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Habit, Education, and the Democratic Way of Life: The Vital Role of Habit in John Dewey's Philosophy of Education

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Habit, Education, and the Democratic Way of Life: The Vital Role of Habit in John
Dewey's Philosophy of Education

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Interdisciplinary Education
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Christie (my *Diotima*). Your boundless love and trust pushed me forward and kept me focused while I spent countless hours in the bowels of the library basement amid the vinegary stench of old and forgotten micro-film. I also dedicate this work to my three beautiful and wonderful children. The tender view of you all sleeping has provided me with love, inspiration, and drive that transcends any intelligibility. I have sorely missed being away from your warmth and I look forward to spending much more time with you all while you are awake. You all have my heart.

To my mom, I trust my intelligence and mind to the point of believing that I can do anything and understand any abstract concept. I have you to thank for cultivating that tenacity and for always being my biggest fan and advocate. I love you.

To my Mamaw and Papaw, I love you both more than you know.

To my dear friend, Julian Stanley Brock, I keep you with me daily.

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ABSTRACT

Some have claimed that John Dewey was one of few thinkers that developed an educational theory that is comparable to Plato.¹ Dewey did something that William James and Charles Sanders Peirce did not do; he applied Pragmatism and the Pragmatic method to the study of education. The main tasks of this dissertation are as follows: (1) Argues that habit is the most important and unifying element in John Dewey's philosophy of education, (2) Critically investigates habit's fundamental role in his democratic project of reconstructing culture toward establishing and sustaining the democratic way of life. In addition to the latter points, this project shows how and why the critique of habits and cultural values is central to Dewey's philosophy of education and reveals how important the process of unlearning is to the continual development of human possibilities.

The latter tasks will be carried out by first reviewing the historical influences on Dewey's thinking with regard to habit and surveying secondary literature that has dealt with his position on habit. Second, the Deweyan conception of the nature of habit and the formation of habit in immediate experience will be explored. Third, Dewey's educational philosophy will be examined. Education, which Dewey asserts to be Democracy's midwife, should produce growth that is characterized by perpetual reconstruction of habits of thought and practical conduct. Fourth, in investigating habit, individuality, and

¹ Stephen Cahn stated, "Suffice it to say that John Dewey is the *only* thinker ever to construct a philosophy of education comparable in scope and depth to that of Plato." *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969-1991), LW 13: xviii.

community, a close reading of Dewey's position on habit highlights that the political enterprise of education and the transactional process of learning are cultural projects that demand ongoing re-evaluation and refinement community values. The conclusion will argue how important the ongoing improvement of a cultural instrumentalism, through schooling, is to sustaining a steady path of cultural self-correction. For Dewey, schooling, in cultivating the requisite habits, serves the crucial social function of developing and recasting new forms of the Democratic way of life toward creating a "Great Community."

Dewey had a persistent concern for the ethos of the Democratic way of life but feared that the stultification of an individual's plasticity of habit will inevitably bring on the "social arterial sclerosis" of the public. Like his pragmatism, experimentalism, and instrumentalism, the Democratic way of life, for Dewey, is an attitude. This attitude, like any attitude, is shaped and channeled by a force as powerful as gravity, habit.²

² William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1950), 126.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The force of habit penetrates and interpenetrates every recess of human existence and conduct. As John Dewey states in *The Public and Its Problems*, “Habits are the mainspring of human action.”¹ Dewey goes on to assert in *Human Nature and Conduct* that “Habits are links in forming the endless chain of humanity. Their significance depends upon the environment inherited from our forerunners, and it is enhanced as we foresee the fruits of our labors in the world in which our successors live.”² The proposed dissertation will critically investigate the fundamental role habit plays in John Dewey’s philosophy of education. The following questions will be raised and addressed throughout the dissertation: What is a habit? Why is habit needed? What habits are most appropriate to human welfare and development of critical intelligence? Why are habits important to the democratic way of life? Dewey's pragmatism and thought on education are relevant for the current state of affairs because they call attention to the democratic ethos that must exist in both social and political institutions in a democracy.³

¹ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, in *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953*, vol. 2 of 37 vols., ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969–91), 334. From this point forward *The Collected Works of John Dewey* will be referenced as follows: EW for Early Works, MW for Middle Works, and LW for Later Works. These designations will be followed by the volume number, which will be followed by a colon and the page number. For example, the above work would be referenced Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, LW 2: 334.

² John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library Press, 1930), 21.

³ This idea of a return of ethos has been adapted from Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca Walkowitz, eds., *The Turn to Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to state the objectives of the project, explain how the project will be structured, and clarify the research methodologies involved in the project. Additionally, this chapter will elucidate some of the key terminology that will be used throughout the project and show how the subject of habit is intimately related to the topic of education and to the grand goal of living the democratic way of life. Moreover, after pointing out his interest in and commitment to the pragmatic approach to the study of education, the chapter will conclude by outlining the methodological approach and conceptual matrix of this project.

Before proceeding, a clarification on what is meant by “philosophy of education” within the context of this dissertation is needed. The terms *philosophy* and *education* are taken literally here. Philosophy literally means love of wisdom.⁴ Education is translated as a leading to. Dewey points out in *Democracy and Education* that philosophy is education, but also that education is also philosophy; philosophy *of* education is better understood to be philosophy *as* education.⁵ Thus, as philosophy should be understood to be the “general theory of education.” Moreover, Dewey claims,

I have wondered whether such facts signified that philosophers in general, although they are themselves usually teachers, have not taken education with sufficient seriousness for it to occur to them that any rational person could actually think it possible that philosophizing should focus about education as the supreme human interest in which, moreover, other problems, cosmological,

⁴ Jim Garrison also points this out in his *Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Education* entry on John Dewey, accessed May 3, 2012, http://www.ffst.hr/ENCYCLOPAEDIA/doku.php?id=dewey_john.

⁵ Dewey states in *Democracy and Education*,

If a theory makes no difference in educational endeavor, it must be artificial. The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice if we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow-men philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education. (MW 9: 338)

moral, logical, come to a head. At all events, this handle is offered to any subsequent critic who may wish to lay hold of it.⁶

In this dissertation, I “wish to lay hold” of this handle not in the form of critic but rather as supporter and proponent. However, I wish to take it further in supporting that not only philosophers take education sufficiently seriously, but suggest that educators take philosophy as vital to their calling. It should come as no surprise to anyone in the field of education (though I am sure it will for some) that the original metaphor for enlightenment and education was established over 2,500 years ago in Plato’s “cave allegory” found in book VII of his *Republic*. Thus, philosophy of education should be understood within the context of this dissertation to mean a love of wisdom in leading to the growth of the love of wisdom.

Throughout this dissertation, I view Dewey (a true public intellectual) as a political educator. The purpose of this dissertation is to unfold and examine a key element in human nature in its various complexities, habit. By addressing habit’s complexities, I hope to change the way in which habit has been considered in Dewey’s philosophy of education and within education generally, and to re-introduce its critical importance in learning and reconstructing experience. A noted limitation of this study is that it makes a conscious effort to steer out of the direction of becoming too immersed in Dewey’s ethical theory. While, of course, Dewey’s ethics are closely tied to habit, education, and a democratic way of life, it simply is too broad a topic to include within the scope of this dissertation.

⁶ John Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” *Contemporary American Philosophy: Personal Statements*, 2 vols., ed. George P. Adams and Wm. Pepperell Montague (New York: Russell and Russell, 1930), 23.

More broadly, this dissertation uses Dewey's position on habit as an instrument to address the question of cultural need with regard to thinking and critiquing cultural values in education. At the heart of this work, it is concerned with the potential and ability within each person in any given culture to not merely change their character through the reconstruction of habits but to *create* a new version of their self that did not previously exist.

1.1. Habit, Education, and Democracy: A Basic Orientation of Concepts

The concept of habit in the philosophy of John Dewey is one of most difficult parts of his whole philosophy. Habit, like almost all other terms in Dewey's philosophy, has an incestuous relationship to other terms and concepts within his philosophy. However, habit is not merely a concept in John Dewey's philosophy; rather, it is the root concept in his philosophical system. One of the perennial difficulties in reading, understanding, and writing about John Dewey's philosophy is that when one pulls out one concept to examine it in depth, everything else comes out with it. The concept of habit is most exemplary of the latter statement.

The Latin *habitus* or *habere* means to have, possess, or acquire. But what then is it that through various structures of our habits we acquire? As organisms we adapt to the elements we find in the environment, and growth depends upon our right relationship to change within these elements.⁷ Dewey will say that through our consummation with the "outside environing forces" we are "phagocytic" beings that acquire the dispositions of

⁷ It is important to point out here that there is no direct translated word in the Greek for the Latin equivalent *habere* or *habitus*; however, there is what is called ethos, and it is in this that we find *hexis*, and thus, eventually habit. The latter idea of *hexis* derives from a strong Aristotelian influence that will be explored further in chapter 3.

other organisms. In this way, habit must then be contextual. For Dewey, any context limits any universal. What Dewey will then say is that organisms (read: humans) always consume others in some way in the context of social life. Then, our very existence—biological, social, physical—is highlighted by consuming things. We all got here and remain here by eating living things. Even vegetarians sustain themselves by consuming living things (i.e., things that were at one time living). Peirce spoke of habits as a form of demi-cadence in which the closed tonic is never and can never be realized and is perpetually open to reformation. Socially, then, we are born and sustained by contingent relationships.

For Dewey, then the acquisition of dispositions is natural. Habit, therefore, is marked by continuity, by a constant and recurrent mode of adaptation. Thus, in acquiring others' dispositions, in some way, be it in a big way or small, we have adapted ourselves to the structures of others' dispositions. It is important to note here, however, that the same is going within the other individual. The formation of habits, then, is a constant, ongoing process that never ends. This is where Dewey's constructivism must be underscored.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, life whispers in Zarathustra's ear that the secret of life is self-overcoming.⁸ Dewey's constructivism can be seen in a way to be a constant self-overcoming but should also be understood to be a self-recovery. Thus, habit is

⁸ Nietzsche narrates,

“And life itself told me this secret life: ‘Behold,’ it said, ‘I am that *which must be overcome itself again and again*. . . . To be sure, you call it will to procreate or impulse towards a goal, towards the higher, more distant, more manifold: but all this is one and one secret. . . .’ That I have to be struggle and becoming and goal and conflict of goals: ah, he who divines my will surely divines, too, along what *crooked* paths it has to go.”

Frederich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 138.

characterized by growth and adaptation to new environments and to new problems by way of selecting the appropriate dispositions from the great vault of experience that is a part of one's makeup. The self is mediated by society. The state or structure of the individual is always in flux because the environment is. So if we want self re-recreation, for Dewey, we really want social self-re-creation. Habits, then, are not just adaptations *to* the environment but also adaptations *of* the environment.

But perhaps one of most difficult things here about habit is that Dewey calls on every organism to be self-critical. This, of course, is much easier said than done. He likens the intellectual habits of culture to wearing clothes and disrobing. He states that it is necessary to disrobe from the intellectual habits that culture has "bequeathed us" so that we may examine their makeup. But if we take for a moment and think of how our clothes cling to us and we cling to our clothing, we get the image of looking into a mirror and having ourselves reflected back in the mirror. Rarely do we examine the fabric that makes up our clothing to discern or ascertain its makeup. Concurrently, rarely do we examine the fabric of our habits to see what they are made of.

Thus, the relationship here to education is a crucial one. If there is no habit, there can be no growth; and if there is no growth, there can be no education; and if there is no education, there can be no democracy. For Rousseau, as he outlines in *Emile*, the only habit that should be acquired in education is the habit to not acquire habits.⁹ This, of course, is impossible and extreme. For Dewey, education *should* provide the "social continuity of life."¹⁰

⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, translated by Allen Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), pg. 63.

¹⁰ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 5.

However, context is also crucial here. There's a big difference for Dewey between education and schooling. Schooling is one thing; education is another. Whatever the case, Dewey in *Democracy and Education* states that true growth is characterized by "developing the fundamental dispositions toward growth and further education."¹¹ Kant observes in his *Lectures on Education* that "the most great and difficult problem to which any man can devote himself, is to the problem of education."¹²

Experience, for Dewey, always bears upon education. Dewey felt that education is life itself, and in life one is always responding to conflicts, adapting to problems, identifying problems, and seeking to solve them. Thus, education is the perpetual reconstruction of experience. However, what is always taking place in experience is the constant growth and development of habits or different modes or structures of dispositions in order to restore continuity to action. Education, then, is the mediation of experience.

The reconstruction of habit then precedes the reconstruction of experience. In this way, discontinuity of experience presents interruptions in habits, which demand the organism to adjust to the conflicting circumstances to restore continuity to activity. The interruption of habit is the occasion by which an organism has the opportunity to restructure values, make intelligent selections of appropriate action in the given context, and thereby promulgate growth. Teaching, it could be argued, is the deliberate act of interrupting habit so as to make appetizing further growth and more creative reconstructions of experience.

¹¹ MW 9: 338.

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Education* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 11.

The most important parts of Dewey's philosophy of education are growth, experience, inquiry, democracy, and value. However, Dewey's philosophy of education must be understood to be like the natural development of a plant; it is never static, never stable. Within each of these parts of Dewey's philosophy of education habit is the transactional and synthesizing element. In *Experience and Education* Dewey equates habits to attitudes toward growth. What is to be cultivated through education is one's plasticity of habit. Dewey asserts that plasticity here is a power. It is the power to which one is able to modify actions to correctly and accurately adjust to problematic situations. Dewey believed that it was education's job to work to always make sure that plasticity of habit was always flexible and receptive to deliberation and restoring continuity to experience. This in some way is the training of one's intuition.

In "Qualitative Thought," Dewey states that intuition precedes conception and goes deeper.¹³ This, then, is training a discerned recognition of the quality of the objects of inquiry. The affective upshot of this type of training would be that one could better anticipate consequences of actions retroactively and more accurately, not more quickly. In education, Dewey felt patience was very important. One should never sacrifice quality of thought for expedience or efficiency. If one perceives the quality wrongly, then all action will be wrong. The error in perception, then, distorts the mediation of experience.

That is to say education must create critical awareness in one's own experience and illuminate those dispositions that preclude further growth and block the road to inquiry. In examining the fabric of one's habits in each different context that one operates within means that people must respond to the interruption of habits and therefore

¹³Dewey, "Qualitative Thought," LW 5: 243-262.

reconstruct them. And, reconstructing one's habits in a deliberative and intelligent way will lead to further growth and more intelligent responses to interruptions in the future.

However, growth is not just an end; it is also a means. Through the constant formation of habits and reorganization of values through adaptation to different environing forces, growth, for Dewey, should never be too specifiable. What does one get when one gets growth? Dewey would say that the meaning of life is to make more meaning, and the meaning of education to make more education, and if anything should be growing, it should be the definition of growth itself.

Thus, an important question for Dewey is, in reconstructing habits after they are disrupted, are we broadening our habits of inquiry and creating new meaning where there was once none, or are we sedimenting entrenched modes of response that will serve only to block the road to inquiry and impede social self-re-creation? Dewey is interested in the response to adjustment and believes it is critical to growth but also in conditioning how an organism will respond in future situations. Education ends when experience ends. The interpenetration of habits is one's character. In this way, the formation of character is really the habits in action. When one acts, one discloses one's character and one cannot help but act.

Democracy is also an important ingredient in Dewey's philosophy of education, and, because of that, habit is also central to a democratic mode of living. In the previous section of the introduction, habit's important role in John Dewey's philosophy and especially in philosophy of education was brought out. Here, again, we cannot separate the previously discussed topics from his concept of democracy. In this way, democracy cannot exist without education, and true education cannot exist without democracy.

Dewey states in his essay "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" that most of what he had to say about his philosophy could be found in *Democracy and Education*. He gave a lecture in 1939 titled "Creative Democracy: the Task before Us," in which he characterizes democracy as not a form of government but rather an ideal. For him to do this in 1939 is saying a lot, given the world climate at the time; for example, fascism and bolshevism were on the march and democracies were being rubbed out wherever found. In that lecture, Dewey stated, "Democracy is a belief." In this way, then, democracy is an ideal that really has no end. He will go on to say that democracy is both a radical end that has yet to be adequately realized in the natural world. In *Democracy and Education*, he states that democracy is the true and only form of associated living, and shortly thereafter he states, "Democracy is a way of life."

After close investigation of Dewey's writings to see where all this talk of education, reconstruction, and growth leads, Dewey will say that it would lead to the "Democratic way of life." For Dewey, the best form of social life is democracy as a way of life. The democratic way of life, then, is not just about political life but includes the social life, which should always be educative and meaningful.

Intelligent conduct through habituated means of associated living was crucial to Dewey. The work of schooling was to secure this type of conduct. However, Dewey does not conceive of education as being any one person's possession. Conversely, he feels that the intelligence is among us in as much as we communicate with one another. Dewey realized that an educated public is key in discovering and maintaining democracy. There are no singles in Dewey (and the same is true for James); there's no such thing as a thing by itself. Dewey emphasizes the transactive forces at work in any social setting.

Dewey's take on democracy is responding to Plato's critique of the deviant constitutions in book VIII of the *Republic*. Plato says that something happens in the transition from oligarchy to democracy. The rule of the fewer is given over to rule of the many. Thus, there is a distribution of freedom. But, Plato questioned whether the people could ever handle such a responsibility or whether they were educationally ready for it. Dewey says the public can handle the responsibility in as much as education is the main feature of developing critical intelligence so as to give more meaning to our lives, actions, and habits. Democracy as a way of life, as a creative reconstruction of experience and habits, is central to making of meaning in our lives. Each generation has to remake democracy, and the only way in which this can happen is by constantly reconstructing experience so as to make more meaning of the actions they undertake to secure the right relationships with those who are different from themselves.

1.2. The Development of Dewey's Interest in Education

Dewey was a keystone figure in American philosophy, which can be argued to be the only philosophy that sprang forth from the American soil and mind. The backbone of American philosophy or pragmatism is naturalism. We find in pragmatism a return to nature. Pragmatism is an attempt to theoretically describe life itself and to avoid high-minded sophistry. The philosophy here was a direct response to practical problems. This is how pragmatism grew, and Dewey was directly involved with this growth. For this reason, a short word about John Dewey's development as a philosopher and his philosophy as a whole should be visited first in order to give a more informed context of

habit within his general philosophy and to eventually understand how it relates to his interest in pragmatism and education.

The most succinct and meaningful statement about Dewey's development is found in his essay "From Absolutism to Experimentalism." In this intellectual autobiography, Dewey highlights key moments in the evolution of his own thought. Dewey's first meaningful affair with philosophy was with German idealism. He wrote his dissertation (which cannot be found) on "Kant's Psychology." From Kant, Dewey went on to Hegel and spent the biggest part of his early career as a Hegelian. Dewey asserted, "That acquaintance with Hegel has left a permanent deposit in my thinking. The form, the schematicism, of his system now seems to me artificial to the last degree."¹⁴ Ironically, in that same paragraph where Dewey makes the latter statements, he also says,

Were it possible for me to be a devotee of any system, I still should believe that there is greater richness and greater variety of insight in Hegel than in any other single systematic philosophy-though when I say this I exclude Plato, who still provides my favorite philosophic reading. . . . Nothing could be more helpful to present philosophizing than a "Back to Plato" movement.¹⁵

It is hard to overlook the fact that what concerned Dewey also concerned Plato, for example, democracy, education, freedom, culture, and the good life.

Dewey's quest for unification can be attributed to his early teachings at Johns Hopkins by his teacher George Sylvester Morris's Hegelian leanings. Early on in his career, Dewey placed great emphasis on the writings of G. W. F. Hegel. Around the turn

¹⁴ Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

of the twentieth century, many scholars feel the influence of Hegel on Dewey waned; however, new studies such as James Good's *The Search for Unity within Diversity: the "Permanent Hegelian Deposit" in John Dewey's Philosophy* argues that Dewey never fully left Hegel behind.¹⁶ Dewey also recognizes his debt to Hegel in the essay "From Absolutism to Experimentalism." However, it was not just Hegel who influenced the young Dewey and continued to do so. In his second book on Leibniz, Dewey credits Leibniz with confirmation of seeing the human as an organic whole with the universe and environment in which it functions.¹⁷

Dewey in "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" points out that after his affair with idealism, he then turned to the study of psychology, specifically William James's version of psychology. As Dewey became more interested in psychology, his interest in and concern for education also intensified. His interest in William James and G. Stanley Hall, childhood psychology, and commensurately education became very evident during his time at the University of Michigan.

In 1894 he went to the University of Chicago and, of course, it was there where his pragmatic approach to education blossomed with the advent of the laboratory school. Dewey brought with him from Michigan to Chicago one of the most influential figures on Dewey's thinking, George Herbert Mead. The influence of Mead on Dewey's thinking is not easily measurable. Whatever foundations of a social psychological understanding Dewey had, Mead's influence on Dewey took his study of it further.

¹⁶ The latter dissertation was turned into a book in 2006, and since that time, there has also been a master's thesis written in 2010 on the "Hegelian deposit" in John Dewey's philosophy of inquiry that was directed Frank Ryan.

¹⁷ Dewey, EW 1: 378.

Dewey did something that none of the other pragmatists had done. He applied pragmatism in a special way by using a scientific approach to solve problems in education. With Dewey, we see for the first time the principles of pragmatism being applied to the field of education. He talks in his intellectual autobiography “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” about the four main points that give his intellectual path some sort of continuity, and the first point he provides concerns education. He writes, “One is the importance that the practice and theory of education have had for me: especially the education of the young.”¹⁸ He credits this deep interest in education for making the connections and bringing together “what might otherwise have been separate interests—that in psychology and that in social institutions and social life.”¹⁹ The first culmination of his deep interests in education was the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago.

Education is an instrument for Dewey, and an important feature of this instrument must be the use of intelligence. The main tool used for the clarification of new ideas, for problem solving, is human intelligence. One of the central goals of education, for Dewey, is the development and maturation of human intelligence. Intelligence, then, calls for special ways in which one organizes responses to certain impulses; at the elemental level, intelligence is discernment in recognition. Thus, intelligence must be critical. Intelligence arises when one is in the face of conflict. It is the mediating faculty because there is no mediating faculty in the push of an impulse. Reaching a resolution through intelligence is not enough; one needs to proceed to act upon the resolution. One cannot work this out unless he or she forms a hypothesis, a plan, and method (or put

¹⁸ Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 22.

¹⁹ Ibid.

differently, habit). Education (through schooling) must be able to help students sharpen discernment, cultivate the ability to find a pragmatic resolution to problems, and see that resolution through with intelligent conduct yet not get stuck in the same rut of response.

Dewey fully realized the central role education plays in social and political life. However, he also fully realized the centrality of the concept of habit to education and learning. He transferred this naturalistic and pragmatic approach to the field of education. Dewey's philosophy, and his philosophy of education especially, is a continuum. For Dewey, educational philosophy is social and political philosophy, and the root of each is the human thinking and acting within nature and employing habits of mind and body.

1.3. Deweyan Pragmatism: The Context of His Philosophical Thought

Dewey was a pragmatist. In order to understand what that means, I shall go over some of the main tenets of classical pragmatist thought. Pragmatism can be understood initially as the American development of the long tradition of British empiricism. It differs from empiricism in that the latter has a retrospective view; it looks backward and builds its generalizations by way of a quest for origins. A foundational staple of pragmatist thought is a profound Darwinian influence, especially notable in Dewey's thinking.²⁰ Pragmatism as a view is prospective; it is a formula of consequences of actions.

²⁰ Regarding Darwin's influence, Dewey asserted, "conquered the phenomena of life for the principle of transition, and thereby freed the new logic for application to mind and morals and life." MW 4: 7-8. Richard Rorty confirms the attraction to Darwin by saying, "pragmatists are committed to taking Darwin seriously." Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig, vol. 7 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 633. Perhaps the boldest of statements regarding the Darwinian influence on pragmatist thinking is given by Louis Menand. Menand's position is so bold as to suggest that the second major outgrowth of pragmatism (second only to the Civil War) was Darwin's *On the Origin of*

It is not, nor should it be, understood as a theory of truth. Rather, the pragmatist preferred to not examine the nature of truth, but instead focused on how beliefs and values were justified. Pragmatism can be understood both as a movement and an attitude. As a movement, pragmatism was anti-dualistic, aiming to avoid the bifurcation between fact and value on the one hand, and between mind and matter and experience and reality on the other. Furthermore, it sought to resolve the difficulties in method by establishing a principle of continuity. As an attitude, it was moving, not fixed, constantly questioning, and ever-evolving. In either case, the importance of meaning is vital, that is, meaning in ideas, actions, language, logic, science, habits, and philosophy.

Pragmatism is truly an American philosophy.²¹ Because of the newness, the words used by Peirce, James, Dewey, and many others have a new meaning.²² The words themselves were not new, but the meanings the pragmatist gave the words were new. They were changing the vocabulary of philosophy and were trying to establish a style to communicate old issues in a new way and in so doing were creating new issues.²³ By changing the meaning of the words that were used, they created new issues where

Species. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

²¹ In disapproval of a talk given by William James titled “Pragmatism,” C. S. Pierce coined a new word in place of pragmatism. The word was *pragmatism*.

²² H. Heath Bawden calls attention to pragmatism’s “newness” in his article “The New Philosophy Called Pragmatism,” *The Popular Science Monthly* (July–December 1908): 61–72. He says of pragmatists,

They are not really pragmatist, most of them, but idealists. They have developed Pragmatism simply as a means of realizing a new idea in philosophy, which seems more valuable to them than any of the old ideals. . . . The function of the philosophical pragmatist of the day is not to supplant the various forms of idealism, which have held sway, but to make their ideals operative as forces in the world of actual conditions and causes. It brings ideals down to earth; it does not destroy them. (69)

²³ One of the paramount new issues was difficulty in following the language because the pragmatist was in the process of developing the command over the words they used as they used them. This is problematic, as Wittgenstein points out, “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words—Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing the connexions’ [sic]. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases*.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1958), para. 122.

once there were none. In a way, they created issues for themselves just as much as they did for others. Of course, they wrote in English, but the main issue was clarification. These thinkers were concerned with new issues, new problems, about a new world. They write in a period of U.S. history where America was trying to establish and defend itself. In like fashion, the pragmatists were doing the same thing.

The most famous of the pragmatists is Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce, the son of a world-renowned mathematician, and logician himself, was a very scientifically minded thinker. Peirce wanted to remove pathos, or emotion, from the consideration of the pragmatic attitude. Peirce's brand of pragmatism is closely associated primarily with a theory of logic. Central to Peirce's position is clarification of ideas and actions through use of the inductive method. He truly understood the scientific method and the solving of problems concerning clarification to be a public enterprise and practice. Peirce is more in line with a brand of Stoic pragmatism. The commitment by Peirce found in his pragmatism is one that is deeply rational.

William James is another founding thinker of pragmatism. However, his conception of pragmatism differs widely from Peirce's. For Peirce, truth (lower-case *t*) is a final, inevitable, experimental conclusion. For James, truth is good in terms of belief; James's definition is based on what he called "truth's cash-value"; it is based on moral values to define logical values; a true belief is one which is good and one that "works."

For Peirce, the rational meaning of any proposal lies in the future, and proposals are important to Peirce because open inquiry lays the foundation of his position. There are two senses of meaning with Peirce: the object labeled and the clarification of the proposal. He means by this the techniques by which we deduce verification within

statements and the meaning of that verification. Hence, the meaning of any proposition is inexhaustible.²⁴ In contrast with James, the meaning of an idea for James is its cash-value right now in the present tense; it is not found in remote conditionals removed from present experience. In Peirce's view, the meaning of an idea is its credit-value; it is never translated into any finite set of sense data, but it always relates to future verifiability.

Unlike Pierce, James is concerned with morality and experience as something that is felt rather than something that manipulates present and future conduct. In this way, James sees openness of interpreting the meaning of experience as an error. The meaningfulness of experience is something private for James. He is concerned with what belief means to an individual, not what belief means for a public. James is more interested in the psychology behind beliefs than the logic in which our beliefs become fixed. With James, experience is not the succession of discrete impressions but a continuous flow, a stream of consciousness. His position is much more liberal than Peirce's; experience and order are not set, but rather they are in constant flux.

Dewey goes beyond Peirce and James. To be sure, he takes much from them, but at the same time, he moves the pragmatic attitude forward. From Peirce, Dewey takes and applies the crucial element of inquiry and constant request for clarification within the values and habits that dictate a human's thoughts and actions. He also agrees with and expands Peirce's notion of public determination of meaning and the application of the scientific method in addressing social problems.

However, Dewey drops off of the Peircian branch of pragmatism concerning the universalizability of propositions for future actions. This is where Dewey's own version of pragmatism, instrumentalism, comes into to play. His keen sense of context and

²⁴ Richard Rorty once recognized Peirce as the father of the counterfactual conditional.

fragility of immediate, present experience is reminiscent of James's. Within Dewey's instrumentality of intelligence, ideas are instruments that are subject to be tested for verifiability of assertion and to the consequence that will follow with their application. For one to assert that he or she has an idea is, in the Deweyan sense, to say that he or she has a tool to test in experience and in action.

From James, Dewey takes the central notion of experience in all its "blooming, buzzing" confusions and flux. Native also to Dewey, but also to all pragmatist thought, is the rejection of *a priori* knowledge. In Dewey, experience is the source of logical forms of inquiry, and also where problem situations are encountered. Concerning psychology, Dewey moves beyond James in that he goes to question the existence of a private notion of meaningfulness; he will move on into the realm of social psychology.

In Dewey, more than either James or Peirce, pragmatism as an attitude is best demonstrated; it is an attitude in a perpetual phase of formation—an attitude that never ceases in forming. Movement, or, more appropriately, growth, characterizes attitude and its creation. Dewey also goes beyond Peirce and James in his naturalistic pragmatism. Dewey returns to nature. For Dewey, growth in ideas, methods, habits, and instruments of intelligence is an organic affair. Natural forces from within culture direct the attitude toward how one lives his or her life. Dewey, more than any other pragmatist, effectively presents pragmatism not as a doctrine but as an attitude and approach to living. The shining example of this is when Dewey takes democracy as a way in which one lives his or her life. Throughout this dissertation, the context of Dewey's thought rooted in the tradition of pragmatism must not be overlooked, for it is through this lens that Dewey formulates his educational, social, and political philosophy.

1.4. The Methodological Approach and Conceptual Framework of the Project

The methodological approach I take in this dissertation is a critical one. Dewey made it his business as a philosopher to get rid of dualisms, collapse distinctions, and highlight the importance of seeing the human as organism within nature, that is, seeing that human nature is a part of nature itself. In his writings he is always moving. He is very fond of nouns, gerunds, and prepositions; his style of writing picks up and drops off just like a Jamesian stream of thought. In explaining concepts within Dewey, it is very difficult to hold a constant view of the subject at hand, because, for Dewey, the subject and its relationship to the object were always in flux. Any stable view or position on Dewey's ever-changing views is difficult to attain because there are no real fixed points of reference in Dewey.

With that in mind, any meaningful exploration of Dewey's ideas must be a patient and careful endeavor. Dewey's style of writing is conversational. In this way, reading Dewey requires a constant adjustment by the reader. Dewey takes everyday terms like growth, wonderful, habit, inquiry, and logic and amends them, and in amending them also expands their meaning. So following Dewey down his crooked path of articulation and argumentation itself requires a strong measure of flexibility of mind and plasticity of habit of reading and understanding.

Therefore, the method of approach with respect to my handling Dewey's writings is a pragmatic one. To say of a thinker or writer about what they have written, "I do not understand what he or she is saying," is to say something like, "I am unwilling to adjust or unlearn my intellectual habits so as to better understand what the thinker or writer is

trying to say”—I would be saying that I am unwilling to unlearn. Thus, the important concept of unlearning in Dewey’s own philosophy of education and reconstruction of habit is carried out in application of my methodological approach to understanding Dewey’s philosophy. It is a constant cycle of questioning my own understanding, the habits through which I think I understand, and whether or not Dewey himself understands his own position.

In proceeding with the latter method, what follows is the conceptual framework of this project. Up to this point in the project, the tasks of pointing to why habit, as understood to be an expression of growth, is worthy of attention in the context of Dewey’s cultural project of education and investigating the development of John Dewey’s pragmatic interest in education have been carried out. Additionally, this chapter has provided a brief yet necessary orientation to essential concepts and terminology that will be used throughout this dissertation. Finally, this chapter has served to contextualize the intellectual framework, pragmatism, in which Dewey thought and wrote.²⁵

The proceeding chapter will explore secondary literature that has addressed how other scholars have approached the subject of habit in Dewey’s educational theory. To date, not one single manuscript has been published that concentrates on John Dewey’s conception of habit and the crucial role it plays within his philosophy in general or specifically within his philosophy of education. Only three dissertations have focused on this subject. Thomas Kilbridge at the University of Chicago wrote the first in 1949 while Dewey was still living; Xenia Zeldon at the University of Texas at Austin wrote the second in 1988; and William Brownson wrote the third in 1970 at Stanford University.

²⁵ Throughout the dissertation, the context of the time in which Dewey wrote must be continuously recognized, i.e., there was no distinction between psychology, philosophy, education/pedagogy, sociology, etc., as separate disciplines.

The latter chapter will also deal with other works that make mention of the habit and education connection in the form of both books and journal articles. This study will differ considerably from other studies in showing not only the fundamental role of habit in Dewey's philosophy of education but also in demonstrating how his conception of habit implicates his philosophy of education. This chapter will additionally highlight other works that highlight habit's importance to education, learning, and intelligence in order to show that Dewey was not the only thinker in the twentieth century to recognize the importance of this connection.

The most crucial and foundational chapter of the dissertation will concentrate on explaining the Deweyan conception of the nature of habit. The first portion of this chapter will underscore Dewey's development of the concept of habit through his own writings, for example, *Psychology*, *The School and Society*, *Public and its Problems*, *Human Nature and Conduct*, and various other essays and works. It will be observed that Dewey's conception of habit changed from his early writings to his middle works and was expanded in his later works. The main objective in this section of the dissertation will be to highlight Dewey's pragmatic approach to the topic of habit and to show how and why his approach was different from the other philosophers. In recognition that this chapter could easily constitute a dissertation-long treatment, only the main points from each philosophical period (and representative philosophers) will be traced by way of how Dewey responded to them in his writings.

Also in this chapter of the project (chapter 3), emphasis will be placed on habit formation in immediate experience and explore Dewey's position on key elements of human nature such as desire, impulse, and imitation. After tracking how a habit is

formed in immediate experience, attention will be given to how a habit is transformed or modified. This will be done to demonstrate the transactional role habit plays in the social process of education. In order to fully capture the nature of Dewey's conception of habit, this section will establish the social function and evolving nature of habit formation and transformation, given constant changes in conditions.

Because Dewey's philosophy of education is vast and complicated, the next chapter (chapter 4) will solely be devoted to explaining and clarifying his philosophy of education. This explication will explore key elements in his educational philosophy such as growth, democracy, inquiry, and mediated experience. However, the work will begin by asserting that two contexts of education exist for Dewey: schooling and everyday life. Education, for Dewey, was not just preparation for life; rather, it was "life itself." Schooling, on the other hand, was the deliberate practice of facilitating experiences that would instigate, instill, and promote the cultural project of education that found its aims in cultivating a democratic way of life. The school was the cornerstone institution of inculcating democratic means for continuing to re-create the democratic way of life, mediate experience, and reconstruct habits.

In the next section of chapter 4, the concept of habit will be connected back to growth by treating habit not as an expression of growth, but of habit *as* growth. The section will provide clarification that both good and bad habits exist, as do destructive and constructive directions of growth. The establishment of education (in the context of schooling), for Dewey, was a very important cultural project. After explaining habit's important function within inquiry, experience, communication, intelligence, and thinking,

this section will show that education, as a cultural project, is an ongoing, open-ended endeavor.

This section will conclude by arguing that thinking is the tool for solving human problems and that it is education's job to develop and sharpen this tool through cultivating both students' and teachers' plasticity of habit. For Dewey, teachers have the job of training the plasticity of habit so that growth and the democratic way of life can be achieved and "re-achieved." It is important to note here that if teachers are to be successful in doing this, they must also have a very flexible plasticity of habit. This portion will also argue how and why Dewey's social philosophy needed education, but it will also underscore how education cannot be understood without understanding habit because of its vital role in the formation of the democratic character.

After having explored the complex nature of habit, habits as growth, and the formation of the democratic character, the relationship between habit and the individual within the context of schooling or school community will be cultivated. This section will proceed by investigating the role of both student and teacher. In the setting of school, the learning experience is a transactive process that requires both the teacher and student to adjust to problems of understanding and unlearning and to reconstruct their habits. The ensuing discussion of this process will suggest that learning and development of critical intelligence is a communal effort and that both teacher and student have a shared responsibility in the learning process inside the classroom and in the schoolyard between students and their peers.

In exploring where education and the reconstruction of habits lead, chapter 5 of the project will focus on democracy as a way of life. In this chapter, the intricacies and

complexities involved with democratic ideals, habits, and character will be examined. Beyond this, democracy as a way of life will be clarified with regard to what it requires of individuals, culture, education, institutions, and what implications that will have for custom and habit.

Carrying the notion of implication further, chapter 6 will highlight how Dewey's conception of habit implicates his own philosophy of education and his trust in the experimental method. This chapter will serve to point out areas that are still vague regarding Dewey's position on education and democracy as a way of life. These assertions will lead to a criticism of Dewey concerning whether or not he heeded his own recommendations, question the tenability of the "Great Community," and cross-examine whether any such thing as good habits or ultimate immediacy can truly exist.

In the conclusion of the dissertation (chapter 7), answers to the following questions will be reviewed: What is a habit? Why is habit needed? What habits are most appropriate to human welfare and development of critical intelligence? A review of answers to the latter questions in addition to an explanation of how these answers were developed will be necessary.

The dissertation, in the end, will demonstrate that the constant reconstruction of habits to solve human social problems was a chief component of Dewey's cultural instrumentalism that had as its main vehicle the cultural project of education through schooling. The proposed dissertation will bring to the forefront and address, in a Deweyan framework, the realization that the cultural project of education and the improvement of a cultural instrumentalism have no end beyond themselves because, with the introduction of each generation, democracy must be born afresh, and this constant

improvement is contingent on the plasticity and reconstruction of habits that is fostered within the school. What will be highlighted is that the cultural project of education is open-ended and ongoing because so, too, is experience.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF SECONDARY LITERATURE

Academic scholarship on the topic of habit in John Dewey's philosophy of education and in general is limited. To date, a published manuscript dedicated to the critical examination of Dewey's concept of habit does not exist. Providing hypotheses as to why this is would produce little intellectual profit. The purpose of this chapter is to survey and explore what secondary literature is available that treats the subject of habit in Dewey's philosophy of education and in his overall philosophy.¹

This chapter consists of two sections. The first section deals directly with secondary treatments of Dewey's notion of habit. The first section consists of two subsections that explore both dissertation-length treatments and articles that discuss the subject. The second section points out that habit as a theme has been revived in contemporary context, yet, examination of habit not only within Dewey's philosophy of education but in studying philosophy of education in general is still lacking.

¹ It is important to note that habit's important role in education is no new discovery. Dewey's position on habit's relationship is unique because of the Darwinian and pragmatic approach he takes, but others addressed the connection between habit and education prior to Dewey. Worthy of recognition in the context of prior examples of this are found in the following works: Burns Thomson, *Habit: The Formation of a Virtuous Character* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter, and Co., 1864); Joseph John Murphy, *Habit and Intelligence: A Series of Short Essays on the Laws of Life and Mind* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1979); Paul Radestock, *Habit and Its Importance in Education: An Essay in Pedagogical Psychology*, trans. F. A. Caspari (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1879); Stuart Rowe, *Habit Formation and the Science of Teaching* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909). It is interesting to note that the only dissertation that gives deliberate attention to Darwin and the influence of evolutionary ideas on educational thinking is Paul Radestock's work.

2.1. Secondary Scholarship on Dewey and Habit

Dissertations and articles that address Dewey's conception of habit directly will be examined in this section. In both cases (dissertations and articles) the works are reviewed chronologically. There were some critical responses to Dewey's theory of habit by some of Dewey's colleagues during his life (most notably Gordon Allport), but those critical responses are more in the form of reactions rather than explorations of Dewey's position on habit. Some of these responses will be mentioned throughout the various chapters in this dissertation.

2.2. Dissertations on Dewey and Habit

The earliest dissertation found discussing Dewey's conception of habit is John Thomas Kilbridge's "The Concept of Habit in the Philosophy of John Dewey."² This is the only dissertation dealing with habit at a time in which Dewey was still alive. Kilbridge casts a wide net in his treatment of habit within John Dewey's philosophy. His goal aimed at pointing out the central role habit plays in John Dewey's philosophy generally and what implications habit has for education.³

Kilbridge begins the work by pointing the reader to some challenges in clarifying Dewey's ideas. He astutely points out that Dewey's terminology is "interpenetrating and ever-evolving."⁴ He also points out that Dewey, like Plato and Aristotle, is a holistic philosopher. Because he sets out to deal with the topic of habit in all its complex dimensions within Dewey's philosophy, the chapters are very bold in scope. His

² John Thomas Kilbridge, "The Concept of Habit in the Philosophy of John Dewey" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1949), ProQuest/UMI (AAT-T-00420).

³ Kilbridge calls habit "a root-concept of Dewey's whole philosophy." Ibid., 2.

⁴ Ibid.

treatment lays out four main body chapters. The first is “Habit in Ethics”; the second, “Habit as a Social and Political Factor”; the third, “Habit and Inquiry”; and last, “Habit and Education.” Such an undertaking is ambitious, to say the least. Each one of the chapters truly could constitute a full dissertation in their own right.

In “Habit and Ethics” Kilbridge asks, “Are moral acts, as moral acts, independent of environment?”⁵ He answers his own question in the page that follows by saying no. Kilbridge espouses that Dewey felt habit was central to moral acts and was the chief “principle of unity in all actions.”⁶ He drives home the importance of the organism’s interaction with the environment to the constant development of character and what challenges that might introduce for fixed habits. Conduct is key in this chapter of Kilbridge’s treatment of habit. He picks up one of the first points that Dewey discusses in his famous work *Human Nature and Conduct*, and that is morals. At the beginning of the work (his most concentrated exploration of habit), Dewey makes much of the link between conduct, habits, and morals.⁷ While Kilbridge gives a rich account of habits in ethics, toward the end he begins in the direction of the relationship between habit and right action, but stops short of revealing what constitutes a good or bad habit.

In his effort to maintain continuity between subjects, chapter 2 of Kilbridge’s work deals with “Habit as a Social and Political Factor.” Thus, the notion of conduct and habit are put into political context. One of the richest parts of chapter 2 is when Kilbridge highlights that social and political custom as acting as “moral standards.”⁸ Social and political conduct guided by inherited custom or habit concerns not what happens in social

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷ It is important to note that Kilbridge uses the term *ethics* (or *ethos*) most of the time, whereas Dewey prefers *morals*. Kilbridge uses both terms interchangeably, and some ethicists would take issue with that.

⁸ Kilbridge, *Concept of Habit*, 48.

interaction but also what “ought” to be done in conceptions of future moral acts. In underscoring habit’s importance in the social and political sphere, Kilbridge asserts what this means for democratic habits by saying, “providing the democratic machinery of universal suffrage, free elections and majority rule does not and cannot change the habits of thought and action of those who were long accustomed to living under undemocratic forms.”⁹ By saying that, Kilbridge implies that democracy as a way of life is the way in which it can be realized; however, he does not say this charity should be extended in a close reading of the latter passage.

The start of the third chapter resembles the beginning of a new dissertation. Kilbridge makes the transition from habit in ethics and within social and political aspects of life abrupt by jumping straight into “Habit and Inquiry.” One of the most important clarifications Kilbridge gives of Dewey’s ideas is between inquiry and thought. He points out, correctly, that Dewey often uses the words *thought* and *inquiry* interchangeably. The latter is a very important distinction to make, and Kilbridge does it very well. In “Habit and Inquiry,” Kilbridge actually talks more about the distinction between thought and inquiry than about habit and inquiry. Near the end of the chapter, Kilbridge does delve into Dewey’s imperative that thought attend one’s habits. This is key a point to be made, and Kilbridge makes it. Kilbridge recognizes that, when habits are interrupted, that doubt of future action is inevitably introduced. The extent to which that doubt is explored through deliberation of impulses or thought is pivotal in how any present and future problematic situation will be solved. At the end of the chapter, it is evident that as Kilbridge is examining the nature of thought, he is really taking thought itself to be a

⁹ Ibid., 58.

habit. But the question he leaves to the work of the next chapter is, “How can one change his thoughts?”¹⁰

Kilbridge addresses this question indirectly in the final body chapter, “Habit and Education.” Kilbridge richly observes that “education concerns the possibility of improving the native endowment of the individual, of changing human nature.”¹¹

Kilbridge agrees with Dewey that human nature can change, but should be changing so that it brings about individuals capable of changing their habits from “outmoded ones” to “good ones.” The concern, of course, that Kilbridge overlooks is what constitutes a good habit. Kilbridge rightly points to Dewey’s concern for the education of the young. This is a pivotal time in a human’s development, and any distortion of the young’s ability to change their habits will result in the reproduction of “warped and weak” foundations of conduct both in education and society. Key to aims of education is, of course, growth through rich and expansive experiences. Kilbridge makes much of this toward the end of the chapter and concludes, “Education is nothing but continuous growth; continuity and interaction.”¹² He ties this notion together by asserting that in order to understand and improve the continuity and interaction within educational settings, “the psychology of habit” must be “used.”¹³

Despite the fact that Kilbridge bit off more than he could chew in trying to deal with habit in every nook and cranny of Dewey’s philosophy, his contribution to clarifying Dewey’s ideas on the subject is crucially important. In the academic sense, Kilbridge was the first to deal with Dewey’s concept of habit and to give it a critical treatment. It is

¹⁰ Ibid., 83.

¹¹ Ibid., 85.

¹² Ibid., 102.

¹³ Ibid.

interesting to note that the other dissertations that will be discussed in this section never cite Kilbridge, but then again, the other scholars explored in this section did not have access to the search databases that are currently available. Kilbridge's rich contribution can be summarized by his concluding remarks: "[H]abit for Dewey is a term, descriptive of a certain physiological state of the individual, which is employed dialectically, in conjunction with a host of other terms, to explain events which constitute the whole web of experience."¹⁴

The second dissertation that is found on habit is William Earl Brownson's, "John Dewey's Concept of Habit and the Dynamics of Growth."¹⁵ Brownson provides a deep look into what the concept of habit means in one of the key elements in Dewey's philosophy of education, growth. Like Kilbridge, Brownson holds habit as a critical ingredient in understanding Dewey's educational theory. However, he takes a much more focused approach and winds up having a 292-page dissertation as opposed to Kilbridge's 127-page one. Of course, length should not imply quality necessarily, but one can see how rich the topic is, even when focused on one element in Dewey's philosophy.

Brownson actually expands his scope beyond growth in exploring habit as a "unit" and as a "process" in the context of Dewey's concepts of "experience, continuity, interaction, and growth."¹⁶ He goes on to clarify his conception of the relationship between habit and the four latter terms as follows: first, habit encompasses the "entire scope" of human conduct; second, "habit is an interaction"; third, Dewey's exploration of

¹⁴ Ibid., 127.

¹⁵ William Earl Brownson, "The Concept of Habit and the Dynamics of Growth" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1971), ProQuest/UMI (AAT 7112865). There is actually an earlier dissertation by Felix Junior Francisco, "The Concepts of Instinct, Habit, and Mind in the Educational Philosophies of William James and John Dewey" (PhD diss., University of Missouri, 1957), ProQuest/UMI (AAT 0024200). Unfortunately, after several attempts in contacting the university's library and ProQuest, I was unable to obtain a copy of this dissertation.

¹⁶ Brownson, *John Dewey's Concept of Habit*, 4.

the process through which habits change “captures” his point of how habits provide continuity to conduct; and last, through the process of modification, Dewey’s concept of growth “gains content, form, and detail.”¹⁷

Brownson’s work consists of seven chapters with the aim of capturing and illustrating the habit and growth’s dynamic nature. Brownson’s treatment is more an exploration of Dewey’s concept of growth. With regard to the educative process of growing, his work is richer than Kilbridge’s. He delves deep into why experience is seen by Dewey as a problematic situation and calls attention to what an individual must do in addressing the problematic situation. The need for the reconstruction of experience is very prevalent throughout the work.

One of the most fruitful points of the dissertation is found in his detailed account of how habits *can* change. The key point involved in the process of habit reformation, Brownson points out, is knowledge of oneself. He states, “The problem of growth, of development of strong character, of achieving an integration of the variety and complex of habits which constitute the individual, is dependent upon knowledge of oneself.”¹⁸ He astutely recognizes that controlled behavior comes through a controlled mind and a well-developed sense of self-awareness.¹⁹ He continues to note, again, the interaction that is a key point in his work: “Growth implicates a self in the making. It therefore also implicates a knowing self.”²⁰ “Know thy self” really is paramount in understanding how one is made and how one can be re-made.²¹ This is at the heart of Brownson’s

¹⁷ Ibid., 4–5.

¹⁸ Ibid., 252.

¹⁹ This crucial association is directly in line with Dewey’s thought. Dewey underscores the importance in understanding what is at work in one’s conduct, in *Experience and Nature*, by stating that what is needed is “more adequate control of behavior through knowledge of its mechanism.” LW 1: 324.

²⁰ Brownson, *John Dewey’s Concept of Habit*, 257.

²¹ “Know Thyself” comes to us from the inscription found on Apollo’s Temple at Delphi.

exploration of the dynamics of habit and of growth. His work is pivotal in taking apart habit in its intricacies—examining habit’s nature and how habit is made—and providing insightful suggestions for how habits can be re-formed. The limitation of the study is found in Brownson’s extending his examination to explore growth’s “ideal end” (which is a means and an end for Dewey) in living the democratic way of life; however, as noted in his title, that was not what he set out to do.

The third dissertation that dedicates its purpose to studying Dewey’s concept of habit within education is “Habit as Central and Transactional in John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education,” written by Xenia Valerie Zeldin.²² Zeldin’s examination is a brief one. She sets out in the work to look for what is “integral” to education. She finds this in habit. On the whole, Zeldin presents no new conceptual innovations with regard to habit’s role in Dewey’s educational philosophy and argues that the purpose of the dissertation is to assert habit’s importance in education.

However, her work stands out from the others in what she points to in her title. In stating habit’s “transactional role” in education, she promises to explore deeply the important distinction between an interaction and a transaction. While she does treat Dewey’s complex position on experience, nowhere in the work does she use one of his most important treatises on experience, *Experience and Nature*. Within the latter work, Dewey works out in critical detail the notion of transaction, yet it is not referred to once in the dissertation, nor is it cited in the bibliography.

Zeldin’s contribution is a reminder of the need that self-realization should never be discounted within educational practices by either teacher or student. She states that

²² Xenia Valerie Zeldin, *Habit as Central and Transactional in John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education*, (PhD diss., University of Texas-Austin, 1988), ProQuest/UMI (AAT 8901425).

students must listen to teachers and teachers must listen to students so that it is a reciprocating relationship.²³ In so emphasizing this relationship, Zeldin alludes to the transactional role of habit, but moves onto examination of moral behavior within a classroom setting. While she points out the transactional role of habit, yet does not fully examine the richness, she does present the gap to be filled by future researchers of the topic, and for that we future researchers are indebted to her.

The dissertations examined here present a conceptual unity and consistency in treating habit as a key component in Dewey's overall philosophy and in his philosophy of education. The dissertation that most clearly explicates why this is the case is Brownson's. The consistent gap in each dissertation, however, is found in the authors stopping short of tying in the importance of habit to Dewey's cultural goal of living the democratic way of life. Thus, the task of my dissertation is to take up and address this important element in Dewey's educational philosophy and notion of habit.

2.3. Articles on Dewey and Habit

In following the method of exploring works chronologically, Jim Garrison wrote a very fecund article in 1996 titled "A Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening."²⁴ While the article mainly deals with "democratic listening," Garrison points out that the key to carrying out this task is an individual's ability in "risking and reconstructing social habits in open dialogues across gender, racial, and ethnic differences."²⁵ Garrison goes on to

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Jim Garrison, "A Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening," *Educational Theory* 46 no. 4 (December 1996): 429–51.

²⁵ Ibid., 429.

explore Gadamer's notion of prejudice through use of Dewey's theory of habit as it relates to dialoguing across differences in the widest sense of differences.

The rich donation by Garrison in his article is his position that, through engaging others dialectically, the question of need arises. The primary need is to understand not only what others are saying but also what meaning can be found in the dialectical exchange. At heart, Garrison supports (indirectly) the notion of plasticity of habit, for it is through language that meaningfulness with others can be "created." Through creating meaning in dialogue and adjusting habits accordingly, "a person not only considers another's way of life, but also examines her own position in the openness and light of new questions."²⁶ This is key in making meaning with others different than oneself.

Shannon Sullivan provides another creative application of Dewey's theory of habits in her essay "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change."²⁷ Sullivan brings Dewey's pragmatic approach to habit in union with Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Sullivan's aim in the essay is demonstrating how Dewey's concept of habit "can help us understand gender as a constitutive structure of bodily existence."²⁸ In conjoining Dewey's theory of habits and Butler's position on performativity, Sullivan shows the promise found in "reconfiguring" how gendered bodies have been thought of and suggests that the notion of gender itself can be transformed as it pertains to "rigid binaries" and bodily structures. She goes on to suggest that Deweyan Pragmatism has much insight to offer feminist projects concerned with

²⁶ Ibid., 445.

²⁷ Shannon Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," *Hypatia* 15 no. 1 (Winter 2000): 23–42.

²⁸ Ibid., 23.

gender primarily because it reveals “how current, binary configurations of gender might be undercut and transformed.”²⁹

2.4. Conclusion

As was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, secondary scholarship devoted to the rich topic of habit in Dewey’s overall philosophy and philosophy of education is meager. However, the topic of habit in general has come back onto the contemporary scene in full force.³⁰ Beyond the study of habit in Dewey’s philosophy of education, habit’s central educative importance in the context of Dewey’s notion of the democratic way of life is even more rare. The treatments explored within this chapter serve as an indication that habit needs further investigation not only in Dewey’s philosophy of education, but especially in his cultural and educational experiment of democracy as a way of life. In my dissertation, I hope to address that need.

²⁹ Ibid., 40.

³⁰ Evidence of this is found most recently in Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2012). This work has become a *New York Times* bestseller. In keeping the author’s goal, the work makes no mention of Dewey or James primarily because the work is targeted for wide public consumption. One of the most surprising things about the work is the thin examination of the role of education in carrying out the task of exploring the “power of habit.” Another recent work worth mention is William B. Allen and Carol M. Allen, *Habits of Mind: Fostering Access and Excellence in Higher Education* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003). This work makes mention throughout of Democracy and Education, but does not refer to Dewey.

CHAPTER 3:

DEWEY'S CONCEPTION OF THE NATURE OF HABIT

This chapter will explore John Dewey's conception of the nature of habit. This treatment will cover the formation of habit and the role of impulse within the "precarious event" known as experience. Habit is a by-product of experience; however, experience is problematic for habits because, not only does experience beget habits, experience also interrupts habits through presenting conflicts between new and old impulses. Experience is something that continues to challenge the continuity of one's life (this is why Dewey refers to it as "precarious"). So the interruption never ends because (collectively) experience never ends. With this in mind, the following chapter attempts to answer and clarify the following questions: What is the role of impulse in habit? What is habit? What is the nature of habit? How do habits form, and how can they be modified? Why and how does experience pose a problem to habits? Before getting to these pressing questions, a treatment to demonstrate how Dewey's thought on habit developed (or more appropriately, "grew") is needed.

3.1. Background: Early Dewey on Habit

Habit has a long history. There are phases of John Dewey's intellectual development that must be considered with regard to habit in order to see how his position evolved. The first is his early phase as a thinker and writer whereby he concerned

himself almost exclusively with physiological psychology.¹ The second is his idealist phase, in which Hegel had a profound impact on his thinking. The third is his pragmatic turn that ultimately turned his attention to education, social psychology, politics (to name only a few of his intellectual interests), and eventually to what he called “experimental naturalism.” A critical look at how Dewey thought about habit at each of these stages in his development is needed. It must be understood, though, that this cannot be comprehensive in scope; such an undertaking would necessitate another dissertation-length treatment. To this end, works that discuss habit will be highlighted and evaluated within the context in which Dewey found himself during that particular time.² Just as the environment determines the growth of a tree, so does it for the human organism. The same is specifically true with Dewey; the academic environments he found himself in at various stages in his career profoundly affected his thought and the direction of this research. Through this investigation, Dewey’s ever-evolving ideas on the topic of habit can be traced. This examination will also help discern which works of Dewey’s (especially during his last phase or his pragmatic turn) present his most succinct and lucid ideas on the topic of habit.

One of Dewey’s earliest works is his *Psychology*.³ In this work he states that the habit (in mind and body) is the result of successive association. He goes on to declare that the ending of one action in mind and body is merely the beginning point of another action so that the serial randomness of acts is converted to successive association. Thus, habit is

¹ Dewey’s dissertation that is now lost was titled “Kant’s Psychology.”

² Context always limits universal, and for this reason context and external influence is key in understanding Dewey’s development as a thinker. Dewey said, “The forces that have influenced me have come from persons and from situations more than from books.” LW 5: 155.

³ EW 2: pgs. 3-366.

formed and becomes automatic or mechanical for the sake of economy of function, for example, walking. In his early writings, especially in *Psychology*, the essence of habit for Dewey is without doubt repetition. He gives examples of the muscular adjustments the child must make in getting his or her clothes on, and how such adjustments become automatic through repetition, and therefore the thought of the action becomes unconscious.⁴

With all this, Dewey recognizes that the life of repetition and mechanical activity lacks richness and is one that is not desirable because such a life is not conducive to growth or adaptation.⁵ Dewey claims, “If existence depends upon adjustment to permanent elements, growth depends no less upon right relation to changing factors.”⁶ This statement/thought by Dewey is important because it stays with him in his later writings and actually is expanded. The former quote has a strong Darwinian temper. For the early, middle, and later Dewey, change remains a constant infatuation of his. He believes in *Psychology* that survival has little to do with strength or intellect, and everything to do with one’s ability to adapt to change (which in turn has a lot to do with intellect). Clearly, Darwin had a profound influence on Dewey’s thinking throughout his intellectual life.

Dewey in the early works is influenced strongly by Hegel, which is evident in his many references to the notion of “spirit” and the “will of the soul.” In 1891, three years after writing *Psychology*, Dewey taught a course solely dedicated to Hegel’s work *The*

⁴ John Dewey, *Psychology*, EW 2: 103–5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

Phenomenology of Spirit.⁷ Dewey, at this time, was at the University of Michigan, and that same year, 1891, was also the year that Dewey hired George Herbert Mead.⁸ One of the best examples of the “Hegelian deposit” in Dewey’s thinking can be found in his *Psychology*: “The individual is thus constituted an organic, integral part of the world of nature and of society, and the latter becomes a whole, capable of combined deliberation and action, possessing one will and a common conscience.”⁹ Very clear in this quote is Dewey’s affinity for Hegel’s ideas about the absolute whole as found in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁰ The example of the organism becoming a whole with the world of nature and society signals a key turning point in Dewey’s thinking whereby he attempts, as he states in “An Empirical Survey of Empiricisms,” to put back together that which Kant had taken apart.¹¹

The second piece of writing in which Dewey expounds his thought on habit is his first manuscript, *Leibniz’s New Essays Concerning the Human Understanding*. Evident in his early work on habit is that Dewey was concerned with the function that habit serves. In this work, Dewey mainly deals with Wundt’s ideas on basic physical functions or physiology, habits of the body. He distinguishes between “localization of function” and “organization of function” in relation to the body. He does not associate bodily

⁷ For a recent exploration of Hegel’s lasting “impression” on Dewey, please refer to James Good’s *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The “Permanent Hegelian Deposit” in the Philosophy of John Dewey* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005).

⁸ Dewey said of Mead’s friendship that it was “one of the most precious possessions of [his] life.” LW 6: 22.

⁹ Dewey, *Psychology*, EW 2: 115.

¹⁰ The forceful influence of Hegel remains untold. Dewey states in “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” “There were, however, also ‘subjective’ reasons for the appeal that Hegel’s thought made to me; it supplied a demand for unification that was doubtless an intense emotional craving and yet was a hunger that only an intellectualized subject matter could satisfy.” LW 5: 153.

¹¹ Dewey states, “Immanuel Kant, who was not satisfied until he had separated, if he possibly could, everything that belonged together.” LW 11: 73.

“organization of function” to habit, but rather states that “Localization of function is, in short, only the physiological way of saying habit.”¹² At this point in his thinking, Dewey had not yet separated the ideas of localization and organization. It is evident he had not yet made the pragmatic synthesis or read any William James at this point. But, in Dewey scholarship there is scant mention of how important the influence of Leibniz was on Dewey. Dewey states, “He [Leibniz] already learned to think of the world as organic through and through, and found in the results of the biology confirmations, apt illustrations of a truth of which he was already thoroughly convinced.”¹³ In reading Leibniz, Dewey’s quest for unification was fueled, but he took this further than Leibniz did.

Dewey moved to the University of Chicago in 1894, and eventually arranged for Mead to follow and get an appointment there as well. The Chicago years for Dewey proved to be some of the most formative of his thinking, especially concerning his ideas on education and social psychology.

3.2. Background: Middle Dewey on Habit

One of the most telling indicators of Dewey’s transition into pragmatism, specifically regarding his thoughts on habit, can be seen in the following passage found in his 1897 work, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*.¹⁴ In it, Dewey declares, “It is the essence of habit to be instrumental, a means for accomplishing ends.”¹⁵ It should be noted that place of habit is just as central to Dewey’s ethics as it is to his philosophy of

¹² John Dewey, *Leibniz’s New Essays Concerning the Human Understanding*, EW 1: 277.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁴ John Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, EW 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 313.

education. His ideas and interest in education were growing at a rapid rate at this time. This was just one year after the founding of the Laboratory School at Chicago. The strongest evidence in Dewey's throwing off the yoke of idealist metaphysics is found in the former syllabus. Note the term that Dewey uses in tandem with the word habit, "instrumental." He goes on to use words such as "experimental," "practice," and others. The notion of experimentalism will become key and continue to grow in Dewey's thinking throughout the rest of his life.

Other evidence of Dewey's position changing into the pragmatist camp can be seen in his rejection of the Reflex Arc concept. He gave his position on the "Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology" in 1896.¹⁶ In seeking the unifying element in human conduct, Dewey declares that the Reflex Arc concept made conduct into "a patchwork of disjointed parts, a mechanical construction of unallied processes."¹⁷ The early Dewey of 1887 would have accepted this position. Dewey the pragmatist understood that the previous position on the subject of habit had to be amended, especially in light of the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce and Williams James on the subject; however, Dewey went beyond both of these figures. How he did this will be shown in the following sections of this chapter.

Both Peirce and James had a profound effect on Dewey's thinking. Even though Peirce had been a faculty member at Johns Hopkins University at the time Dewey was a doctoral student, Hegel (by way of George Sylvester Morris) had a stronger influence in his early years. However, the ideas of Peirce concerning belief, habit, and inquiry seem to override any Hegelian influence, at least temporarily, in the late 1890s. Coupled with the

¹⁶ John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," *Psychological Review* 3 (1896): 357–70.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 358.

early influence of Darwin from his encounter at the University of Vermont, Dewey found in Peirce an open-endedness that fueled his intellectual inconsolability. Peirce stated,

And what, then, is belief? It is the demi-cadence which closes a musical phrase in the symphony of our intellectual life. We have seen that it has just three properties: First, it is something that we are aware of; second, it appeases the irritation of doubt; and, third, it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or, say for short, a *habit*.¹⁸

The most important word in this quote is “demi-cadence.” Peirce had a strong command of language that neither James nor Dewey did. A cadence is a closed tonic of a note. In this way, the tone of the note is finished. However, in the case of a demi-cadence, the tonic of the note is never closed and is left open, never finished. In this way, belief acts as a kind of fake death. Fake death in the sense that belief, traditionally thought of, would put an end to inquiry, whereas in reality belief is like a demi-cadence, open, always subject to revision, inquiry, and change. This is huge for Dewey because he will eventually want that “rule for action” or “habit” to be thought of like the Peircean notion of belief, as a demi-cadence, never fully closed.¹⁹

¹⁸ Hartshorne, Charles, Paul Weiss, and Arthur W. Burks, eds. *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce (Electronic Edition)*. 8 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–58. Vols. 1–6 edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 1931–35; vols. 7–8 edited by Arthur W. Burks, 1958. Quote found in volume 5, book 2 (published papers), essay, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” pg. 397.

¹⁹ In speaking of the notion of death in the context of habit, Hegel points out that “it is habit of living which brings on death, or, if quite abstract, is death itself.” The death for Hegel is found in consciousness, i.e., that the habit of living brings about death of consciousness of being a living being in an unending universe. G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 195. In keeping with the death motif, Emerson regarded habit as “corpse memory.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *Essays & Poems* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 265. It could be argued that Dewey is responding to this, as fixity, for him, implies a thing no longer growing, thus, his call for habit to be seen as dynamic.

Likewise, James's influence on Dewey is enormous. Dewey found in James's *Psychology* the appropriate use of terms to move forward. Especially important here is James's *A Talk to Teachers* and the importance of psychology and consciousness to teaching and learning. When referring to the fact that his influences came more from people and personal situations, Dewey states that there is one exception. In his intellectual autobiography, he states, "The third point forms the great exception to what was said about no very fundamental vital influence issuing from books; it concerns the influence of William James. As far as I can discover, one specifiable philosophic factor which entered into my thinking so as to give it a new direction and quality, it is this one."²⁰ More influential in Dewey's thinking than in Jamesian psychology was James's conception of experience.²¹ The idea of experience living on in future experiences had profound residual effects in Dewey's thinking. Specifically concerning the topic of habit, James's conception of habit as the "flywheel of society" is important to note here and will be expounded on later in this chapter. Also in this middle period is when Dewey's interest and passion in combining pragmatism and education were at their strongest, beginning with works like *The School and Society*, *The Child and the Curriculum*, *Democracy and Education*, and *The Educational Situation*.

In going forward, the "later Dewey" will be discussed within the context of the remaining sections of this chapter: "The Role of Impulse," "What is Habit?" "The Nature of Habit," "Habit as Will, Means, and Ends," "The Problem of Experience," and in the conclusion. An important theme that will be present throughout the remainder of this

²⁰ John Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in *Contemporary American Philosophy: Personal Statements*, ed. George P. Dams and Wm. Peperell Montague (New York: Russell and Russell, 1930), 17.

²¹ Specifically powerful examples of this can be found in James's essay on "Pure Experience" and his writing, "Does Consciousness Exist?"

chapter is Dewey's strong accent on the social nature of the human mind and social psychology, for which Dewey owed much to the influence of George Herbert Mead.²²

3.3. The Role of Impulse

One of the most important elements of Dewey's philosophy of habit and human nature (in general) is impulse. He will in certain places in his early writings interchangeably use the word *instinct* with *impulse*. He also does this even in *Human Nature and Conduct*. However when he says "instinct," he really means impulse. Impulses beget habits; without impulses there would be no habit(s).

Dewey owes a great debt to Aristotle in highlighting the important role impulse plays in shaping habit, character, and behavior. Aristotle begins his discussion on the basic endowment of human beings by referring to the human's natural powers. Aristotle's "power" is Dewey's "impulse." While there are many powers, Aristotle divides these into three main bunches: power of sense, power of intellect, and power of mimesis. Living, present, and active within each power is a passion. The passion is built into the power. The passion, just like the power, is in constant motion, never idle. It is an integral part of human nature.²³ Every power has a craving and a direction to be realized through action.

However, the crucial point here is that each power (and built-in passion) must be organized and coordinated if action is to be taken. The form of this structure Aristotle

²² One of Dewey's most pronounced debts to Mead is his notion of a self-reflective intelligence. According to Mead, one only realizes he or she might even have a self when he or she "becomes an object unto himself." It is the socially reflective mind that creates this awareness. Mead states, "The organization of the self is simply the organization, by the individual organism, of the set of attitudes toward its social environment—and toward itself from the standpoint of that environment, or as a functioning element in the process of social experience and behavior constituting that environment—which it is able to take." George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, And Society, from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, vol. 1, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 100, 91.

²³ Aristotle, like Dewey, conceived of nature's chief characteristic as movement and/or growth.

refers to as “hexis” or sometimes translated as a state (which is made up of parts) or “possession.” The word *habit* does not ever appear directly in the ancient Greek language, but the Latin translation of the Greek word *hexis* was a having. This structuring is what Dewey refers to as “habiting.” If *habitus* in Latin means to have, what is to be had is a structure of parts that comprise one’s character. Thus, Dewey (whether he knows it or not) gets his initial conception of impulse and habit from Aristotle’s original understanding of the structuring of the powers in human nature.

A key idea when thinking about impulse or power is the natural endowment of humans to imitate, or, what Aristotle calls, mimesis. For Aristotle, this is one of the most important powers that a human has primarily because of its importance in learning and general survival. This is one of the earliest and basic impulses humans have. The context of the Aristotelian and Deweyan notions of the natural impulse of mimesis is similar. The human’s intellectual craving or desire, specifically the desire to know, feeds the natural power of mimesis.²⁴ To know what is desired and why is a different matter; often times it stems from the basic notion of knowing how to live or survive, and hopefully later will develop into a more sophisticated concern with how to live and survive well.

However, as native as impulse is, it is also imperfect, “chaotic, tumultuous, and confused.”²⁵ It is the first raw response to any stimulus encountered in the outside world.²⁶ Impulse or instinct is a force to be sure, but it is a fluid force. Thus, for Dewey, the term *force* should be understood to be a collective term for impulse. However, he also

²⁴ The use of this concept and further clarification of it must be attributed to David Hume. Hume, in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, underscores the vital importance of “impressions” and how the impressions affect and continue to affect ideas and custom throughout all lived experience.

²⁵ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library Press, 1930), 177. Hereafter, reference to *Human Nature and Conduct* will be denoted by using *HNC*.

²⁶ Dewey states, “Stimulus and response are mechanically linked together in an unbroken chain.” *Ibid.*, 173.

says the same thing for habit, that is, that habit is a force (specifically, “a conservative force”) and experience. So, if the impulses (or instincts) are fluid, they need guidance to do so, but they also need form; they are formless to begin with. Where do they acquire their form and how? For Dewey, they acquire their form just like the tree does, from the environment or, more appropriately, from culture.

Such a position on habits as being the means of intervention beseeches these questions: What intervenes with habits? Is there a filter to the filter, an intervention to that which is intervening? Dewey offers the concept of impulse in regard to the questions presented above, not in the sense of “a filter to the filter,” but rather a point of interference with entrenched modes of conduct, habits. William James described habits as the “fly wheel of society”²⁷; impulse, then, could be identified as the “fly wheel” of habits. Dewey said this of impulses in relation to habit: “Impulses 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.”²⁸ Impulses should be understood here to be a coordination of sensory elements and certain stimuli that engage one’s immediate attention to a particular circumstance or disruption of habitual activities. However, impulses should also be considered a point of conflict, a “deviation,” Dewey says, with any entrenched or rigidly organized habits. These impulses can impede any type of fluidity in carrying out habits.²⁹ Thus, to use a Piercean notion, an impulse can create an “irritation of doubt” in the perception and thought in the forces of habit at work because

²⁷ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1950), 121.

²⁸ Dewey, *HNC*, 98.

²⁹ Harvard Professor Hilary Putnam once pointed out to me at a conference that the James quote that is found over the arch in William James Hall at Harvard reads, “The Community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community.” Both James and Dewey valued the importance (and fragility) of impulse very much.

they are much less prearranged than habits and carry little predictability or anticipatory value. Such interference caused by impulse, in Dewey's line of thinking, will result in the instigation of deliberation regarding new possibilities for future action. So if habits can be dispositions to act, and any disposition be construed as a predisposition, the potential energy of how one is predisposed to respond in certain situations and in certain circumstances has for a moment, be it however brief, become less knowable and thereby less controllable. At this particular moment in time, a certain sensation of malaise may be experienced. Thus, impulses create occasions for deliberation in reconstructing the medium, or if habit is defined as means, means by which all objective conditions are organized and filtered in tending to prearranged demands for action.

Individuals may resist or willfully ignore such occasions because of the personal value and attachment given to certain habits. Deliberation is not an option, because the individual does not make it so on any such occasion. Not to say that the person in observing and experiencing disruption of this type is not deliberating. To be sure, he or she is in deliberation, but in such a way that seeks not to redirect or reorganize any channel of impulses that will lead to the revision of any old habits. To this means, the individual even further ensconces their old and precious habits. In doing so, conduct has ceased being intelligent and becomes unproductive in assisting growth and the educative process in reconstructing and reorganizing habits and experience. Intelligent control of habits can never be achieved in this way. The interpenetration of habit—character—has regressed due to the disequilibrium wrought by impulse. Accordingly, habits and impulses are in constant discord, and impulses are in perpetual competition with other impulses, habits with habits, and old habits with new impulses.

The sifting of impulses received becomes a system of valuation. Habits are then a genus of valuation. Valuation judgments face a person when he or she is dealt unfamiliar or unrecognized impulses that block the action habit. Individuals who choose to not seize the occasion provided by impulses to revise or make more flexible their habits perpetuate society's dangerous surrogate of intelligence, ignorance. Valuations, for Dewey, are activities of wishes. An appropriate discussion of Dewey's theory of valuation and morality in valuations, in a social sense, customs, would require the attention of a book-length treatment; indeed, others have made such attempts in this regard. However, for sake of concision, attention will be redirected to intelligence in conduct.³⁰

Along the idea of discord among impulse and habit, a balance must be achieved. As has already been discerned, when conflicts between impulses and habits, in the way that habits may be barred from action, arise, a command for adjustment appears. Thus, activity stops, and reflection or assessment of the situation is required. Dewey says that one must then deliberate. The individual must then examine and investigate the source of disruption in order to resume activity. However, to what degree or level one carries this investigation out is of one's own volition. One may only engage in a sophomoric rumination of how to resume activity and divorce any specie of thought from the habit being blocked so as to properly deliberate and identify the true locus of interference.

For Dewey, thought in habit is imperative. Not just any thought, but thought that will enhance the meaning about the present condition and situation concerning the intermediate acts or means that are being impeded. Any kind of willful recession of awareness or deliberation shall oblige the individual to be a slave to old ruts. This,

³⁰ A concise treatment of ethics and valuation can be associated here, with George Boas's "Habit, Fact, and Value," *The Journal of Philosophy* 36, no. 19 (September 14, 1939): 523–30, and in James Seth's "Pragmatist and Idealist Ethics," *The Philosophy Review* 32, no. 2 (March 1923): 182–97.

Dewey declares, is a bad habit. Deliberation should produce some form of extrication from old and congealed habits so as to make an intelligent adjustment to any disruption that occurs; without this, the plasticity of impulse and habit, which one must have, says Dewey, cannot be maintained. Dewey states that “[t]hought which does not exist within ordinary habits of action lacks means of execution.”³¹ In short, in this way, habits would lack meaning. Dewey continues by observing that if thought is not a staple fixture in habit, the two things separate into different containers. Thought then becomes a separate habit from habit itself. This habit then becomes isolated from other habits in which thought is a requisite. The operation of habit, here, has become disjointed/divided. To gain meaning about the means of action, habits, thought in habit must be present and active in order to reorganize and restore continuity.

Regarding intelligence in conduct concerning habits, Dewey asserts the end to progress. However, the subject of progress like that of Dewey’s values and morality is vast in its scope and cannot be covered in depth here, but is important to his aim, and thus will be mentioned. Growth to be gained out of intelligent reordering and reconstruction of habits, in Dewey’s view, is the act of growing. For Dewey, growth and growing are the same. They produce progress. Dewey asserts, “Progress is present reconstruction adding fullness and distinctness of meaning, and retrogression is a present slipping away of significance, determinations, and grasp.”³² If progress is not this, Dewey claims, then it is nothing. Dewey gives these insights regarding converting disruption into equilibrium:

The converting is progress, the only progress conceivable or attainable by Man.

Hence every situation has its own measure and quality of progress, and the need

³¹ Dewey, *HNC*, 67.

³² *Ibid.*, 281.

for progress is recurrent, constant. If it is better to travel than to arrive, it is because travelling is a constant arriving, while arrival precludes further travelling is most easily attained by going to sleep or dying.³³

Dewey gives his own imperative in this respect, “[s]o act as to increase the meaning of present experiences.”³⁴ Dewey places his *faith* for this end in the institution of education.

3.4. What is Habit?

Dewey’s answer (and the nature of the answer) to this question changed over the years of his teaching and writing. The most comprehensive statement that Dewey gives on his position regarding habit is found in *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. However, there is a problem with clarifying how Dewey defined habit. The reason for this is because Dewey’s definition of habit always changed. Even more problematic, Dewey, in order to avoid having to stick with a definition, would often use the word *habit* accompanied by the adverb *as*, for example, “habits as . . .” All one needs to do in this case is simply fill in the blank. A famous example is in Dewey’s section in *Democracy and Education* titled “Habits as Expressions of Growth.” The way Dewey uses the word *habit*, then, always makes habit similar to, or kind of like whatever came after the *as*.³⁵ In this way, Dewey’s position is an unfinished one, but Dewey never wanted finality for his position on habit.

³³ Ibid., 282.

³⁴ Ibid., 283.

³⁵ Examples of this can clearly be seen when Dewey in various works mentions habit in the following ways: “Habits as expressions of growth” (*Democracy and Education*), “habits as modifications of Internal and External structures of behavior” (*Logic*), “as a mode of action or activity” and “Habits as social functions” (*Human Nature and Conduct*), and “as a projective unit” and “as virtue and vice” (also *Human Nature and Conduct*).

There are problems in trying to pin down exactly what Dewey meant by habit. One of the first problems is that Dewey's definition of the term is never fixed. Unlike William James, a major influence on Dewey's thinking regarding habit, Dewey characterizes habit not "fixity" (as James does), but rather, he characterizes habits by associating them with terms such as "novelty," "chance," "change." The last term is key here. Dewey does not want to accept that habits are fixed and cannot be changed or are permanent. Dewey wants habits to be open, subject to change, and "experimental." The difficulty with Dewey's position here on habit is understanding exactly what he is talking about. If habit is to be open, then, is he still talking about habit? Are not habits set or fixed?

Dewey does not address the latter questions directly. He goes beyond just mere characterization of habit and recommends that his position be accepted so that the view of habit, in the context of schooling by both teacher and pupil, is an open one where habits are seen as temporary and flexible. In this sense, habits are like hypotheses that are subject to continual revision. And, if that is the case, then, the term *habit* cannot be adequately defined, for the definition of habit should be as temporary (and/or open) as the habit(s) itself. Rather, only the nature of habit can be explored. Any attempt to define what habit is will always result in a futile end. The very idea of habit, then, should be just as open (and temporary) as a habit (both in definition and in practice) itself.

Dewey applies the term *habit* in a very dynamic sense whereby it can be used in many different ways and contexts. A good example of this can be seen when surveying a great variety of functions that the work of habits produce. Some of these are "Inferential conclusions," "dynamic reflection," "perception," "desire," "attitudes," "associations,"

“reasoning and imagining,” “sensitivities,” and “fear and love.”³⁶ At a certain point, one begins to question whether Dewey is applying the term *habit* appropriately, given the diversity of the human functions just listed.

The pressing question(s) here as if to direct it to Mr. Dewey is, “Why even use the term *habit*?” “Of all terms, why *habit*?” Dewey had to use the word *habit* in order to understand what happens to impulses. A difficult question to wrestle with is if he did not use the word *habit*, what other term could he have used? Structure? Form? If he does not have the term, he then makes the human subject an absolute fluidity, just like a river, without ever attaining shape or form while it runs. Dewey gave a clue as to why he used *habit* in *Human Nature and Conduct*. He said,

The word habit may seem twisted somewhat from its customary use when employed as we have been using it. But we need a word to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systemization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for an overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity. Habit in its ordinary usage comes nearer to denoting these facts than any other word.³⁷

However, an even clearer statement regarding habit is the following:

³⁶ Citations in respective order from Dewey’s works: *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 12; *The Public and Its Problems*, 158; *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 143; *The Public and Its Problems*, 158 (again); *Experience and Education*, 26; *On Experience, Nature, and Freedom*, 192; *Human Nature and Conduct*, 177; *Experience and Education*, 26 (again); *Human Nature and Conduct*, 69. There are many more examples such as the ones provided, but they are just too numerous to list.

³⁷ Dewey, *HNC*, 40–41.

What exists in normal behavior-development is thus a circuit of which the earlier or “open” phase is the tension of various elements of organic energy, while the final and “closed” phase is the institution of integrated organism and environment. . . . In the behavior of higher organisms, the close of the circuit is not identical with the state out of which disequilibrium and tension emerged. A certain modification of environment has also occurred, though it may be only a change in the conditions which future change in the organic structures that conditions further behavior. This modification constitutes what is termed habit.³⁸

What is important to take note of in the above passage is Dewey’s emphasis on the organism and its environment. Dewey will not call such a relationship “interactional” but will take it further and deem it “transactional.” In this way of thinking, then, a modification occurs not just in the organism but also in the environment, that is, the organism changes as the environment does. Habit is then a behavioral “circuit” that is not closed, but open, and that affects future conduct. However, Dewey did not realize the importance of the word *habit* alone. He read James’s *Psychology* and agreed with James that habit is the “flywheel of society” but knew that, like any flywheel, it is characterized by its moment of inertia in which any change or disturbance in rotational force will be resisted. In this way, Dewey used the term *habit* because of his agreement with James in its being the “flywheel of society,” but Dewey felt that this “flywheel” could be trained in such a way that is open and not resistant in changes or disruptions to rotational energy or force. If this is the case, though, habit can no longer be called a “flywheel.” What Dewey is fairly successful in doing is keeping the term *habit* under control for use of his own

³⁸ John Dewey, *Logic*, LW 12: 38.

purposes alone. He did this by assigning a new meaning to the term. He wanted the term to become synonymous with change, not with something static.

Dewey's peculiar use of language deserves notice here. Dewey, as well as the other pragmatists Peirce and James, was involved with changing the language he was using while he was using it. The Pragmatists would take terms and assign new meaning to the term. Of course, in so doing, the aim was clearly to eventually change thinking, but they could not do that without first changing the meaning of the terms they used. This is a very tricky thing the pragmatists were involved in; they were trying to change meaning of the language while at the same time using the language. The example of the term *habit* is a good case in point. Dewey clearly wanted to change the way people thought about habit by vying for habit to be associated with change and flexibility, not rigid, deep-grooved ruts.

3.5. The Nature of Habit

Dewey sets out to define habit and its nature in *Human Nature and Conduct*.³⁹ Nonetheless, Dewey in the very early part of the book makes it clear that habits are both “virtues and vices” that incorporate and assimilate objective forces of the outside world. They are constant contributive interactions of “elements” by the composition of individuals with “elements supplied by the out-door world.”⁴⁰ In this way, they are a mixture, or rather, “working adaptations,” of individual elements with environing forces or objective conditions. The force of these objective conditions is paramount in Dewey's

³⁹ G. C. Field, is tough on Dewey in his review of *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, *Mind* 32, no. 125 (January 1923): 79–86. The notion of “parlor game” here is taken from E. H. Carr's position on the idea of counterfactual history.

⁴⁰ John Dewey, *HNC*, 21.

model. Dewey is fervent about the idea that an individual must understand the construction of these conditions, or the objective forces at work, and how they have shaped his or her habits or the extent to which they enter into his or her habits. This is part of the intelligent control of habits. If an individual can understand the forces at work that enter into his or her habits, then one has arrived at the first level of understanding how habits can change or be reconstructed.⁴¹ Dewey states that habits do not change directly; he asserts that this is the work of magic. However, they have the *potential* to change indirectly when and if the conditions out of which they were born can be modified. This modification occurs only in the intelligent evaluation and valuation of objects, “which engage attention and which influence the fulfillment of desires.”⁴²

Throughout the discussion of habits as social functions, Dewey never uses the word permanent in regard to habits, but he does give evidence to suggest that all people are born into the world with one common inheritance, habit. This inheritance is, of course, different with each assortment of environing customs into which an individual is born, but the principle of an individual being born into objective conditions that have been molded by past conditions and habit is inescapable. Thus, Dewey declares, “habits are links in forming the endless chain of humanity. Their significance depends upon the environment inherited from our forerunners, and it is enhanced as we foresee the fruits of our labors in the world in which our successors live.”⁴³

⁴¹ H. S. Thayer has a similar observation in his work, *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 169–87.

⁴² Dewey, *HNC*, 15–21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21.

3.6. Habits as Will, Means, and Ends

Animals and humans alike need habits. Neither human nor animal operates on the basis of primitive impulses. The impulses must be given direction. Building on the last quote in the previous section, the examination of habit goes deeper for Dewey. Dewey exclaims,

All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self in any intelligible sense of the word will, they are will. They form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity.⁴⁴

Habits here incorporate and give direction to purposive activities and prescribe specific entrenched conduct on the social and personal level. Thus, habits in the mind are constant valuations of judgment screening and are channeling impulses in the correct direction so as to produce the most desirable end or outcome. In this way, habits must be understood as means, but a specific kind of means: active means. Dewey continues, “They are active means that project themselves, energetic and dominating ways of acting.”⁴⁵ Dewey explains what he means by this in distinguishing tools, from materials and “means proper.” Potential means only become active or actual means, in the elementary sense, when tools such as a hammer or a saw and board come into conjunction with the eye, arm, and hand in some specific function. The specific function here must be understood to be an active functioning correspondence between “external materials and energies.” To bridle the discussion, these organizations are habits by saying that these means are only

⁴⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

means when “they enter into organization with the things which independently accomplish definite results.”⁴⁶ Such organizations, in form and function, are habits.⁴⁷

In examining habit and its relationship to will, Dewey looks at individual acts independent of the external forces. In an earlier quote, Dewey states that “habits are will.” However, it should be noted that one may want to change his or her habits, but this cannot be achieved by mere power of willing an end. Due to the rigidity of habits in adulthood, the sphere where habits have become entrenched modes of behavior, mining the means by which certain ends come about is crucial in understanding habit’s affiliation with will. Dewey clarifies, “The ‘end’ is merely a series of acts viewed at a remote stage; and a means is merely the series viewed at an earlier one.”⁴⁸ Thus, if ends are defined as a collection of acts at a remote stage, then means are a collection of acts at an earlier stage.

Taken instrumentally, means in and of themselves have ends, each of which are performed at certain early stages. The end is a series of means, and the means are a series of ends. Habits are ends, too. Dewey states, “Means and Ends are two names for the same reality. The terms denote not a division in reality but a distinction in judgment.”⁴⁹ The ends meaning is conceived in the “nature of the means” that are produced from the end. The means must meet or satisfy a specific end in each act in order to continue operation in perpetuating progress in achieving the desired remote end. In this way, means are not just a series of isolated acts, but rather a series of connected intermediary acts. In order to achieve a desired remote end, one must divert all attention away from that remote idea

⁴⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁷ Recall in the previous subsection where Aristotle’s conception of the structure of the powers was covered. Dewey plays with the concept a little likening it to an “organization” or “arrangement.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁹ Dewey, *HNC*, 36.

and focus attention on each intermediate act that will promulgate achievement of that act's end.

In this context, the most important intermediate act is the one presently engaged in so to bring about the next *one*. Dewey supports this by stating that “[t]he first or earliest means is the most important end to discover.”⁵⁰ This self-perpetuating,⁵¹ chronological connected system of means will then lead to the completion of a series of intermediate acts that will allow the remote end to no longer be remote and proceed to be negotiated.⁵²

Habits are the intermediaries, mediums, ends, or filters that intervene with, and often disturb, personal will/desire and the execution of acts that serve need. As such, this filter, habit, is always polluted. It is mixed with experienced sensations and sensory elements from certain experiences.⁵³ The ideas and perceptions of the latter two elements depend heavily on the organization and operation of habits. Dewey exclaims, “Reason pure of all influence from prior habit is a fiction. But pure sensations out of which ideas can be framed apart from habit are equally fictitious.”⁵⁴ The filter of habit will remain contaminated because environments, sensations, and experiences always overlap and shall continue to do so. Thus, the mind is always dependent on habit, and habit is dependent on objective forces that individuals come into contact with in external affairs.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Dewey asserts in *HNC*, “Habits once formed perpetuate themselves by acting unremittingly upon the native stock of activities. They stimulate, inhibit, intensify, weaken, select, concentrate and organize the latter into their own likeness. They create out of the formless void of impulses a world made in their own image.” P. 125.

⁵² A good resource regarding an in-depth treatment of Dewey’s conception of ends and means can be located in Aldo Visalbergh’s “Remarks on Dewey’s Conception of End and Means,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 50, no. 25 (December 3, 1953): 737–53.

⁵³ This line of thinking is very close to Hume’s, as found in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* on the section devoted to “impressions and ideas.”

⁵⁴ Dewey, *HNC*, 31.

Habit is then the filter by which these objective forces are perceived and thought of and how they commensurately are adapted to or resisted. In this way, habit indeed is a structure; however, it is a structure (or structures) that will continuously be subjected to disruption by the constant flow of experience. Dewey wanted desperately for habit to become synonymous with a temporary arrangement of ways of behaving, though this can only be if one has the plasticity to withstand the change in structure, and the challenge and training of this plasticity takes place in experience.⁵⁵

Changing or modifying habit is a complex endeavor. Earlier it was stated that only through changes in the environment could any revision in habit come about. However, another important point is that when and if one habit changes, then all potentially habits change. For a naturalistic approach to the topic of habit, it could not be otherwise. In this way, any change in habit (or habits) must come through the reconstruction of experience. This discussion will be expanded in the subsection on the problem of experience.

3.7. The Problem of Experience

Experience might be the most difficult concept that one can think about and attempt to understand; however, it is at the heart of pragmatism.⁵⁶ The term *experience* is

⁵⁵ If one looks hard enough, the notion of plasticity can also be found in Hegel. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon 1971), 143. The Hegelian idea of plasticity is broadened and carefully examined by Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth Doring (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁵⁶ William James recognized that “experience” was a double-barreled word in that it not only denotes the perception of the facts of existence but also includes the affective association of humans with such facts. This points then to the question of whether facts are facts at all or are instead values. William James, “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” in *Writings 1902–1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1145. Dewey expands this further in *Experience and Nature* by stating, “It is double-barrelled in that it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality.” LW 1: 18.

nothing new; however, what was new was the way in which Peirce, James, and Dewey talked about experience and what they did to recast the meaning of experience. The British empiricists' influence is important here. Dewey's essay titled "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism" is fraught with casual yet direct responses to Hume. It should be noted that in no way is this subsection on experience aimed at giving a thoroughgoing account of Dewey's philosophy of experience. Rather, it aims to show how experience affects habits and vice versa. For Dewey, *experience* is the most comprehensive term. Without experience, there would be no habits. However, before proceeding with this, an explanation as to the nature of experience is needed.

"The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism" essentially states that one cannot experience not-reality. Everyone has experience, but the crucial distinction to be made is between existence and an Aristotelian term Dewey uses (but gives new meaning), *essence*. Dewey, in talking of essence or "essences," does not mean the same thing as Aristotle does. Essence for Dewey is the product of one's inquiries. The bridge between essence and existence is language. Existence is reality as we find it. Dewey says in his *Logic*, the situation is the only thing that is given; data and the rest are taken. Essence is not a higher reality or more real than other realities, but it is the shape, the form or essence of the "idos" of the reality conducive to our desires, interests, and purposes. Between essence and experience there needs to be a distinction because essence is the form of existence that we want (or have had in past experiences and wish to have in future ones). The form is a critical thing here. The form in this Deweyan context should not be thought of as a Platonic form in that it is somehow outside of reality or space or time. In Dewey's thought, what is important about form is what we make of existence

and past (and future) experiences. This is the creative component in Deweyan pragmatism.⁵⁷

Thus, experience is a give and take. Experience is problematic because it is through experience that problems arise. Problems require response and adjustment. You influence your environment, but your environment also influences you. You change your environment, but by changing the environment you are changing yourself. It could be justifiably argued that experience is not problematic; rather, the adjustment to a given experience is the problem. While at first glance this seems logical to pursue, it must be considered just how the adjustment was introduced. The answer to that is through experience. Without experience, there would be no need for adjustment. Does one cease to experience when adjusting, or is not adjustment also an experience? The adjustment is the response to an experience, but also adjustment is an experience. So, there is indeed a problem with adjustment, but the problem is presented through experience, and for this reason experience is problematic. Problems of experience and adjustment cease in death, but as long as one lives, there will be problems of experience that call for adjustment, which is another problematic but also another experience.

Why is adjustment a problem? This is where habit comes in. It is easier to address the problem of adjustment rather than the problem of experience at large because experience always overflows any meaning given. It is as though the meaning is a bucket, and the person goes down to the William James stream of experience and dipped the bucket into the water only to find that, after examining or talking about what is in the bucket, the stream continues to rush on without pause of any kind. Of course, this

⁵⁷ As mentioned earlier and seen here, a key element in Dewey's philosophy, not just of experience and habit, but as a whole, is the profound influence of Charles Darwin on Dewey's thinking. Receptivity to change and use of dynamic terms and ideas is key in Dewey's thought on habit.

example is indicative of any academic discipline (to some extent) whereby what is being missed is the stream of experience while the meaning (or the bucket) is being examined.⁵⁸ After what is in the bucket is examined and poured back into the stream, usually we find that the water, or whatever was in the bucket, is just old water and has lost meaning because of the constant pace of experience. While language mediates experience, experience itself is more consummatory and immediate.

The problem of adjustment is a problem associated with the habits of thoughts and actions already acquired in experience. If habit is indeed a social function and constitutes an embodied, acquired disposition to act, and if every disposition is really a predisposition, experience challenges habit's structure because it calls for adjustment, and adjusting a habit is not always easy or simple. The acquisition of a habit is an extremely complicated and ongoing concept. When acquiring a disposition (or forming habits) one also acquires the values the disposition holds and the disposition before it held.

Thus, in acquiring a disposition, one also adopts and inherits a system of valuing and organizing ideas. Acquiring seems to trivialize what actually happens in the process of habit formation. A key point to understand in this "acquiring" is *mimesis*, or imitation; that is, acquisition occurs through mimesis. This is built into culture or experience at large. Mimesis occurs in the early stages of life but never ends. But the challenging discernment to make is what patterns of conduct and thought are best and worthy of imitation. The most basic habits that humans form early on in life are the habits of

⁵⁸ Dewey was openly very concerned with the specialization of academic disciplines. He states, "Much that passes for thinking is nothing more than technical manipulation: it results in specialized *habits* of thought, which is why they may be effective in limited fields, do not apply to larger problems and issues of life." "Making Education a Student Affair," MW 15: 199. In another essay titled "The Liberal College and Its Enemies," Dewey exclaims, "Genuine intellectual activity occurs in closets rather than on house tops. But academic closets are pretty highly specialized and departmentalized affairs. Specialism is the vogue of the day in scholarship. While some degree of specialism is indispensable, in excess it contributes to the decline of liberality of mind." MW 15: 208.

survival, such as eating, drinking, acting, and so on. So, within experience, survival is paramount, but later one will be concerned with how to survive well and, eventually, best. These are more refined selections that humans take from culture.⁵⁹

Within each predisposition (acquired and assimilated into one's own character) is contained a specific moral content for human conduct. When acquiring a disposition, one acquires others' already acquired dispositions. Dispositions, then, are a collection of arrangement of certain values, and the cycle of acquiring values, dispositions, or forming habits (or structuring impulses) never ends, and that which we form or acquire is never our own and is always (now and forever) the working adaptations of others' predispositions to act.

The conduct that derives from such a contaminated system/filter of valuation will always carry with it a certain moral content that is either good or bad. One will always have character, but what kind of character? The dispositions we adopt are like the character of the democratic man for Plato. The latter character is comprised of the marketplace of constitutions.⁶⁰ In this way, any disposition, for Dewey, represents and reflects the marketplace of dispositions. With each disposition we acquire we adopt/adapt, inherit a new agora of values and system of evaluation. In this way, we can never be original or authentic, but also we also cannot be autonomous. Accompanying the acquisition of habits and dispositions also are essences of present existence and future experiences. Thus, the problem of adjustment goes deeper than the problem of readapting

⁵⁹ It is important to note here that in a letter to a friend, Dewey once stated that, in reflecting on his work *Experience and Nature*, he should not have used the word *experience* and should have used the word *culture*.

⁶⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 228–31 (557d–561).

or reconfiguring habits; it goes back to the initial problem of experience, specifically the difficulty of recasting essences of existence.

In this way, experience continually challenges the validity of one's habits because experience is always changing, but habits resist change and adjustment. Experience interrupts habits; it criticizes. Examining ways of thinking is difficult because the force of habit and experience is so strong that the way in which thinking is carried continues to distort what one thinks he or she should be thinking about. Thinking is, indeed, a habitual activity, but changing what one thinks about is extremely difficult. Families, social influences, and political institutions all hinder the investigation of habits of thought. What one thinks about is one's choice to a degree, but to another degree it is not. Hans Georg Gadamer states, "Culture has us before we have it."⁶¹ Experience can be blinding to the examination of patterns of thought, but it also can be extremely freeing and rich.

While experience is problematic, it should not be taken negatively. Indeed, experience is a good problem to have, given the alternative. Dewey felt that the interruption of habits was a good thing, a necessary occurrence to support and expand growth. Experience (and nature) is characterized by growth and motion, and Dewey's recommendation is that, as experience grows and is enriched, our intelligence and habits grow with it. For Dewey, a problem is an opportunity to sharpen intelligent response to any given situation. However, in order to solve a problem or state what the problem is, a method is needed. This is where the power of intelligence has its full promise. A problem well stated or identified is half solved in Dewey's thinking, but this cannot happen

⁶¹ Jim Garrison in his article on "Democratic Listening" quotes this statement, asserting that it is Gadamer's idea. I disagree and posit this idea came from Hegel from whom Gadamer read and gleaned much of his philosophy culture.

without method. But, because experience is ever changing, so are the problems presented in experience ever changing.

The adjustment should be taken here to be the reconstruction of experience, which promulgates revision in habits. Recall that when and if a habit changes, it is all habits that have to be revised to some degree because the “one” is interconnected to the greater “whole.” Thus, the educative experience (especially that found or that which should be found according to Dewey in school) should call into question the critique of experience. Without criticism, adjustment or experience cannot be carried out. Dewey, in one of his most powerful yet mystical statements on examining and revising habits, states,

We cannot permanently divest ourselves of the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our own time and place. But intelligent furthering of culture demands that we take some of them off, that we inspect them critically to see what they are made of and what wearing them does to us.⁶²

Dewey brings about an idea that seldom is considered. We neither inspect our clothes (their stitching, fabric, etc.) nor our habits to investigate how they are made or what they are made of. They (habits and clothes) are part of our everyday life, but when we put them on they shape themselves to our body, and our body shapes to them. This is key to understanding the nature of habit.⁶³ It is the trans-active force of experience and constant adaptation and re-adaptation of values and attitudes that gives new opportunities to create meaning. There is a key element in the notion of the transaction here that is often missed—that it is self-critical.

⁶² Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, LW 1: 40.

⁶³ It should be pointed out that the connection of clothing to habit is nothing new; in fact, a nun’s clothing is actually called “habit.” For an extremely rich history of the concept of habit in connection with the clothing of nuns, see Elizabeth Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (New York: Doubleday Books, 2005). Of particular interest in that book are the first two chapters, “Enigma” and “Tradition.”

There has to be critical awareness and thinking along the pragmatist lines in order to understand the continuously changing problems that must be addressed by the continual adjustment of method and methods. One cannot just use one method that has been historically useful at certain points or a point to employ it again despite the radical changes in the problems. The problem of experience is a good problem, but the responses (and adjustments or reconstruction of experience) to the good problem can be destructive and can severely limit future experience depending on the set of habits the agent has acquired through experience.

3.8. Conclusion

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, habit (for Dewey) was an un-definable concept; however, an orientation to its nature can be given. Dewey would want to remind the reader, though, that this nature, if it is a nature, should change and take on new characteristics as time progresses. In the present chapter, it is clear that Dewey wants habits to remain open, not fixed, and plastic, so that the recasting of habits can be achieved with a high degree of efficiency. The methods of thought associated with habit and experience should remain open as well. In being widely known as the “philosopher of method,” Dewey hopes that like habit, the scientific method will also be open. However, all this concerning the nature of habit, having a plasticity of habit, surviving well, and solving problems in experience presupposes that the organism has been adequately trained in how to carry out such inquiries and take the appropriate selections from culture. One of the main conditions that must exist is freedom. This is democracy’s

greatest good.⁶⁴ But how can freedom be achieved with the advent of engrained custom of institutions, especially the particular institution Dewey found most promise in, the school?

What Dewey proposes in his thinking on human nature is that human nature, when “cultivated” through proper education, can change. One of the chief difficulties with teaching or educating is transmitting the values gained through lived experience to those who do not yet have such a fund of experience from which to pull. This principle is especially true when discussing a specific type of experience, schooling. It is this institution (the school) that is in the most precious position to positively affect the training of the intellectual impulses that thereby lead to the plasticity of habit that is required in reconstructing experience, changing human nature, and developing the best form of democratic character.

⁶⁴ In Plato’s *Republic*, Glaucon asks Socrates, “What do you think defines it [Democracy] as good?” Socrates replies, “Freedom: Surely you’d hear a democratic city say that this is the finest thing it has, so that as a result it is the only city worth living in for someone who is by nature free.” P. 232.

CHAPTER 4:
HABIT AND EDUCATION

This chapter will focus on clarifying Dewey's philosophy of education, explaining how habit lives and operates within a major dimension of Dewey's philosophy of education (growth), and distinguish between education and schooling. The chapter will also show how the constant reconstruction of habits demands perpetual unlearning, changing human nature, and, in conclusion, it will highlight how the cultivation of the plasticity of habit in education (through schooling) is essential to the growth of the democratic character and to sustaining the democratic way of life.

Dewey understood and treated the concept of education very broadly. To treat the topic of Dewey's concept of education in the broad sense would result in a multi-volume work. However, Dewey did distinguish between comprehensive education (or life) and schooling or formal education. In this way, we have informal and formal education.¹ In both cases of education (informal and formal), habit is present and operative. Education conceived in either context is not a terminus. Education in this way is a constant forming and reforming of habits. Before proceeding, a justification of the context of the educational setting is first needed.

¹ Dewey alludes in *Democracy and Education* to the fact that social change can only come about by education in the formal sense. He declares, "We are thus led to distinguish, within the broad educational process which we have so far been considering, a more formal kind of education—that of direct tuition and schooling." LW 9: 8.

In Dewey's thinking, context always limits any universal an agent creates, and universals, for Dewey, are products of our inquiry, so they are created. Any universal is always bound by the context. This is very important in understanding Dewey, yet both universalism and contextualism belong together. One cannot exist without the other.

What holds true in one context may not hold true in another one. Dewey states,

Habits of speech, including syntax and vocabulary, and modes of interpretation have been formed in the face of inclusive and defining situations of context. . . .

We are not explicitly aware of the role of context just because our every utterance is so saturated with it that it forms the significance of what we say and hear. . . .

Now thought lives, moves, and has its being in and through symbols, and, therefore, depends for meaning upon context as do the symbols. . . . I should venture to assert that the most pervasive fallacy of philosophic thinking goes back to neglect of context.²

Context always determines the meaning of *any* experience. Habits are also contextual. The neglect of context is the besetting fallacy of philosophy, but more widely, the meaning of any given (or taken) experience. This insistence from Dewey to be hyper-aware of context cannot be overstated. It must be noted, though, that even the school, while it is a context unto itself, is also a part of a larger context, society. The school's context is society; one cannot exist without the other. School cannot escape the context in which it appears and functions. Without society, there would be no school. So with the focus of the treatment in this chapter being education in the context of schooling, it would

² Dewey, "Context and Thought," LW 6: 4–5.

be a “pervasive fallacy” to neglect the recognition of what society does to the school (and its members) and how the school affects the habits of society at large.

4.1. Education and Schooling: A Crucial Distinction

Dewey often says *education* when he means *schooling* and *schooling* when he means *education*. Education and schooling are not different, per se, but they do require distinction. It is only good Deweyan practice to discern the context between the two. Education in a very broad sense equates to the transmission of cultural values, ideals, *custom*, and traditions from generation to generation. All experience is educative, and all humans are educable (to varying degrees). Dewey confirms education’s importance by saying, “Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. . . . Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life.”³

Transmission occurs through communication.

Education comes about by living, speaking, communing, and interacting with other living beings within nature. Education always has a context; in the broad sense, that context is nature. Informal education here is “incidental,” something that occurs through casual association between an organism and its environment. However, “the express reason of the association,” here, is not the cultivation of critical intelligence.⁴

Formal education (or schooling) is another matter.⁵ The context of education being examined here is carried out because it is in a school where the training of intellectual habits are made deliberate and where the focus is centered on the human as

³ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 5.

⁴ Ibid, MW 9: 9.

⁵ Dewey speaks of informal and formal education by sometimes employing the terms “incidental” and “intentional.”

the object of learning. The school for Dewey is essential and is the chief vehicle through which cultural amelioration can be realized and cultivated.⁶ Dewey notes that the school is, indeed, a peculiar social institution within the fabric of society. Through its “pattern of organization,” it is a social institution sharply “marked off” more so than any other in society.⁷

There is no question that education (in everyday life) will take place and learning will occur as long as one lives, but how it is directed, nurtured, and guided (especially in an institutional setting) is of critical importance to Dewey, and, subsequently, that is why the organization and contents taught in schools were of dire concern to him. Perhaps more important are the points of what is being learned and what disposition or attitudes are being cultivated. School is more than preparation for life as a social being.⁸ It is training the plasticity of habit so as to make conscious and meaningful present lived experience. But Dewey’s concern early on, most notable in *The School and Society*, was what was taught in school was in no way related to everyday social life. Where school becomes disconnected to everyday life, schooling loses not only its meaning but also its context.

Because the wider society dictates the content and structure of schools, schooling for Dewey is a cultural project. In the synergistic view of educational contexts, the “incidental” and the “intentional” should always bear on each other whereby the “intentional” prepares the pupil for the enrichment of life in the “incidental,” that is, that

⁶ In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey emphasizes the school’s crucial role: “Without such formal education, it is not possible to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society.” MW 9: 11.

⁷ Dewey, “Traditional vs. Progressive Education,” LW 13: 5.

⁸ To put to rest a long-held myth, Dewey never said in any text he wrote, “Education is not preparation for life, but is life itself.” This quote cannot and will not be found in any Dewey text. He says similar things, but never that exact quote.

each works in harmony so that the “social continuity of life” is continually improved. Furthermore, the duality of school and society is a problem that continues to challenge and disturb the continuity of the social life. Dewey felt that the dualism of school and society should be collapsed, but the distinction between the two settings is worth acknowledging.

4.2. Habit and Growth

Dewey had an extremely elaborate philosophy of education that has been the focus of thousands of books. The chief concepts in his philosophy of education are growth, intelligence, inquiry, experience, and democracy. One conceptual dimension that carries more weight and meaning than any other in his philosophy of education and that is a vital naturalistic element of connection is “growth.” Dewey asserts in *Democracy and Education* that, “Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself. The criterion of the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact.”⁹

Some feel that the notion of growth in Dewey’s philosophy of education is an incomprehensible concept in Dewey. If this is the case, also incomprehensible is education. However, the concept of growth must be understood not as an end in itself (or goal) but as a naturalized end. Growth is nothing outside of nature for Dewey. Growth is a part of life. Education (in the wide sense) is essential to this process, but so is education in the school setting because the type of habits trained and tempered in the school will always be present after schooling is finished.

⁹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 58.

Orientation to his philosophy of education can best be gained through connecting the dynamic term *growth* to each of the major concepts in his educational theory. Further, by seeing how habits affect growth, his philosophy of education can be even better understood. Growth is not something that has happened, or to be hoped for, but is something that is “happening”; it is presently active even as I write this sentence. It has no telos beyond itself in that it can be expanded to mean growing the enrichment of present experience. It could be argued that education and growth could be used interchangeably. Also, at no particular point should growth become specific or definable. In fact, if there is anything that should be growing it should be the definition of growth itself.

Two questions must be answered: What is growing through schooling? and What is growing through education in everyday life? Ideally, for Dewey, in school, inquiry is growing, experience is growing, habits are growing, character is growing, democracy is growing, intelligence is growing, conception of growth is growing, the reconstruction of experience is growing, the plasticity of habit is growing—*everything* is growing. The answer to the question, “What is growing through education in everyday life?” is no different from the one just given. To what extent and direction each of the latter concepts and naturalized ends grow depends on the habits acquired through schooling and everyday life.

Education has conceptual relatives that can serve as being interchangeable, for example, democracy, growth, and so on. However, growth has one more equivalent in Dewey’s philosophy of education, and that is reconstruction of experience. Dewey states, “In its contrast with the ideas both of unfolding of latent powers from within and of

formation from without . . . the ideal of growth results in the conception that education is a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience.”¹⁰ Habits directly affect growth. Furthermore, Dewey recognizes in *Democracy and Education* that habits are “expressions of growth.” Growth can be hindered or arrested by the sedimentation of habits or be propelled forward toward infinite richness (and expansion) through a high level of plasticity of habit. It is only through the flexibility or plasticity of habit that growth, in the genuine Deweyan sense, can occur and continue growing.

4.3. Democracy as Education

In Dewey’s educational philosophy, Democracy and education belong together. In going further, neither concept, in the Deweyan sense, can exist without the other. In referring to *Democracy and Education* (one of his most famous works), Dewey states that most of his philosophy could be found there.¹¹ Education and democracy are both *means* through which we keep ourselves open to present and future enrichment of experience. Depending on the context, democracy, education, and growth (in Dewey) can be used interchangeably. Each concept is part and parcel to the other.

Dewey states, “Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.”¹² Taking this notion further, then, democracy is characterized by constant change with each new generation. However, this presupposes the fact that the old generations have imparted or transmitted the appropriate set of intellectual habits to the new generations so that not only democracy can be born anew, but, preceding that,

¹⁰ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 11.

¹¹ Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” in *Contemporary American Philosophy: Personal Statements*, 2 vols., ed. George P. Adams and Wm. Pepperell Montague (New York: Russell and Russell, 1930), 32.

¹² Dewey, “The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy,” MW 10: 139.

education has been born anew. The reconstruction of education must take place prior to the democracy's new birth. The way in which democracy is made new is through education, but education (by way of reconstruction of experience and therefore habits in schooling) must be revised first.¹³

In so far as democracy and education belong together and in certain contexts can be understood interchangeably, democracy, as Dewey conceives it, does pose a challenge to education. He states, "In the fact that Democracy in order to live must change and move, we have, I think, the challenge that democracy offers to education."¹⁴ In the way that no form of life or anything that is living is static and is characterized by motion and growth, democracy is a living thing. However, of chief concern to Dewey is how to keep democracy a living, "growing" thing. More specifically, in what way(s) is democracy growing? Dewey asserts that anything living, "either goes forward or it goes backward, and the end of the backward road is death. Democracy as a form of life cannot stand still. It, too, if it is to live, must go forward to meet the changes that are here and that are coming. If it does not go forward, if it tries to stand still, it is already starting on the backward road that leads to extinction."¹⁵

Schools are indeed crucial here. Dewey underscores the importance of schools by stating,

¹³ Excellent articles to refer to that explore the deep intricacies within the notion of democracy as education or democracy for education can be found in Thomas Alexander's "Educating the Democratic Heart: Pluralism, Traditions and the Humanities," and J. E. Tiles's "Education for Democracy." Both are book chapters found in Jim Garrison, ed., *The New Scholarship on Dewey* (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995). Another key work in dealing with Deweyan democracy and its intimacy with educational reform is Jim Garrison, ed., *Reconstructing Democracy, Recontextualizing Dewey: Pragmatism and Interactive Constructivism in the Twenty First Century* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008). Of specific interest in the context of this particular work by Garrison is the last chapter of the latter work, titled "Deep Democracy."

¹⁴ Dewey, "The Challenge of Democracy to Education," LW 11: 182.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Just as democracy in order to live must move and move forward, so school in a democracy cannot stand still, cannot be satisfied and complacent with what has been accomplished, but must be willing to undertake whatever reorganization of studies, of methods of teaching, of administration, including that larger organization which concerns the relation of pupils and teacher to each other, and to the life of the community.¹⁶

The schools are responsible for guiding the understanding of cultural forces at work and the commensurate direction these forces are aimed at. Understanding here is not the same thing as knowledge. Understanding, in this context, should be taken to be a continual development, whereas knowledge could be taken to mean “information.” Information could be understood to be static by nature. Therefore, understanding of the information (or knowledge) is the conceptual achievement through which an “intelligent attitude of mind” can be developed, not by mere information alone. Information is one thing; doing something with the information is another. This intelligent conduct or action is at the heart of democracy for Dewey.

Thus, democracy is to education as education is to democracy. What does democracy, in the pure Deweyan sense, provide to the institutionalized education that is so valuable? Freedom.¹⁷ Freedom is precious for Dewey, especially as it relates to democracy and education. It is the necessary condition that must exist in order that democracy by way of education continues to grow. This is radical, however. Dewey

¹⁶ Ibid., 183.

¹⁷ Plato recognized this 2,500 years ago in *The Republic*. In the dialogue, Socrates and Glaucon assert, “And isn’t Democracy’s insatiable desire for what it defines as the good also what destroys it? What do you think it defines as the good? Freedom: Surely you’d hear a democratic city say that this is the finest thing it has, so that as a result it is the only city worth living in for someone who is by nature free.” Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 562, b,c.

declares that “the idea of freedom is so intimately connected with the very idea of democratic institutions. . . . Consequently, freedom is an eternal goal and has to be forever struggled for and won anew. It does not automatically perpetuate itself and, unless it is continually re-won in new effort against new foes, it is lost.”¹⁸

It is imperative here for Dewey to not only re-win freedom (and maintain it), but also to use the freedom in the appropriate way. This is radical. Dewey recognizes that “[t]he end of democracy is a radical end. For it is an end that has not been adequately realized in any country at any time. It is radical because it requires great change in existing social institutions, economic, legal and cultural.”¹⁹ Of course, specifically with regard to social institutions, Dewey had in mind schools. Thus, a strong measure of liberalism (not of the classical sort) must be realized and cultivated.

The re-winning of freedom hooks directly up to the perpetual rebirth of democracy and of education. Because of this, the school as local community becomes chief agency through which this can be achieved and promoted; however, there must be freedom and liberalism in the schools and in education, in general. If education is to be democratic and democracy is to be educative, free thought and inquiry are vital prerequisite conditions for democratic growth and realization of human potential.²⁰ Thus, with democracy comes responsibility, a great responsibility, and with this great responsibility comes the need for being prepared to handle the perpetual renewal of

¹⁸ Dewey, “Freedom,” LW 11:247.

¹⁹ Dewey, “Democracy is Radical,” LW 11: 298.

²⁰ This notion is at the heart of Larry Hickman’s (ed.) *John Dewey: Between Pragmatism and Constructivism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009). Of particular interest to the context mentioned in this section is Jim Garrison’s essay found in the volume, “Dewey’s Constructivism: From the Reflex Arc Concept to social Constructivism,” and the documented email exchange at the end of the work.

democratic experiment through the ongoing reformation of habit. To be sure, Dewey wants growth, but specifically democratic growth.

4.4. Learning as Unlearning

There is a common phrase, “plasticity of habit,” that is used by Dewey scholars and has been referred to throughout this dissertation that needs clarification. This phrase is of particular import when referring to Dewey’s philosophy of education. What does it mean to have a plasticity of habit? Dewey never gives a full account or expansive explanation of what he means by plasticity of habit, but he does provide some clues. At first thought, one might surmise that such a phrase refers to one having a flexibility of mind that is perpetually open to change and revision. I argue that what is meant by plasticity of habit goes much deeper than *having* a flexibility of mind. The property of plasticity will vary by degree from object to object and from subject to subject. In the case of the present section, the context of both schooling and everyday life will be taken into consideration in relation to plasticity and the notion of unlearning.

There’s no doubt that Dewey’s understanding of the plasticity of habit is intimately connected to the concept of learning, but it is even more deeply connected with the concept of unlearning. “Plasticity” does not merely refer to the ability of any one thing to continue to grow and expand, but extends to include reflective contractions of self, that is, of having the ability to reexamine and evaluate the resources and equipment of our own thinking. Dewey states that, “[w]ithout it [plasticity], the acquisition of habits is impossible.”²¹ Furthermore, also without it, the reconstruction of those acquired habits

²¹ Dewey clarifies further what he means by plasticity by stating that it “is something quite different from the plasticity of puddy or wax. It is not a capacity to take on change of form in accord with external

is also impossible. Unlearning involves reexamination of values, reconstruction of experience, adjustment, self-criticism and criticism in general, and subjecting one's own *self* to discussion and scrutiny.

For Dewey, plasticity of habit is another way of saying that one has the ability to unlearn that which he or she has learned and to reconstruct experience. In this way, plasticity of habit for Dewey is a power. It is an extremely important power—the power to be self-critical and self-corrective. This power is one that should always be nurtured and cultivated in everyday life but also in school (by student, teacher, administrator).

Learning, for Dewey, involves constantly constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing the meaning of present experience. Construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction, for Dewey, belong to each other just as learning, unlearning, and relearning do; they are different names for the same thing. However, the one part of the cycle that is often discomfoting to work through and think about is the deconstructive part or the unlearning.²² It is difficult to achieve a balance, but Dewey felt it necessary, that is, he aimed to be constructively deconstructive and deconstructively constructive. Usually any prospect involving one delving into the depths and contents of his or her character is unappetizing because, not only does this call into question one's knowledge self and world, but, on a deeper level, it criticizes one's identity.

One of the interesting aspects of Dewey's position on learning is that he points out that with learning comes unlearning; learning even implies unlearning. Unlearning comes first before anything new is "learned." Dewey asserts that by learning anything at

pressure . . . but . . . power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences, the power to develop dispositions." Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 55.

²² Constructivists' theories of learning often overlook the important deconstructive part of the cycle of learning, and the deconstructivists often overlook the constructivist part.

all, a limit has been set, and the stakes for future learning have been raised. Dewey states in *Experience and Nature* that “[t]he very operation of learning sets a limit to itself, and makes subsequent learning more difficult.”²³ A limit has been set with regard to context. Dewey believed that no one ever really learns how he or she learns because contexts and circumstances surrounding experience are always in flux and changing. So, then, when one has learned something in one context, the operations of how the skill was developed or learned will not be universally applicable to every future potential context. Thus, the limitation of context flows out to include applicability of method.

The famous American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, whom Dewey read, once said, “It is only when we forget all learning that we begin to know.”²⁴ This passage seems enchanting in many ways but also ludicrous at the same time. It seems that Thoreau is saying that all learning is merely unlearning, but Dewey, known as the philosopher of method by some scholars, might want to point out that if one unlearns, then that presupposes that one has learned how to unlearn. Dewey might argue that one does not just “forget” all learning. This is impossible. For Dewey, then, unlearning does not just immaculately happen; one must learn how to unlearn. In this way, unlearning is even a learning process of learning how to unlearn. Just as learning is associated with a method, so should be unlearning.

Dewey’s position, here, becomes complex. Unlearning is a learning process of not just *how* to unlearn, but *what* to unlearn. The focus of learning here transitions from method to appropriate selection of criteria, in other words, what is kept and what is thrown out in past experience. This calls for a sharpened discernment in recognition of

²³ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, LW 1:214.

²⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, vol. XII of 14 vols., ed. Bradford Tolley and Francis Allen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 317.

what is useful to solve a specific problem in a specific context. Dewey then shows that unlearning (and learning, in general) has as its chief characteristics criticism and examination of past experiences and present resources. In order to learn, unlearn, and relearn, one must have a certain receptivity toward self-criticism that allows him or her to unlearn old ways of learning and always come up with new ways of reconstructing experience. Habits and “lessons learned” become precious possessions. There seems to be a deep commitment by some educationists that one find his or her learning style and learn new things. Dewey would frown on such a position and assert that any learning style could never possibly be the same because with each thing that is learned, something had to be unlearned, and a precious habit had to be compromised to whatever degree. For Dewey, the stultification of habit is a serious threat to one’s ability to unlearn and reconstruct experience.

To learn, then, is to imply that one has a clear goal in mind and has been critical and unlearned the appropriate things. This process really becomes a system of valuation. Dewey declares, “Indeed, he is lucky who does not find that in order to make progress, in order to get ahead intellectually, he does not have to unlearn much of what he learned in school.”²⁵ Dewey says the same principle has currency throughout one’s life, in and out of school.

Learning makes human existence a bit more difficult because it requires one to keep up with what he or she has learned and what he or she has yet to learn. One needs a method, but the method will continually change. In Deweyan terms, to learn is to learn that one has much more yet to learn and unlearn (and eventually relearn) and many more ways of learning, unlearning, and relearning to explore. Put differently, learning calls into

²⁵ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, LW 13: 28.

question the self and demands that one be self-critical. Dewey states, “The more an organism learns, the more that is, the former terms of a historic process are retained and integrated in this present phase, the more it has to learn.”²⁶ This requires one to have sharpened existential sensibilities and a constant self-conscious attentiveness to immediate experience.

Take, for example, the child who goes to school for the first time, or at any time, and returns home. When students (and teachers just the same) go to school, they carry with them baggage. The habits cultivated at home do not always sync perfectly with those taught and valued in school. What is taught in the home is not always taught at school, and vice versa, and therefore there is a demand for adjustment and readjustment to the specific environment and values. Usually, children learn quickly what is unacceptable at school, but sometimes they can get mixed up; they sometimes forget what they have learned or unlearned and how they did it. Dewey asserts that this happens to the most intelligent individuals. The students go to school, at an early age, with a very promising power for growth, which Dewey recognizes as “immaturity.” The latter term should not be taken negatively in this context.

Dewey sees immaturity as a dynamic potential for growing.²⁷ Often, immaturity in the adult world is something to be corrected and, as a contemporary adult concept, is most frequently associated with a lacking, underdevelopment, lack of growth, or in cases of infancy, helplessness. Dewey deeply does not want immaturity to be associated with any kind of static end such as maturity. He asserts, “The seriousness of the assumption of the negative quality of the possibilities of immaturity is apparent when we reflect that it

²⁶ Dewey, “Nature, Life, and Body-Mind,” LW 1: 215.

²⁷ From *Democracy and Education*, Dewey declares, “Taken absolutely, instead of comparatively, immaturity designates a positive force or ability,—the power to grow.” MW 9: 54.

sets up as an ideal and standard a static end maturity. The fulfillment of growing is taken to mean an accomplished growth: that is to say, an Ungrowth, something which is no longer growing.”²⁸ One is always growing and is always, to some extent, immature. Maturity, or being “grown-up,” is never really achievable in Dewey’s way of thinking.²⁹ He goes on to say, “Few grown persons retain all of the flexible and sensitive ability of children or vibrate sympathetically with the attitudes and doings of those about them. . . . The native mechanism of the child and his impulses all tend to facile social responsiveness.”³⁰ For Dewey, immaturity is a precious possession of an individual that requires sensitive cultivation and preservation to make growth even more expansive and experience ever more meaningful.

It is important to note the distinction between immediate and mediated experience. Immediate experience literally means any experience that has not been mediated, or without mediation. After the immediate experience, that which has been encountered becomes mediated into the fabric of our social self. In this way, we are always reconstructing experience, and from this reconstruction, meaning is created. According to Dewey, this is always the case. Each immediate experience has different qualities because of previous mediations of immediate experiences.

Reading a novel would be a good example of this. Whether the reader of a novel is conscious of it or not, the author of the novel is responsible for mediating an experience, and the reader is really re-mediating the work. In both cases, if the novelist were to rewrite the novel or the reader to reread the novel, each would do so differently;

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Obviously, it should be understood that “maturity” and “immaturity” in this sense should not be taken in the physical sense, but in the intellectual and mental.

³⁰ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 55.

it would not be the same experience for either. This should ring true for anyone who has read a novel, or any book for that matter, more than once; each time it is read, one usually gleans something new that was missed before. While this point may seem elementary to mention, it is important to note that each immediate experience is a new one; there is always new immediacy because past experiences have been mediated. Dewey wrote a whole work on this notion called *Art as Experience*, but really when Dewey's point is followed, "art as experience" transforms into experience as art, that is, the art of always constructing new immediacies. Really, the immediacy is not new, but rather a revision of past mediations of experiences.

The most important moment in learning or in reconstructing experience, for Dewey, is right now, the present. He states, "We always live at the time we live, and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future."³¹ In this way, Dewey speaks of learning today as preparation for future learning. For Dewey, we always begin with what we have (resources) and where we are (intellectually and environmentally). The human mind, which is a very creative thing for Dewey, is never really a blank slate. We bring with us our inheritance of resources and dispositions to every situation we encounter.³²

Therefore, it is not exactly the requisite skills that have been acquired through learning (or the reconstruction of experience) that makes future learning difficult, but rather, it is the acquisition of an attitude or disposition toward unlearning or

³¹ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, LW 13: 29–30.

³² It is important to note, here, that the Dewey felt that the logical forms of thought come about through experience. In this way, the encounters build upon experience, which directly affect logical forms of thought.

deconstructing in order to reconstruct experience that makes future learning difficult. Dewey is very passionate and clear on the point that the most important thing to cultivate and develop in an individual is the ability to be self-critical by way of a flexibility of method.

In speaking of the importance of attitude toward learning, Dewey cautions that the most damaging and dangerous attitude to form or adopt toward learning is one that accepts learning as a static thing. There are many scholars writing today, even, that take learning as a product. Dewey asserts,

Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future. The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning. If impetus in this direction is weakened instead of being intensified, something much that mere lack of preparation happens.³³

What happens in this case, Dewey will go on to say, is that the student or pupil will be robbed of native powers to make meaning of present experiences and examine carefully the attitudes that have already been developed and are being developed with regard to learning. The fact that each and every experience should always be preparing “a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality” supports Dewey’s well-placed word collateral because all past learning and unlearning is subordinate to

³³ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, LW 13: 29.

future learning and disposition toward learning, in general.³⁴ This, for Dewey, is the meaning and the reason for reconstructing experience.

Sophists of learning have had and still have difficulty in coming to terms with Dewey because many ask, “and just where might ‘experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality’ lead?” Of course, Dewey might reply that such experiences lead to experiences of even deeper and more expansive quality. In this case, for Dewey, the answer to the question of what is the meaning of life might well be to make more meaning. And, somehow this constant making of meaning through learning and the reconstruction of experience adds to the continual creation of the universe. The Heraclitean posture of Dewey’s position on learning (that the person is always searching out and recreating one’s self and that learning and education ends when experience or life ends) is very complicated to think through and apply. This, for Dewey, speaks to the fact that we are created creators in a continually creating universe, and it is up to us to create meaning.

Dewey asks much of us in his position on learning and reconstructing experience. He asks that we examine the resources we bring to each experience, that we have a sharp of awareness of the present and past, that we *always* remain open to the unknown (and prepare accordingly), that we be self-critical, that we mine and examine those things in experience that cause us discomfort, but perhaps most of all, he asks that we realize that intelligence and learning is not the sole property of any one individual, but rather, it is among us.

Unlearning requires the perpetual development of critical intelligence on all fronts, for example, social, self, and so on. Habits and impulses do not illuminate or know

³⁴ Ibid., 28.

themselves. Dewey clarifies this by asserting that habit “does not, of itself, know, for it does not of itself stop to think, observe or remember.”³⁵ Not only, of course, does critical intelligence allow one to understand and come to know the world around him or her, but it also affords him or her to become acquainted with the world within him or her. The efficiency and precision of the legislation of desires, or impulses, to unlearn that which we have learned depends on the receptivity to the reflective self and to social intelligence.

Learning requires pruning and is a constant re-adaptation and reorganization of values by way of reconstructing experience. Dewey suggests that there is always potential for learning, growth, and education so long as there are experiences we have yet to have and people we have yet to interact with. The process of growing is difficult because, for Dewey, it involves constant cross-examination of self against society. However, there are intangible and enriching rewards for having grown, which find their realization in making the process of growing ever more meaningful.

In school, one (both teacher and pupil) is receiving guidance, and what the guidance often calls for is the restructuring of the habits and an astute awareness and knowledge of the ingredients of character. It is both self-awareness and self-knowledge. The point of schooling is that the student is brought to the intellectual point where students (and teachers) not only are aware of their habits but also have the tools to examine the habits and learning how and what to unlearn that inhibits future experience from growing in “ordered richness.”

³⁵ Dewey, *HNC*, 177.

4.5. The School, Local Community, and the Individual

At the time Dewey was writing and working, education was in dire need of reform. He recognizes early on in *The School and Society* that the one place where children are sent to acquire the tools to go on learning is the one place that is most difficult to “get experience.”³⁶ Dewey asserts that the school needs the “chance to be a miniature community, an embryonic society.”³⁷ It is through this “embryonic society” where intelligence has the greatest promise of getting a local home, a local home in the face-to-face community called the school.³⁸

In recognizing humans as being social creatures through and through, Dewey is often misunderstood on the matter of intelligence and the concept of the individual.³⁹ In Dewey’s thinking, one’s own conception or awareness of individuality is realized in the company of others, that is, in a social setting. It is where individual differences present themselves but also where one comes to realize that he or she is in no way an atomic self.

Individual freedom can never be realized without intelligence. Intelligence understands the world that creates individuals but also how individuals create their world. However, intelligence and experience both have a context and are greater than any one individual. Intelligence, just like experience, is a shared thing. For Dewey, one of the biggest benefits of schooling is that it provides a context in which intelligence cannot

³⁶ Dewey, *The School and Society*, MW 1: 12.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Dewey declares,

Organized intelligence has made an advance that is truly surprising when we consider the short time it has functioned and the powerful foes against which it has had to make its way: the foes of inertia, of old, long established traditions and habits—inertia, traditions, and habits all of them entrenched in forms of institutional life that are effulgent with the prestige of time, that are enveloped in the glamor of imaginative appeal and that are crowned, severally and collectively, with an emotional halo made of the values that most prize.

Dewey, “Authority and Social Change,” LW 11: 141.

³⁹ When it comes to the concept of community or society, it could be argued that Dewey is closer to being a philosophical anthropologist.

only operate, but also grow. In this way, the school is a form of the local community.

Dewey asserts the importance of local communities by stating,

In a word, that expansion and reinforcement of personal understanding and judgment by the cumulative and transmitted intellectual wealth of the community which may render nugatory the indictment of democracy drawn on the basis of the ignorance, bias and levity of the masses, can be fulfilled only in the relations of personal intercourse in the local community. . . . Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator. . . . We lie, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium.⁴⁰

The enrichment of the quality of relationships within the local community is extremely important and is at the heart of Dewey's democratic aims of education through schooling. This enrichment is brought about and sustained through deeper cultivation of ideas by way of more effective applications of communication and participation.⁴¹

Individuals are held in place by codependent relationships, physically, biologically, and socially.⁴² Growth depends on one's ability to negotiate new meanings with others different than him or her.⁴³

For Dewey, it is no accident that such words as communication, commonality, communion, and community are closely etymologically related. The latter relationship is

⁴⁰ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, LW 2: 371.

⁴¹ One of the critical questions of the twenty-first century just might be, "what do we do with relationships with people that different than ourselves?" Dewey has a much richer and sophisticated conception of diversity (intellectual, cultural, ethnic, religious, etc.) than we do today.

⁴² Larry Hickman makes much of the importance of social control, and efficiency in his chapter, "Socialization, Social Efficiency, and Social Control: Putting Pragmatism to Work," found in David Hansen's *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's "Democracy and Education"* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 67–81.

⁴³ Dewey says in one of his earliest writings, *Psychology*, that, "If existence depends upon adjustment to permanent elements, growth depends no less upon right relation to changing factors." EW 2: 115.

deeply conceptual and deliberate within the framework of his pragmatism. Dewey felt that successful communication translates into creating commonality. Dewey states, “Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular; and part of the miracle it achieves is that, in being communicated, the conveyance of meaning gives body and definiteness to the experience of the one who utters as well as to that of those who listen.”⁴⁴

The notion that communication creates participation goes deeper for Dewey because he really means that what is created, with regard to participation, is a “co-participation.” In communicating with a conversational partner, each human must be able to take and discern the attitude of the other. That is, one must understand and grasp that the other individual has a different perspective to donate, with regard to the third thing.

In other words, when conversational partners are reaching out to grasp something, an idea or concept, each human needs to be aware that the other person has a different position, yet each person seeks to grasp the concept. Nevertheless, one must always be required to be considerate and thoughtful of the other’s position in order to arrive at a better understanding of some concept or idea. In this way, this would be an example of a co-participation with regard to communication.

The principles of participation (or co-participation) and communication are especially vital in the context of the school. This extends beyond the classroom into the schoolyard, group work, field trips, and so on. A true form of growth is realized in working together to make and assign meaning through language in coordinated activities. Understanding one another is a crucial context of everyday life but also in school. This is how relationships are strengthened and how people grow within a

⁴⁴ Dewey, “Force and Coercion,” LW 10: 248.

community. Communication is a transaction, not merely an interaction. Communication takes place in the way in which we are together.

Dewey recognizes that something happens within a community that does not happen singly. This is what happens within a family, a school, a friendship, and a marriage. All transaction, all reaching out to understand one another is characterized by embodiment. Communication has to do with the health of the individual's and the community's existential state. It is how one is fed. With this, communication could be taken as a form of nutrition (of vital nutrition in the case of schooling). There must be a marriage of openness, tolerance, and community pedagogy. If this is not the case, democracy is at risk of losing its meaning, importance and effectiveness in the context of schooling and everyday life.

What Dewey means by growth here, in the context of schooling, is that I am able to feed myself the nutrition of experience and reconstruct my experiences to give them more meaning, and I will continue to do this and can also feed others this same nutrition. Buber states that all our "real living is meeting,"⁴⁵ and Dewey is saying something very similar. Dewey states,

Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process. Since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience and education.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Continuum Books, 2008), 62.

⁴⁶ Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us," LW 14: 229.

The development of the self is mediated by society, but especially by the local community. Communication creates community because it allows selves to transact on more than a physical level. The communication of ideas allows meaning to build upon itself. Charles Taylor declares that language points out differences that do not even exist in reality. Language (by way of communion) goes beyond reality in some sense. Nonetheless, this communion requires much of its participants in the context of school.⁴⁷

Making meaning with those different than us requires the ability to unlearn. This principle, of course, applies to the pupils in school (and has been covered), but also applies to teachers as well. The teacher is crucially important in the local community of school. Teaching demands adjustment, not just of self, habit, and experience, but particularly of method. The student, by no means, is the only one being called on to adjust and reconstruct habits (or grow); the teacher has this same requirement. Teachers, just the same as students, enter the classroom with whatever habits and character they have up until that point. The teacher is a good teacher in as much as he or she is an astute, conscious, and precocious student first. The teacher is learning and unlearning as he or she teaches.

But, what is it that he or she is learning or unlearning? In any case of learning or unlearning, the main object (or subject) of scrutiny is knowledge. Dewey prefers not to use the term *knowledge* and in place of that use “warranted assertion” or “warranted assertability.” The main concept associated with warranted assertability is funded

⁴⁷ George Herbert Mead’s influence on Dewey’s thinking in the last page and a half must be acknowledged. Specifically, Mead’s essay “The Nature of Reflective of Intelligence” is of special import here. In that essay, Mead observes that if the self is anything at all, it is a constant reorganization of other acquired selves and commensurate attitudes. For Mead, it is in the mind that we find others, but also it is in others’ minds that we find our “self.” The self, then comes about through the *process* of communication. The process of socialization by way of reflective intelligence is educational. Education, when philosophically considered is seen then as the process of internalizing the social act within the separate individuals and creating social interests and social intelligence.

experience through the use of the experimental method. In no way does warranted assertion translate into a Hegelian absolute or truth for Dewey. Rather, meaning and truths, for Dewey, are the products of language and inquiry. Truths, then, are simply warranted then by the soundness of process of inquiry that produced them. Truth merely means a series of operations that produce the desirable result. It is concrete operationalism. The point is, if you perform a specified set of operations, and do so consciously, then you are then committed to a “maker’s theory of knowledge.” If one (the teacher) then knows how something (or an idea) is made in this context out of a given material, then we can speak of its truth, but its truth is never absolute. In the case of the teacher, he or she also has to be able to speak of any idea’s untruth.

Experimentalism is vital here in the way that the teacher is a sharply conscious methodologist. A warranted assertion is an assertion that has anticipated or considered the consequences retroactively through funded experience. Thus, the teacher must have a sophisticated sense of discernment in the knowledge (or warranted assertions) he or she has and the plasticity of method by which to unlearn that which does not apply in furthering the enrichment of present experience for both themselves and students.

Therefore, teaching is a reciprocal, transactional process without end. The teacher (and his or her activity of teaching) is the means of interrupting students’ habits, and the students are likewise challenging or interrupting the teacher’s habits. Throughout the drama of experience, one’s habits will be put to the test, be interrupted. Indeed, experience as conceived of by James and supported by Dewey is an “alternation of flights and perchings. Life is interruptions and recoveries.”⁴⁸ The students are teaching the teacher, and the teacher is also teaching the students. The teacher’s receptivity to

⁴⁸ Dewey, *HNC*, 179.

modifying or adjusting his or her habits and openness toward unlearning depends on prior cultivation of the plasticity of habit. The teacher is the agent of transmitting the methods of learning and unlearning and reconstructing habits. So, the teacher has to be really effective at unlearning in order to show and lead students in how to reconstruct their own habits.

There must be a breakdown of elitism and authoritative rule in the classroom. The transactional process of learning (and unlearning) must be democratic for Dewey. The teacher must have a great deal of plasticity of habit, at least as much as or more than the students, in order to teach the students about and cultivate the plasticity of habit in the students. The teacher is a radical agent whose main goal is to liberate impulses to find new direction through facilitating experiences that are conducive to growth (unlearning) and restructuring of habits.⁴⁹ Teachers must be an example of perpetual social self-recreation, but so should be the teacher's teacher(s).

This all presupposes that the teacher's teacher (and then his or her teacher) also possessed a high degree of plasticity of habit. Thus, the power to develop disposition, to grow, to go on learning, and to remake one's self is handed down and transmitted whereby both student and teacher become ever more conscious and open to the modification of habits, scrutinizing values, unlearning, and, perhaps the most important attribute, they become free. In this way, the schooling of the teacher is important and will be discussed later on in the dissertation.

⁴⁹ Teachers must also have a profound love of learning, themselves, in order to cultivate that in their pupils and colleagues alike. For an in-depth look into the important concept of love and passion in Deweyan pedagogic practice see, Danile Patrick Liston and Jim Garrison, eds., *Teaching, Learning, and Loving* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004).

Thus, the institutional setting of education (schooling) contributes to the continual renewal and growth of the democratic character by way of making the local community of the classroom the medium for discovery of difference through cooperative co-participation. Community (and in the case of school) is always in a state of becoming. It is not so much an imagined thing but rather one that continues to be realized (and grow) through intercourse with others different than us. The face-to-face community of the classroom and school provides the theater for the deliberate cultivation of the democratic character (and values such as freedom, etc.), the realization of individuality and codependent relationships, and the critical development of social intelligence.

4.6. Conclusion

For Dewey, all social philosophy (really, philosophy on the whole) is a philosophy of education, and any philosophy of education needs a philosophy of experience, and any philosophy of experience must include that which takes place within the day-to-day drama of experience (inside and outside of the school), which is the formation of habits and production of character. As highlighted in chapter 3, Dewey called the character the interpenetration of habits; thus, habits provide the contents of one's character. Character is disclosed through associated conduct, and, as Dewey points out, conduct is always shared. However, Dewey is not concerned just with the formation of character in general, but rather, he is deeply concerned with the formation and reformation of the democratic character.

Democracy challenges not just education, as Dewey recognizes in his essay "Democracy's Challenge to Education," but it more deeply challenges human nature. In

the Deweyan sense, it challenges humans to change their own nature, by way of recasting habits and reconstructing experience. Unlearning is difficult because it involves changing human nature, which will alter one's character; it changes how one knows him or her self in relation to the world around him or her and how he or she has come to know and understand the world in general. In the disclosure of the individual act, the statement is not, "this is who I am," rather, it is "this is who I want to be."

It needs to be understood that character for Dewey (and etymologically taken) is dynamic. The Greek translation of character means "to carve." Character is an active verb. The conceptual analogy in relation to human character could be a tree. The carvings on the tree are habits, and, like a tree, we acquire the carvings, yet we can never disown the carvings or give them back. Like with the tree, our carvings stay with us. The carvings make us who we are. Indeed, the carvings direct the activities of our character (or our carving). We may be able to modify the carvings, but we can never erase them. However, the habits (or carvings) are all intimately interconnected. Character is not something that is discombobulated. So when one habit is modified (if it is truly modified), then all habits must be modified to compensate for the modification. Structures cannot be independent of the stuff they organize. If one part of the structure is changed, the whole structure is changed to some extent.

The complex thing here is that it is the environment that gives us our habits or carvings. Further, it is the environment that determines the direction and richness of the growth of the tree and the individual. As discussed in the beginning of the chapter, context will always limit any universal. Democratic schools cultivating critical self-

inquiry, then, are crucial to the cultivation of the democratic character.⁵⁰ The school, then, must provide a democratic environment replete with fertility for growth of the democratic character. But the school, just like a democratic culture, is never a fixed or static environment. Modifying habits and long-established customs of social institutions is wrought by changing the environmental objective forces that sustain them. Dewey states, “We must work on the environment and not merely the hearts of men.”⁵¹ One’s experiences change only because experience changes him or her.

If Dewey is a philosopher of anything, he is a philosopher of growth. Dewey stated later in life that he felt foolish for using the term *experience* and wished instead he had used the term *culture*. Dewey understood well the important role institutions play in the formation of cultural attitudes and dispositions; he knew well that an individual’s composition of character is made from habits acquired through selections taken in culture. By culture, Dewey meant an ever-developing cultivated intelligence that is social in nature that not only equips individuals to make more intelligent selections from culture but also produces even more viable options to select from that are conducive to democratic growth. Only a cultural instrumentalism guided by the experimental, scientific method can advance and foster the appropriate intellectual habits requisite in producing a democracy as a culturally self-correcting process. This leads to “conscious life,” and “conscious life is a continual beginning afresh.”⁵² Conscious life is the democratic way of life.

⁵⁰ The importance of inquiry in education is followed and developed in a comprehensive way in James Scott Johnston, *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). Johnston firmly claims that inquiry is vital in constructing rich qualitative experiences (p. 86).

⁵¹ Dewey, *HNC*, 22.

⁵² Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 370.

CHAPTER 5:

HABIT, EDUCATION, AND DEMOCRACY AS A WAY OF LIFE

In being etymologically sensitive (as Dewey would appreciate), the word *education* means to lead or a leading to. Where does education lead for Dewey? One of the few times he was clear in addressing this question, save for growth, was to specify that education should lead to, recreate, and maintain democracy as a way of life. This phrase has been used and abused so much over the course of the twentieth century to the point of becoming quite trivialized. Dewey meant something much deeper and radical than what is thought of today when considering the meaning of democracy as a way of life. This chapter will clarify the concept of democracy as a way of life, state what such a way of life would require, and explore the implications (and tensions) of that way of life and Dewey's own position given the plasticity of habit and character.

5.1. Deweyan Democracy: A Brief Orientation

Literally, the term *democracy* stands for a type of government and distribution of justice whereby the power belongs to the people, or, in other words, rule by the people. When the Greeks established democracy where the people hold the power, where they decide, it was a participatory democracy or direct democracy. The people directly participate in making the laws because the laws directly affected them. Action, here, leads to judicious and intelligent acts (hopefully, anyway). This is really a situation where

every citizen is participating; this is the picture of ancient democracy. This is the meaning of participatory democracy whereby the citizen of the polis is not just a human being, but a human being born with political aspects.

Humans are, by nature, as Aristotle states, political animals. We are such animals that we will form a city and become participants of the institutions of the city. We are at the same time logical and political animals. When the native powers for being political blossom completely, a process has been accomplished whereby we move from potentiality to actuality. These logical, political features stand for a bunch of potentialities that have to be actualized. When they are actualized, we have the full picture of what human being is. There is no doubt that Dewey was familiar with this and was responding to contemporary tensions of his time.

Currently and in Dewey's time, a democracy is a misnomer for the United States. The United States could be better characterized as a republic. When talking about contemporary democracies, Dewey felt these political aspects did not define the end, but rather the means. This is where Dewey employs the term *democracy* differently than Aristotle did (and really all others who have come before). When Dewey selects the aspects of democracy as practiced, he distinguishes them as means, not ends.

Aristotle calls a citizen one who knows how to rule and how to be ruled. Every citizen has this double capability. The second part is very important because it takes intelligence rather than just obedience to be ruled. If you are ruler today, what do you do tomorrow when you are not? You have to know how to be ruled and take part of a social life. Thus, there is a common element between Dewey and Aristotle. It is a privilege in a genuine democracy for every citizen to take part of the rules that govern his or her life.

Participation is a must. This way you help shape the character of the institutions that govern and also what attitudes it hopes to cultivate. This is one of the rules characteristic of Dewey's democracy: a genuine citizen participates in the shaping of the governing institutions. If you are denied that privilege, then you are a victim of a kind of government called despotism and you are in a state of tyranny. If a leader denies access to governmental change, that leader is a tyrant and cannot talk about being democratic. If he or she uses the term, it is an abuse. And, if the citizen(s) have this privilege and do not take part in it, he or she is also a tyrant to himself or herself. This is a very subtle point, and it shows you that you have this responsibility to yourself. Dewey does something very clever. He takes democracy out of the realm of classical politics, out of the rigid way of thinking about it in the form of government, and makes it more personal and meaningful; something closer to the individual, "a personal way of individual life."¹

But, what exactly does Dewey mean when he says "democracy" or "democratic"? His conception is not at all like the ancients'. On several occasions Dewey provides clarification on this matter, but perhaps the clearest, consolidated statement Dewey gives can be found in his essay "Creative Democracy, the Task Before Us." Dewey asserts,

Democracy is belief in the ability of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness. Democracy is faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process. Since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience

¹ Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us," LW 14: 230.

and education. All ends and values that are cut off from the ongoing process become arrests, fixations.²

Thus, democratic experience here is both an end and a means. In this way you do not have an effect until you have a cause, which means in a certain way that the effect is the cause of the cause, and both the cause and the effect is together democracy.

What ends do democracies aim at, or do such ends even exist? These political aspects of democracy are the best means for the best human end. Otherwise, why have democracy? A deep understanding of human nature is essential here. If this is not done, one will be confused about what means he or she must employ to get there. There are certain ends to be realized, and what those are is at the heart of Dewey's philosophy, that is, the full development of the human personality.³

Dewey makes no exception for economic status, religious conviction, sex, race, or geographical location. He is talking about human beings wherever they are found. For the collection of human beings, the promotion of social human developments is paramount. Whenever thinking about an individual's personal developments, the interpersonal developments must also be considered. There must be no elitism in democracy. If democracy entails superiority whereby someone's welfare comes first, automatically the subordinate is a means; he or she are inferior and will soon become a slave (in the Aristotelian sense).

² Ibid., 229.

³ Dewey confirms, "The ideal of Democracy demands the fullest possible development of personality in all—irrespective of birth, wealth, creed or race—through cooperative association with others, and mutual understanding and consent. The ideal further demands that all the institutions, customs, and arrangements of social life shall contribute to these needs, that is, that they shall be educative." Dewey, "The Forward View: The Free Teacher in a Free Society," LW 11: 538.

Unless we have human intelligence, social in character, we cannot form and reform the institutions that govern us. Intelligence, very shrewdly pointed out by Dewey, is not given to everyone in equal amounts. We are not all geniuses, and we are not all morons. Some are smarter than others. There is no human being deprived of intelligence. This does not give the smart the right to exploit and abuse the less smart. Intelligence to whatever degree is really generally speaking the greatest asset of humanity. Not anger, not jealousy, not envy; these are not the great assets. Dogs and cats get jealous and angry. No matter what degree of intelligence one has, one must contribute to whatever extent his or her intelligence will allow.

Dewey states, “The revival of democratic faith as a buoyant, crusading and militant faith is a consummation to be devoutly wished for. But the crusade can win at the best but partial victory unless it springs from a living faith in our common human nature and in the power of voluntary action based upon public collective intelligence.”⁴ The development and perpetual cultivation of “public collective intelligence” is absolutely central to Dewey’s cultural project. While humans may well be unequal in distribution of intelligence, they are morally equal and “obligated” in that every individual has a right to have his or her unique potential educated so that each can make his or her unique contribution to society. This means that each person will have a unique trajectory when they learn their continuity will be unique. And, democracy feeds and grows on that uniqueness as its potentialities become ever more realized and conscious.

Thus, diversity and pluralism are important. However, not just religious, ethnic, or physical differences, but deep intellectual and dialectical differences should be highly valued. For Dewey, democracy has the potential to bridge the gap between understanding

⁴ Dewey, “Democracy is Radical,” LW 11: 298.

and prejudice. He writes, “The very reason prejudice is so obdurate, so hard to deal with, is that it comes from the irrational part of our nature, the sub-human part of instincts and impulses, fears, jealousies, dislikes, in comparison with which our reason is little and, only too often, somewhat flickering.”⁵ In Dewey’s way of thinking, at no point can reason be “flickering.” It must be consciously used in all aspects of association with others.

When Dewey speaks of democracy in the United States, he does so frequently as a proponent to be sure, but he also does so as a critic. Dewey declares, “Distortion and stultification of human personality by the existing pecuniary and competitive regime give the lie to claim that the present social system is one of freedom and individualism in any sense in which liberty and individuality exist for all.”⁶ Indeed, cultural and political criticism was an attractive feature of a true democratic society in Dewey’s way of thinking. Rich dialectical debates on differences were a key component of democratic growth.

This is where the importance of education comes in. Dewey, in linking democracy and education, was responding to Plato’s observations in an intimate way, and by re-immersing ourselves in the confusions of Plato (and making vulnerable our modern immunity to ancient wisdom), will enrich our understanding of Dewey’s position on the democratic method and its greatest good, freedom.⁷ Dewey says, “The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and

⁵ Dewey, “Understanding and Prejudice,” LW 5: 397.

⁶ Dewey, “Democracy is Radical,” LW 11: 297.

⁷ I attribute the recommendation to “re-immersing ourselves in the confusions of Plato” to F. C. S. Schiller’s review of Dewey’s work, *The Quest for Certainty*, in *Mind* 39, New Series, no. 155 (July 1930): 373.

persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public.”⁸ While it can be agreed on that the world has suffered more from bad leaders than from the masses, it must also be recognized that the enslaved and “uneducated” masses have perpetuated the bad habits through the reproduction of their own ignorance.

Essential elements of Deweyan democracy include (but are not limited to) openness, diversity, liberalism, plasticity of custom and habit, freedom, inquiry, reconstruction of and continuity of experience. Democracy should never be something merely thought to take place in state capitals or in Washington, DC; it should be understood to be taking place in every nook and cranny of human experience. Democracy is radical, then, because the democratic means and ends are radical.⁹ And, the means are radical because they involve an enlightened, open-ended transaction or co-participation of “public collective intelligence” among citizens that will allow for democracy, to “be born anew with each generation” working toward solving shared social problems. In this way, when Dewey speaks of democracy, even in the early context of *The School and Society*, it should be understood as a way of life. Dewey confirms this by stating, “It is to realize that democracy is a reality only as it is indeed a commonplace of living,” but also in as much as it is thought of and treated as a way of life.¹⁰

⁸ LW 2: 365.

⁹ Dewey was certainly never short of opponents and naysayers concerning his conception of democracy and political philosophy, in general. Of special mention here is the work of Morton White, Walter Lippman, and even Charles Austin Beard (a fellow progressively minded educator) to some degree. Works of note are Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957 [1947]); Mark Whipple, “The Dewey-Lippmann Debate Today: Communication Distortions, Reflective Agency, and Participatory Democracy,” *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 2 (2005): 156–78; Charles Wellborn, *Twentieth Century Pilgrimage: Walter Lippmann and the Public Philosophy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004); Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993); Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914); and Charles Austin Beard, *Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908).

¹⁰ Dewey, *The School of Society*, LW 14: 228–29.

5.2. Democracy as a Way of Life

Within the disposition or the structure of powers (or habits), we find a way of living and acting, an attitude toward associative living and methods by which we carry that task out. A way of life is an expression of value and ethos. Democracy, for Dewey, is a way, a means, a method, a technique, a mode, even an attitude in which human potentialities can continually be cultivated and discovered.¹¹ It is a way of life. If not looked at it as a method or means, it becomes an unchangeable structure. He states, “Democracy has always professed belief in the potentialities of every human being, and all the need for providing conditions that will enable these potentialities to come to realization.”¹² There must, however, be a strong measure of liberty present in order to help one continue to realize his or her potential.

5.3. Liberalism

Liberalism is an essential feature of democracy as a way of life. The other element of democracy here is freedom of action, and this is important. One must have the freedom to act intelligently and through informed conviction. To have freedom to act without informed conviction is to act without intelligence. This is an abuse of freedom. One cannot contribute information to the welfare of one’s society that one has not treated critically.

In Dewey’s democratic experiment, it is the responsibility of each citizen to develop his or her intelligence to the highest degree, because only then can reliable

¹¹ Dewey does not speak of democracy like any other thinker that had come before him. Exception to this statement must be given to the work of Boyd H. Bode. Bode was a close follower of Dewey’s writings and wrote a book called *Democracy As A Way of Life* in 1937. Boyd H. Bode, *Democracy as a Way of Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937).

¹² Dewey, *The School of Society*, LW 14: 277–78.

knowledge about anything be shared. Otherwise, freedom degenerates into confusion and disorder, which is something that happens too frequently in every human organization. This ultimately leads to the greatest sin of “the democratic man,” which is to say, the abuse of freedom. Plato knew well and points out in the eighth book of the *Republic* that the abuse of freedom soon turns the democratic state into a tyrannical one. Dewey would never support forcing convictions on others unless the convictions have passed the test of intelligence. He also deeply felt opposed to coercion of any sort.

Any discussion of liberalism in the United States will, no doubt, come to center on the individual. While liberalism is a very important condition of democracy as a way of life, it must not be confused with the classical brand of liberalism, for example, that of John Locke or John Stewart Mill. He observes,

The underlying philosophy and psychology of earlier liberalism led to a conception of individuality as something ready made, already possessed, and needing only the removal of certain legal restrictions to come into full play. It was not conceived of as a moving thing, something that is attained only by continuous growth. Because of this failure, the dependence in fact of individuals upon social conditions was made little of.¹³

Dewey shatters classical liberalism. Atomistic individualism collapses in Dewey’s position. He believes that individuality, a mind, natural rights are not things one is born with. Instead, a mind and individuality are things that emerge and become ever more realized and cultivated through social intercourse with other living beings. Thus, minds emerge through meanings, and meanings emerge through language, and language through

¹³ Dewey, “The Crisis in Liberalism,” LW 11: 30.

association. Of course, Dewey is in debt to G. H. Mead for this idea.¹⁴ In this way, Dewey recasts and broadens the connection between liberalism and individuality.¹⁵ In Dewey's way of thinking, an individual is indivisible from the culture that creates him or her because humans are held in their place by the codependent biological, political, social relationships. This is Dewey's social psychology at its best.

Liberalism, then, is not a personal possession of one person, but rather is extended, valued, and used widely as a cultural apparatus that has a "social office to perform."¹⁶ And this office has to do with intelligent adjustment between old and new habits and customs. Dewey writes, "The old and the new have forever to be integrated with each other, so that the values of old experience may become the servants and instruments of new desires and aims."¹⁷ Between conflicting old and new habits, "there is always an adjustment to be made, and as soon as the need for it becomes conscious, liberalism has a function and meaning. It is not that liberalism creates the need, but that the necessity for adjustment defines the office of liberalism."¹⁸ Thus, the office of liberalism is not just defined in terms of adjustment of habit or custom within an individual, but rather the community. Thus, liberalism serves an integral "mediating function" that works to free the operationalization of critical reflective intelligence.

¹⁴ It is important to point out that Mead's most famous work is called *Mind, Self, and Society*. It could be argued that the sequence of concepts in Mead's famous work are out of order. Perhaps it should go something like *Society, Self, and Mind*. Mind becomes a transient emergent object that only continues to become more transient and in so doing becomes even more emergent.

¹⁵ It is worth recognizing that the classical notion of liberalism as represented by John Stewart Mill (who took much from the teachings of his father, James, as well as from Jeremy Bentham) was liberalism for a certain class of people, the wealthy. In that way, not everyone is extended liberalism. This is a major problem for Dewey.

¹⁶ Dewey, "The Crisis in Liberalism," LW 11: 36.

¹⁷ Ibid. The quote continues, "We are always possessed by habits and custom, and this fact signifies that we are always influenced by the inertia and the momentum of forces temporally outgrown but nevertheless still present with us as a part of our being. Human life gets set in patters, institutional and moral. But change is also with us and demands the constant remaking of old habits and old ways of thinking, desiring, and acting."

¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

“Freed intelligence as the method of directing social action” finds the root of its release in liberalism, for liberalism’s end is aimed at liberty, liberty of the mind.¹⁹

One of the aims of the democratic way of life, then, is the fulfillment and improvement of the human personality. But whose or what institution’s responsibility is it? What do institutions do, and why are they needed? Is the school doing it? Institutions operate to form attitudes and habits. As a special group, the school often fails.

Democracy can be claimed for the broadest group, but when it comes to the high schools and primary schools (especially in Dewey’s time), it ends.

Take the family as an institution. Is a family democratic? Is there liberalism there? Do the children receive the liberty they deserve for the fulfillment of their humanity when at home? Dewey states, “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.”²⁰ Parents can become tyrants of their own domain. You can talk about family values all you want, but they will not withstand criticism either from without or from within. They will not meet the criteria for the correct political life most of the time, but Dewey felt they should.

In the context of the family or at home is where one begins to form character; in a family first, and then in the school. This is where children get their emotional orientation and moral attitudes. If the family abuses or neglects these, then by the time a child becomes an adolescent, it is too late, and this is where crime comes from. He writes, “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

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, LW 2: 368.

individual can really grow normally to his full stature.”²¹ Dewey felt that the school and family (and society as a whole) ought to uphold, implement, and reinvent this concept of democracy as a way of life.

The school, then, becomes a pivotal institution in which democracy as a way of life can become conscious of its aims and purpose. It must be a place where students as well as teachers and administrators carry on the democratic way of life and learn how to continue to do so. Additionally, it must be a place where liberalism is alive and well. Dewey states, “When I say the first job of renascent liberalism is education, I mean that its task is to aid in producing the habits of mind and character, the intellectual and moral patterns, that are somewhere near even with the actual movements of events.”²²

Democracy as a way of life requires that the school (teachers and administrators), the family (parents, grandparents, etc.), society, and individuals on the whole should be the best examples of the democratic way of life and promote individual liberty wherever possible. Dewey writes,

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.²³

²¹ Dewey, *The Need for a Philosophy of Education*, LW 9: 202.

²² Dewey, “Renascent Liberalism,” LW 11: 44.

²³ Dewey, *A Common Faith*, LW 9: 58. This quotation is found on the headstone of John Dewey in Burlington, Vermont.

The responsibility of the transmission, evaluation, and refinement of democratic values is each individual's responsibility; it is a cultural project. However, it may well be a cultural project without end. But this makes it radical, and radicalism is exactly what is required in the context of liberalism and the democracy as a way of life. Dewey writes, "If radicalism be defined as a perception of need for radical change, then today any liberalism which is not also radicalism is irrelevant and doomed."²⁴

Everyone should be living democracy, and if the family cannot do it, the school ought to, and if the school cannot do it, then the family and society ought to. They should be dedicated to equality and openness. For Dewey, equality should always accompany freedom; one cannot be realized or carried out without the other. This is what everyone has to learn and continue to learn. They (i.e., everyone) have to learn to respect and trust their intelligence and respond positively to the condition of freedom and not abuse it. If they do not, they become their own tyrant, and you can never expect such a person to respect or teach you. The conception of common good and general well-being demands full dedication of living the democratic way of life. "As an ideal it expresses the need for progress beyond anything attained so far."²⁵ But such progress requires a method for making even more progress to this end (or rather, means.)

5.4. Democratic Method

Embarking on the quest to realize and maintain the democratic way of life requires the establishment of a method, the "democratic method." Efficacy of democratic methods depends on treating democracy as a living, breathing thing that will perpetuate

²⁴ Dewey, "Renascent Liberalism," LW 11: 45.

²⁵ Dewey, "Time and Individuality," LW 14: 112.

and enhance the cooperative harmony of collective intelligence. Democratic means cannot belong only to a few; they must be available to all.

The democratic method reaches to the center of Dewey's special brand of pragmatism known as instrumentalism. It is a cultural instrument or tool in order to bring about the realization of the best possible life, the good life. To be clear, democracy as a way of life is not the realization of the good life, but rather is the *way* in which the good life can be brought about. In this way, the democratic method could be equated to a conception of cultural instrumentalism through which the methods of evaluation and refinement of cultural values and the cultural values themselves could be continuously improved.²⁶ At the heart of the democratic method is a scientifically minded and critical-thinking citizenry that is conscious of the ever-present demand for social intelligence, examination, and change with regard to values, education, authority, and method itself. However, the use and application of this method must be conscious; individuals must be aware of what and how they are using the method when they are using it.²⁷

One cannot help but notice the striking resemblance the democratic method has with the scientific method. Dewey declares,

Science through its physical technological consequences is now determining the relations which human beings, severally and in groups, sustain to one another. If it is incapable of developing moral techniques, which will also determine these relations, the split in modern culture goes so deep that not only democracy but all

²⁶ I am indebted to the late Mike Eldridge for the phrasing of "cultural instrumentalism." His work was an outstanding exploration of the notion of a cultural instrumentalism in the context of Dewey's concern about transformative power of aesthetic experience. Mike Eldridge, *Transforming Experience: John Dewey's Cultural Instrumentalism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998). However, Eldridge does overlook the central components of habit, education, and schooling to this cultural instrumentalism.

²⁷ Dewey declares, "tools can be evolved and perfected only in operation," and this operation must be deliberate. Dewey, "The Search for the Great Community," LW 2: 339.

civilized values are doomed. Such at least is the problem. A culture which permits science to destroy traditional values but which distrusts its power to create new ones is a culture which is destroying itself.²⁸

Thus, the scientific method is democratic by its nature and taken in a social context, will expose conflicting interests. Navigating those conflicting interests is key. Dewey writes,

Of course, there are conflicting interests; otherwise there would be no social problems. The problem under discussion is precisely how conflicting claims are to be settled in the interest of the widest possible contribution to the interests of all—or at least of the majority. The method of democracy—insofar as it is that of organized intelligence—is to bring these conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised, where they can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests than are represented by either of them separately. The more the respective claims of the two are publicly and scientifically weighed, the more likely it is that the public interest will be disclosed and be made effective.²⁹

Thus, both the democratic and scientific method require a cooperative effort and consist of a community of inquirers constituting a working together of ideas, coordination of values, and negotiation of conflicting claims. However, it must be strongly noted that scientists accept a method of inquiry; they have trust in the method and do not question it. It could be argued that a scientist could not be considered a scientist if he or she did not accept the scientific method. Dewey treats the democratic method in a similar way; he does not question it, nor does he think it should be questioned. In this way, the

²⁸ Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, LW 13: 172. Also, Morris Cohen once wrote, “Science is a flickering light in our darkness, but it is the only one we have and woe to him who would put it out.”

²⁹ Dewey, “Renascent Liberalism,” LW 11: 56.

democratic method might be better understood to be a democratic scientific method of associated living.

Democracy as a way of life, then, is an experiment. Fixity cannot be a feature of this experiment. Citizens in the democratic experiment must be like scientific inquirers, “engaged continuously in educating one another, as are the engineers who use their methods and results; and as far as science is humanized, it also educates the layman. . . . The idea of the educative function of in a genuine democracy is not then a fantasy imported from without.”³⁰ The educative function is transferred from within from science and the scientific method.

Democracy as an ongoing cultural experiment demands much of its citizenry. It means that there must exist a cultural plasticity of custom or habit within each person that society cultivates early on in life through school and family. “When customs are flexible and youth is educated as youth and not as premature adulthood, no nation grows old.”³¹ The youth’s conception of the flexibility of custom or habit cannot be educated if their teachers and the teacher’s teachers do not have a plasticity of habit such that they can cultivate that in their pupils.³²

Such a way of life requires an openness of individuals within a culture. Social cooperation and collective intelligence are precious values here. What this means is that people leave their values, ways of thinking, and character open to public discussion and debate. This means that individuals are able and willing to question both others and, most

³⁰ Dewey, “The Forward View: The Free Teacher in a Free Society,” LW 11: 538–39.

³¹ Dewey, *HNC*, 102.

³² A similar problem as the one mentioned occurs in Plato’s *Republic*. The problem concerns who teaches the teacher’s teacher. In this way, a rejuvenation within teachers’ colleges is key, but who will provide the appropriate leadership needed in the reconstruction of teaching professors of education how to teach? It is highly unlikely that this will occur on its own, but Dewey felt it necessary to happen. Hence, we have Dewey’s enduring legacy both at the University of Chicago and the Teachers College at Columbia.

importantly, themselves. This is difficult because individuals are often in love with themselves and their ideas. It is one thing to verbally accept what Dewey proposes in his tenets of the democratic way of life, but implementing such practices into the activities and conduct of everyday life is another matter altogether. Being able to critique, identify, and correct one's own errors in thinking is key for Dewey's democratic citizen. It is not enough for one to espouse that he or she is his or her own strictest critic. One must take it some steps further and fix what is wrong with his or her own thinking. If one does not do this, no one else will do it for him or her. Self-correction is key in living the democratic way of life. This is at the heart of the process of democracy and education and an effective community and cultural pedagogy.

Taken educationally, this means a complete reversal of educational institutions and practices as we know them. Contextually, it must be the teachers who are the best students and in as much as the teachers are excellent students will determine the degree to which they are excellent teachers. If the teachers themselves have nothing else to learn, what else, then, is left to teach? Dogma. In such a given culture that carries out the democratic way of life, it is not the "old dogs" that have the most difficulty in learning new tricks; rather, it is the "old dogs" that learn the tricks the best and the quickest. Rather than become ever more sedimented and rigid in thinking as one grows old, one would become only more radical and open in thinking and would have an even greater degree of flexibility of habit. The democratic method is indeed radical. Dewey states, "There is, moreover, nothing more radical than insistence upon democratic methods as the means by which radical social changes be effected."³³ This requires individuals to question themselves, their ways of thinking, and their values. This, of course, includes the

³³ Dewey, LW 11: 298–99.

reconstruction of habits, and if one is able to reconstruct habits, revisions in character will inevitably follow. Dewey's educational project that aimed at cultivating democracy as a way of life was an ambitious task; it essentially constituted a revision in human nature as we all know it. And, Dewey felt it was possible.³⁴

The democratic method or way of life is a means in which the flux of life can be directed, and the crucial role of education here cannot be overstated. He writes that human society "is always in a process of renewing, and it endures only because of renewal. . . . For the most part, this continuous alteration has been unconscious and unintended."³⁵ Thought must be kept alive and awake, and educational institutions should be giving this constant recitation with the support of the community.

Dewey feared that this unconsciousness that is perpetuated by inadequate education would lead to a stagnation of society and a stultification of custom and individual habit. Such rigidity of habit will eventually produce "social arterial sclerosis." He writes, "Not the nation but its customs get old. Its institutions petrify into rigidity: there is social arterial sclerosis."³⁶ This is a paralysis of the intellect and sedimentation of habit that is difficult to redirect in any given culture. It requires "rejuvenation" or recovery from within of a cultural plasticity of habit. It requires unlearning.³⁷

³⁴ It must be pointed out that some feel that such a way of life is not possible. One of the skeptics is Robert Tallise. He states in various places that Deweyan democracy is out of date, and democracy as a way of life is not achievable. Robert Tallise, "A Farewell to Deweyan Democracy," *Political Studies* 59, no. 3 (2011): 509–26; "Saving Pragmatist Democratic Theory (From Itself)," *Etica & Politica* (Ethics & Politics) XII, no. 1 (2010): 12–27, special issue on Pragmatism and Democracy, guest-edited by Roberto Frega and Fabrizio Trifirò; "Can Democracy be a Way of Life?" *Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society* 39, no. 1 (2003): 1–21.

³⁵ Dewey, *HNC*, 95.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁷ This, therefore, is characteristic of democracy as a way of life. Socialization here is a fact. The question of whether or not one will become socialized is not negotiable, but in what ways will the person become socialized and for what purpose is worthy of serious consideration.

This reaches to the root of habit. There is a strong connection between method and habit and the individual. Indeed, a method could be understood as a set of habits, and a set of habits as a method. Dewey confirms this and the power of habit by saying of habit, “we acknowledge that a habit has this power because it is so intimately a part of ourselves. It has this hold upon us because we are the habit.”³⁸ Thus, the person is the habit and method and, in that case, is also the means—the only means through which the democratic way of life can be realized. The question for Dewey is, what kind of habits or methods are appropriate or among the variety of habits that are most conducive to human welfare, growth, and the establishment of the democratic way of life? Dewey would say, democratic habits or methods, but taken further, could be understood to be democratic characters.

This goes even deeper for Dewey, and takes an ethical turn. The question transcends what type of habits or methods and springs forward to ask, what type of people, characters, or citizens are needed. Dewey finds it to be a mistake to ever divorce ethics (or morals as he says) from every facet of human life, for example, politics, education, and society. At every point, any individual act is a social act; therefore, action is always social in nature. Being social in nature, actions have to do with choice and consequences. A return to ethos has been a theme that has been discussed in several

³⁸ Dewey, *HNC*, 24.

books in relation to democracy and citizenship.³⁹ Democracy is a type of experience. Thus, democracy as experience, as education, as means, must have a criteria and vision.⁴⁰

Even more pressing, however, is to consider where such a way of life will lead. Will such a way of living produce a democratic ethos conducive to discovering and cultivating the best habits and customs? Can there even be such things as good or bad habits, given that all situations are bound by context? Does the democratic way of life have ultimacy? Dewey answered yes and found that vision of ultimacy in what he called the Great Community.

5.5. The Great Community

The “Great Society” will transform into the Great Community, provided that democracy as a way of life is carried out. If and when the Great Community does come into being, “a society in which the ever-expanding and intricately ramifying consequences of associated activities shall be known in the full sense of that word, so that an organized, articulate Public comes into being.”⁴¹ The Great Community is a vision; it is where the democratic way of life will lead, provided everyone lives the democratic way of life.

Dewey only talks about the Great Community at length in two different instances. One is in his chapter in *The Public and Its Problems*, and the other is at the Conference

³⁹ Works of note here are Richard Bernstein, “The Retrieval of the Democratic Ethos,” in *Habermas on Law and Democracy: Critical Exchanges*, ed. Michael Rosenfeld and Andrew Arato (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 287–305; Jason Glynos, “Radical Democratic Ethos, or, What Is an Authentic Political Act?” *Contemporary Political Theory* 2, no. 2 (2003); and Stephen K. White, *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Gregory Pappas makes much of the concept democracy as experience in his exploration of Dewey’s ethics, *John Dewey’s Ethics: Democracy As Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Pappas makes central to his study of Dewey’s ethics the importance of moral education and the constant need for improvement in morality through education and democracy as a way of life.

⁴¹ Dewey, “The Search for the Great Community,” LW 2: 350.

on Education and Philosophy at the University of Illinois on October 21, 1949.⁴² In 1949, Dewey writes,

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*.⁴³

This statement captures Dewey’s enduring faith in the enriched process of democratic experience. If the democratic way of life is the means through which the Great Community can come into “being,” then the individual living that way of life is the means to that means.

The Great Community is, no doubt, an ideal state, a Deweyan version of “Kallipolis.” It is a kind of community to be hoped for. Dewey, like Socrates, builds the great community in logos. It is an exercise in providing social hope through the creative powers of the intellect, and also an exercise in criticizing current cultural values because Dewey cannot point to an exemplary community that can be modeled or replicated.⁴⁴

⁴² I am in debt to Philip Bishop for highlighting this observation in his dissertation, “Dewey’s Pragmatism and The Great Community” (PhD diss., University of South Florida, 2010).

⁴³ Introduction to *Essays for John Dewey’s Ninetieth Birthday*, ed. Kenneth Dean Benne and William Oliver Stanley (Urbana, IL; Bureau of Research and Service, College of Education, University of Illinois, 1950), 3–4, from a statement read for Dewey at the Conference on Education and Philosophy, University of Illinois, October 21, 1949. Also in Dewey, “Greetings to the Urbana Conference,” LW 17: 89.

⁴⁴ Given the context in which Dewey was writing and thinking, America needed all the hope it could possibly get. Talk of the “New Deal,” the “Great Society,” etc., filled the air both politically and socially. Dewey was no doubt responding and contributing to this environment in his supporting the creation of the Great Community.

In order to make this vision a reality, Dewey states that there are conditions to be met. These conditions include, but must not be limited to, cooperative and mutual beneficial association, the consistent continuity of social life, the liberal release of human potentiality through social (and educational) institutions, and the active participation and integration of individuals within the community. These conditions are broad and vague at best, and the number of conditions can and must grow both in specificity and number.

However, in his conception of the Great Community, Dewey gives a very real sense of finality and end. One gets the impression that such an ideal might be static, and if that is the case, then growth ceases. What about habits in such a community? In the Great Community, habits would be at their best. But, given Dewey's keen sense of context, can there be such a thing as a *good* or bad habit? Good and bad, for Dewey, are relative to the context of the problematic situation at hand and whatever the criteria of the experience demands and to what extent it retards or promotes growth. But in the Great Community, it seems that context is replaced by universal.

Unfortunately, Dewey does not flesh out his vision of the Great Community in detail; for example, he neglects to mention how social reforms concerning welfare, poverty, schooling, and healthcare would work. Rather, Dewey only provides the unfinished form of the vision. Perhaps this is no accident, however. It may well be that the vision can never be complete. To be charitable to Dewey, the cultivation of living democratically does not complete the vision of the Great Community but rather enriches, cultivates, and expands the vision.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The power of imagination is key here in constructing the vision of the Great Community. It required him, like James, to "first grasp his center of vision by an act of imagination." William James to Miss S---, May 26, 1900, in Henry James, ed., *The Letters of William James*, vol. II (Boston: Atlantic Monthly, 1920), 355.

One of the most important features or conditions of the Great Community is communication. Dewey states, “Till the Great society is converted into a Great Community, the public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible.”⁴⁶ Communication, here, should be understood to be an art and a very important art. Dewey writes,

The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness. . . . Artists have always been the real purveyors of news for it is not the outward happening in itself, which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation. . . . The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breath life into it.”⁴⁷

Social inquiry can only be realized and cultivated through freedom of expression, and since experience drives toward expression, communication as a communal art is transformative.⁴⁸ Dewey affirms, “The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.”⁴⁹

It could be argued that the Great Community was Dewey’s appeal to his critics who found him to be aimless. The Great Community could be seen as Dewey’s attempt to provide democracy with something that Aristotle felt democracy never had, a target. The

⁴⁶ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, LW 2: 324.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 349–50.

⁴⁸ Dewey was way beyond his time when it came to his understanding of the importance of language. Quine recognized, “When Dewey was writing in this naturalistic vein, Wittgenstein still held his copy theory of language.” W. V. Quine, “Ontological Relativity,” in his *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 27.

⁴⁹ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, LW 2: 328.

Great Community was democracy's target as donated by Dewey. It would be too easy to accuse Dewey of going from absolutism to experimentalism back to absolutism. Dewey does not use the absolute later on in his writings much at all. He does, however, use the word "ultimate." The question that Dewey does not address is whether or not his "vision" of the Great Community was revisable. In this case, the Great Community was an "ultimate" target that, on the whole (excepting the paramount element of communication), lacked cohesion, criteria, and a clear plan of action, but moreover, its apparent telos went against Dewey's open-ended program of education and cultural experimentalism. In this way, the Great Community or the public of such a community might never come into "being," but could only hope to be in a constantly rich state of becoming, and democracy as a way of life is its midwife.⁵⁰

5.6. Conclusion

Dewey feared that his country suffered from political and social confusions wrought about by and perpetuated through educational institutions. He states, "A society that is uncertain of itself, that does not know where it is going or where it wants to go, will be reflected in an educational system that is also drifting and uncertain."⁵¹ The conception of drift should be taken literally here; the symbolism is similar to a rudderless boat out at sea. Dewey's position on democracy is a reminder of the crucial importance of the activity of schooling and educating and reconstructing experience. And, at the root of this

⁵⁰ In this way, it is the process of democracy as a way of life that is key. Jurgen Habermas agrees that "communicative rationality" is essential to the democratization of living. He asserts, "The Democratic procedure is institutionalized in discourses and bargaining processes by employing forms of communication that promise that all outcomes reached in conformity with the procedure are reasonable. No one has worked out this view more energetically than John Dewey." Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Malden: MIT Press, 1996), 304.

⁵¹ Dewey, "Education, the Foundation for Social Organization," LW 11: 234.

activity lives the concept of learning, which is another way of saying, acquiring habits. In Dewey's way of thinking, the solution for curing the "ailments of democracy is more democracy," provided that it is continually being revised through education.⁵²

Democracy has its origins like learning does—through interactions and transactions. It would be characterized by continuity; that is, what one has learned would allow one to go on learning rather than having blocks to future learning. Communications is just a continuation of our interactions with the environment. Dewey states, "To cooperate by giving differences a chance to show themselves because of the belief that the expression of difference is not only a right of the other persons but is a means of enriching one's own life experience, is inherent in the democratic way of life."⁵³ Those kinds of interactions and their continuity lead to important understandings of the role of difference within growth.

This is key to our socialization. We all must be socialized. For Dewey, socialization was inevitable anyways, so the question becomes, how will the person be socialized? If one has been socialized to participate in varied interests internally (within your group) and to be open to cooperate and interact with others different than you, you can continue to actualize your potential in unique ways. Things do not have potential if they are things they have yet to interact with that are different than them. Social efficiency comes easily if we are open and free to coordinate ourselves and our values with others who have been socialized in a similar way; in other words, we then arrive at a socially efficient arrangement organically not mechanically.

⁵² Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, LW 2: 327. Roman Briggs (University of Arkansas) gave a paper at the 2009 Society for Advancement of American Philosophy titled "Democracy By Way of Democracy: A Critical Explication of Deweyan Liberalism," which took this notion further.

⁵³ Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us," LW 14: 228.

Thus, at the heart of democracy as a way of life is the ever-*becoming/continuing community*. Community consists of individuals who constantly interact. To what extent is this interaction educational? Dewey liked that democracy (with education pushing it along) might bring about social interactions that are educational. Of course, this might presuppose that individuals within the community have the appropriate set of dialectical habits to foster deliberately conscious educational interactions. Interactions are educational anyway, but they are not always consciously so. People can only actualize their potential through educational transactions with others different from themselves if they are aware of what is conspiring when they communicate or commune with others.

Democracy is like science in that it is growing by use of a special method and is conscious of that method. Like science, democracy is never complete. Science is seen as successful, and to this success it owes debt to application of a special method; Dewey felt that democracy could share the same success in as much as the democratic method of associated living was used and continually improved. So, for Dewey, what should be growing are democratic methods so as to produce more sophisticated, more intelligent democratic methods. In this case, then, the democratic way of life yields more democratic ways of life.

In a similar way, democracy is also like philosophy to some degree. Philosophy is the only discipline that can ask, what is philosophy? This is because it is at root a philosophical question. Biology cannot do this. "What is biology?" is not a biological question; it is a philosophical one. Democracy works the same way. It is a way of life in which "What is democracy?" is a democratic question. Much of its appeal is found in its

ability to question itself or its own existence.⁵⁴ This is the reason democracy (with education and liberalism fueling the fire) is radical; it is a way of life in which everyone should be able to question everything, including but not limited to democracy's existence.

Dewey's faith in democracy is not faith in some abstract universal, but rather a faith in a process of experience. He does tend to equate social institutions to personal habits. And we should always be able, through social intelligence cultivated in school and society, to examine and tweak these things. Dewey's attraction to Democracy as a way of life or the democratic method is that it has the potential and ability to be self-correcting, but primarily because so do humans.

For Dewey, the method is the live creature. It is the development of the live creature's full personality, and it is a personal way of individual life. In this way, the live creature is the democratic method that must be able to question himself or herself and be socially self-correcting through transaction with others. It is one thing to agree or recognize that democracy as a way of life (in the Deweyan sense) is and should be self-renewing through education, but it is quite another thing to accept what that means for one's own individual interests and habits. Thus, the aim of the critique of habit or the purpose of the critique of habit in living the democratic way of life is at once individual and social aimed the reconstruction of experience.

Democracy, like science, will work in large part because of its corrigibility; democratically/scientifically minded citizens must be willing to test their ideas; they must not see themselves or their ideas as infallible. Thus, the democratic citizen must put questions to nature and change his or her ideas if their ideas do not work out in

⁵⁴ Whether or not Dewey actually wants this to happen is quite a different matter.

experience. This is difficult primarily because one's human nature is against him or her.⁵⁵ Experimental, flexible habits and attitude must be cultivated through the democratic way of life. If this does not happen, Dewey warns that cultural stagnation and the stultification of personality are inevitable.

Democracy (through education) should be creating freethinking individuals who are allowed to let their natural creative endowments flourish and grow; however, this runs counter to elite interests. Until every facet of life is democratized (including industry through social inquiry and social intelligence), then politics will remain merely the shadow that is cast of business over society.⁵⁶ It should allow individuals to bring out what life is actually like and discuss how to make it better. If this can happen it will have revolutionary effects in the way in which social inquiry works toward solving social problems.

Perpetual, conscious intellectual and cultural transformation of custom and habit and the restoration of continuity of life are keystones in democracy as a way of life. Thus, the rediscovery, revision, and rejuvenation of this way of life depend on one's ability to readjust to the interruptive, discontinuous nature of experience. To live a life of full and ever-expanding meaning, that is, to live democratically, is to be open to questioning ones

⁵⁵ Dewey couches the task as forbidding when he asserts,

It would have taken a new race of human beings to escape, in the use made of political forms, from the influence of deeply ingrained habits, of old institutions and customary social status, with their inwrought limitation of expectation, desire, and demand. And such a race, unless of disembodied angelic constitution, would simply have taken up the task where human beings assumed it upon emergence from the conditions of anthropoid apes. In spite of sudden and catastrophic revolutions, the essential continuity of history is doubly guaranteed.

John Dewey, "The Search for the Great Community," LW 2: 336. Thus, there is heavy tension between human culture as it is found and as it could be.

⁵⁶ Noam Chomsky refers to this in *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*, ed. Peter R. Mitchell and John Schoeffel (New York: New York Press, 2002), 321.

values, way of thinking, and reconstructing whatever habits hinder the rich development of the human personality.

CHAPTER 6: CRITICAL APPRAISALS

Dewey's position calls for some critical evaluation. This chapter will undertake a brief critical examination of a series of issues that present interesting implications for Dewey's position; these topics will include stability and change as it relates to character and habits, his definition of democracy, and the application the experimental method to his own way of life. This chapter will be a criticism of abstract elements (though not all of them) that are present in Dewey's position on habit, education, the democratic way of life.

6.1. Change and Permanence in Habit and Character

Dewey was a strong proponent of and was influenced heavily by Darwin. Dewey has a problem with permanence and stability. Through this chapter this problem will continue to show up within Dewey's position. As was explored earlier, he feared a "social arterial sclerosis" wrought by lack of change, lack of adaptability or plasticity of habit, and deficiency in schooling and community pedagogy. For Dewey, survival or betterment did not depend on strength or intelligence alone, but rather on how well one can adapt to change and continue to do so. According to Dewey, democracy as a way of life affords this level of flexibility of habits.

However, change and permanence in Dewey's philosophy presents a problem. We might ask of Dewey, what is permanent or stable? If you turn change into an absolute concept, whereby you mean that everything is undergoing change, if experience is in reference to a constantly changing environment, this includes any feature that is disclosed by our encounters with the world, then how can we describe permanent features? It is this term, *stability* (or permanence) that needs to be carefully examined. In ignoring this, then change becomes absolute, and one could fall into uncontrolled relativism. This takes on special importance when it comes to the discussion of values.

If it is to be characterized as democratic, our behavior has to be such that it can have a certain stability and constancy. Without stability, one cannot make decisions, much less have those decisions be considered democratic. This is a perennial problem of philosophy, not just one Dewey struggles with; that is, namely, how does one answer the question of permanence?¹ Dewey could not accept and did not accept Plato's theory of forms. This is one of the issues that Dewey has to discuss and does in his metaphysical thinking, especially in "Experience and Nature."

What about the democratic character? Any person who has a high degree of plasticity of habit would also, then, have a high degree of plasticity of character. The notion of the plasticity of character suggests that the purposes in which activities are aimed and values of such activities are inconsistent. Having no fixed points of reference is a problem. Dewey calls for a democratic character or ethos, but does this mean that the characteristics of that ethos should be inconsistent and capricious? Dewey, on the one

¹ Plato's response is that there are permanent characters in the world, which depend on the theory of the forms. There are forms that transcend sensible objects, and these forms have a separate existence of their own.

hand, calls for continuity and, on the other, calls for ever-present and dynamic change. This presents a whole other set of problems for developing a democratic character.

One could transfer the problem of stability to see what is permanent in cognition, and then he or she would come to those features of intelligence called the laws of thought. One cannot really think and respond to any problematic situation unless he or she has a stable frame of reference. Is it possible to call up in imagination sciences and scientists whereby they come up with hypotheses to explain the phenomenon, only to find that the concepts of science continuously change? If there is no intellectual stability in the sciences (specifically associated to method), then one has no way of securing the understanding or explanation he or she wants. No sooner than one offers an explanation then a theory of change comes in and shows that one must redefine all of the concepts that were being used. Can one redefine the laws of logic? One can either employ the theory of non-contradiction or not employ it. What place, then, would logic hold in the sciences?²

This is one of the problems Dewey faced. His solution is interesting when he speaks of the experimental aspect of science. We confirm the processes of scientific thinking. As soon as impulses enter, habits will perform, and social institutions shape these personal habits. These habits have a stable character and some degree of fixity (so says William James, at least). Stability enters there in the formation of habits. Whether these habits can be understood as having permanence is what Dewey questioned. He wanted them to remain open. But, in living the democratic way of life, can habits be open

² I employ the term *logic* in the way Dewey intended it. Logic was a theory of inquiry. To ask if one can redefine the laws of logic is another way of saying, can one redefine the law of inquiry (which is itself an inquiry or logical question).

if they are operative? It seems to be that the formation of habits testifies to success of certain stabilities.

We should make a distinction between habitual stability and absolute unchangeability. Let us take the case of certain scientific theory that had tremendous influence, for example, Newtonian physics prior to Einstein. In Newtonian physics, the laws presuppose that the universe is stable. The language of how to get at the ultimate features of the universe is mathematics, which is dependent on stability of meaning. The meaning of the triangle is not negotiable (mathematically speaking). The meaning of plane remains stable throughout the development of a whole mathematical system. This is a basic characteristic of mathematical systems. Why is math so privileged to have stability of meaning? Is this a habit of the mind? Is it native to the mind? Descartes says yes, but just because it might be called a feature of the human mind does not mean it is a feature of nature. In looking at the structure of Newtonian science, it becomes quite clear that, in looking at the stabilities talked about in the world of mathematics and the stability in natural phenomenon as laws of nature, stability is an objective fact as much as a mental operation. But even now, without presuppositions or assuming stability of meaning, you the reader cannot even understand a thing I have just written.

The meanings of my terms cannot change from minute to minute. An operation of communication that would remain is that it takes certain stabilities of meaning for granted. The words I speak today have a stable meaning. If they cannot be understood, why do we have dictionaries? Dictionaries state established meanings. Cultural changes in definitions of words are another matter.

Within a given context, the words remain stable for what they stand for. This is one of the greatest distinctions that operate through the formulation of philosophy ever since philosophy became an intellectual enterprise. We will always try to understand change and permanence. We have to seek stabilities, or we cannot communicate (indeed, this is what I am doing in this dissertation). Imagine what the world would be like if, whenever you had a need, you had to respond to it and utilize external goods, but they change minute to minute. Unless the objects have certain stable features and you can refer to these stable features in order to organize your conduct, you will be lost. Heraclitus talked about change and referred to it by saying, “You can not step into the same river twice.” It is not the same river, provided one even steps into it in the first place.

What happens is this: if you make change completely absolute, then nothing becomes intelligible, including intelligence itself. You cannot understand even your own understanding. Today we talk about the changing character of the world, and if change happens too rapidly we become neurotics and do not know how to respond. The pressure becomes so intense that no sooner do you learn a given way to respond or develop a certain habit, the world changes. Technology has given a new set of structures that you must also memorize and learn in order to be successful, but can you keep up? If the world continues to change, we cannot form the appropriate habits quickly enough.

Change is not simply something to which we respond in the natural sciences, but we do so also in the social sciences, in customs, religion, art, and so on. When it comes to values, our behavior has to become as articulate and clear as possible so it can respond to changes. Without a stability of character, we get easily disoriented and confused. Thus,

Dewey's notion of change is novel and radical but can be harmful in trying to build on the notion of living a democratic character. His promise of a democratic character and his conception of change run counter to one another and could lead to some accusing him of anti-foundationalism.

6.2. Democracy and Its Problems

The problem of defining democracy (understood as democracy as a way of life) is associated with the problem of change in Dewey's thinking. If the democratic way of life yields more democratic *ways* of life, what exactly is the goal or point? This is the problem with democracy that Aristotle pointed out over 2,500 years ago. What is the goal? Do we just keep adding to the pot without taking stock and throwing out that which does not and did not work?

In a moment of sincere honesty, Dewey admits,

I do not know just what democracy means in detail in the whole range of concrete relations of human life—political, economic, cultural, domestic—at the present time. I make this humiliating confession the more readily because I suspect that nobody else knows what it means in full concrete detail. But I am sure, however, that this problem (of not knowing what democracy means in detail) is the one that most demands the serious attention of educators at the present time.³

He thinks that democracy's potential to question itself is attractive, but does not really want that to happen, primarily because he does not have the answer, or if he does, it is not the correct one.

³ Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, LW 11: 190.

This calls into question whether or not Dewey is even his own kind of “democratic.” He says, “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.”⁴ This is a pretty clear statement about what the name of democracy represents for Dewey; however, how can democracy represent this when Dewey admits that he does not know what it means in “full detail”? Does this abstraction of the meaning of democracy perpetuate Dewey’s own ability to look inward and apply his own recommendations to his own life? Does it create a blindness to the corruptibility of self?

There’s no doubt that Dewey has a vision as set forth in the Great Community, but this vision is a bit distorted. He calls it the “Search for the Great Community.” However, later in the *Public and its Problems*, it becomes clear that it is not so much the “Search for the Great Community” as it is for search for the conditions to bring about the Great Community. Thus, Dewey’s vision of the Great Community does not mean he can relay what the “form” of this vision truly is. He states, “When these conditions are brought into being, they will make their own forms.”⁵ The conditions will make their own forms? One could nitpick such an assertion to death, but the latter statement by Dewey is indicative of his own distorted vision of both the Great Community and the conditions (that will create their own forms) essential to bringing the Great Community into being.

The confusion present in Dewey’s vision not only implicates his understanding of the Great Community, but also of democracy. As was shown, Dewey was also not sure

⁴ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, LW 2: 184.

⁵ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, LW 2: 327.

about what democracy meant. If this is the case, then that crisis in understanding implicates the full meaning of democracy as a way of life. This would, then, further implicate and confuse the means by which the democratic way of life can be achieved, the institution of education. If Dewey does not know the full meaning of democracy, does not this also imply that he might not realize or know the full meaning of education?

To be charitable to Dewey, perhaps he made such an admission as a call to arms for citizens to work together to solve social problems concerned with democracy and education through the social method of intelligence, which Dewey associates with the full art of communication. In a way, the statement was a criticism both of himself and of culture at hand. Sheldon Wolin's criticism might be right: "[D]emocracy is too simple for complex societies and too complex for simple ones," but for Dewey, there is no such thing as a simple society and, consequently, no such thing as simple democracy either.⁶

To be sure, democracy is a creative force brought about by the wonders of communication in creating both participation and co-participation. Dewey notes in his essay "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us" that it is "creative democracy" that is needed and should be hoped for. The democratic experience should be of a Socratic type, and aesthetic in nature.⁷ With this charity, then, perhaps Dewey's admission that he does not know what democracy means in full detail could be equated to Socrates professing to

⁶ Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 42.

⁷ Dewey states in his intellectual biography "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" that [n]othing could be more helpful to present philosophy than a "Back-to-Plato Movement"; but it would have to be back to the dramatic, restless, cooperatively inquiring Plato of the Dialogues, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn and not to the artificial Plato constructed by unimaginative commentators who treat him as the original university professor.

"From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in *Contemporary American Philosophy: Personal Statements*, 2 vols., ed. George P. Adams and Wm. Pepperell Montague (New York: Russell and Russell, 1930), 21.

not know what wisdom or justice is. Dewey was in search of the good life, yet he did not know exactly how to get there. He was chasing an ideal but failed to make a clear distinction between the ideal and the degree of attainment of that ideal or how close culture can come to attaining the ideal.

6.3. Teaching the Teachers

Dewey's problem, in stating and formulating his program of political educational reform, was not unlike Plato's. Who is going to teach the teachers? The question is not so much, who is willing to go back down into the cave, but rather who has actually gotten out of the cave. Put differently, who among the citizenry is actually living the democratic way of life, understands how to reconstruct their experience and, thusly, habits, and has the tools to teach others how to do that?

Dewey took the teaching of teachers seriously. However, the concern that precedes that one concerns the teachers (or professors of education) of the to-be teachers. Dewey knew that teaching teachers was vital to the realization of democracy as a way of life, but he never addressed fully the training of the professors who would be charged with teaching future teachers.

Why? Perhaps because he felt he was the teacher of the teachers who teach the to-be teachers. Is Dewey appointing himself? Does he need a teacher? Who will teach him? Does he need to be taught? Does he have something to learn? He does not address these questions directly, but maybe that is because he himself is not sure he is living the democratic way of life. Can he teach the democratic way of life if he does not live it himself and possess the requisite habits?

He claims in a short essay titled “Making Education a Student Affair” that the most crucial part of making education a student affair is to help students make their own “THINKING” their primary concern. Beyond this, if the teacher is also an excellent student, then the teacher’s primary concern should also be his or her own “THINKING.”⁸ There is no question that teachers’ colleges and colleges of education are Dewey’s legacy to varying degrees, but what could be questioned is the extent to which these colleges of education make it their business in making “THINKING” (and the examination of thinking, etc.) a student, teacher, and teacher-of-the-teacher affair.⁹

If the answer to the latter concern points to the position that thinking is of primary importance, it would, then, stand to reason that philosophy of education, ethics in education, and social foundation types of courses are the richest and most valued in the to-be teachers curriculum. Is this the case? Dewey recognizes in *How We Think* (1910) that the crisis in education is associated with person’s ability of knowing how to think and what to think about and how to change what one thinks about if the situation calls for something different.¹⁰ Are faculty and professors of education in colleges of education today thinking about their own thinking and habits of thought? Thus, the problem of who

⁸ The word “THINKING” is in all caps in the article. Dewey, “Making Education a Student Affair,” MW 6: 287.

⁹ Dewey states in *How We Think*,

The operation of the teacher’s own mental habit tends, unless watched and guided, to make the child a student of the teacher’s peculiarities rather than of the subjects he is supposed to study. His chief concern is to accommodate himself to what the teacher expects of him rather than to devote himself energetically to the problems of the subject matter. “Is this right?” comes to mean “Will this answer or this process satisfy the teacher?”—instead of meaning “Does it satisfy the inherent conditions of the problem?” . . . “it is obviously undesirable that their chief intellectual problem should be that of producing an answer approved by the teacher, and their standard of success be successful adaptation to the requirements of another.

John Dewey, *How We Think* (New York: D.C. Heath and Co., 1910), 49.

¹⁰ Changing what one thinks about and how one makes that adjustment has everything to do with rechanneling habits and the method by which that is achieved.

will teach the teachers goes back to Plato, is one we find in Dewey, and is one we currently face today.

6.4. The Limits of Dewey's Experimentalism

Dewey admits that he is deeply committed to the experimentalist position of engaging and learning about the world in which he lives. However, does he actually apply the recommendations he makes to his own life? Dewey talks about the scientific method, but what evidence do we have that he used it? Does Dewey's talk of the scientific method implicate or preclude his use of it? This section has the mission to briefly point out two instances that provide evidence that Dewey's experimentalism has its limits. The first example is the notion of the democratic way of life. The second is his lack of testing when it comes to his philosophy of habit. He never tests his theory of habits or democracy as a way of life. Also, in expanding that, in so not doing, he also does not employ the scientific method either in a laboratory or in everyday life. Dewey talks about the experimental attitude but does not use it in his own life. He never tests his theory of habits. Does not that go against his position?

In speaking of democracy as a way of life, Dewey never provides any alternative mode of living. Democracy as a way of life, then, must be understood to be the best possible way of life. This is curious. It is curious because in his seemingly conscious attempt to avoid dogmatism, he becomes dogmatic about living the democratic way of life. He becomes dogmatic in his non-dogmatic approach. This implicates democracy as a way of life being a continuing and expanding creative experience.

As stated earlier, Dewey finds democracy's ability to question itself attractive in that it offers the possibility of continual growth; but does he actually want this to happen? He never provides a full account of any methodology of self-criticism or a way in which democracy could carry out this criticism or line of questions except for the statement that he sees education as democracy's midwife through which it should be born anew with each generation. Democracy is self-correcting only in as much as the citizens that comprise this way of living can be self-correcting. Thus, the citizens must be able to question themselves. Was Dewey willing to question himself? These questions are not easily answered. But, understandably, this is a very difficult thing to do. It is one thing to be a learner, but a different matter to become an unlearner. If democracy did indeed question itself, this could compromise Dewey's whole program and perhaps, more importantly, his faith; yet, such an exercise is necessary. Dewey provides the tool of democracy as a way of life but does not fully teach us how to use the tool primarily perhaps because he himself was not in possession of the tool.

On the matter of testing his theory of habit, Dewey was taken to task by many psychologists and philosophers. G. W. Allport gave the most notable criticism. The failure in actually testing his theory of habit is associated to his lack of actually applying the scientific method to his theories on the whole. Allport states, "Dewey's conception of habit . . . has a decidedly deductive cast. It is not advanced with experimental evidence, nor is it compared in any detail to similar units, especially attitudes, proposed by other psychologists."¹¹ One finds it very difficult to argue with Allport in his latter observation

¹¹ G. W. Allport, "Dewey's Individual and Social Psychology," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, The Library of Living Philosophers series, vol. 1 (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1939), 271f. This is especially hard to take when Dewey states, "Experiment is required in order to institute the data which warrant inferred propositions." *HNC*, 70.

and rather ironic given that Dewey felt that the only way to get knowledge (or warranted assertability) was through the scientific method of controlled inquiry.

Allport continues the critique and includes a word that cuts deep, “isolationism.” Allport continues, “Here we have an example of the isolationism that afflicts Dewey’s psychology. Granted that relatively little work had been done in 1922 upon the perplexing problem of units of personality, still there were many contacts that he could have made with profit.”¹² Dewey felt that humans were social through and through, and, for this reason, any intelligence is social intelligence and this is why the latter statement from Allport cut deep. Allport is essentially criticizing Dewey for his lack in application of social intelligence and inquiry in testing his ideas before he wrote about them. It could be argued that Dewey was talking about developing new methods of inquiry, social methods of inquiry. But, even so, he was not doing so experimentally or clinically and could only do so dialectically.

While Dewey was in no way an experimental scientist testing ideas in a laboratory, his posture in his writings suggest that he felt that philosophy has some sort of control over other disciplines (social science, natural science, and humanities). This might be especially true in the case of psychology. Perhaps this is what made Allport most uneasy. However consistently inconsistent Dewey might have been in applying his ideas to his own way of life or in testing them in the lives of others, his genius, dialectical power, and vast influence cannot be denied.

The purpose of this chapter is in no way intended to browbeat or denigrate Dewey or his position at all, but rather to call attention to points that need to be further clarified and explored by future research so as to bring about a fuller understanding of Dewey’s

¹² Allport, “Dewey’s Individual and Social Psychology,” 272.

rich position on habit, education, and the democratic way of life. Indeed, in the Deweyan spirit, criticism and self-criticism is much celebrated and is a prerequisite power for growth. As much of a force as Dewey was in the progressive education movement and in political and social reform, blind spots still existed in his position and in application of his position, but justifiably so.¹³ Dewey was only human and was a testament to how difficult it is to be self-critical of one's own habits and nature. However, further research is needed to excavate his intellectual biography, which he stated to be "unstable, chameleon-like, yielding one after another to many diverse and even incompatible influences; struggling to assimilate something from each and yet striving to carry it forward in a way that is logically consistent with what has been learned from its predecessors."¹⁴

¹³ Dewey knew well he needed others in order make his project and conception clearer and more coherent. William James remarks on the dangers of dogmatism and the dangers of a single vision in his *Talks to Teachers* in a section titled, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings": "Hands off: Neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands." William James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1928 [1902]) 269.

¹⁴ Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," 22.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION

The themes throughout this dissertation have aimed at showing how and why habit plays a central role in John Dewey's philosophy of education and in his cultural project of democracy as a way of life. However, the integration of the themes leads to a broader realization that any philosophy of education is really a philosophy of culture. Within any culture exist customs, and within the customs live individual habits shaped by both social interactions and the institutions.

The conceptual advance found in this dissertation is the accent and emphasis placed on a previously obscure concept in relation to Dewey's philosophy of education and notion of habit, which is the conception of unlearning as an educational and cultural value. For one to say that he or she has nothing to unlearn is to say that he or she has nothing more to learn. Any attitude or habit that compromises growth should be carefully examined and reconstructed. Any such reconstruction calls into question what to keep and what to discard; it is, at root, unlearning. For Dewey, any given individual's and culture's ability to unlearn that habit (or habits) that inhibits growth of the democratic character is an indication of critical intelligence.

As was seen in chapter 2, scholarship focusing on Dewey's conception of habit as it relates to his philosophy of education is scant. Even more scant is scholarship of his position on habit and its relationship to democracy as a way of life. As has been seen

throughout this work, the topic of habit is a broad and complex one. Secondary literature on the subject shows how others struggle to keep a rein around the concept while articulating the connections within Dewey's philosophy. From the review of previous literature, some of the complexity of the concept was shown as well as how the concept operates in many other parts of Dewey's philosophy such as ethics, inquiry, and in human nature in general.

The full complexity of habit was shown in chapter 3. It was established that any change in one's habits constitutes a change or adjustment of all habits, a full adjustment of ethos and character. Additionally, habit is indefinable for Dewey. Dewey wanted habits to remain flexible, not fixed, and subject to continual revision and refinement. However, this goes directly against the traditional conception of habit, even going back to Aristotle. Aristotle felt that once an individual came to a certain stage of development, habits and character were set. Dewey was challenging this; however, Dewey's justification for the changeability of habit was not quite as strong as Aristotle's position on the fixity of habit. Dewey felt that habit's plasticity and open-endedness was its greatest promise for growth in his cultural project of education.

In carrying forward the cultural project of education, in chapter 4 it was shown how habit lives and operates in the most integral component of Dewey's philosophy of education, growth. This was demonstrated with the contrast that Dewey makes about "intentional" education (schooling) and "incidental" education (everyday life). Dewey argued that one of the crises in education was that education as it was found in schools at the time he was writing proved to disrupt the continuity of social life; that is, habits and values cultivated at home were out of sync with those taught in the classroom. The

experience involved with learning and unlearning and acquiring habits is a creative experience; however, in order to fully appreciate this rich, immediate, and consummatory quality of experience, one must remain conscious of what is at work in the formation of character.

Nevertheless, Dewey did not have just any character in mind. He was specifically speaking of the democratic character, which was highlighted in chapter 5. In pointing to the way in which people should live their lives, the democratic way, Dewey has often been misunderstood as a sort of high priest of democracy or that his urging comes secretly in the form of indoctrination or subtle coercion. Any such reading is a misreading of Dewey.

As was shown in chapter 5, democracy as a way of life is an open life, one that deeply values difference, social intelligence, a socially scientific attitude toward solving “Problems of Men,” and ongoing criticism and improvement of values.¹ It was underscored that the foundational element central to establishing democratic cultural self-correction was education. This was imperative not only to the initial establishment of democracy as a way of life, but for the perpetual reestablishment. Through the constant reconstruction of habits carried out in Dewey’s ideal of democracy as a way of life, culture can continue to question and improve the adaptive pragmatic method through which values can be reconditioned to keep up with the ever-changing nature of social life.

¹ It should be pointed out that Dewey is not without his contemporary critics regarding his conception of democracy. Robert Tallise has largely cutting, critical remarks to make concerning Dewey’s conception of democracy. Tallise posits in his work, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy*, “In this book I have proposed a way of thinking about democratic politics from a pragmatist but anti-Deweyan perspective, and I have argued that this decidedly Peircean conception of Democracy is superior to the Deweyan view that dominates contemporary pragmatist political theory.” Robert Tallise, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 131.

Chapter 6 pointed out some elements in Dewey's thinking that still require clarification. Abstractions of concepts exist in any person's way of thinking, and Dewey is no exception to that. Dewey, like the other pragmatists pointed out in the introduction, was involved with changing a language. He and the other pragmatists were changing the meaning of the terms while they were using the terms. Chapter 6 points out how this, to various degrees, implicates the clarity of Dewey's ideas about change, democracy, and also habit. Dewey was still revising and questioning the terms he used up until his late life. In this way, Dewey exemplified that "growth comes through growing."² Chapter 6 represents what work is still to be done in clarifying Dewey's rich ideas. Indeed, it is an invitation to test the limits of one's own intelligibility of ideas in order to realize that the mind is not merely the means, but also the end.

7.1. The Need for a Conscious Pragmatic Attitude in Education

Dewey pushed pragmatism in the direction of instrumentalism and toward application in the field of education. All ideas are to be regarded as instruments. The meaning of any idea always contains (in some way) a plan of action. Through an idea, we are able to specify operations to be performed. Performing these operations is an experimental testing, which in turn secures the validity of an idea. The instrumentality of ideas means that they have an active, mediating role in experience. However, we must note that thought and action are continuous. Educational researchers are indeed pragmatic to some extent. The same could be said of every human to some extent. Humans meet problems that require solving, and they solve the problems in different ways.

² Dewey, "Commencement Address: San Jose State Normal School," LW 17: 65.

To be pragmatic means to be experimental, not just with actions, but with ideas, beliefs, and habits. Living the democratic way of life is akin to living the pragmatic way of life. In either case, it is a consciously reflective mode of living. Reflection occurs whenever we encounter an obstacle to an activity. The germ of thinking is the problem set up by some conflict in experience any time an impulse is blocked. Thus, thinking should move from a doubtful situation to a settled one. Hence, the function of reflective thought is to transform a situation in which there is experienced doubt, conflict, or disturbance, into a situation that is clear and resolved.

It is this pattern of reflective thinking that Dewey means by pragmatic method. In this regard, reflective thinking to solve problems is the same in science as it is in any other living situation. The method, in other words, is continuous. Its purpose is not to discover eternal truths, but to serve humans in identifying needs and developing a method in which the needs can be met. Pragmatism implies that one is being pragmatic; thus, pragmatism is a process, a function, and an activity, rather than a storehouse of solutions and conclusions. It begins with problems and ends with solutions subject to revision. It mirrors and reflects, at its heart, a scientific openness.

Any solution becomes established only after it has been tested in experience. Hence, "idea" means to hold an as yet untested hypothesis, and it's meaning is to be used as a tool. However, within the pragmatic vein of thought, any solution is still subject to revision. Ideas of social conduct evolve from social experimentation in response to social problems, conflicts, and needs. However, insofar as conditions change, ideas must also change. This is where habit is central to Dewey's position as a political educator within his naturalistic view of reconstructing experience.

To treasure ideas and habits is a natural response to values that are directly felt by individuals, but it is also present in cultural values. Both personal habits and cultural customs are seen, on the whole, as precious possessions. To evaluate, however, is to reflect in order to express relations so that we can connect emotional and personal preference to public transactions. Appraisal calls for critically intelligent evaluation and, eventually, reconstruction. Critical evaluation, then, requires intelligence; it requires qualitative sharpness in discernment of personal and cultural values that will help keep one growing in the Deweyan sense.

Dewey is a philosopher of nature as much as he is a philosopher of education. Experience occurs within nature and is of nature. Experience is the transaction of living things with their environment. For Dewey, the function of the pragmatic attitude is to illumine humans to their continuity with nature and within the context of their own development. While ideas for Dewey are no doubt instrumental, they are also natural. This is why a conscious pragmatic naturalism is very important to education.³ Central to Dewey's pragmatic attitude is naturalism. Dewey highlights that the parts are not the whole, yet they comprise the whole. The intimacy in learning involves a naturalistic understanding of how habits come about, develop, distort, corrupt, and how they might be modified and improved. It is not enough to know what tools are available or even how to use the tools. What must be understood and explored is how the tools are made and how they might change or be re-made. The functional value and meaning of a conscious pragmatic attitude in education can be found in revealing and correcting the hidden

³ A rich exploration of Dewey's pragmatic approach can be found in Peter T. Manicas, *Rescuing Dewey: Essays in Pragmatic Naturalism (Studies in Ethics and Economics)* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008). Another work important to understanding Dewey's naturalism in historical and philosophical context is John P. Anton, *American Naturalism and Greek Philosophy* (New York: Humanity Books, 2005).

entrenchments of thought prevalent in culture that promote “the unexamined life” and perpetuate “social arterial sclerosis.”

7.2. The Live Creature Creating the Live Culture

It was stated in chapter 5 that democracy is a type of experience in Dewey. To take this further, Deweyan democracy should be a deliberately creative experience.⁴

Democracy as a way of life finds much of its meaning in its making. The art, then, is found in the experience, that is, not *art as experience*, but *experience as art*.⁵ This is a craft or an art of social self-remaking through education and the reconstruction of habits. In this remaking, the reconstruction of habits itself becomes a habit, a habit that is subject to continual revision through the ongoing cultivation of critical intelligence.

The fact that habit is social in nature thrusts into the “polis” or political affairs. The same can be said of humans. Aristotle pointed out long ago that humans are political in nature. The purpose of political association is not only for the sake of living, but also for the sake of living well within one’s self—but also through interpersonal associations. The purpose finds its birth in what is selected from culture. Thus, culture is something that is not easily exported and that cannot grow from without, but must grow from within. The live creature is created a creative creator of himself or herself and of the culture in which he or she lives. Democracy as a way of life should never corrupt or compromise

⁴ This notion is supported by the work of Omar Swartz, Katia Campbell, and Chistina Pestana, *Neo-Pragmatism, Communication, and the Culture of Creative Democracy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

⁵ I am indebted to Thomas Alexander for the expression of “experience as art.” In clarifying the purpose of his book, he states, “It is the thesis of this book that the best approach to what Dewey means by ‘experience’ is not to be gained by focusing primarily, on the theme by which Dewey is generally known, his ‘instrumentalism,’ but instead by looking at experience in its most complete, most significant, and most fulfilling mode: experience as art.” Thomas Alexander, *Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), xiii.

this creativity but rather continue to cultivate it in full richness. The creative live creature living the democratic way of life, in full command and realization of his or her creative powers, is central to a living culture's direction of growth and the ongoing cultural project of education.

Among many others, one of Dewey's most powerful gifts to us is in pointing out that culture itself, like the development of the individual, is a project without finality. He takes seriously Emerson's sentiment that "this surface on which we now stand is not fixed, but sliding."⁶ It is the incompleteness that should spur us to action. Dewey writes,

The man who sets a goal of final achievement before himself, a goal in which he anticipates having overcome all defects, and exhausted all the possibilities, sets before himself a goal of extinction of conscious life. It is the sense of the incomplete that stirs us to action: it is the stirring to action which makes us conscious of ourselves and of this world in which we live.⁷

The purpose, then, in selecting this special topic of habit in Dewey's philosophy of education and cultural experiment of democracy is to revitalize critical examination of what is essential in one's own nature. All learning and intellectual growth concerns habit. In this way, habit's role in cultural change and refinement of values cannot be overstated, nor can its importance be fully realized in its full intelligibility. The educational significance of this critical examination of habit is underscored in the crucial role education plays in deciding the fate of democratic institutions and also habit's role in deciding the fate of an individual's own learning and growth. Dewey shows that the

⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," in *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1883), 257.

⁷ Dewey, "Commencement Address: San Jose State Normal School," LW 17: 65.

growth of democratic institutions as well as of individuals is a fragile thing. One of his main contributions to understanding the needs of the educational process is his treatment of habit as one of the central unifying principles needed to understand human cultural conduct in all its creative potentialities. In moving from experience to culture, Dewey also goes beyond education to *paideia*.⁸ Dewey awaits us at the end of the long road toward cultural self-recovery.⁹ The challenge we currently face in education and culture is consciously recasting our habits of thought so that we can see him waving.

⁸ Dewey points out later in life in revising the introduction to his most famous treatise on metaphysics, *Experience and Nature*, that he would not use the word *experience* and would replace it with *culture*. In justifying this revision of terms, he states,

The name “culture” in its anthropological [not its Matthew Arnold] sense designates the vast range of things experienced in an indefinite variety of ways. It possesses as a name just that body of substantial references, which “experience” as a name has lost. It names artifacts which rank as “material” and operations upon and with material things. . . . Instead of separating, isolating and insulating the many aspects of a common life, “culture” holds them together in their human and humanistic unity—a service which “experience” has ceased to render. What “experience” now fails to do and “culture” can successfully do for philosophy is of utmost importance if philosophy is to be comprehensive without becoming stagnant.

Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, LW 1: 362–63.

⁹ My conception of Dewey waiting at the end of the road is due to Richard Rorty’s comment, “James and Dewey . . . are waiting at the end of the road which, for example, Foucault and Deleuze are currently travelling.” Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xviii.

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