of the environment for humans is other humans and their actions. Therefore the reluctance of other members of one's culture to change proves equal parts condition and challenge while attempting to change a habit. The habits of others are a condition insofar as they act as environing situations for one's own actions and they are a challenge because the recalcitrant habits represent an easy and available expression of needs and desires. Dewey stated that "habit is the mainspring of human action and habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs of a group."[84] Here Dewey is saying that among adults, other adult's habits act as one of the greatest blockages to habit-reformation while among children the adult's habits act as one of the only means available for habit formation by way of emulation. As Dewey stated, "Conduct is

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[82] Dewey, John. *Problems of Men*, p. 190.

[83] More will be said about the process of education in chapter five.

[84] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 159.

always shared; this is the difference between it and physiological process. It is not an ethical 'ought' that conduct *should* be social. It is social, whether bad or good."[85] It was Dewey's recommendation for social reform to begin with early education; adapt the plastic habits of the youth while they are still easily molded rather than tackling adults who are set in their ways. Consider by way of analogy a sapling compared to an ancient oak. While a simple wire can direct the growth of a sapling, it would take tremendously strong steel girders and massive effort to reshape the enormous branches of an ancient oak tree into new directions. Likewise, if a culture is to change and grow toward the great community, habit reconstruction and formation would be the guide-wire upon which its growth would occur.

Humans are Beings Capable of Experience

Enumerating human needs and our ability to acquire habits does not exhaust the equipment humans are born with. Humans are also organisms capable of experience.

> Experience is a matter of the interaction of organism with its environment, an environment that is human as well as physical, that includes the materials of traditions and institutions as well as local surroundings. The organism brings with it through its own structure, native and acquired, forces that play a part in the interaction. The self acts as well as undergoes, and its undergoings are not impressions stamped upon an inert wax but depend upon the way the

[85] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 17.

> organism reacts and responds. There is no experience in which the human contribution is not a factor in determining what actually happens. The organism is a force not a transparency."[86]

The mere presence of humans in an environment means that modifications to that environment will occur; modifications will continue as long as humans are present in that environment merely because humans, in living and existing, modify their surroundings to a great extent. If humans fail in this modification, it is likely their survival fails as well. Consider the case of a culture that lives in an extreme environmental situation such as a barren desert or blighted tundra; if hunting, clothing and shelter are not constructed from the very stuff of the environment then it is unlikely if said culture will persist. Additionally, it is because of our native structure that we acclimate to our environment just as we do, for "there is a constitution common to all normal individuals. They have the same hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; they are fed with the same food, hurt by the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same remedies, warmed and cooled by the same variations in climate."[87] Experience is not the idle spectating of a remote and disinterested mind; instead it is the vital transaction of an animal, instilled with a definite structure, with its ever changing surrounding environment. The chasm of skepticism about the existence of an external world has virtually no meaning to a creature that, in its

[86] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 246.

[87] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 245.

hunger seeks food, or one that in the heat of sexual desire seeks a mate. Instead the creature seeks, in the world, for some way to slake the felt need.

While Dewey utilizes the term "experience" from the British Empiricist tradition, he has so thoroughly modified it as to make it a completely new term. The Empiricists meant by this term a constant influx of sensations that were atomic in nature. By associating these atomic impressions humans were capable of formulating more advanced and complex ideas. Dewey retained very little of the meaning of this term and instead held experience to be a field rather than atomic and discriminating rather than just associative. Whole situations are felt and from within this situation specific aspects are isolated and selected as worthy of attention.

Humans as Cultural Beings

Native equipment, while present, is not nearly as important as acquired habits in understanding human behavior for while "[h]abit is the mainspring of human activity" it should be noted that "habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs of a group."[88] If one wishes to understand human *behavior*, the focus should not be on human nature but rather on culture. Yet racial essentialists have long claimed that differences exist between the natures of people of different "races" than themselves. But Dewey stated that "[n]either the savage nor the civilized man is what he is by native constitution but by the culture in which he participates."[89] Ironically, the differences are in the habits and customs acquired and the similarity is in the native composition. The essentially

[88] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 159.

[89] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 345.

human is little more than capacity for emotions, needs, experience, inquiry, habit formation and the acquisition of language. But all humans, as humans, possess this; we have more in common than different in this regard. Those behaviors associated with a specific "races" are more often cultural practices performed by ethnically related people. Gender roles differ from society to society and very little, if anything, can be pointed at as essentially female or male, aside from reproductive organs.[90] As Dewey stated,

> The problem is to find out the way in which the elements of a culture interact with each other and the way in which the elements of human nature are caused to interact with one another under conditions set by their interaction with the existing environment.[91]

The difficulty in discerning just what is attributable to human nature and what is attributable to culture is one of the central problems of philosophy but it is important to note at this point that just culture and human nature are not the only elements to be observed; it is also important to note that humans and human cultures exist within the medium of nature and the actions of humans and cultures directly affect their environments. This is painfully obvious by means of scientific inquiries which show upcoming climactic changes which are due in large part to cultural practices brought about by the Industrial Revolution, the mechanization of labor and the burning of fossil fuels to power this

[90] Not to mention more nuanced and non-dualistic conceptions of sexuality such as Hijras, Fa'afafine and the fourth and fifth sexualities among Native American tribes as described by anthropologists such as Graham, Trumbach and Roscoe.

[91] Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture*, p. 22.

mechanization. One of the aspects of Dewey's philosophy which will be most important in the coming decades will hinge upon the need for humans to find cultural harmony with their environing factors or find the harmony of the grave.

But even here we find that Dewey has advice for us: cultures can co-exist insofar as they communicate. The refusal to discuss, cutting off diplomatic ties, refusing to engage in dialogue will likely lead to conflict. While communication is not guaranteed to soothe ruffled feathers, the absence of meaningful alternatives speaks volumes. But communication is a pre-requisite, a necessary aspect, not a solution. The solution involves inclusion, across cultures, in formation and direction of activities. It also involves participation across cultures in those directions and activities. Insofar as one group dictates and demands of another, there is no cross-cultural communication; there is monologue and ultimatum. If a great community is possible, its cultural activities must be inclusive, participatory and openly communicated.

Humans are Habitual Beings

In many ways habits are stronger than the impulses and the needs which they represent. "Admission that men may be brought by long habit to hug their chains implies a belief that second or acquired nature is stronger than original nature."[92] The need may not change and the impulse may be frustrated, but the habit will continue to be activated until the impulse which activates it is channeled elsewhere. But even the act of channeling an existing habit (especially an ingrained one) is one of the aspects of human nature that is subject to modification, and therefore reconstructable. This is particularly frustrating when

[92] Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture*, p. 14.

the habits which exist are designed specifically to thwart or defuse needs and impulses which are native. These unhealthy habits, though acquired, do injustice to the individuals who have acquired them.

And while "[i]t is hard to teach an old dog new tricks," Dewey states that "it is harder yet to teach society to adopt customs which are contrary to those which have long prevailed."[93] The greater the length of time a custom has existed, the harder it is to excise the custom from one's cultural practices. This makes sense if cultures are considered as webs of habits rather than simplistic learned responses. Dewey held that habits could not possibly be the over-simplified operant conditioning discussed by behavioral psychology of his day because so much changed from situation to situation that a host of other habits would also have to be in operation and working in tangent in order for any one of them to operate. In effect, operant conditioning works primarily because experience is of a field and judgment is capable of discrimination.

The fact that habits are acquired, and that most of human behavior operates by way of habits, points to an important aspect of Dewey's political views. Different habits than currently exist can be inculcated into the young by way of education to bring about societal behavior different than our own. While Dewey is often painted as an ameliorative philosopher, and that this is largely true for how he recommended conflict resolution among those who currently walk the earth, I believe his educational reform amounts to radicalism when the implications are considered. Dewey held that if we could determine, experimentally by way of laboratory schools, which customs and habits best

[93] Dewey, John. *Problems of Men*, p. 186.

promoted the protean but creative nature of humanity that we could promote human flourishing. It was his conception that fostering creative problem solving by way of education in methods of inquiry and experimentation alongside promoting practices which forged new paths of growth would lead to cultural practices which he labeled democratic.[94]

Culture as Communal

Philosophers are tasked with discerning those practices which not only vary widely in different cultural mediums, but also promote equilibrium, harmony and growth. As Dewey phrased it, "[t]he problem is to know what kind of culture is so free in itself that is conceives and begets political freedom as its accompaniment and consequence."[95] This culture, whatever its form may take, likely can not be found among the existing cultures as political freedom is only had sparingly and selectively in existing societies. While specific countries[96] may experience to a degree the political freedom Dewey is discussing here, it may be attributable to accident and contingency rather than to an operation of the culture.

Dewey did not hold freedom to be a "god-given right" or even a natural right. The brute existence of slavery, the enslavement of humanity to the needs and wants of a tiny minority and the enslavement of humans to their own desires are but examples that freedom must be achieved rather than assumed. While

[94] More will be said of "democracy as a way of life" in chapter six.

[95] Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture,* p. 13.

[96] This is a term distinct from culture; multiple cultures may exist within one country and a single culture may exist across multiple countries.

formulation of a set of customs and habits which would promote this freedom has been theoretically formulated, the achievability of them is still a cultural project left unfinished.

Since Dewey held habits as mutable and unfixed, and that individual's habits are shaped by their culture and education, and further still that habits either achieve or frustrate native needs and desires, Dewey's project for describing the great community hinged upon finding how to adjust each of these variables in such a way that they promote the cultural transmission of habits and customs which best promotes individual growth. Dewey continually maintained this cultural project could be achieved in part by way of the key-holders to cultural transmission, education:

> In progressive communities they endeavor to shape the experiences of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be formed, and thus the future adult society be an improvement on its own.[97]

Here Dewey envisions education not merely as a process of instilling young minds with information gleaned by past, but as an unfolding process which better equips the young for encountering situations as yet not conceived. In a contemporary setting, this can be a rather complicated affair: there are typically elected officials, school boards, administrators, staff, teachers, unions, parents and students involved in the process. No one aspect of this process is solely responsible for the activity of education, and blame should not rest exclusively on any single element for failures of cultural growth. When variables are changed in

[97] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education,* p. 92.

complex situations it is sometimes difficult to tell what the specific effect of that given variable is due in part to the context of other variables and in part to the unscientific nature of education.

The solution Dewey offered was to more fully integrate inquiry, experimentation and scientific methodologies into the matrix of education. By identifying variables and, whenever possible, isolating them, then their effects are more easily identified. Even were an entirely scientific school developed, similar to Dewey's own laboratory school, the effects of political endeavors can not be ignored. This lesson is painful in light of the political powers which complicated Dewey's own experience in this area.[98] As long as governments play a role in educational practices, educational experimentation will always yield to political power. As long as politicians are beholden to their constituents, such as is the case in contemporary America, in effect the schools will be beholden to cultural forces, especially those very forces the educational experimentation is attempting to change. Integral to individual growth is education, but communication is the median by which education is transmitted and is one of the six conditions required for the formation of a community.

Institutions which Foster Individual Growth

Drift is one of the single largest enemies that Dewey's cultural project came into conflict with. He promoted the use of intelligent inquiry to isolate and find resolution to the problems facing humans, but the more he promoted this agenda, the more he came to realize that customs and habits die hard. The

[98] I refer here to the seizing of the Laboratory school by administrators at the University of Chicago which prompted Dewey's resignation.

mindset which holds that continuing to pursue a course solely because this is the course that has been pursued for decades, or even centuries, is a difficult mindset to change. The goal of a given practice is often subsumed to the bare fact that this practice has taken deep root in the traditions of the culture or people. Traditions provide emotional stability even while they may be the culprit for bringing about environmental problematic situations. Such is currently the case with the use of fossil fuels to power tools and implements which bring about infrastructural stability, provide clean water, grow food and transport essential supplies to distant places.

These tools and implements, themselves cultural practices, are subject to criticism in their use and expression. But similar to recalcitrant cultural customs, our tools are slow to change as well. While Dewey was not aware of the environmental devastation occurring by way of the tools of the industrial revolution, he was painfully aware of the cultural upheaval they had borne. It is my contention that Dewey would have recommended as radical an overhaul of our machines as he had recommended for our culture had he been aware of the consequences of their use.

Social institutions such as education provide one inlet for possible change of cultural and mechanical use. Rather than idealizing the state or government as the height of human achievement as some philosophers did, Dewey believed these were institutions that should be brought to bear upon human concerns rather than forcing humans to curtail to ingrained institutional drift. Dewey stated that

> it is true that social arrangements, laws, institutions are made for men, rather than that man is made for them; that they are means and agencies of human welfare and progress. But they are not means for obtaining something for individuals, not even happiness. They are means of *creating* individuals.[99]

Dewey maintained that institutions are primarily oriented toward the future; while individuals may corrupt and misdirect the energies of these institutions toward their personal gain; despite this the institutions function to create individuals. What short-sighted and self-interested individuals do not notice, or do not care about, is that once the institutions are directed toward the promotion of a narrow set of individuals rather than toward the bulk of humanity, they still *operate* upon the bulk of humanity. When laws are crafted to benefit the wealthy and punish those without wealth, these laws certainly do benefit those with pecuniary gifts but they create situations that act as environing conditions for the next generation.

Realization of the great community will be hindered until cultural institutions are oriented toward the welfare of the individuals they are producing and toward fostering ways of living which promote inquiry and participation. Pecuniary practices and power politics distract energies of these institutions away from the goal of fostering democratic ways of life, and will continue to do so until measures are taken to limit the influence of power and wealth upon institutions of education. Until steps such as these are taken, the achievability of

[99] Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 194.

the great community will continue to remain on-hold, and out of reach. One in-road to better fostering a democratic way of life is to inculcate the habits of inquiry into the young and reconstruct the habits of those more set in their ways until they have inquiry and participation as their base-line way of life.

Chapter Four: Habits

This chapter will explore the following works by Dewey: *The Public and its Problems*, *Democracy and Education*, *Experience and Education*, *Freedom and Culture* and *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry* but primarily *Human Nature and Conduct*.

Were cultural institutions focused upon the development of individuals rather than self-interests of an elite few, the fulcrum for change would be the cultivation of habits. Cultural institutions operate by transmitting habits to generations of individuals who are normally endowed with capabilities in communication. Therefore habits stand as the primary vehicle of culture and the medium for tradition. Habits are commonly conceived of either as passive instruments laying in wait, such as "walking, playing a musical instrument, typewriting," or as active powers which overcome our conscious awareness, as in the case of "foolish idling, gambling, addiction to liquor and drugs."[100] Dewey believed each of these were habits but only told, at best, half of the story. The fuller story is that habits are not just a part of us, they do not merely contribute to our being who it is that we are; the case is far more serious than that. Dewey put it bluntly when he stated that "we are the habit." So thoroughly are we composed of habits that Dewey stated "[m]an is a creature of habits, not of reason nor yet of

[100] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 24.

instinct."[101] Even when we utilize reason and instinct, we do so by way of habitudes. The fact that "bad" habits aren't formed consciously (at least not by most people), or that these habits formed over periods of time rather than by acts of will of choice indicates that "all habits are affections, that all have projectile power, and that a predisposition formed by a number of specific acts is an immensely more intimate and fundamental part of ourselves than are vague, general, conscious choices."[102]

In short, habits are the very fabric of our being, not ornaments added on after the fact. Additionally, habits are formed and can be reconstructed, thus reinforcing the conclusion drawn in Chapter Three that while human nature is fixed, its fixity is protean. This protean nature is habitudes. Dewey defined habits as "(1) that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; (2) which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; (3) which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and (4) which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity."[103] Each of these aspects of habits will be explored within this chapter.

Habit formation

Humans are beings capable of forming habits and the process of habit formation is referred to as learning. Dewey did not mince words when discussing the importance of habit learning when he said that "[t]he influence of habit is

[101] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 88.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, pp. 40-41. Numbering mine.

decisive because all the distinctively human action has to be learned, and the very heart, blood and sinews of learning is creation of habitudes."[104] As was discussed in Chapter Two, the outcome of a controlled inquiry can result in a warranted assertion, but what was left unsaid was the relationship between inquiry and habits. A consummated inquiry can become integrated as a habit. When this is done, the habit of learning is already half-formed.

It is granted that habits can be acquired by emulation of the actions of adults or individuals in power. Dewey referred to habits formed in this way as "training" rather than "education" because training ignores cultivating "independent judgment" and "inventive initiation."[105] The differences are enormous: in training, habits are formed as exactly as possible to the mold and conformity is expected. The emphasis upon authority and following orders is obvious and overt. In education, habits of inquiry are cultivated; judgment and initiative are a matter of utilization of inquiry to overcome problematic situations rather than reliance upon customs. By having encountered a problematic situation in the first place custom proves itself incapable of overcoming it; were customs enough to ensure continued harmony, no problematic situations would arise outside of instances where traditions were not followed. But in the case where traditions are followed and problems still arise, inquiry is preferred to merely attempting "tried and true" methods in the face of their failure. Here emphasis is placed upon integrating the novel and unusual into one's stock and trade rather than looking to people of power for instruction.

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[104] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 160.

[105] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct,* p. 97.

Habit formation is therefore of the utmost societal importance but habits are also intractable for all of their malleability. Dewey was keenly aware of this when he stated that

> Any one with knowledge of the stability and force of habit will hesitate to propose or prophesy rapid and sweeping social changes. A social revolution may effect abrupt and deep alterations in external customs, in legal and political institutions. But the habits that are behind those institutions and that have, willy-nilly, been shaped by objective conditions, the habits of thought and feelings, are not so easily modified.[106]

This statement by Dewey is often overlooked by those who turn to Dewey for social radicalism. Dewey *was* interested in progress, but he wasn't foolish enough to believe it could be accomplished rapidly. He was aware that habits of thought are different, and in many ways more foundational, than habits of actions. Examples of habits of thought which are more foundational than overt habits of action include modes of thinking which are paranoid, fearful, distrustful and self-serving; even in a setting potentially capable of becoming a community; if these habits persist then actions of sharing and caring will take no root. Habits of action can be shaped and adapted by overt force, but habits of thought persist. If the only reform enacted is upon the habits of action little more has been accomplished than a "muscular trick." But it should also be admitted that habits of

[106] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 108.

thought are in large part affected by environing conditions, including the habits of others:

> The basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them.[107]

Regardless of how tenaciously certain individuals maintain their habits of thought, if they enter into regular social interplay with others whom are different than themselves, the eventual erosion of their "steadfast" belief is inevitable. But even buried habits die hard.

All that has been said begs a single question: just how is it that habits are formed, or re-formed? Mead criticized Dewey for falling "back too much upon the outworn doctrine of imitation, and for this reason he has no satisfactory account of the arising of the self in conduct."[108] It should be noted on Dewey's behalf that imitation is but one process for habit acquisition, and not even a particularly intelligent one at that. Habits are formed, in part, whenever needs are satiated. This fact is partially responsible for the formation of bad habits and "magical" thinking. For instance, an action is taken virtually at random and afterward the consequence sought is obtained. In future situations it is a rare individual who will not recourse to attempting the random action a second time in hopes of it

[107] Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*, p. 35.

[108] G. H. Mead's posthumously published review of "Human Nature and Conduct" as found in *The Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 30, October 1994, p. 378.

succeeding again; if this happens more than a few times. Almost certainly a habit will form.

But this only tells a portion of the story as there are other means to form habits beyond mere imitation; the means Dewey most ardently promoted was the utilization of intelligently directed inquiry, but even he admitted that the habit of learning is but one more habit to be acquired. Habits which are formed by blind groping, “magical” thinking and rote imitation are unintelligent and stifle future growth insofar as they do little to nothing to prepare the individual for instances when they are challenged and their habits fail them. Therefore Dewey steadfastly promoted the use of inquiry as the basis for habit formation. When a problematic situation is resolved by means of inquiry the individual is equipped with a warranted assertion. Warranted assertions are fallible and subject to revision, but the more careful the inquiry, the less likely revision will be needed in the near future. The important difference between groping and inquiry hinges upon the use of deliberation, judgment and experimentation in the determination of what course to take.

Habit re-formation, what Dewey called habit reconstruction, is a different issue. Once a habit is formed it is very difficult to ever rid oneself entirely of it. The best course of action, according to Dewey, is to consider the end result, or goal, of the habit in question. Does the habit, in fact, accomplish this goal? If it does, re-construction is either merely aesthetical or whimsical, but probably not necessary. But if the habit fails to accomplish its goal, then the habit is frustrating

the very need it is supposed to sate; this is a case where reconstruction is either wanted or necessary.

To reconstruct a habit requires that first conscious hesitancy be employed; the habit must be short-circuited by means of thought. In brief, the individual must think before they act. Once the habit's dynamo is suspended then the individual can either recourse to magical thinking and blind groping or can engage in inquiry. If the individual engages in inquiry, the consummation of that inquiry should satisfy the need and will go a short way toward eroding the earlier habit.[109] Continual recourse to the consummation of this inquiry, rather than falling back into a mechanical response which does not sate the need, will continue to weaken the initial habit until one day the consummation will be the habit. This process may take a great deal of time or, in the case of life-threatening habits, it may take a great deal of attention but a rather short amount of time. It is highly unlikely that a non-life threatening habit will erode quickly.

An important omission in Dewey's description of habit reconstruction is mere repetition. Repetition alone is the least likely path to habit reconstruction because "repetition is in no sense the essence of habit."[110] Dewey maintained his belief that repetition was a consequence of a formed habit rather than the path to its formation and he said as much when he stated

> Ability to repeat is a result of a formation of a habit through the organic predispositions effected by attainment of a

[109] Another alternative which Dewey mentions is supplanting another already existing habit in an attempt to sate the need. Once energy is diverted in this way to another existing habit, there is a good chance of this different habit taking hold.

[110] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct,* 42.

> consummatory close. This modification is equivalent to giving some definite direction of future actions. As far as environing conditions remain much the same, the resulting act will look like a repetition of a previously performed act. But even then repetition will not be exact as far as conditions differ. Sheer repetition is, in the case of the human organism, the product of conditions that are uniform because they have been made so mechanically – as in much school and factory 'work.' Such habits are limited in their manifestation to the rather artificial conditions in which they operate. They certainly do not provide the model upon which a theory of habit formation and operation should be framed.[111]

This stands, in part, as equal part conclusion and criticism. It is a conclusion insofar as Dewey determines that habits are not the consequence of repetition but rather the source of repeatability. It stands as criticism of existing school and factory work insofar as they promote narrow-minded habit formation which is so mechanical in its formulation that it is useless outside of artificially constrained environments. If trends in future jobs remain consistent this criticism remains a problematic situation for existing universal education regimes because the majority of the jobs that graduates will work in do not yet exist. An education system that promotes inquiry methodology and adaptive skills of critical thinking

[111] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, pp. 32-33.

acquisition is far better suited than one of mechanical training in artificial conditions.

Action as Habits in Operation

Habits are the organic means to satisfying native needs and impulses. But they are also ends insofar as character is composed of a system of habits. While habits operate as means, they can either aid the organism in accomplishing its goals or they hinder the accomplishment of its goals. In themselves habits are blind to their consequences. They are powers which can be drawn upon or which well-up unbidden, but in isolation habits are not informed. Of this Dewey stated that "habit does not, of itself, know, for it does not of itself stop to think, observe or remember."[112] Thought is also the result of habit since thought is but another action taken by humans. Habits operate unconsciously only when they are "suavely efficient."[113] Otherwise a certain amount of direction, forethought or intelligent reaction is required.

Individuals who operate solely based upon habitual response act mechanically, and usually poorly, in situations; they have become closer to robots than humans. Dewey stated that "the routineer's road is the ditch out of which he can not get, whose sides enclose him, directing his course so thoroughly that he no longer thinks of his path or his destination."[114] The walls of routine have become so high as to be virtually insurmountable. These individuals act without thinking but not in a sense that is vital and flexible; rather they act

[112] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 177.

[113] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 178.

[114] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 172-3.

without thinking because even thinking has become encapsulated so deeply by the ingrained mechanical responses. People who have "attained" such a degree of mechanization are unsettled by any derivation of routine and the novel becomes a source of deep disquiet.

> Habits reduce themselves to routine ways of acting, or degenerate into ways of action to which we are enslaved just in the degree in which intelligence is disconnected from them … the acquiring of habits is due to an original plasticity of our natures: to our ability to vary responses till we find an appropriate and efficient way of acting. Routine habits, and habits that possess us instead of our possessing them, are habits which put an end to plasticity.[115]

Routine habit therefore can stand as an obstacle to growth insofar as it ends the plasticity of responses the organism possesses. When plasticity is cut off, the organism is ensuring eventual disharmony unless the environment is artificially maintained to suit just and only the organism's habitual responses. This may be an option for situations of medical or mental care but becomes too cumbersome for any individual organism to maintain on its own by way of mere routine. Dewey held as a basic supposition that existence is precarious. No amount of routine habitual response will ever adequately acclimate the individual to the environing conditions because those environing conditions are subject to variety and change.

[115] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*, p. 54.

> The short-sighted method which falls back on mechanical routine and repetition to secure external efficiency of habit, motor skill without accompanying thought, marks a deliberate closing in of surroundings upon growth.[116]

Those educational systems which operate largely or entirely on the level of blind and routine acquisition of habits are therefore cutting off the possibility of flexibility in such a way as to stunt growth. Because of the importance currently placed upon training students to take standardized tests, it should be no surprise that the educational system of the United States is failing in such a spectacular fashion when it is recognized that the goal of this system is effectively to enshroud the student in routine. Unless drastic changes in this system are implemented, the possibility of the great community emerging in the United States approaches zero.

But action, brought about by habit, can originate by way of either routine or intelligence. In the case of intelligence, the action can either be one of forethought or contemplative reaction. If the action is the result of careful forethought, it will appear as if the action occurred with no thought at all. In the heat of the moment, this will, to some degree, be true. The thinking occurred prior to the event and determined that if conditions of a specific sort ever arose then specific actions would be required to deal with it. In the case of contemplative reaction, the situation is reversed. In contemplative reaction there is a lag between when action is heeded as necessary and when action is taken; this lag is the time needed for the individual to determine the course of action

[116] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*, p. 54.

best suited to the situation; in a word it is contemplation and conceiving of ends to pursue. Because no prior thinking occasioned the individual to consider a situation just so, they must engage in deliberation to call forth a habit already existent to deal with the situation or inquire into what needs to be done; past structured energies must be channeled to new situations.

Habits and Potentialities

While it may appear odd that the potential nature of habits is explored after their active capability, this is close to Dewey's own handling of the situation:

> Habits as organized activities are secondary and acquired, not native and original. They are outgrowths of unlearned activities which are part of man's endowment at birth. In conduct the acquired is the primitive. Impulses although first in time are never primary in fact; they are secondary and dependent. Even if by some miracle original activity could continue without assistance from the organized skill and art of adults, it would not amount to anything. It would be mere sound and fury."[117]

The native and inborn purposive activity is primary in the sense that it is present before the existence of any habit that could satisfy it. But habits are acquired and not native; so to speak they come "after the fact" when compared to native purposiveness. But in the moment of action, habits are primary in that the structured impulse of the past is the acting force.

[117] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, pp. 89-90.

Habit Reconstruction

Impulses may be the source of novelty, but as soon as they well up they are beholden to the existing habits of the individual and those habits act either mechanically, intelligently or by way of drift. In this way habit and impulse act opposed to one another, but "[h]abit and impulse may war with each other, but it is a combat between the habits of adults and the impulses of the young, and not, as with the adult, a civil warfare whereby personality is rent asunder."[118] The war between habit and impulse is rarely within a single individual. Far more often it manifests as a war between the impulse of those whose habits are not yet formed and those whose habits are crystallized. When this conflict occurs within a single individual, there is a dire need for reconstruction of habits. This reconstruction Dewey calls education.[119]

The Transmission of Habits

Habits are transmitted primarily by way of communication. Even imitation is a form of communication insofar as the one being mimicked is transmitting the act to mimic. But this is a shallow form of communication which is, at best, one way. The important aspect of communication is not just how communication occurs, but rather what is transmitted in the communication:

> Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life … Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more

[118] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 71.

[119] More will be said about habit reconstruction in chapter five.

> than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding — like-mindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. The communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions — like ways of responding to expectations and requirements.[120]

Community exists in communication and therefore transmission can be thought of as community in a verb-form. Language is more than just the tie that binds humans to one another in communities; language is the very medium of community. Values and dispositions can be communicated, but so can habits and traditions. If communication is the medium in which community exists, then cultural habits are the muscle in which community affects the world. Unlike the pie example Dewey alludes to, where it can only be divided up among so many, communication can be spread widely without dilution. Information handed out in this way is the true heritage that humans share among one another; it is the only

[120] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*, p. 26.

human product which grows with age rather than shriveling beneath the weight of time, but the very transmission of these beliefs, aspirations, aims and knowledge can itself be a habitude.

One of the largest problems humanity faces in the transmission of cultural values and traditions is stagnation and drift. Just because values are transmitted from the distant past does not mean they continue to knit communities together, or that they still function in the role they originally developed to fill. Ideals can be as much of a hindrance to community life as they can be the very lifeblood of it. When Copernicus worked out the mathematical system to prove Aristarchus' heliocentric system, this finding cut deeply into the existing social traditions which were, in part, founded upon a geocentric model. By challenging this deeply held belief, Copernicus was fighting against not just adherents to an astronomical model, but to the very currents of culture. This esoteric conclusion marked the declaration of a culture-war of sorts: those who continued to hold the belief that the earth was the center of the solar system had more than just an astronomical prediction to uphold; they were conserving a cultural matrix, of which geo-centrism was but a part. Even in the face of rigorous mathematical proofs and astronomical observations, the weight and resistance of tradition refused to accept the findings. This example stands as a reminder that Dewey was right in determining habit as the recalcitrant aspect of human nature. This example also demonstrates the great wealth of culture that is transmitted from generation to generation; Aristarchus declared the sun the center of the solar system, and it took nearly two millennia for mathematical proofs to accord with this finding.

Generations of mathematicians conserved and transmitted this before it could challenge then established ideals. Charles Darwin himself admits the great debt he owed to Aristotle's biological work, even as he criticized specific components of it.

Likewise, just because something is new and original does not perforce mean it is better than a traditional value. The value of value, so to speak, is whether the custom in question is capable of accomplishing the good or end it is directed toward. Determining which and how to transmit values is therefore of the utmost importance to social order. If values are adhered to just because they are traditional and antiquated then society is stagnant. Conversely if progress is sought just for its novelty and not for its capability, then society is adrift. As Dewey said, "[w]hen customs are flexible and youth is educated as youth and not as premature adulthood, no nation grows old."[121] Not only are individuals more capable when educated to be "flexible" with their customs, but individuals working together benefit as well. Once the Church's choke-hold on the transmission and clarification of values came to an end, science experienced a rebirth that had never been witnessed in the whole of recorded history. The tenacity of individuals like Galileo Galilei who pursued knowledge, even when it differed radically from the accepted conclusions of his day, should be celebrated as heroes. The very fact that individuals pursued knowledge of this sort in the

[121] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 102.

face of death should demonstrate its value, for “the best measure we have of what is valued is the effort spent in its behalf.”[122]

Habits constitute the web of actions and beliefs which define a culture. Traditions are transmitted by way of languages, themselves traditions of communication, to future generations, and communities are composed of overlapping cultures of communication. Because of the great diversity of human behavior brought about by the multitude of cultures, it is inevitable that communities will come into conflict over values. What determines whether these communities can come together to form a community of communities, the great community, is whether these communities have flexible enough individuals that habits can be reconstructed to better accommodate alterity. The more inflexible a community is, the less inclusive its habitudes are towards alterity. The more flexible a community is, the more inclusive its members will be toward ways of life different than their own.

[122] Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture,* p. 17.

Chapter Five: Education, Freedom and Growth

This chapter will utilize the following works by Dewey: *Art as Experience*, *A Common Faith*, *The Public and its Problems*, *Human Nature and Conduct*, *Individualism Old and New*, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* but primarily *Experience and Education*.

Flexibility of communities is based upon the habitudes of its individual constituents where knowledge, human nature, habit acquisition and culture fuse in the act of education. Education therefore stands as the determining factor of habitude flexibility and each of these elements plays a vital and necessary part in the process of community formation. The habits of the teacher act as delimiting boundaries and are transmitted to the learner in the form of cultural acquisition. Past knowledge of the learner accumulates to make possible the educative experience of the present; the new experience allows for further clarification of past knowledge by way of reflection and relation to new contexts. Past and present knowledge is utilized by the learner to project future consequences and engage their environment. The process of education is, in effect, one sustained habit reconstruction brought about by way of thinking and ideally aimed at obtaining a harmonious balance between organisms and environment.

This habit reconstruction is called growth by Dewey and translates into an expansion of habits. To this effect Dewey stated that

> The only freedom that is of enduring importance is the freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgment, exercised in behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worth while. The commonest mistake made about freedom is, I think, to identify it with freedom of movement, or, with the external or physical side of activity.[123]

He held that the more education an individual has, the more capable that individual is at observing and judging and therefore more capable of successfully navigating novel situations, thus making the individual "more free." Intellectual freedom without physical freedom is little more than fantasy, but physical freedom without intellectual freedom is little more than mental enslavement. Almost more than anywhere else, freedom of thought is needed in educational situations to better habituate individuals to independent thought if they are to become members of the great community. Equally important, the individual must be willing to reconstruct habits which prove to be unhelpful, stagnant or dangerous. If an individual is unwilling to reconstruct unruly habits, they act as a possible jeopardy to themselves and others.

Culture as cumulative

Culture is as much an environment for humans as is their spacio-temporal surroundings. Because culture is such an influential aspect of human experience, it can either be the chain that binds or it can be the key to enduring freedom. Humans are not born into a cultural vacuum and do not develop their culture

[123] Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*, LW 13.39.

alone. Instead, humans are born into complex cultural structures that overlap and occasionally conflict with one another. But no human acts as the sole, or even dominant, adapter of their cultural environment.

> As the developing growth of an individual from embryo to maturity is the result of interaction of organism with surroundings, so culture is the product not of efforts of men put forth in a void or just upon themselves, but of prolonged and cumulative interaction with environment.[124]

Dewey here makes a close linkage between the acquiring of habits by an individual as analogous to the accumulation of culture by a civilization. Due to the organic emphasis to Dewey's theory of experience, the matrix of experience that is culture necessarily also is a transaction between organisms and environment, but on a scale of magnitude larger than the focus of the individual.

The fact that human culture is cumulative has multiple philosophic implications. To begin, culture represents the true human heritage. Even when cultures have long since disappeared, their legacy lives on. The mathematical and scientific findings of the Egyptian dynasties survive their demise and continue to be vital and active habitudes in the lives of millions. While the monolithic Pyramids constructed by this same civilization exists as well, they have become little more than an assortment of ornaments showcasing the physical existence of a people who have long since disappeared. The philosophic advances made by Greek philosophers have continued to shape the

[124] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 28.

political formulation of civilizations and have acted as the ember for the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

But the longevity of these cultural practices and values are found in their ability to combine and multiply in new habits and customs. Were the values of these civilizations constrained to just what and how they were originally utilized, they would likely have long since been fossilized and referred to in the same way as baubles found in museums. Instead, these values and beliefs have acted as threads to be woven into new and interesting practices. Geometric mathematics has morphed into a form that would be virtually unrecognizable to Euclid, yet his theorems continue to be used to the current day.

> The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it.[125]

The heritage of values which we are to transmit to those who come after us are threads inherited from previous cultures and must be conserved, rectified and expanded upon or they cease to be of importance and use. All human progress that has occurred has built upon the foundation laid by those that came before.

[125] Dewey, John. *A Common Faith*, LW 9.58. This quotation is found on the headstone of John Dewey in Burlington, Vermont.

Dewey is likewise recommending that we continue the process whose fruit we cherish in order that those who follow us may do the same, perhaps even in a more accessible manner.

Newton claimed he stood upon the shoulders of giants, so too do all humans stand upon the giants of the past, but it should not be forgotten that Dewey also tasked us with clarifying these values; we are not to pass on the values of the past as a creed or dogma, but rather as critical recipients. If criticism and clarification of these values is accomplished then a culture grows and thrives according to how well the criticism and clarification translates to a harmonious balance with existential and natural forces. To the extent that values are handed down and dogmatically followed then they become mechanical and inevitable disintegration ensues. To this effect Dewey stated that "[c]reation, not acquisition, is the measure of a nation's rank; it is the only road to an enduring place in the memory of mankind."[126] Dewey more often called creation by the term reconstruction, or utilizing the materials and ideas of the past to build something anew. In the act of reconstruction, even the oldest traditions remain vital and new.

Education and Culture

In light of the implications and necessity of cultural growth for the continued life of society, the importance of education is therefore enormous.[127] I

[126] Dewey, John. *The Later Works of John Dewey, Volume 14, 1925 - 1953: 1939 - 1941, Essays, Reviews, and Miscellany*, LW.14.256.

[127] Those with a communistic bent are inclined to recommend revolution as the means by which concrete conditions should be changed to accommodate new socio-economic environments. Dewey would disagree substantially with this view as it would do little to nothing to change the underlying habits of individuals. Therefore rather than advocating revolution as a

wish to re-iterate a point made in Chapter IV whereby education was differentiated from training: education is a preparation for the unknown, not just an instilment of the known. Dewey stressed the importance of equipping students with capabilities rather than factoids; he held that

> knowledge is a function of association and communication; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned. Faculties of effectual observation, reflection and desire are habits acquired under the influence of the culture and institutions of society, not ready-made inherent powers.[128]

If knowledge is understood as operational rather than static, and as guiding rather than fixed, then education can be said to be a transmission of habits of thinking, reflecting and hypothesizing. The "copy theory" mentioned in Chapter II, whereby knowledge is as exact as possible in mirroring reality, holds education to be direct and exact transmission of knowledge to the next generation. Education of this manner inculcates individuals toward passivity and acquiescence toward figures of authority, for they possess the exact knowledge of the past. Any society which holds freedom and liberty as values, and not as mere lip-service, will abhor education situations that demand passivity and

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means (usually violent in nature) for overcoming problematic situations, Dewey recommends education as a means of social change. Though gradual, insofar as educational reform affects the generation to come rather than the existing one, Dewey held educational reform to be a means consistent with the ends desired; peaceful means beget peaceful ends.

[128] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 158.

acquiescence of the learner, for these systems limit intellectual freedom rather than foster it.

Different conceptions of liberty will contribute to objections at this point. Those who hold liberty to be the absence of obstacles will differ in acceptance or rejection of this theory of education from those who view liberty positively as an accumulation of ability. Dewey was critical of merely negative freedom saying that

> Liberty does not mean the removal of the checks which nature and man impose on the life of every individual in the community, so that one individual may indulge impulses which go against his own welfare as a member of society. But liberty for the child is the chance to test all impulses and tendencies on the world of things and people in which he finds himself, sufficiently to discover their character so that he may get rid of those which are harmful, and develop those which are useful to himself and others [129]

Here Dewey's conception of freedom shows through. Merely negative freedom is criticized for cultivating citizens who may eventually develop habits and indulge impulses which are ultimately harmful to himself or others (even if only indirectly by way of example). Instead Dewey views freedom as the ability to test and experiment to find those tendencies which are harmful, and to rid oneself of them, but also to find those which are healthy and to embrace them. Members of

[129] Dewey, John. *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924. Volume 8: 1915, Essays, German Philosophy and Politics, Schools of Tomorrow Freedom and Individuality* ed. Jo Ann Boydston, MW 8.297.

a community are not isolated atoms; their doings transact with other members and their actions have ramifications which ripple beyond consequences to themselves. Individuals within communities utilize freedom and come to hold as valuable certain traditions, but not all communities share the same values. As potential members of a great community, individuals must be flexible in pursuing those habits which bring about harmony and equilibrium with environing situations; it is the only hope for a sustainable community.

Because different communities hold different values it is of utmost importance for the community of communities, the great community, to be capable of acclimating to multiple different value systems simultaneously. Dewey takes it as a bare reality that diversity of value is the consequence of culture:

> How is the tremendous diversity of institutions (including moral codes) to be accounted for? The native stock of instincts is practically the same everywhere. Exaggerate as much as we like the native differences of Patagonians and Greeks, Sioux Indians and Hindoos (sic.), Bushmen and Chinese, their original differences will hear no comparison to the amount of difference found in custom and culture.[130]

Given that there is diversity of values, and given that the diversity exists in cultural mediums, not within human nature, the path for conflict resolution is the utilization of inquiry to overcome the problems faced and reconstruct culture. Once values are reconstructed to draw communities together, the primary

[130] Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 91.

method for transmitting these reconstructed values is through communicative education:

> I believe that education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction.[131]

This uncovers one of Dewey's assumptions about the great community: those communities that will be willing to adopt new traditions, in the effort to better acclimate to neighboring communities, will be able to enter the great community; those unwilling will not. On a large scale, this is like viewing individuals. Those willing to work with one another can take part in conjoint endeavors while those unwilling can, at best, be forced into compliance, but never really enter as willing participants. The fulcrum of change is education, not salvation.

Education as Growing

The term growth, like many of Dewey's terms, has a mainstream cultural meaning that is close to Dewey's own, but he has adapted it to fit within his open-ended system in a divergent way. Growth, for Dewey, is a term which captures moral, educational, political and aesthetic elements and goes beyond merely biological contexts, although it includes them. The growth which Dewey is conceptualizing is an intellectual growth, one that captures an individual's increased ability to handle new and difficult situations that arise by way of a stock

[131] Dewey, John. *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898. Volume 5, Essays, My Pedagogic Creed*, EW 5.93.

of warranted assertions and habits of inquiry and learning. Growth therefore stands as the central concern for matters of education and

> the function of education is to help the growing of a helpless young animal into a happy, moral, and efficient human being, a consistent plan of education must allow enough liberty to promote that growth.[132]

The culture which an individual thrives in acts as the soil which will cultivate the individual, but in order to fully thrive and flourish, the individual needs *enough* liberty. An important distinction is between unchecked freedom and enough freedom. Unchecked freedom gives a plethora of opportunities, some rewarding and some fatal, while enough freedom is an attempt to delimit the opportunities to primarily those that are rewarding, promote individual flourishing, cultivate inquiry and contribute to the well-being of the individual. Where this line is drawn is determined by way of controlled inquiry rather than allowing for the drift of unchecked freedom.

While growth is an ideal, the process which approximates that ideal is an engaged one whereby "the educative process can be identified with growth when that is understood in terms of the active participle, *growing*."[133] It is not a stopping point, one which can be achieved and finalized, but rather is a moving target. Just as a plant is thought to thrive as long as it is growing, so also should the habitudes of the individual thought to be thriving only insofar as they are not

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[132] Dewey, John *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924. Volume 8: 1915, Essays, German Philosophy and Politics, Schools of To-Morrow, Freedom and Individuality,* MW 8.295.

[133] Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*, p. 36.

stagnating. An individual whose habits have calcified ceases to grow and instead operates in a mechanical manner. The walls of habits have so enclosed them that further development is shut off and life becomes a drudgery of reaction. The individual in this case has effectively entered into a habitual stasis and ceases to expand their capabilities.

Still other individuals expand their capabilities in a narrow focus, but by doing so almost ensure that growth will not continue in other manners:

> That a man may grow in efficiency as a burglar, as a gangster, or as a corrupt politician, cannot be doubted. But from the standpoint of growth as education and education as growth the question is whether growth in this direction promotes or retards growth in general.[134]

The gangster, corrupt politician and burglar can cultivate the skills of taking advantage of other people, but in so doing they intellectually isolate themselves as well. They have decided to only take the fruits of other's labor rather than cultivating for themselves. But the act of isolating oneself in this manner necessarily brings its own consequences: by only taking, some of the greatest intellectual and cultural growth is cut off, for some of the most rewarding and healthy lifestyles can only be achieved as an active, participating community of people fostering cultivation as opposed to narrow-mindedly seeking promotion of one's own selfish ends.

[134] Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*, p. 36.

Until such time as educational institutions are geared toward promotion of growth and flourishing rather than skills training, it is likely that cultural stagnation will continue. As Dewey stated:

> If our public-school system merely turns out efficient industrial fodder and citizenship fodder in a state controlled by pecuniary industry as other schools in other nations have turned out efficient cannon fodder, it is not helping to solve the problem of building up a distinctive American culture; it is only aggravating the problem.[135]

In order to break the cycle which relegates the overwhelming majority of individuals to live lives of drudgery and to promote healthy co-existence, educational systems must orient away from skills training and toward human flourishing by way of cultivating intellectual growth. This isn't to say that skills training should not be present in education, only that it must not be the central focus. Only when the habit of learning and the habits of inquiry have been inculcated into public school curriculum can thriving cultural growth become a reality.

Freedom as Growth of Human Capability

There is an age old adage that says "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." This quote applies equally to education as it does to feeding for if you can inculcate the habit of learning and the habits of inquiry, an individual will teach themselves for the rest of their lives. Enduring freedom is the ability to handle and overcome problematic

[135] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New,* p. 62.

situations to bring about flourishing equilibrium, and this goal is best accomplished when the individual can find novel ways around unforeseen problems. True growth, in the sense of ongoing growing, is accomplished when an individual no longer requires teachers and becomes instead their own teacher. When the ability to hypothesize, research, experiment, and resolve situations without the aid of others has been so ingrained as to become second nature, then an individual is not hampered by the fetters of traditions and has accomplished a stable freedom. When a community of individuals embraces this as their culture then problems become stepping stones to the solidification and clarification of values rather than stumbling blocks.

The means by which this feat can be accomplished already exists, if only in narrow circles. Motivating students to want to learn stands as the preliminary step. This can be accomplished in many ways, but peer pressure stands as one of the most effective means of motivation. Distributing the lesson to individual students and having them teach one another stands as one of the most effective ways to motivate the desire to learn (in order to be able to teach the material, a student must first learn it themselves) and creates an atmosphere of cooperation insofar as the students learn from each other. This technique is often used in upper division higher education seminar classrooms, but need not be restricted to just those environments. The orthodox belief is that students prior to that point in their intellectual growth are incapable of the feat of teaching another, much less of teaching themselves. Insofar as it remains a practice isolated to senior undergraduates, it will remain a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even if younger students

do not student teach *well*, the experience of being thrown into the role of taking one's classmate's education into one's own hands can be just enough motivation for the fires of self-learning to be stoked.

Granting students the freedom to pursue projects that are related to course content, but also of interest, provides fuel for the fire of inquiry by allowing personal interest to enter the equation. Once a student finds passion and interest in some small aspect of learning then the likelihood of this translating to other avenues increases dramatically. However, there is very real problem that drift can enter in, whereby merely anecdotal interest drives the research; whatever context of content is present must act as a guiding light or students will be unable to transition this habit into things unrelated directly to their tastes and interests. Said differently, their choice should be allowed to roam, but within the boundaries of the context of content.

To date, the sort of freedom which results has been erratic and sporadically distributed across the human population. Luminaries and shining beacons of enlightenment stand out from the masses as geniuses and leaders, but it was Dewey's conviction that these individuals had attained something which was not unique, only difficult:

> we are given to looking at this and that 'age' marked with great names and great productivity, while forgetting to ask about the roots of the efflorescence. Might it not be argued

> that the very transitoriness of the glory of these ages proves that its causes were sporadic and accidental?[136]

There are many variables which must be "just right" in order to allow an individual to attain the sort of freedom herein discussed. Nicoli Tessla was able to cast off hindering beliefs and ways of thinking about the world in order to release the full potential of electricity, not because he was a freak but because he had attained a freedom of thought that no law can secure. No amount of political, economic or legal freedom can ensure an individual's potentiality will be released; this is only possible through obtaining the right habits, culture, education and acting upon them. These things are not birthrights that only a privileged few can possess and covet, but have never been sufficiently clarified such that others may fully partake in them. Geniuses accomplish these goals by autodidactic pluck and luck; it stands as a challenge to clarify the conditions required to bring about this sort of on-going growth such that it is a common cultural heritage. Dewey said that:

> Honesty, industry, temperance, justice, like health, wealth and learning, are not goods to be possessed as they would be if they expressed fixed ends to be attained. They are directions of change in the quality of experience. Growth itself is the only moral 'end.[137]

When growth is the end toward which educational practices and cultural traditions aim, only then can a culture which is inherently free bring about the release of human potential that has to date been cramped and hindered behind

[136] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New,* p. 60.

[137] Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 177.

superstition, tradition and ignorance. If, and when, this cultural feat is accomplished then a golden age like no other will be experienced by humanity and not just enjoyed by a privileged few.

Chapter Six: Democracy and the Great Community

This chapter will focus on the following works by Dewey: *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, *Democracy and Education*, *Individualism Old and New*, *Art as Experience*, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* but primarily *The Public and its Problems* and *Freedom and Culture*.

In the previous chapter, Dewey's aim of growth of individuals in cultural institutions was recommended. Contemporary cultural institutions are largely, although not entirely, operating at the behest of pecuniary interest, especially the interests of a wealthy privately educated upper-class that benefits from a public educational system that aims to produce docile factory-workers rather than participating and critical citizens capable of self-direction. So long as only a small fraction of the population benefits from the educational practices, there will be no growth in a wide-spread manner, there will be no critical engagement of issues and more of the same is all that can be expected. If, however, the recommended steps are taken, there stands a chance that individuals can be fostered to cultivate their potentiality and become more than mere cogs in a machine beyond their understanding.

Democracy as a way of life

A culture whose members are inherently free has been a philosophic quest as yet unaccomplished in any wide-spread manner. This free culture

should be sharply differentiated from political institutions which grant legal freedoms to individuals in the form of rights and privileges; legal freedom may be direly important for bringing about a free culture, but

> [i]f we want individuals to be free we must see to it that suitable conditions exist: - a truism which at least indicates the direction in which to look and move. It tells us among other things to get rid of the idea that leads us to believe that democratic conditions automatically maintain themselves, or that they can be identified with fulfillment of prescriptions laid down in a constitution."[138]

Those prescriptions which lay down the democratic form of government may well bring with it privileges and procedures which contribute a modicum of legal freedom, but they do not *ensure* cultural freedom. Dewey recognized this difference between political institutions and cultural practices and called those practices which fostered individual freedom by the name of a democratic way of life. Case in point, it would likely be difficult to maintain a free lifestyle under a totalitarian dictatorship; so thoroughly would a dictatorship instill fear and paranoia in the populous that it would be difficult to secure trust and participation amongst one's neighbors. Said differently, there are political arrangements which preclude a democratic way of life, but a democratic political arrangement does not ensure a democratic way of life. If the conditions are not met to bring about a community, then the consequent way of life which is fostered by this community is likewise infinitely less likely to appear. Further, if the democratic culture is

[138] Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture,* p. 34.

lacking, the political institution of democracy is likely to suffer from malaise, apathy and widespread disinterest.

Dewey stated that democratic conditions do not automatically maintain themselves but instead require conditions be present, otherwise they wither and die. These conditions, like the controlled conditions of a scientific experiment, require the active shaping of practices. When a collection of individuals ceases to participate, regardless of what other conditions exist, the democratic way of life ceases as well; when fear and paranoia reign instead of trust and natural association, the democratic lifestyle cannot take root. Dewey stated that

> [w]e acted as if our democracy were something that perpetuated itself automatically; as if our ancestors had succeeded in setting up a machine that solved the problem of perpetual motion in politics. We acted as if democracy were something that took place mainly at Washington and Albany—or some other state capital—under the impetus of what happened when men and women went to the polls once a year or so which is a somewhat extreme way of saying that we have had the habit of thinking of democracy as a kind of political mechanism that will work as long as citizens were reasonably faithful in performing political duties.[139]

The first problem to overcome is therefore the belief that democracy is a self-perpetuating umbrella of protection. Once this belief is gotten rid of, it becomes

[139] Dewey, John. "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us," LW 14.225.

apparent that merely voting is less than sufficient to maintain democratic ideals. Placing belief in voting for someone else, who is then acting as a representative, shuffles responsibility onto others rather than requiring any real participation on the part of the citizenry; it promotes a way of life that is passive, acquiescent and irresponsible. There should be no surprise when individuals raised in this environment feel powerless and out of control. Case in point, there is widespread apathy toward the political machinations even within countries where voting is allowed and, at least nominally, in control of selecting candidates for government.

Democratic Living to Bring About Individual Growth

The Democratic way of life is one where all of the individuals who make up the community in which they are a part feel as if they have a channel toward directing the growth of that community and are not merely free-loading from the work of others nor slavishly directed toward the interests of the few.

> A society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others, is the only environment in which any individual can really grow normally to his full stature.[140]

Some may feel this is unrealistic, that no three people can ever really share the same direction in thought and action, and for individuals who are not a part of the same community and who do not share the same values, this is largely true. But those individuals who have been cultivated within a value system which they share in common, making decisions between them feels natural and easy. If this shared value system includes the utilization of careful inquiry to overcome

[140] Dewey, John. *The Need for a Philosophy of Education*, LW 9.202.

problematic situations, it is even easier to pursue solutions. Granted, agreement upon conclusions may be difficult to arrive at, even among scientists, nevertheless problem spaces are easier to agree upon, thus increasing the likelihood that solutions will be found to concrete problems being faced.

Dewey states that this requirement, to be both a part of and in part able to direct the course of a community, stands as the environing conditions in which an individual can "grow normally to his full stature."

> Government, business, art, religion, all social institutions have a meaning, a purpose. That purpose is to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals without respect to race, sex, class or economic status. And this is all one with saying that the test of their value is the extent to which they educate every individual into the full stature of his possibility. Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society.[141]

The most important aspect of this quote is the *educative value* of business, art, religion and all social institutions; education is often thought to exist solely in a classroom, but for education to be the process of growing, and for growing to continue one's entire life, education can not be constrained to an artificial segment of one's life. All areas, especially those involving consort with other

[141] Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, MW 12.186.

members of one's community and social settings at large, must be educative. These encounters promote one to interrupt existing habits and reconstruct them in light of overcoming problems faced in these various arenas. It is in this way that cultures do not stagnate, for their citizens are continually re-forging the very fabric of the culture in their transactions with one another. But if education means only and exclusively what occurs within the confines of buildings called schools, and only when led by authority figures called teachers, then leaning is constrained to a very narrow window of opportunity, and anyone not given this opportunity by definition does not learn. Cultural stagnation is all but guaranteed by a paradigm such as this.

When a culture becomes trapped within the confines of its habits, it slowly calcifies and becomes incapable of handling novel situations. This petrifaction of habits spells the inevitable decline of that culture unless intervention is had. When habit has solidified and is inflexible, the responses to unexpected and previously un-encountered situations are either haphazard and groping or entrenched in a response which is not overcoming the present ills. Both are problematic, in that they are both unlikely to promote movement toward resolution, but also because the inflexibility of habit means future problems are not likely to be resolved either. Alternate approaches exist as well, such as appeal to supernatural entities to solve the problem, but approaches such as these are equally unproductive.

Since the individual only exists within a cultural and social matrix, the habits of the individual are largely forged within the heart of activity of that society.

> All communication is like art. It may fairly be said, therefore, that any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it. Only when it becomes cast in a mold and runs in a routine way does it lose its educative power.[142]

If cultural and societal habits are calcified, the individual's are likely to be as well. This environment is not conducive to bringing about a healthy mode of living as one's habits must be continually crafted and reconstructed to participate in the shifting pattern of democratic life. This is not to say that it is certain any individual raised within a stagnant culture will likewise be stagnant, but that the difficulties to overcome are so great that it becomes vanishingly unlikely. Conversely, just because an individual is raised within a democratic culture does not ensure their continued cultivation and growth; conditions are either present or absent, after that point it is up the individual to take advantage of the opportunities afforded. Additionally, there are more factors than just culture in shaping an individual's state of mind; as Dewey added that "the trend of occupations, the pattern of social arrangements, are the finally controlling influences in shaping minds."[143] The trend of occupations plays a significant role because even if one is raised in

[142] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*, p. 9.
[143] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New*, p. 62.

a balanced culture, if there are no opportunities for work aside from mindless repetitive tasks, the individual will find it difficult to thrive.

Education Oriented Toward a Democratic Way of Life

Given that institutions and social arrangement in most part control the development of habits; given that when allowed the choice of lifestyles the democratic way of life is preferred; it stands to reason that in order to satisfy this preference our institutions should promote as widely as possible democratic customs and habits. Transparency and participation in the central weavings of social institutions and arrangements should be the highest priority for education, and yet the institution of education as currently organized is little more than an accreditation process or a government funded day-care at for the majority of those who flow through its confines. Dewey held this should be unsurprising given that:

> Consequently the effective education, that which really leaves a stamp on the character and thought, is obtained when graduates come to take their part in the activities of adult society which put exaggerated emphasis upon business and the results of business success. Such an education is at best extremely one-sided; it operates to create the specialized 'business mind' and this, in turn, is manifested in leisure as well as in business itself. The one-

> sidedness is accentuated because of the tragic irrelevancy of prior schooling to the controlling realities of social life.[144]

This is not to say that people should be unconcerned with earning a living; far from it. Rather Dewey is here stating that in earning a living, one must orient adult activities toward those which include interests beyond the exclusively pecuniary and to integrate activities into earning a wage which promote human flourishing and growth; this theory is in direct opposition to the arrangement of workers as mere cogs in a machine and embraces modes of doing business which humanize those who perform them. But the arrangement which views citizens as mere workers fully rejects the attitude that "the mental poverty that comes from one-sided distortion of mind is ultimately more significant than poverty in material goods."[145] In place of a mental poverty, people are given opportunity at meager material goods, relegating them to be second or third-rate consumers, but not flourishing individuals.

Poverty of education, even amidst material wealth, is more unjust than the converse; at least someone who is hungry but educated can devise and execute ways to slack their hunger. But when mental poverty abounds, in the form of exclusively profit-orientation, even those who financially benefit the most are only further enslaving themselves (and more importantly millions of others) and ensuring continued unrest and unhappiness as well as disequilibrium with their environmental conditions. The fabulously wealthy may not view themselves as slaves, living amidst opulence and power, but their enslavement to their own

[144] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New*, pp. 62-3.

[145] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New*, p. 63.

desires means they more than anyone will not see respite from their prison, though a luxurious one.

One of the only paths out of this poverty is to have educational systems provided for the materially impoverished to ensure they are not likewise educationally impoverished as is currently the trend. Even our "public" school system in America has at its root the property taxes of the lands surrounding the school to provide material resources for the school. When those properties are poverty-struck, likewise the school is cash-strapped. While money does not automatically ensure quality of education and the absence of money does not automatically ensure deficiency in education, the two are largely correlated. Not-for-profit organizations and charitable donation can only be expected to equalize the schools to the degree which these organizations and charities have clout; in their absence, inner-city and rural schools will continue to choke.

The Achievability of the Great Community

Dewey laid out the conditions required for the great community to be possible at all, as he called it, "the search for conditions under which the Great Society may become the Great Community."[146] Further, attaining these conditions may be inadequate, for "it is not claimed that the conditions which will be noted will suffice, bit only that at least they are indispensable."[147] In order to arrive at a community, however, Dewey first sought the conditions for the possibility of association. He saw a distinction between an association and a community, because a mere collection of individuals counted as an association

[146] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 147.

[147] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 157.

but more was needed for that to solidify into a community. To even become an association and not just an aggregate, there had to exist an arrangement and coordination of parts. Dewey stated that an organization is another word for an association, but regardless of which synonym we used, it was a group of individuals that had a rudimentary functional basis that came together in an organized manner. This could range from The American Philosophical Association to a local bowling league, and while these associated forms of living promoted the foundations of communal life, they did not quite attain the unification of community. Nevertheless, in order for a collection of individuals to become an association, there must be coordination and there is usually a function which defines why they come together. One of the most pressing functions that organizations can provide its members is protection, access to tools and medicines, but also companionship and the possibility for enduring bonds. It is unimportant as to whether these people are geographically contiguous or not, only that they come together in some manner and coordinate their actions. Dewey stated that "associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community."[148] Therefore, the first condition for the attainment of community is organic association.

The barest benefit of association was known to even early hominids. Associated living brings protection and freedom which an individual is incapable of having alone. As Dewey stated "individuals can find the security and protection that are prerequisites for freedom only in association with others— and then the organization these associations take on, as a measure of securing their

[148] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 151.

efficiency, limits the freedom of those who have entered into them."[149] Association also comes with a cost: the individual must conform and adopt the values and practices of those around them for fear of being ostracized from the association. This conformity is not always something the individual is aware of; so thoroughly are they indoctrinated into the values and beliefs of those they associate with. Sometimes these must be adopted, as when an outsider joins the group and must learn its ways. While associated living brings a certain amount of freedom, it also takes away from freedom in another sense. The freedom granted by association is the liberation of potentialities that comes with coordinated living, while the freedom sacrificed is the ability to behave indiscriminately. Dewey went on to say that the only meaningful freedom is the ability to control conditions in order to bring about desired consequences, and while independent existence permits the greatest range of individual behavior, it doesn't allow for the greatest range of control over conditions. Many of the most meaningful outcomes have as their prerequisite the cooperation and coordination of other individuals. Contemporary life shows many examples of this ranging from corporations, team sports, research groups, and book clubs to family life. All told, Dewey held the positive freedom gained from association far outweighed the indiscriminate freedom of rugged individualism for "no man and no mind was ever emancipated merely by being left alone."[150] The freedom granted by associated life in conjunction with the safety it offers is the second condition required to bring about a community.

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[149] Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture*, pp. 126-7.

[150] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 168.

The most direct route to controlling conditions, and thereby being free, is to possess knowledge of social means. Knowledge is a social capital; it is developed, passed on, distributed and clarified by way of social means such as language, education and conjoint research. Additionally, many researchers depend upon tools which are either developed or produced by others or otherwise are products of sociable living. Even if one had the know-how and ability to craft these tools, still the resources needed to produce them are a social capital. Steel is more than a metal dug whole-cloth from the earth; it must go through a process, itself the result of generations of social investigations, to become a product. So much of what contemporary life depends on is so indelibly social that its social nature has become transparent. The more advanced research has become, the more specialized the tools which permit that research to further have become as well, and therefore the more socially indebted it is. The third condition for the attainment of community is the possession and distribution of knowledge. In order for a community to flourish, this social knowledge must be distributed freely and inquiry must be encouraged not prevented.[151]

Individuals are not just beholden to the values and beliefs of the associated life, but they are also expected to be held responsible, to the extent which they are capable, in forming and directing the activities of the group. Individuals who wish only to reap the benefits of associated living will never really be a part of a community because community life is a give and take. Individuals able to do more are expected to do more. The bright and charismatic should step

[151] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 166.

up to the role of leadership and guides, the courageous should defend and the careful should calculate. On the other side of this coin, the group should demand the liberation of the potentialities of its members in harmony with the interests and goods of the association. If individuals do not take part in directing the activities of the group, they are beholden to something which they are not really a part of, and if groups do not demand the furtherance of individual potentiality, they may never obtain their capacity to participate in said group.

> From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the group to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain.[152]

Therefore, the fourth condition for community is the participation of its members in taking their responsible share according to capacity in the doings and sufferings of the community.

Not all members of associations and communities share the same values, and often times this can lead to conflict and bloodshed. A collection of factions and cliques can only become a community if these various groups interact flexibly and fully. If membership in one group comes at the expense of other groups, or if the exploitation of other groups is the express purpose of one group, there can never exist a community of these parts. Effectively, these groups are either gearing up toward, or are already presently in, a state of war. Dewey uses the example of members of a robber-band to make this point:

[152] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 147.

> A member of a robber band may express his powers in a way consonant with belonging to that group and be directed by the interest common to its members. But he does so only at the cost of repression of those of his potentialities which can be realized only through membership in other groups.[153]

While participation within the band can continue freely, association with other groups is strained by way of the parasitic nature of the robber-band. The robber-band cannot be an integrated aspect of a community insofar as they prey upon that very community. As long as one group benefits at the detriment of another, there can be no association, and therefore no community. Dewey states that group cohesion is necessary when he said:

> From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common: since every individual is a member of many groups, this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly and fully in connection with other groups.[154]

The fifth condition for the attainment of community therefore stands as the smooth integration and cooperation of internal groups.

One of the chief ways to bring about peaceful cooperation is by way of communication. Genuine shared interest is perhaps the most powerful glue that can hold a community together, and shared interest is only possible if the

[153] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 148.

[154] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 147.

interests can be conceptualized and communicated. The clearest form of shared interest is when each member has in mind the same consequences and utilizes the same modes of meaning to bring about those consequences. Even if individuals are speaking to one another, it does not mean they are communicating. Communication requires more than merely talking *at* one another, it requires talking *to* one another. Though it is impossible for the experience of events to be passed directly to other members of a community, it is possible for those events to be shared. This sharing comes by way of utilizing signs and symbols which stand as representations of the events or experiences.

> Only when there exist signs or symbols of activities and of their outcomes can the flux be viewed as from without, be arrested for consideration and esteem, and be regulated.[155]

Dewey said "symbols in turn depend upon and promote communication,"[156].the signs and symbols only act as communication when both parties have the same or very similar meaning for those signs. Emotions and beliefs make up the bulk of shared interest, but goals and outcomes play their role as well. Therefore, the sixth condition for a community is the maintenance of common signs and symbols which allow for robust communication of meaning between its members. These six conditions 1) trust from natural association 2) mutual benefit 3) the possession and distribution of social knowledge 4) the active participation of the members in the directing of the community 5) the full integration of individuals and 6) communication through shared signs and symbols stand as the

[155] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 152.

[156] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 153.

requirements to bring about a cohesive and free community. If any one of them is lacking, the result is a community striving to become, but existing still only at the level of an association. The benefits of a robust community can be felt by every member of that community, and whether individuals realize it or not the strongest drive among us is to belong. Belonging to an association is one thing, but belonging to a healthy community brings about individual fulfillment in ways no mere association can. Interestingly absent from these conditions is a numeric value of how many individuals are required to bring about the great community. Also absent are reference to material wealth; is it possible for just a few individuals suffering from abject poverty to have a democratic community that is flourishing? I leave this question for a future investigation.

Achievability of Individualism within the Great Community

Given that the conditions for the achievability of the great community are met, then this new individualism will not to be a boogeyman to be feared and hated, it will be something to be achieved. This new individualism has been a rarity in human history, usually deserving of mention in historic texts or celebrated for genius or development of science, industry or art. But its rarity is due to the conditions which bring it about being largely adrift and sporadic rather than stable and secured. Dewey argued that were these conditions secured an era of new individualism could flourish. This era could only be brought about by developing a community whose cultural institutions foster the growth and development of individuals, thus creating the environment in which more individuals could thrive than previously. In effect, Dewey was promoting a culture

which would free individuals rather than enslaving them to traditions which did not aid their natures in flourishing.

There exist countries where only a select few, usually the wealthy and powerful, are given the opportunities to flourish, countries whose social fabric is constructed in such a manner that a small group of people make the decisions that affect a larger group of people without their consent or say will inevitably have to resort to an increasing police presence to enforce their will upon the unwilling. In effect, a small group of people are forcing the modifications of the environment upon a larger group of people who will undergo its effects and the consequences of these modifications. But if movement toward a police-state is not desired and increased cooperation is preferred then communication must be sought:

> For it is by activities that are shared by language and other means of intercourse that qualities and values become common to the experience of a group of mankind. Now art is the most effective mode of communication that exists."[157]

Art creates potentially common elements which exists in the possible transactions of human organisms with their environments and unites humanity in its shared possession in consciousness. It is through these possibilities that greater access and communicability occurs than any of the natural languages that exist because,

> [a]rt is a more universal mode of language than is the speech that exists in a multitude of mutually unintelligible

[157] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 286.

> forms. The language of art has to be acquired. But the language of art is not affected by the accidents of history that mark off different modes of human speech.[158]

Dewey believed that artistic expression served as the more universal method of communication. The truth of this statement is obvious to dictators and tyrants for they seek absolute control over art (often called propaganda in this context). Art easily moves emotions when words do not. Even though a specific work of art may not speak to a given individual, art surrounds us and is internalized by us; we are creatures of art as much as anything else. Furthermore if art has an impact on one of our fellow humans and that human in part makes up our cultural environment then indirectly art has affected our environment and our experience.

Language, for all of its wonderful ability to transmit, still is imperfect in its communicability. While art itself is an imperfect medium of communication, it at least transcends many of the limitations of spoken and written language. Dewey stated that "[t]he difference between English, French and German speech create barriers that are submerged when art speaks."[159] People from vastly different cultural backgrounds can each be moved by a work of art, though they have no means of describing the experience to one another, for lack of a shared medium of expression, aside from more art. In this way art acts as a language, but only when

> language is taken in its widest sense, a sense wider than oral and written speech. It includes the latter. But it includes

[158] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 335.

[159] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 335.

> also not only gesture but rites, ceremonies, monuments and the products of industrial and fine arts. A tool or machine, for example, is not simply a simple or complex physical object having its own physical properties and effects, but is also a mode of language. For it *says* something to those who understand it, about operation of use and their consequences.[160]

The importance of this is often lost on contemporary philosophers who fixate on written or oral speech as the epitome of language. This is especially ironic when the written or spoken words fixated upon are displayed by way of a technology (such as a computer screen or even printed upon a sheet of paper) which is in effect a mode of language of its own, requiring an art to utilize.

In one sense art is the heart of human experience; or rather it is a "quality that permeates an experience."[161] Aesthetic experience, that which humans share in common, regardless of linguistic cultural practices, is a unifying fabric of humanity. Membership in the great community would require communication on levels that language alone is incapable of delivering due to the vast diversity of languages utilized. If these barriers are to be overcome, it will only be by way of artistic communication and the cultivation of an aesthetic experience required for participating in this communication.

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[160] Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, p. 46.

[161] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, p. 326.

Dewey further believed that the most effective means for bringing about communication among individuals from radically different cultures was by way of art.

> [N]o matter what may be the case with the impulses and powers that lead the creative artist to do his work, works of art once brought into existence are the most compelling of the means of communication by which emotions are stirred and opinions formed.[162]

It is by way of art that individuals can truly express their uniqueness, and communicate with others. But art has a wide range of inclusion for Dewey and is not limited to the "high arts" or the museum. Engineers can express their genius by way of crafting new machines, athletes can push themselves beyond the limitations of those who came before them, performers can stir emotion with new plays and musicians can craft new tempos. But even this does not capture the range of activities which Dewey believed the term "art" expressed, for game-designers, poets and teachers are included within this concept. Any human activity which creates and communicates can be viewed as a work of art.

Those individuals who would live in the great community would therefore not be limited to transmitting information with written or spoken language, because as Dewey stated "[w]e are beginning to realize that emotions and imagination are more potent in shaping public sentiment and opinion than

[162] Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture,* p. 16.

information and reason."[163] The most powerful and heartfelt communication is expressed with emotions and imagination, not with words. The Ancient Greeks knew this, and tragedy stood as a connective tissue for their culture accordingly.

For this reason, if no other, art should be harnessed as a means of shaping sentiment and opinion toward educational, cultural and lifestyle modification which brings about greater freedom, democratic arrangement and individuality rather than the converse. An can be concluded that an advocate of rugged individualism, elitism and plutocratic social arrangement will thus see expressive art as their greatest foe and will attempt to curb its growth at every turn in order to protect their interests.

It should be mentioned that art can just as easily be used as propaganda to inflame the passions and motivate many toward actions which harm themselves but benefit a shrewd few. Despots utilize art to convey their dominance for this reason; were art's communicative power not so thorough, despots would not waste their time and effort in plastering their face across a nation's surface. Art is therefore not panacea and in no way guarantees that its communicative ability promotes well-being. Though emotions communicate better and more fully than words, the intellect which shapes them may solely have personal interest in mind. Art can be harnessed to craft a *feeling* of solidarity and belongingness, something which many individuals desperately seek.

The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century saw advances in the art of mechanization, and this is one of those examples of an art that did as much harm

[163] Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture*, p. 16.

as good. Though the machine age multiplied the power of human labor and allowed for the creation, transportation and distribution of goods never before seen, it also acted as a limiting condition for millions of individuals who were forced to labor in monotonous assembly lines due to socio-economic forces brought about largely by the introduction of machines into various industries. The unfulfilling labor was not the worst issue though, for during this time a new culture was forged and this culture has trapped individuals more thoroughly than wage-slavery ever could have. The artifice which crafted the machines played just as acute of a role in forging a culture of passivity among those who were doomed to toil within the bowels of those machines, and this suffering has had consequences which reach even the twenty-first century. Even through the darkness of the industrial revolution, Dewey held there to a silver lining:

> The solution of the crisis in culture is identical with the recovery of composed, effective and creative individuality. The harmony of individual mind with the realities of a civilization made outwardly corporate by an industry based on technology does not signify that individual minds will be passively molded by existing social conditions as if the latter were fixed and static. When the patterns that form individuality of thought and desire are in line with actuating social forces, that individuality will be released for creative effort.[164]

[164] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New*, p. 69.

The existence of mechanical and technological advancement can either trap humanity's future or free it. Any tool can be used for harm or good; even the splitting of the atom can either be the most destructive weapon in humanities arsenal or the source of non-destructive energy. The tool itself represents no inherent evil, but the usage of it is determined as much by creative intelligence as it is by existing social conditions.

Though the existing conditions today are largely utilized to benefit a small number of wealthy individuals, this does not mean they are destined, doomed or necessarily committed. A shift in cultural practices could result in tumultuous change on par with the French Revolution, and upend the differences in a short period of time, but even this would not take root unless the change were one of habit and not merely outward condition. Conditions can change, but the ties that bind are behavioral practices passed from one generation to the next.

The cultural practice of dividing labor into "civilized" and "toil" must radically change in order for progress to occur. Dewey stated that:

> The question of the relation of man and nature, of mind and matter, assumes its vital significance in this context. A 'humanism' that separates man from nature will envisage a radically different solution of the industrial and economic perplexities of the age than the humanism entertained by those who find no uncrossable gulf or fixed gap. The former will inevitably look backward for direction; it will strive for a cultivated elite supported on the backs of toiling masses.

> The latter will have to face the question of whether work itself can become an instrument of culture and of how the masses can share freely in a life enriched in imagination and esthetic enjoyment."[165]

Only when education has become an instrument for cultivating inquirers and artisans rather than automatons and meek acceptance of leadership will culture be humane. Our current conception of schools is likely to be radically different were Dewey's advice followed. In an article published in the New York Times titled "Dewey's Outline for a Utopian School," Dewey depicted what educational life looks like in a "Utopian" society.[166] There is no calcified institution known as "school" for the Utopians, and instead the younger generation consorts with older generations in directed manners. Their education is the transaction they receive in wider society, which due to its democratic fabric, is educative in nature. What Dewey never dealt with was what further social inquiries would be required once the conditions for the great community were met. Given that these conditions are all but out of reach to contemporary society, the question remains: *were* they obtained then would social inquiries still be required? If a community had established trust among its members, open lines of communication, shared benefit and mutual protection for those who participated and utilized the most advanced social inquiries available, would this not be a community which had achieved harmony? Even this community would face the unknown, for life is full

[165] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New,* p. 61.

[166] First published in New York Times, 23 April 1933, Education section, p. 7, from an address on 21 April 1933 to the Conference on the Educational Status of the Four and Five-Year-Old Child at Teachers College, Columbia University.

of uncertainty, unrest and change. The utilization of social inquiry to diagnose, evaluate, hypothesize and experiment would never cease in the great community, and these inquiries would be the elixir by which the democratic culture would stay young. Rather than looking backward to bygone times for solutions in tradition, a culture that solves its problems by controlled social inquiry would have a mechanism for overcoming those problems it faced. I end with one final quote from Dewey:

> Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion. It had its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication.[167]

We have yet to arrive at a full and moving communication due to a variety of problems, but if free social inquiry is utilized in finding the solution to these problems and embraced, then a democratic lifestyle is a possibility within the grasp of human communities, thus allowing for the formation of a great community.

[167] Dewey, John. *The Public and its Problems,* p. 184.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Upon reflecting about Dewey's theory of the great community, one is struck most by how utterly it has failed to materialize. This post-script will explore this by delving into a historical look at the eclipse of the pragmatism movement in philosophy, the waning of Dewey's influence upon the practice of education, an examination of contemporary problems in light of Dewey's suggestions and current movements in globalization, especially in relation to meaningful prospects of sustainable peace.

In a 1928 article in *Time* magazine, Count Hermann Keyserling was quoted as stating: "the two contributions of America to world culture are Professor Dewey and Negro jazz."[168] Likewise in the same article it was reported that:

> Dr. Fai, acting as Rector of the National University at Peking, was presenting an honorary Ph.D. degree to John Dewey. "We honor you," said Dr. Fai, "as the Second Confucius."[169]

However in 1958, just six years after Dewey's death in 1952, a *Time* magazine article noted the following:

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[168] *Time* Magazine, June 4, 1928, Cover story. See the following link: http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19280604,00.html

[169] Ibid.

> The Deweyites thus transformed conditioning techniques into ends in themselves. Teachers' colleges assumed the dignity of lamaseries. Teachers were denied the chance of learning more about their subjects, in favor of compulsory education courses in how to teach them ... But their exclusive devotion to techniques and group adjustment should never again be allowed to hide the fact that American education exists first of all to educate the individual in a body of learning, with a tradition and purpose behind it.[170]

While some innovations were hailed, the overall criticism of Dewey's influence is notable. How can sentiments vary this widely in thirty years? Dewey's contribution to American education was seriously questioned. But this raises a further question, if pragmatism can be seen as a creative response to Emerson's clarion call in his 1837 Phi-Beta-Kappa address titled "The American Scholar," why was this native philosophy to America no longer trusted in certain circles? To understand the negative criticism of pragmatism, namely the failure to appreciate the importance of the movement called pragmatism, one must bear in mind Dewey's special role and contribution in the development of pragmatism.

The Growth of Pragmatism

While Charles Sanders Peirce coined the phrase "pragmatism" and William James popularized it, Dewey played his part by more carefully

[170] *Time* Magazine, "Education: The Long Shadow of John Dewey." Monday, Mar. 31, 1958. See the following link:
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,937554-2,00.html

elaborating the philosophical stance on this concept by attempting to eliminate dualisms and argue for the continuity of experience. While Peirce and James were both rigorous scientific minds, each of them maintained some variation of the Christian faith. Dewey, however, broke from this faith as he turned away from absolutism in favor of a thorough-going naturalism. As he worked through the implications of a naturalistic perspective, he turned his attention away from epistemological issues, which had plagued even the early stages of pragmatism. Instead Dewey came to focus on issues of community and scientific understandings of the world even more so than those who had come before him. It should be noted that from pragmatism's earliest formation, the idea of community was of central importance. Peirce discussed community in the limited context of formation of belief:

> The man who adopts [the method of tenacity] will find that other men think differently from him, and it will be apt to occur to him, in some saner moment, that their opinions are quite as good as his own, and this will shake his confidence in his belief. This conception, that another man's thought or sentiment may be equivalent to one's own, is a distinctly new step, and a highly important one. It arises from an impulse too strong in man to be suppressed, without danger of destroying the human species. Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other's opinions;

> so that the problem becomes how to fix belief, not in the individual merely, but in the community.[171]

Peirce here declares that the thoughts of others weigh heavily upon us all. He further held that the community of scientists was an exemplar of how the social aspect of belief formation can serve the quest for truth. We are not silos of thought, or islands adrift; we exist within a social matrix which always includes the thoughts of others. For Peirce our earliest thoughts are likely little more than imitations of those of our teachers and parents. Hence the only way to avoid coming into conflict with others is to live alone.

By expanding upon Royce's conception of the great community in light of Peirce's faith in the scientific community, Dewey was able to excise Royce's focus on a religious community. Instead, Dewey steered pragmatic philosophy into the realm of culture and practice, and focused on concepts such as social injustice, educational deficiencies and political power. This shift of focus marks off Dewey's particular contribution, but it also demarcates a point of departure from his contemporaries. Perhaps Dewey's most significant departure was embodied in the founding of his Laboratory School in Chicago and his pioneering research in pedagogy.

Dewey's Influence in Educational Theory

To echo a previous statement, one of the most perplexing aspects of Dewey's influence on educational theory is noting the abject lack of it in a contemporary setting. To this day, those teaching future educators quote Dewey

[171] Peirce, Charles "The Fixation of Belief," Popular *Science Monthly* 12 (November 1877). Parenthetical addition mine.

avidly, yet the techniques, methods, findings and habitudes he developed find no appeal in most contemporary Educational Colleges. Many contemporary educators continue to utilize lecture as their primary method of transmitting information, even when the very information they are transmitting regards the inherent limitations, problems and short-comings of lecture when compared to discussion, seminar style learning and other aspects of Dewey's educational theory. Dewey's pedagogies are praised but only rarely acted upon.

Dewey's main principles to reform education may be quoted as follows from his 1927 *Child and Curriculum*:

> 1) What can be done, and how can it be done, to bring the school into closer relation with the home and neighborhood life – instead of having the school a place where the child comes solely to learn certain lessons?...
>
> 2) What can be done in the way of introducing subject-matter in history and science and art, that shall have a positive value and real significance in the child's own life; that shall represent, even to the youngest children, something worthy of attainment in skill or knowledge, as much so to the little pupil as are the studies of high-school or college student to him? …
>
> 3) How can instruction in these formal, symbolic branches – the mastering of the ability to read, write and use figures intelligently – be carried on with everyday experience and

> occupation as their background and in definite relations to other students of more inherent content, and be carried on in such a way that the child shall feel their necessity through their connection with subjects which appeal to him on their own accord?...[172]

It can be readily seen that Dewey's school aimed at uniting the experience of the child at home with that of the child at school. The habits and skills needed by a child to navigate and integrate themselves into their life-space would be the animating forces behind the learning of subject-matter and the arts.

In attempting to find ways that school could more seamlessly integrate the child into a sense of community involvement, the child was being inculcated with the habits of participation so that when adulthood came, they would be well acquainted with the rhythm and hum of adult activity, Utilizing skills and techniques which would be of use in the household such as sewing and carpentry allowed the child to more mutually benefit the household. Through active learning of the system of patterns and symbols utilized in written communication and mathematics, the child could more competently take part in the transmission of ideas.

As mentioned in chapter four, schooling that is focused on training rather than the development of the individual forms habits of passivity and acquiescence to authority. While individuals in position of power may wish to maintain a citizenry that is meek and obedient would thereby seek to maintain a

[172] Dewey, John. *The School and Society and The Child and Curriculum: An Expanded Edition*, the University of Chicago Press, 1990, pp. 166-168. Portions omitted for space.

training regimen. Utilizing training is not in the interests of the individuals who seek to fulfill their full potential. In effect, as Dewey repeatedly stated, the then contemporary educational system actively thwarted three of the most important conditions to be met for the promotion of the great community: 1) the utilization of inquiry to solve problems, 2) the participation of the members and 3) the seeking of full potentiality of the members. The first condition of the utilization of inquiry is thwarted because members are taught to rely upon authority rather than the exercise and the findings of inquiry. The second condition of participation is thwarted because individuals are taught passivity rather than activity. Finally the third condition of the full potentiality of the members is thwarted because memorization of material does not cultivate or utilize critical thinking and thus does not further their growth. The then contemporary education system had focused on rote memorization and recitation of concrete information rather than the integration and utilization of the habits required to put this information to use.

Contemporary Problems and their Solvability

In chapter six, six conditions were discussed as necessary to the further attainment of the great community. What was left from this discussion was not just what was required but whether those requirements are possible themselves. I am unaware of any society that has managed to secure and promote all of the conditions, though pockets of individuals exist that have attained this or that condition. For example there still exist neighborhoods where the families trust and know one another well enough and each benefit from one another's presence and work. But do they promote the achievement of the full intellectual

potential of their entire community? Do they possess and share the results of social inquires? And while members of scientific communities may share signs and symbols as well as the results of their inquiries, do they have the full participation of their members in guiding their community?

A tension is seen within Dewey's thinking, for while personal growth is the ideal of education, without the attainment of stabilization of the six conditions, continued growth is unattainable. Said differently, a point of sufficiently stable patterns are indispensable to the attainability of the great community. These stabilizing patterns can, and should, act as guiding principles of education. Were these conditions obtained, maintenance of them should be of utmost priority thereby directing growth to furtherance and continued upkeep of the great community. Until such time as all conditions are met, education should be geared toward the achievement of them, thereby standing as a specific, even final, end-in-view to be obtained.

No culture has been worked out which can claim to have attained all six conditions: 1) trust among community members, 2) mutual benefit for all community members, 3) possession and distribution of social knowledge among community members, 4) the active participation of community members, 5) achievement of the full potentiality of individuals within the community and 6) communication by utilization of shared signs and symbols. Either Dewey's theory is unattainable or the conditions have merely not yet been met. It is my contention that because examples exist for each of the individual conditions, each in turn is proved possible. The attainment of all six conjointly merely stands

as a cultural project as yet unfinished. Why does the attainment of all six continue to elude humanity?

Dewey's own answer to this problem is that the social forces operating as blockages of the attainment of the great community come in two forms: the first form of blockage are the pecuniary interests of the wealthiest portion of society which operate to protect their wealth and power: "Armies and navies exist to protect commerce, to make secure the control of raw materials, and to command markets. Men would not sacrifice their lives for the purpose of securing economic gain for a few if the conditions presented themselves to their minds in this bald fashion."[173] Currently the interests of the wealthiest are protected with the blood and sweat of the poorest. Education, politics and industry have been steered to maintain the *status quo*, thus benefiting those currently in power.

The second form of blockage are those spiritual teachings beholden to an alien culture that largely no longer applies to contemporary conditions: "one of the main difficulties in understanding the present and apprehending its human possibilities is the persistence of stereotypes of spiritual life which are formed in old and alien cultures."[174] Past societies acquiesced to spiritual teachings formed in a distant land where communities were "local; they did not merge, overlap and interact in all kinds of subtle and hidden ways."[175] Contemporary life lacks "patterns sufficiently enduring to provide anything stable in which to acquiesce,

[173] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New,* p.31.

[174] Dewey, John. *Individualism Old and New,* p. 72.

[175] Ibid, p. 73.

and there is no material out of which to frame final and all-inclusive ends."[176] Until such time as the six conditions for the great community are secured, contemporary life will continue to lack the stability required to frame these ends, for the attainment of the conditions constitutes them as ends-in-themselves. Insofar as individuals and communities continue to cling to superstition and magical modes of thinking, especially as found in calcified modes of fundamentalist religious activity, these ends remain out of reach.

The primary reason these ends remain unattainable in these settings is the turning away from social inquiry in favor of superstition and tradition; rather than seeking answers to problems, people recourse to intuition or tradition for answers. This is manifested as a continued resistance to universal public education by religious organizations and skepticism about the results of scientific inquiry, as relates to global climactic shifts and other pressing matters.

Sustainable Peace and Globalization

The League of Nations was founded in 1918 as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, and came at the conclusion of World War I. The nations involved in drafting the document, and in turn forming the League, had as their primary interest the prevention of future wars and the settling of international disputes. From its inception it lacked the full cooperation of its member states because taking part in the activities of the league were not always of primary benefit to the individual states. Thus while it was formed to prevent wars, it depended upon the cooperation of its member states, especially its most powerful members, to

[176] Ibid.

enforce its regulations and sanctions. America did not participate in the League due to its having voted against the signing of the treatise.

When World War II broke out in 1939, it became exceedingly clear that the League of Nations could not carry out the charge it had been given, namely to prevent world wars. At the conclusion of World War II, in 1945, another institution, the United Nations, was formed in an attempt to prevent a third World War. The question then arises: does the United Nations qualify as the way to establish the great community? One principle of the great community is that conflicts are resolved through social inquiry rather than violence, so if the United Nations were to qualify as the framework for the great community, it should prevent future wars. Twenty-six current wars constitute evidence that the United Nations is unable to meet its charge. The section that follows will explore whether the United Nations can in fact meet the conditions for the attainability of the great community.

The first condition for the attainment of the great community is trust of its individual members. Here the individuals are not unique biological organisms but states that do not trust each other. The second condition is the mutual benefit of all members. While it is not common practice, some nations take actions which do benefit only other nations; the more common rule is for nations to only benefit themselves so it is an open question whether there is common and mutual benefit to be had from membership in the United Nations. The third condition is the possession and distribution of social knowledge among the members. Here the United Nations fulfills the condition as international inquiries are pursued and

widely published. But this condition is being circumvented by the occasional use of power and influence to prevent inquiries from moving forward. The fourth condition is active participation of the members and while the United Nations has many member states, not all of them guide the decisions of the United Nations. Powerful states like Russia, China and the United States play a far larger role in determining U.N. policy than Albania or Gabon. In this way the U.N. acts as a magnification of social issues inherent within these powerful nations rather than as a solution. The fifth condition is the achievement of the full potentiality of individuals. While membership within the U.N. pays dividends to the powerful nations and ancillary benefits to the less powerful nations, it does not seek the full cultivation of the communities that comprise those nations. This is characterized most by continued poverty and strife felt by member nations that could easily be alleviated by efforts on behalf of the powerful nations. Their continued ignorance or apathy toward these conditions can only be viewed as a lack of interest in the full potentiality of their members. The final condition of communication by utilization of shared signs and symbols is the most difficult to gauge. While words are translated between member nations in order to accurately convey meaning, subterfuge and political posturing color these meanings with layers of interpretation, thus clouding whether or not signs are being utilized in a shared manner.

In summary, of the six conditions that Dewey stated as necessary for the attainability of the great community, the United Nations comes close to meeting a single condition but is a great distance from the other five. If Dewey's conditions

accurately represent those principles needed for the formation of a stable community of peace, then the United Nations was not designed to meet the overwhelming majority of the conditions needed.

Conclusions

The blockages to meeting the conditions for attaining the great community are powerful and entrenched. The leaders in power who control and direct political processes perhaps believe that allowing these blockages to erode would undermine their various positions within the community. Perhaps there is some truth in this, as a community oriented toward full participation of its members wielding the results of social inquiry would have no need of demagogues and messiahs. There are no such communities which meet all of the conditions laid out by Dewey. The attainment of these conditions appears dubious as long as power politics continue and organizations prevent educational institutions from flourishing. Communities exist, and perhaps even nations, which have attained one or more of the conditions; a fact to which Dewey was aware. But Dewey was skeptical of the emergence of a community attaining all six anytime in the near future. Dewey's suggestions were not utopian in character, each one is attainable, and has been attained to some degree by individuals and communities. Nevertheless the emergence of the great community will continue to be a cultural project yet to be attained for many years, perhaps centuries, to come.

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