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## 17. EXPERIENCING GROWTH AS A NATURAL PHENOMENON: JOHN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY AND THE *BILDUNG* TRADITION

### INTRODUCTION

Dewey belongs to the small company of philosophers who granted education a major role in their philosophical argumentation. For Dewey (1916/MW pp. 9, 338), education was not merely an institution to transmit skills, ideas, and attitudes, but also a laboratory “in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and are tested”. Moreover, he argued that education offers a way for individuals to find their true calling in social service (1897/EW pp. 5, 95).

Several commentators have argued that Dewey was a *Bildung* oriented thinker (Lovlie & Standish, 2003, p. 5; Good, 2005, 2006; Fairfield, 2009, p. 90; cf. Pikkarainen, 2000). Dewey's debt to the *Bildung* tradition<sup>155</sup> can be explained partly by the fact that in his early philosophy, he was drawing from the 19th Century German idealists.<sup>156</sup> It was specifically from Hegel and neo-Hegelians that he obtained the conception of philosophy as immanent cultural critique in the service of social growth – a view he never rejected (Rockefeller, 1991; Shook, 2000; Good, 2006). From Hegel, Dewey also discovered logical tools to frame how human experience functions in social growth. Like Hegel, early Dewey was interested in bridging the dualism between subject and object, taking the analysis of the dynamic relationship between self, society and the Absolute as a viable point of departure. Even if Dewey later abandoned the Absolute from his philosophy he never lost this holistic dialectic vision (1930/LW pp. 5, 146).

In what follows, I shall investigate how Dewey's ideas of growth and education relate to the *Bildung* tradition and how he developed these ideas in different phases of his career. My main objective is to show that while Dewey preserved the Hegelian frame of philosophizing, the content of his philosophical categories changed significantly. I also argue that this change has critical implications for the interpretation of his pedagogical philosophy.

### EARLY DEWEY: A PHILOSOPHER OF *BILDUNG*?

#### *From Idealism to Instrumentalism*

Dewey as an idealist. While there is no doubt that Dewey began his career as an idealist, his beliefs differed significantly from those of his most idealist contemporaries (Good, 2006; Rockefeller, 1991; Shook, 2000). What was common to young Dewey, Hegel and the 19th Century neo-Hegelians was the heavy emphasis they all put on experience as the point of departure of philosophizing. We build ourselves as knowing subjects from the resources we

discover in the realm of experience. As there is no going beyond this realm, the key epistemological question concerning knowledge becomes a question of the inner coherence of our ideas, provided by categories intrinsic to experience (1888/EW 2, pp. 189–190; Shook, 2000, pp. 127–130).

Both Kant and Hegel argued that it is possible to discern these categories by reflection. However, Kant made an ontological distinction between categories and experience, positing a transcendent thing-in-itself behind experience as the cause of sensations, and further maintaining that sensations are cast into coherent experience by categories; and that this coherence is guaranteed by the transcendental subject (Kant, 1933, B pp. xvi–xx, 89–90, 166–168). In turn, Hegel argued that sensations, experiences and categories are functional parts of the absolute consciousness (Mind, Spirit) that develops along its own logic, without a need for reference to the thing-in-itself, and also without a need to posit the transcendental subject as the ultimate guarantee of the coherence of its categories. All that we can examine philosophically is to be found within self-consciousness. Philosophy becomes part of the self-development of the Absolute when we realize the role that our finite minds play in its development. (Hegel, 2008, §7, §11ff.)

Shook (2000, p. 66) classifies Dewey's early thought as absolute neo-idealism, arguing that, while Dewey was influenced by Hegel and American neo-Hegelians,<sup>157</sup> his system also resembled Edward Caird's philosophy.<sup>158</sup> Dewey shared with Caird a deep suspicion of the philosophical value of the thing-in-itself. Both Caird and Dewey also agreed that as an intelligible system, the world can be known in its entirety, and that absolute self-consciousness should be seen as the ultimate actualization of intelligence. Furthermore, Dewey and Caird shared a strong doubt about all kinds of philosophical dualisms, constructing their metaphysical ideas on a Hegelian dialectical account of how the Absolute finds its inner unity in its reflective activity.

Throughout his career, Dewey remained true to three Hegelian (and Cairdian) points of departure: (1) objects of knowledge become objects of knowledge in the process of knowing; (2) to study the world philosophically is to study how the world is presented in experience; (3) philosophy is primarily the study of how we become knowing subjects. The first point has relevance for developing a theory of knowledge; the second takes us to the realm of metaphysics; the third suggests a need for a philosophy of self-development or, as Dewey later put it, growth.

Philosophy, psychology and growth. Dewey began to elaborate the third point already in his earliest writings, arguing that we need to conceive philosophy from the standpoint of psychology, which he interpreted as the study of how consciousness emerges from experience (1884/EW 1, pp. 34–60, 1886/EW 1, pp. 122–167). Because philosophy is always confined to experience, and because experience becomes reflective as self-consciousness, philosophers share their study object with psychologists. The common empirical ground for psychology and philosophy is to be found in learning, which Dewey took to be an aspect of the self-development of the Absolute.

Despite early Dewey's commitment to absolute idealism, his "psychological standpoint" also reveals a deep allegiance to empiricism, as he postulated experience as the primary category of philosophical analysis (1886/EW 1, pp. 122–143, 144–167). Again and again Dewey lamented how easily

philosophers fall into assuming a metaphysical distinction between subjective experience and the objective world. He criticized especially pungently the epistemology of the 18th century British empiricists and their heirs (1883/EW 1, pp. 19–33, 1886/EW 1, pp. 122–143). British empiricists had argued that the sources of our conscious states are located outside experience, from where they leave their mark to our minds as “impressions”. Dewey argued that rather than mere associations of impressions, conscious states (sensations and ideas alike) should be seen as integral to experience, existing as functional phases of how the latter develops into self-consciousness.

Later, working with his colleagues at the University of Chicago, Dewey developed an instrumentalist theory of knowledge on the basis of this “immediate empiricism” (1905/MW 3, pp. 158–167). Instrumentalism can be seen as a manifestation of how the Chicago school philosophers and psychologists<sup>159</sup> became alienated from the presuppositions of absolute idealism. Instead of continuing to build epistemology on a theory of how the Absolute becomes individualized, Dewey and his colleagues focused on developing theory of knowledge based on functionalist psychology. The latter took sensations, ideas and categories as intelligent functions of experience, based on an organism’s natural proclivity to cope with its changing environment. During his Chicago years (1894-1904), Dewey also began to elaborate the philosophical implications of functionalist psychology, this work culminating in the naturalist metaphysics of his later works, published for the most part in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>160</sup> In Chicago, Dewey also began to identify his ideas with classical pragmatism, a philosophical perspective that was introduced to the general public by William James at the turn of the 20th Century.

#### *Dewey’s early educational philosophy*

Dewey became interested in educational questions when working at the University of Michigan (1884-1894) (Dykhuisen, 1973, p. 50). From the beginning, two themes motivated his pedagogical vision: (1) he was interested in formulating a systematic view of the relationship between philosophy, psychology, and educational theory with reference to the general account of self-development; (2) he wanted to develop a concept of education as social function, with a strong ethical vision of growth. Thus, Dewey’s early works in education reflected both his “psychological standpoint” and the social underpinnings of Hegelian *Bildung* philosophy.

The psychological standpoint and education. In *Psychology in High-Schools from the Standpoint of the College* (1886/EW 1, pp. 81–90), Dewey argued that (1) educational subject matter should to be related to the student’s experience and that (2) the goal of education is formation of an intelligent individual capable of critical thinking. These two notions were recurrent in Dewey’s later pedagogical writings; perhaps more than any other idea, they associated his name to the child-centered views of education of the early 20th Century.<sup>161</sup>

According to Dewey, the specific study of psychology has two goals: (1) to show to the learner how she thinks, and (2) to prepare her mind for further learning. Dewey also argued that the primary function of studying psychology

is “cultivation of openness and flexibility of mind” and, in this way, supporting “spontaneity of action” (ibid. pp. 85–86). This way the student’s own “feelings and ideas” are objectivized and she becomes conscious of the processes of her cognitive development (ibid. pp. 87–88).

Dewey argued that rather than teaching psychological facts by rote, the teacher should help the students to find the facts themselves by making systematic observations of their own behavior. In this process, the teacher should take the role of a co-researcher rather than an instructor. This was again an indication of things to come, for in his later writings Dewey emphasized experimentation as the basis of meaningful learning, insisting that the students cannot be taught directly, but only by channeling their active interests in constructive activities (e.g., 1916/MW 9, chapter 1).

The social function of education. Dewey also associated self-development with the ethical task of becoming a full-fledged member of the community. In line with Hegel, he did not make a strong distinction between the individual and social aspects of experience. The self that is developed is a social self, which means that the growth of an individual contributes to social growth, and education is ultimately education for conjoint life. Absolute experience realizes itself as individuality that discovers itself as a conscious subject when growing into the ethical life of the community, aided by education.

Already the young Dewey took *democracy* as a guiding ethical ideal for social growth.<sup>162</sup> Democracy represents “the idea of a [divine] personality, with truly infinite capacities, incorporate with every man ... a society in which the distinction between the spiritual and the secular has ceased [and] the church and the state, the divine and the human organization of society are one” (1888/EW 1, p. 249). Community is the ideal realization of democracy, as it can best support the growth of individuals into freedom in social life (see also 1916/MW 9, chapt. 1).

As Dewey’s focus of social growth shifted from the self-development of the Absolute to the progress of democratic society, he became more and more interested in educational issues. This also reflected his increasing interest in ethics, both as a philosophical discipline and as a study subject. In *Teaching Ethics in the High School* (1893/EW 4, pp. 54–61) Dewey analyzed ethics as an integrative school subject. The focus of ethical study should be on the objective conditions of self-development. “Objective conditions” are here defined simply as conditions of ethical life in society: ethics is “the statement of human relationships in action” (ibid. p. 56). Society renews itself through self-realization of its individuals. This renewal takes place in the growth of the social organism, accomplished as a democratic way of life in which individuals share their ethical quest for positive freedom (Westbrook 1991, chapter 2).

According to Dewey (1893/EW pp. 4, 57), it is through exercising imagination that we learn to reflect on ethical situations. Ethical reflection, or deliberation, does not necessitate absolute or universal moral codes. It has a functional rather than contemplative role: we deliberate to overcome problematic situations, not to follow transcendental ideals. The goal of ethical education is “the formation of a sympathetic imagination for human relations in action”, that is, the building of an ethical character (ibid., p. 113).

Bildung for Sittlichkeit. Dewey’s commitment to the Hegelian *Bildung* tradition is especially apparent in his early writings on higher education. In a *College Course: What Should I Expect from It?* (1890/EW 3, pp. 51–74),

Dewey compares higher studies to traveling in foreign countries, arguing that through alienation the mind is able to stretch out from its “provincialisms” (ibid. p. 52). This alienation takes place when students are introduced to new ideas of new people in new settings. College education is preparation for social life, and as such, requires maximal free contact between individuals. Only by promoting positive freedom can college establish “an ethical atmosphere” conducive to social growth (ibid. p. 54). College should target formation of an ethical character, recognizing how human relationships provide a “sense of proportion and right values” needed in this formation (ibid.).

Good (2006, pp. 31, 134) argues that Dewey’s “ethical atmosphere” comes close to Hegel’s idea of *Sittlichkeit*, the “concrete morality” that people use to define themselves as ethical subjects in society. An important implication of *Sittlichkeit* is that ethical values cannot be subsumed under transcendent authority: people discover the reasons for ethical conduct by examining their actual interactions (see also 1894/EW 4). General principles of right conduct can only be abstracted from empirical examination of historically conditioned social experience, mediated by deliberation.

#### DEWEY’S EXPERIMENTAL PERIOD: TOWARDS A NATURALISTIC ACCOUNT OF GROWTH

##### *Educational implications of instrumentalism*

The instrumentalist theory of knowledge. In his middle period, Dewey continued to develop his educational ideas in relation to a philosophical theory of the dynamics of knowledge informed by functional psychology. This account became the foothold for instrumentalist logic, an attempt to describe the general conditions of how knowledge functions in problem solving conducive to individual growth (1903/MW 2, pp. 293–375, 1916/MW 10, pp. 319–365).

In *Psychology* (1887/MW 2), Dewey described conceptualization as the “universalizing mode of mental activity” that synthesizes sensory particularities to “individuals”, *viz.*, fully actualized entities that are the objects of knowledge (Shook 2000, p. 103). The universal point of reference for concepts is absolute consciousness, which encompasses all possible relations. However, in a later edition of *Psychology*, Dewey argued that concepts are universal only because they refer to concrete modes of activity (1891/EW 2, p. 179). This idea was developed further in Dewey’s educational writings, foreshadowing his instrumentalist theory of knowledge (e.g. 1891/EW 3, pp. 142–147).

Dewey’s account of concept as a function of activity can be seen as a critical reaction to realistic theories that take concepts as representation of objects external to experience. Throughout his career Dewey was critical of accounts that make knowledge a representation of how things are outside experience. He argued that instead of producing representations of external things, conceptualization helps us to form generally applicable ways to act in subsequent life-situations. Instead of mirroring antecedent objects, conceptualization creates new objects as new possibilities of action.

Dewey’s constructive notion of the object of knowledge is possible because he makes a logical distinction between thing and object. In realistic

epistemology, a thing can be taken as an object of knowledge to a degree that knowledge amounts to concept as its truthful mental representation. How we end up having truthful conceptions of things is explained in psychological terms as mind interpreting a sensation of a thing as objective stimulus, forming a judgment that subjugates the latter under conception. According to Dewey, there is no need to posit an ontological distinction between stimulus and sensation, nor between sensation and concept. We grasp something as stimulus when we have a need to adjust our activity to resolve a problematic situation – when we need to learn. How to accomplish this adjustment cannot be determined before we find out what needs to be done. Thought is the process of arriving at practical judgments on such a matter. Knowledge is the aspect of thought that judges which things are worthy of attention by anticipating what kinds of implications their relationships have for further activity. The relationships between things are interpreted as meanings, pointing to new ways of approaching problematic situations in the future. A concept marks the generalizable aspect of such meanings: meanings are taken under consideration as general expectations of how things will turn out when mediated by activity.

This dynamic notion of conceptualization as part of active experience explains why, for Dewey, the object of knowledge cannot be a state of affairs external to experience, reflected in mental image and grasped in conceptualization. Mental images of things are not in themselves representative of how things are: they are phenomenological objects, things that we take for granted in daily activities. Before mental images are interpreted as stimuli, they are taken as “bare existences”, things that are “had”, rather than “known”. Conceptualization provides focus when it helps us to realize “the power which a particular image has of standing for or conveying a certain meaning or intellectual value”. A concept is “something which the image does”, a mode of activity that looks for new meanings. (Ibid. pp. 142–143.)

General concepts thus coordinate particular images, establishing new meaning relations between things “had” in experience. Meaning is not something that the mind puts in the world (contra idealism); nor does it mark a relationship between an inner mental image and an external state of facts (contra realism). Rather, meaning is an objective relation that thought discovers between things in experience. For Dewey, “had” experience is already potentially meaningful, but its meanings are only actualized as vehicles of thought. It is in this sense that meanings can be also called ideals or values: as ideals, they result from inference that actualizes the potential meaning. Whereas the idealist Dewey makes meaning domestic to consciousness, the instrumentalist Dewey emphasizes the concrete embeddedness of meaning as a means to control active experience. We learn to conceptualize, infer and think, as we learn to act in more meaningful ways.

Instrumentalism and learning. One of the reasons why Dewey opted for an instrumentalist account of knowledge was that he felt that neither idealism nor realism give justice to learning as an empirical phenomenon. The postulate of immediate empiricism posits that a thing is what it is experienced to be (1905/MW 3, p. 158). Experience proves that the things are not static, but in perpetual change. We learn to cope with this change, which makes learning a matter of discovery of meaning that, in turn, necessitates thought and conceptualization. All our ideas and concepts are tools for grasping the meanings inherent in active experience. Thus, a concept is not the terminus of

thought: conceptualization “enriches the percept”, making new inferences of things possible (ibid. p. 145). In other words, conceptualization is a phase in a larger scheme of sense making: it is embedded in the way we encounter our volatile surroundings as learners. The goal of learning is harmonization of experience, which amounts to an increasing meaningfulness of life.

How can this harmonization be explained? The instrumental view of learning is based on a notion of *habit*, or synchronization of goal-directed learner’s activity to changes in the environment (1896/EW 5, pp. 96–110). We human beings are complex agents, in the sense that our activity involves numerous simultaneous acts. Because we can reflect on our own activity, it is possible for us to consider one of these efforts as primary. When this takes place, other acts take a secondary role, coordinated to contribute to the primary act. This coordination introduces the possibility of purposive *action*: a possibility that comes in handy when we encounter problematic situations. A problematic situation is a configuration of things that inhibit the synchronization of acts, preventing a more extensive scheme of action to take place. The postponement of “complete and direct activity” calls forth a meaning relation as a new interpretation of how the coordination can be re-established (1892/LW 17, p. 158). When a new coordination emerges, experience regains harmony as its ingredients are again experienced as a coherent whole – hence, we learn. This kind of coordinated and completed situation is, for Dewey, the ultimate goal of thought and also the proper object of knowledge and learning. (Shook 2000, pp. 177–178.)

The key pedagogical conclusion Dewey draws from this instrumentalist theory is *learning by doing*:

“... there is but one genuine way to lead the mind of the pupil on from percept to concept: to present, from the first, the percept in its genesis, in its origin and growth, in its proper relations. It is not necessary that the rationale of the process should be explicitly pointed out, or the child made to give reasons for everything. On the contrary, prematurely fixing conscious attention upon the relations may be the very means of preventing their being grasped. But let the object be, as it were, done over and over again; let the relations in it be used; let the mind act in accordance with the principle involved; and sure ground is laid for the conscious apprehension of the concept later.” (1891/EW 3, p. 146; see also 1899/MW 1, pp. 92–96; MW 4, p. 185.)

Learning requires a concrete effort to bring forth the meaning-potentials embedded in experience. According to Dewey, *experimentation* is the best way to introduce the students to concrete operations that help them to hone their cognitive skills (Dewey 1910/1997, pp. 91–93, 99; 1916/MW 9, p. 160; 1938/LW 13, pp. 58-59). In experimentation, ideas and concepts are not taken as decisive, but as means in the ongoing thought process: they are applied in the discovery of new relationships between the learner and her environment, to find out how things can amount to ideas and, at the end of the process, to ideals, or valued objects. Learning by doing is not merely a didactic dictum that stresses activity, but also a normative judgment of the most efficient way to promote life-long learning: experimentation helps the students to recognize the general conditions of “how they think” (Dewey 1910/1997) and to build their further learning on this recognition. Whereas the “psychological standpoint” indicates the need to clarify this process, the task of its general

examination falls into instrumentalist logic. Thus, from the standpoint of instrumentalism, logic is a general theory of learning.

*Bildung and Dewey's middle period philosophy of education*

In 1894, Dewey moved from the University of Michigan to the University of Chicago and began the most fruitful part of his educational career, culminating in ideas presented in *Democracy and Education* (1916). The Chicago years (1894-1904) made it possible for Dewey to develop his logical and educational ideas in tandem. The famous laboratory school offered a place to experiment on pedagogical theories. Moreover, the social emphasis of the Chicago school of philosophers and psychologists, combined with the fact that the instructional system in the city was in dire need of development, made instrumentalism a politically conscious movement, reflecting Dewey's growing interest in social problems. (Dykhuizen 1973, pp. 87, 102; Westbrook 1991, chapter 4, 1992, pp. 401–402.)

Dewey brought together the educational implications of his functionalist psychology, instrumentalist theory of knowledge, and the theory of social growth in *School and Society* (1899/MW pp. 1–109), an edited collection of lectures targeted at the parents and teachers of the Chicago laboratory school. In this book and related writings, Dewey argued that experience is the proper point of departure for learning and independent agency is possible only in the ethical frame of a democratic society, which means that school should prepare the students for living in such a society (ibid. pp. 24–25, 8-9, 39–44, 99–100; see also 1897/EW 5, pp. 54–55). In similar manner psychology and ethics can illustrate two sides of social growth, while in pedagogy it is imperative to see method and subject matter as functional parts of a whole. Educational methods are only significant in relation to social goals: in a similar manner, educational content should not be separated from its social significance. The methods applied, and the subject matter learned in school can never be decisive, because society is in perpetual change (see also 1897/EW 5, p. 86). The social implications of learning are to be negotiated over and over in pedagogical situations, and it is in these negotiations that their ethical meanings are realized.

Earlier, in *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey had argued that education should be based on “participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race [sic]” (ibid. p. 84). The natural “instincts” of the child should be translated “into their social equivalents” by projecting them “back into a social past” in a way that they can be seen “as the inheritance of previous ... activities” and, further, projecting them “into the future to see what their outcome and end will be” (ibid. 85). Hence, Dewey conceived education as a mediator between the past and future, between the meanings already actualized and meanings that hold potential for future actualization; this mediation is triggered by the situational needs of the students.

The recognition of the open-endedness of education may be the most significant distinction between Dewey's instrumentalist pedagogical philosophy and Hegel's concept of *Bildung*. In his middle period, Dewey discarded the teleological world-view of absolute idealism, putting emphasis on the situational conditions of learning. These conditions are not fixed, but always involve an element of chance, thus requiring open-endedness in



determining and realizing educational goals. Open-endedness is also necessitated by “the advent of democracy and modern industrial conditions”, which makes it “impossible to foretell definitely just what civilization will be twenty years from now” (ibid. 86). The school should not just equip students with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to participate in the present society: it should also prepare people for future social service, in a “community life in which all ... agencies are concentrated [in a way] that will be most effective in bringing [them] to share in the inherited resources of the race [sic], and to use [their] own powers for social ends” (ibid. 87).

*Growth as building of new habits of action*

Dewey’s insistence that learning serves the ethical needs of society, and his assertion that learning is situational and subject to the needs of the individual, brings forth a tension between society and individual, articulated by Kant in his famous pedagogical paradox: “How do I cultivate freedom through coercion?” (Kant 1991, §29). Here Kant’s paradox is mirrored in a problem of how education can answer to the individual’s need to be socialized, and still respect her right to be the subject of her own growth. Moreover, how can education present its “demand for independent action” in the ordained context of the school curriculum (Kivelä 1997)?

Like Hegel, Dewey did not see the disparity between *Bildung* and education, or child and the curriculum, as insolvable (1902/MW 2, pp. 271–291). Education can contribute to the positive freedom of the students if its curricula and instructional methods are adapted to the needs of their social growth, understood in terms of ethical life. Ethical life provides the realm for realization of positive freedom. Instead of highlighting schooling as an alienating factor, necessary to liberate the students from their homegrown “provincialities”, Dewey insisted that school life should grow gradually out of home life, continuing the activities with which the child is already familiar (1897/EW 5, p. 225, 1899/MW 1, pp. 92–93). The function of the school is not to testify the inherent meaning of these activities, but to reproduce them in such ways that the child will be capable of playing his own part in their realization, and understand their social implications. In other words, the goal of reintroducing such activities in school is to prepare the students for ethical life: it is only when the students learn to judge the social significance of existing habits that they can grow into independently acting individuals in democratic society, capable also of changing these habits when necessary.

In *School and Society* (1899/MW 1), Dewey argues that by focusing on “occupations”, or activities that are socially meaningful, educators can keep up the balance between the intellectual and practical phases of learning required for ethical deliberation (ibid. pp. 92-93). This emphasis on socially meaningful learning activities is based on what Dewey indicates as the “psychology of occupations” (ibid. p. 92). The latter places the students’ interest in active participation in a pivotal place in education, mirroring the instrumentalist account of learning as development of new habits driven by our constant need to solve situational problems.

Dewey’s middle period educational writings can be seen as pedagogical applications of his instrumentalist logic and theory of knowledge. However, they also inspired further development of instrumentalism, affirming the

applicability of the idea of the Chicago school. Furthermore, they indicated that the problems that Dewey set out to solve in his theoretical philosophy were, at root, practical problems of social growth. The key pedagogical problem for Dewey was this: how can education help the students to grow into independent agents capable of ethical deliberation in a democratic community?

*Growth to democracy*

Growth and inquiry. Dewey had used the term “growth” already in his earliest philosophical writings in connection with the “logic of concrete experience” (1884/EW 1, 59). The idealist Dewey considered experience as a medium for self-development; as an instrumentalist he took experience as the logical point of departure for active intelligence. In his middle period writings, growth indicated an organic process of change, based on the instinctive need of a growing organism to balance its habitual activity with its changing environment (1903/MW 2, pp. 293–378). Before long, Dewey would introduce growth as a full-blown metaphysical category describing a universal feature of active experience (1925/LW 1; Boisvert 1988; Shook 2000, p. 198).

Because of an organism’s continuing striving to balance experience, again and again frustrated by new tensions emerging from inhibited habits, growth could no more be taken as teleological in the sense of having a final cause. Rather, the principle of growth had to be rationalized by the animate being’s instinctive need to sustain its activity by establishing new organic relationships to its environment. The more complex an organism, the more complex the processes of reconstruction of habits. As far as we know, we human beings are the most complex adaptors: thus, growth is especially demanding for us, as it necessitates continuous coordination on multiple plateaux of life—biological, psychological and social-cultural. Habit is nature’s way to help us cope with this coordination: in culture, we have harnessed habit to social use that provides the foundation for social growth and, thus, for education.

Because growth is by nature a reconstruction of the learner’s habits, it is also empowerment in the sense that it helps the learner to use her intellectual powers to better cope with changes in her environment. This empowerment takes place through experimental *inquiry* that utilizes tools of communication to convey shared meanings (1910/MW 6, pp. 236–237, 1933/LW 8, pp. 199–208, 1938/LW 12, pp. 109–120). Inquiry is our basic way to relate to the world, but also a way to realize agency in a social setting.

Democracy as frame for inquiry. *Democracy and Education* (1916/MW 9) can be taken as a synthesis of the social consequences of Dewey’s instrumentalist theory of learning. Dewey’s positive goal in the book was to formulate an educational philosophy appropriate for democratic society; his negative goal was to criticize philosophical ideas that prevent the realization of this kind of outlook (1916/MW 9, p. 3). This critique reveals how Dewey elaborated the instrumentalist tenets of learning in relation to his political thought. As indicated above, Dewey’s point of departure for understanding growth was active social experience: whatever we experience, we experience as social agents, habituated in the cultural ways of our society.<sup>163</sup> This cultural habituation is by its logical constitution simply an adaptation to changing environmental conditions that increase in complexity in social life. Dewey also argues that education is the deliberate adjustment of growth to promote social

wellbeing. Education thus cannot be just the transmission of old habits: it must also establish new habits. It does this by making it possible for the students to reflect on their own learning, to learn to adjust it, and thus to act as subjects of their own growth.

While instrumentalism appears on the surface to be a logical exploration of a sound thinking process (Dewey 1910/1997), it can also be seen as a theory of deliberation: that is, a theory of how people interact in situations that require ethical solutions (Shook 2000). Dewey argued that intelligent action and ethical conduct are both based on the process of forming practical judgments to cope with problematic situations. Practical judgments are formed to enhance the conditions of our shared life – thus, their formulation necessitates sharing experience in social inquiry (1916/MW 9, chapter 1). In inquiry, we learn to connect things in meaningful ways, which in turn provides us with better conditions to build new habits by using these connections as working ideas in practical judgment. This is the key to improved social harmony.

Whereas instrumentalist logic and functional psychology provide an account of *how* we think and learn, social and cultural studies provide an account of *why*, and *what for*. Dewey (ibid. p. 6) argues that we learn primarily to communicate, in order to make social growth possible. In society, we encounter a complex environment that necessitates finding efficient ways of sharing ideas in order to reflect on how things relate to each other, and to experiment conjointly on the meanings derived from these reflections. Schools and other educational institutions offer secure places for this experimentation. Thus, they are laboratories in a sense more extensive than providing places to test and concertize philosophic distinctions: they are also laboratories for social life (1916/MW 9, p. 338).

According to Dewey, the recognition of the need to experiment also applies to ethical values or ideals: they, too, can be taken as a means of building communities in which people share interests and negotiate on what they see as valuable goals of action. Because modern industrial society furnishes a mix of all kinds of interests and interest groups, it is important that we learn to agree on what kinds of ideals or values can be realized in practice. Subjecting values under investigation is part and parcel of ethical life: it is only through collective inquiry that social harmony can be established as part of democratic way of life. Dewey's theory of democracy is an attempt to explicate the normative conditions of this kind of collective inquiry. *Democracy and Education* can be seen as a systematic argument for the need of this kind of an explication on the basis of the educational needs of the American society of its time of writing.

In his idealist phase, Dewey seemed to have equated democracy with *Bildung*, in the sense that the former provides the most potential social-cultural platform for the self to actualize into full consciousness. In *Democracy and Education* and related writings,<sup>164</sup> Dewey posited democracy as a flexible way of life, a public forum for individuals to coordinate their interests for promoting more fruitful interactions with each other. As a harbinger of this kind of life, education does not take place only for the continuance of society, but also to cater for new possibilities of social growth. Because people interact with each other in social groups, and because social groups interact as well, we must seek the criteria for democratic life from the ways these interactions can be deliberately organized. Dewey (ibid. p. 89) had two general criteria for

organization of such life: (1) how the members of the groups commit to shared goals; (2) how freely the groups communicate with each other, to coordinate their interests. As conflicts are inevitable in a complex society, ethical deliberation – *viz.*, examination of the meaning of ideals in terms of how they can be applied in moral judgments – is necessary. It is a central task of educators to help to make this examination possible.

The value of education. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (*ibid.* chapters 5 and 6) criticized earlier philosophical theories of the value of education in ways that reveal a renewed attitude towards Bildung as self-development. Here he also made a contrast between the ideas of earlier pedagogical philosophers and his own ideas of education as continuous reconstruction of experience. From the instrumentalist point of view, education cannot be taken merely as preparing for adulthood, for it must be based on the shared experience of the educated involved in actual social situations. In other words, education does its work here and now, seeking the ingredients of growth in the concrete interactions between the learners and their environment.

Nor can education realize its value as exercising abstract psychological faculties or capabilities: what is being exercised in education is not distinct cognitive capabilities but the whole intelligence. Learner's capabilities always refer to concrete modes of action and find their reference in concrete situation. It is important to relate capabilities to their actualizations, for instance, in learning how "occupations" correspond to meaningful activities in social life.

Dewey (*ibid.* chapter 6) also criticized Herbart's idea of learning as formation of mind based on internalization of subject matter that is logically arranged by the educator. According to Dewey, in his didactic emphasis, Herbart neglected the necessity of communication for learning. What is learned should always find its proper realization in social life in order to gain meaning, and this necessitates experimentation. Mere expectation that rigorous educational methods guarantee internalization of well-tempered subject matter cannot make justice to this point of departure.

Moreover, in *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (*ibid.*) argued against the theory of recapitulation that takes ontogenetic development analogous to the phylogenetic development.<sup>165</sup> While many early 20<sup>th</sup> Century educational theorists took recapitulation as useful notion to justify the need to organize education in productive ways for both individuals and societies, Dewey reminded that evolution does not obey pre-disposed laws, but always includes an ingredient of chance. In a similar vein, inheritance does not provide a fixed set of prospects for growth: rather, it furnishes a biological frame within which social growth can channel in different courses according to the environmental conditions. As one of these environmental conditions, education can open new field of possibilities for growth as long as educators recognize the basic plasticity of growing individuals. In the same way that individuals can grow into understanding of new meaning-relations, social groups – even whole societies – possess plasticity that affords cultural change.

Additionally, Dewey (*ibid.* 61–65) criticized idealist notions that take education as unfolding of individual's latent powers. Here he also implicitly criticized his own earlier view on social growth as the development of the Absolute. According to Dewey (*ibid.* p. 61), this kind of a teleological view elevates the ultimate goal of human growth high above the empirical sphere of

everyday life, which means that some kind of “working substitute” must be invented. Dewey (ibid. p. 62) makes a distinction between two ways in which the idea of “education as unfolding” was made concrete in Hegel and Froebel. Both shared a belief in Absolute as an immanent value goal of human growth. However, neither took Absolute as transcendent, but as something that is present “here and now” as potential that seeks its way to actualization (ibid.). Hegel described this actualization as *Bildung* writ large: it is a process in which the Absolute works itself “out through a series of historical institutions which embody [its] different factors” (ibid.). In turn, Froebel posited that “the actuating force [of the Absolute] is the presentation of symbols ... corresponding to [its] essential traits” (ibid.). For the instrumentalist Dewey, all transcendental goals are empty in the sense that being transcendental, they can be taken as mere potentials devoid of any actualized subject matter. Dewey acknowledges that Hegel’s philosophy “marks in one direction an indispensable contribution to a valid conception of the process of life” and in this way avoids the weaknesses of “an abstract individualistic philosophy” that regards mind as “a ready-made possession of a naked individual” (ibid. p. 64). However, Dewey also argues that Hegel’s notion of social institutions as “objective mind” was confused by being “haunted by the conception of an absolute goal” that made the cultural actualizations of the Spirit – “language, government, art, religion” – mere stepladders in the ascension of Man (ibid.). Instead of granting individuals positive freedom, Hegel’s approach falls in the danger of making people obedient to the existing institutions, stripping them from their “spiritual rights” (ibid.). This way, conformity becomes a requirement for education – an unfortunate outcome that, as Dewey argued in another context, may have influenced the political stagnation of the Prussian state in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>166</sup>

From these criticisms we can infer that while Dewey saw it to be important to consider growth in social terms, he did not have a need for fixed cultural authorities to determine what is to be learned, how, and by whom. If education wants to contribute to social growth, it has to find its place within a democratic way of life – a way of life in which everyone can participate in negotiation of shared ideals that guide their inquiries of meaning-relations. This demand also applies to education of small children, who are to be guided towards ethical deliberation by paying increasing attention to the social implications of the “occupations” through which they learn. Education can become truly educative only if it establishes learning situations where the students can develop their intellectual powers together with their ethical dispositions.

#### GROWTH OR *BILDUNG*: DEWEY’S NATURALISTIC PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION.

##### *Dewey’s ‘Hegelian deposit’*

While *Democracy and Education* reveals that by 1916 Dewey was critical of all transcendental rationalizations of education, he still seemed to cling into several basic tenets that he developed as an idealist (Shook 2000).<sup>167</sup> For instance, (1) Dewey continued to believe that experience is philosophically absolute, in the sense that we cannot form judgments that refer to outside

experience. In a similar vein as to some idealists (most notably Hegel), Dewey took experience to be active: he posited that experience consist of an active two-way relationship of the experienter (organism) to its environment. However, in his naturalist period, Dewey did not restrict active experience to self-consciousness: an important aspect of his naturalist metaphysical outlook is that experience ranges out of the focus of the conscious self, into a realm that is not “known”, but “had”, in the sense that we do not yet catch its relationships (1925/LW 1). It is only when something disturbs the balance of this “had” experience that relations between things emerge as problems to be taken into conscious focus, anticipating their interpretation as actualized meanings in order to re-establish the balance. This indicates that all learning is based on problems that emerge from the background of active experience (1931/LW 6, pp. 11–12, 1934/LW 10, p. 241, 1938/LW 12, p. 76).

(2) Furthermore, the idealist, instrumentalist and naturalist Dewey took self to be of active experience rather than of the transcendental subject. For the instrumentalist Dewey, conscious self was an emergent aspect of experience, surfacing in the case of halted activity to take care of the problem. Hence, there is no need to posit the absolute self as the ultimate reference of the activity of the individual self. Self is a conception we use to explain how intelligence emerges in experience, and how it effects the latter from within. Because experience is not primarily individual, but shared, self is also social: the inquiries that call forth self-consciousness take place in the culturally habitual realm of social interactions that provide the foundation for individual self-consciousness. Because social experience is not a static configuration of relationships, but a complex web of interactions<sup>168</sup> in continuous growth, the social self grows by adapting to changes in the cultural environment. Another way to put this is that the social self is always in a constant process of realization. However, for the naturalist Dewey, self-realization cannot be an actualization of any absolute or transcendent. It may be akin to *Bildung* in the sense that the social self grows according to an organic teleology, but this is the teleology of nature, ultimately based on chance variations of evolution.

(3) Both early and later Dewey regarded cognition as a function of experience in growth: cognition helps us to form dynamic ideas rather than to represent static facts. Ideas are not mental representations of external relations, but means of controlling growth in ways that produce new, more inclusive habits to deal with facts. Ideas are means in of arriving on at ideals, the latter of which instrumentalism takes as established meaning-relations that help us to cope with problematic situations in the future. Thought is responsible for providing harmony into experience. However, thought does not produce experience: experience precedes thought and all cognitive processes, including learning.

(4) Dewey never shook the idealist tenet that knowing – and thus, learning – produces its object as an object of knowledge. This is because the object is not the point of departure, but rather, the end product of the intellectual process – a realized value. Because knowing is a function of active experience, its object is not something that resides in the subjective mind nor in the extra empirical reality: the object of knowledge is the actualization of the meaning potential of a situation. Hence, learning is both productive and constructive: a learner does

not construct experience, but rather new ways of relating to experience in its possible configurations as it constructs its objects as values.

(5) Like the idealists, Dewey took the categories, or principles of knowledge, as a means of harmonizing experience. Principles are instrumental in mediating the unstable phases of experience to new stable phases via practical judgment. Naturalist Dewey (1938/LW 12, pp. 108–120) designates the process of arriving from the indeterminate to determinate phase as inquiry, building on the instrumentalist idea that thought is, at root, practical problem solving. Thought intervenes in the facts by inferring how acknowledging their relations can produce new habitual activity: it is in this sense, and only in this sense, that thought provides form in experience.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey (1934/LW 10) developed a naturalized aesthetics on the basis of this dynamic account of experience, arguing that we find satisfaction in re-establishing a balanced phase. The balanced phase can be identified as “esthetic” experience: in it, things are experienced immediately just as they are, without a need to reflect on their meanings. The achievement of this kind of a balanced state is felt as to be exceptionally enjoyable when it is sensed to be a fulfillment of a completed scheme of action. Throughout history, people have gone through pains to organize their experience in ways that afford such consummatory states.<sup>169</sup>

Dewey also shared with some idealist the idea that categories may transmute. Whereas both Hegel and early Dewey took this possibility as an indication of the self-development of the Absolute, post-instrumentalist Dewey took it as an indication that problem-solving procedures work in helping us to adapt to changes in our environment.

#### *A Naturalist Considers Bildung.*

As indicated above, Dewey’s allegiance to Hegelian idealism waned, until it broke almost entirely during the First World War (Good, 2005, 2006, chapter 6). While Dewey (1897, p. 6) had earlier referred to Hegel as “the great actualist”, arguing that the latter shifted the philosophical focus into concrete things of experience, Dewey’s attitude was clearly different in his account of the German Philosophy and Politics (1915/MW 8, pp. 135–204). While Dewey still lauded Hegel for proposing that “the Actual is the Relational and Rational is the Actual [sic]”, he also wrote that Hegel might be called “a Brutalist”, arguing that the latter subjected Reason to the Will objectivized in the politics of the state (ibid. p. 191). Even if this account of Hegel was politically biased, it reveals that Dewey was ready to abandon the idea that ethical deliberation is based on absolute values. Moreover, he clearly did not any more no longer shared Hegel’s historical teleology, according to which world is in its way to a logically predetermined fate.

Dewey’s naturalist metaphysics can be seen as an attempt to describe the general categories of experience rather than suggest a definite appraisal of the Reality outside experience (1925/LW 1; Boisvert, 1988). Throughout his career Dewey held that experience reveals the world as an organic system of interactions. However, Dewey’s early metaphysics described mind and matter as organic unity, functionally distinctions emerging when thought mediates the self-development of the Absolute (ibid. p. 37). This process may be indicated as

*Bildung* in an Hegelian sense, for it is constitutive of a spiritual subject that finds its individuality in active experience through its relationships to other subjects and the environment.

If *Bildung* is taken as a process of self-development in which the self gradually becomes aware of the conditions of its growth, and if this awareness is taken to require interaction with the world, including both the natural and cultural environment, also the naturalist Dewey can be taken as a *Bildung* oriented thinker (Good, 2006, pp. 245–247). However, his naturalism necessitates certain reservations as to how *Bildung* can be understood. For instance, the self cannot grow spontaneously: its growth must be a function of active experience that seeks harmony with its physical, biological and social-cultural environment. Moreover, there is a natural limit to the growth of an individual: when an individual dies, its growth ends. However, as a social phenomenon growth endures as long as societies prevail. Even after their demise, growth goes on at the lower plateaux of experience if the conditions are favorable to it. Dewey also thought that experience is entirely of this world, which means that its growth does not follow, or aim at, any transcendent ideals or principles. The ultimate goal of growth is growth itself, understood as a reconstruction of experience (1916/MW 9, chapter 1).

Because of the complexity of human experience, and of the symbol systems that we apply to cope with this complexity, reconstruction of experience becomes such a difficult task that we cannot cope with it with our inherited resources (ibid.). It is here that education proves its worth. In a rudimentary sense, education is simply channeled social growth: through education, we learn to match our individual need to those of our culture and of other cultures. Even if society dictates the value goals of instruction, education can also be liberating – as long as educators recognize that active experience must be both its the beginning and end point (1938/LW 13). Because Dewey argues that education proper cannot take place directly, but it always has to find a medium, it cannot be coercion in Kantian sense: that is, it cannot be a case of educators imposing ideas on the students' mind. Students always infer the meanings of what they are about to learn in actual situations of learning. A tactful educator educates by positioning herself into these situations, teaming up with the students in the shared realm of communication that furnishes the conditions for their cognitive and ethical growth. Even if we can say that the subject is empirically determined, this determination is not due to some external force: education is not imposed on us, but takes place within experience.

If Dewey's immediate empiricism is followed to its logical naturalist conclusion, the relationship between subject and object is no longer seen as an external relationship between subjective and objective states, but as an internal relationship of the "subject matter" emerging in the problematic situation and the hypothetical "objective" of the practical judgment that succeeds to resolve the problematic situation (Boisvert, 1988, pp. 35–36; 1938/LW 12, pp. 88–89). The self is of course involved in judgment. However, the self is not an hermetic entity captivated in its own subjectivity: it marks the active dimension of inquiry, as the later aims at practical judgment. Hence, self-realization is an emergent property of the process of inquiry, directed further by our inferences of how constituents of a problematic situation hang together. We find ourselves from experience, as we identify with its subject matter, discovering from its



realm a problem to be inquired into. Instead of seeking absolute liberty, the self finds positive freedom in constant reorganizing of the subject matter of experience.

Education can contribute to *Bildung* if it is taken as conducive to reconstructive growth in society, rather than being reduced to socialization. Education does not have to settle on its original function of transmission. It can also see itself as conducive to social growth, in the sense that it makes possible habits that afford meaningful relationships between people and their environment. It is in the ethical realm that social growth takes place, as people learn to coordinate their different views to promote a democratic way of life. From this standpoint, Dewey's most important contribution to the *Bildung* tradition was not the naturalization of the growth process, but his analysis of the social-ethical underpinnings of a society that fosters democratic habits.

## NOTES

- <sup>155</sup> By "*Bildung* tradition" I refer to the tradition of interpreting human growth as self-development that goes back to Herder's vision of philosophy as growth, Schiller's and Goethe's notion of the harmonic development of the individual, and Hegel's idea of formation of an individual's unique potential through social practices and institutions. Dewey seldom used the word "*Bildung*" in his texts. His rare mentions of the term are in the list of sources for *Psychology* (1886/EW 2, pp. 176ff) and in *Contributions to A Cyclopaedia of Education* (1911/MW 6, pp. 405–406).
- <sup>156</sup> Dewey's long career can be divided in three phases: the idealist (1882–1903), experimentalist or instrumentalist (1903–1925) and naturalist period (1925–1952) (Boisvert 1988, pp. 15–16). Shook (2000) argues that Dewey strayed from idealism slowly, preserving certain idealist tenets throughout his career.
- <sup>157</sup> For Dewey, the most important American neo-Hegelians were W. T. Harris and G.S. Morris. The former, a renowned educationalist and a key member of the St. Louis Hegelians, published Dewey's first philosophical papers; the latter was Dewey's philosophy professor in Johns Hopkins and, later, his senior colleague at the University of Michigan. Both Harris' and Morris' readings of Hegel were influenced by F. A. Trendelenburg. (Rosenstock 1964; Shook 2000, chapter 2; Good 2006, chapter 2.)
- <sup>158</sup> Edward Caird (1835–1908) was a neo-Hegelian Scottish philosopher known for his argument that Kant's philosophy was only a first stage in the transition of philosophy to absolute idealism.
- <sup>159</sup> Most importantly, G.H. Mead, J.R. Angell and J.H. Tufts.
- <sup>160</sup> Dewey moved to New York in 1904 and worked for the rest of his career at the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University.
- <sup>161</sup> However, Dewey never saw the student as the sole point of departure for education. For Dewey, such pedagogical dualisms as those between child and curriculum, student and teacher, method and subject, required as much reconciliation as the philosophical dualisms that they were based on (1938/LW 13, chapter 1).
- <sup>162</sup> Here Dewey followed American neo-Hegelians rather than Hegel himself. For Hegel, democracy was never an optimal mode of government (Good 2006, pp. 33–34).
- <sup>163</sup> Even when Dewey embraced naturalism in his metaphysics, he continued to highlight the primacy of the category of the social: "the social, in spite of whatever may be said regarding the temporal and spatial limitation of its manifestations, furnishes philosophically the inclusive category" (1927/LW 3, p. 45).
- <sup>164</sup> See especially *Public and Its Problems* (1927/ LW 2, pp. 235–372).
- <sup>165</sup> It seems that Dewey earlier subsumed to recapitulation theory but abandoned it in the 1910s (see 1911/MW 6, pp. 408–412, 1916/MW 9, pp. 78–82, 1936/LW 11, pp. 210–211).
- <sup>166</sup> See especially *German Philosophy and Politics* from 1915 (MW 8), in which Dewey seemed to make a final break with Hegelian idealism. Good (2006, pp. 239–242) argues that at this point in his career Dewey was under heavy influence of the reactions of the American public to the political situation in Europe. Thus, part of his turning away from Hegel might be explained by his criticism of German militarism and its philosophical rationalization. It is also interesting to

see how Dewey's ideas were taken in German educational philosophy at the times preceding the Second World War (see Tröhler & Oelkers 2005; on Dewey's later impact into German pedagogical discourse, see Bittner 2005).

<sup>167</sup> The outline of the following examination is based on Shook's (2000, pp. 201–212) analysis of the development of Dewey's theory of knowledge.

<sup>168</sup> Later, writing with Arthur Bentley, Dewey (1949/LW, pp. 3–4, 66–68) suggested the word "transaction" instead of "interacton" to depict holistic interaction that is not based on "self-action" of its participants (ibid. p. 68).

<sup>169</sup> Because Dewey indicates these processes as art, also education, as conducive to social growth, can be taken as art. Indeed, in *My Educational Creed*, Dewey lauded education as "the supreme art" (1897/EW 5, p. 93; Väkevä 2004, 2007).

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