

“THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENCE AND SITUATIONS IN DEWEY’S DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION”

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Abstract: This paper connects Democracy and Education to Dewey’s wider corpus. It argues that the book’s central objective is to offer a practical and philosophical answer to the question, What is needed to live a meaningful life and how can education contribute? The paper argues that DE is still plausible as a “summing up” of Dewey’s overall philosophy because it centers upon “experience” and “situation,” both crucial concepts that connect Dewey’s philosophical ideas to one another, to education, and to democracy. After a brief synoptic analysis DE’s major philosophical ideas, the main sections are devoted to experience and situations and are followed by a brief complementary afterword regarding the surprisingly significant role of art and aesthetics.

INTRODUCTION

How should we live? What makes life meaningful? While it is almost inconceivable to imagine today, answering these profound philosophical questions are the main quarry of John Dewey’s 1916 textbook for teachers, Democracy and Education (hence DE).¹

DE seeks to answer that question not only by offering proposals answering and superseding the classic educational proposals (from Plato, Rousseau, and others), but also by providing justifications grounded in what was then current in biology, psychology, epistemology, sociology, and pedagogy. All this was set into both his account of human intellectual history (especially the development of science) and what in hindsight we recognize as his mature views about the purpose of philosophy.

Dewey’s own opinions about DE are, by now, well known. We know that in 1916 he had written to Horace Kallen that “Democracy and Education in spite of its title is the closest attempt I have made to sum up my entire philosophical position,” and we know that he commented in his 1930 autobiographical sketch, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” that DE was “for many years

[the book] in which my philosophy, such as it is, was most fully expounded."² What do we make of that comment, now, one hundred years after its initial publication? Does DE still sum up or expound Dewey's overall philosophy? In many ways, the answer is "yes." DE leaves little that is central to Dewey's corpus neglected; it presents detailed criticisms of key dualisms in philosophy in combination with positive accounts of Dewey's key beliefs in psychology, educational theory, and philosophy. If we consider the main philosophical lines advanced, the answer is clear: his pragmatism is here; his instrumentalism is here; his radical empiricism is here; his ethics and account of the social self are here; his theory of democracy is here; and his metaphilosophy is here. While much would be expanded or treated separately in subsequent years (e.g., intellectual history, metaphysics, logic, aesthetics, and philosophy of religion), DE unquestionably expresses most of Dewey's core beliefs, the spine of his philosophical Weltanschauung.

The charge for this essay was to "examine DE's connections to Dewey's wider corpus." But because there are so many connections, this author faced a daunting challenge. How could I say something about all the major connections, in the space allotted, without creating what would amount to a list of perfunctory-entries-with-footnotes? I confess being unable to accomplish this; the relationship of DE to Dewey's corpus requires a book.

Instead, the essay will instead select the elements of DE most necessary to answer the book's own question regarding how a meaningful life can be lived. I am convinced, after much painstaking research, that two notions in the book clearly stand forward: "experience" and "situation." These are the fundamental pivots connecting Dewey's philosophical ideas to one another and to education and democracy. They are the existential nexus of all meaning-making, in all spheres of life. For these reasons, this essay will focus on their presentation in DE and their connection to Dewey's corpus.

The plan of the essay is as follows. In order to set the scene (and avoid making the essay exclusively about "experience" and "situation"), a brief synoptic thread of DE's major philosophical ideas (each a "bead" on the thread) is offered. This is followed by two main sections on experience and situations, with a brief afterword about the surprisingly significant role of aesthetics in DE.

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION'S PHILOSOPHICAL THREAD

Because DE is a long book, and because it is replete not only with philosophical ideas but also with histories and facts of many kinds (including all major aspects of education), it can be difficult to see what constitutes the philosophical spine or “thread” running through the book.

Here is way we might thread the philosophical “beads” in DE, starting with the most elemental and ending with the most complex.

Experience. The first bead in thread is “experience.” In DE, as in Dewey’s corpus, experience is of signal importance. Because the term is much misunderstood (and maligned), DE explains how and why experience has been mischaracterized before providing an account of (a) what experience is and (b) why it is significant for human beings— especially children. “Experience” functions for Dewey by replacing dualisms (such as mind/body, reason/emotion, individual/society) with continuities which more closely resemble our actual lives. The larger aim is to shift the onus of responsibility for living meaningfully squarely onto human shoulders; selected continuities advance this aim because they undermine dualisms with a pretense to “ultimacy,” an authority (supposedly) beyond experience, which can be appealed to for criteria (guides, aims) regarding truth, goodness, beauty, etc.

DE explains how experience can be self-sufficient and the implications such self-sufficiency for those practices we call ethics, knowledge, aesthetics, religion, politics, and especially education.

Situations. But experience doesn’t just occur randomly or in a homogeneous flux. Rather, experience is had in situations. “Situation,” then, is the second bead in the thread. The importance of “situation” to education cannot be understated; more familiar to pedagogues as “teachable moments,” the creation of certain kinds of situations is the primary way learning (of all kinds: skills, theories, facts, values, etc.) advances. In DE, Dewey is clearly developing the metaphysical and logical importance of situations as he applies it to education.

Minds and Thinking. One element comprising every situation of teaching-learning is, of course, the people involved. Such people, we typically say, have “minds” and are “thinking” and one

cannot presume to educate without having a reasonable sense of what those terms mean. The nature of minds and the activity of thinking is the third bead in the thread.

DE's challenge regarding "minds" and "thinking" is daunting, since our very use of these terms (as noun and as verb) already (and quite unconsciously) re-inscribes a very old set of assumptions—of, for example, the mind as a cabinet, of knowledge as contents, of thinking as a set of logical operations. DE argues that thinking itself is a form of experience, and mind is not a thing (substance, or possession) but rather a catch-all label for the many active ways we observe, forecast, and respond to circumstances. While such metaphysical and psychological waters seem out of place in a textbook on education, DE makes the connection: we have built vast educational apparatuses upon inherited and mistaken models of mind and thinking. To reconstruct the former we must understand the latter.

DE utilized momentum generated by Dewey's earlier work (e.g., in psychology, instrumentalism, and education) and created a new synthesis to redress contemporary educational dysfunction and advance these key philosophical conceptions for subsequent development.

Inquiry. While there are many purposes for a thinking mind, problem-solving has proved remarkably important for survival and growth. "Inquiry" is Dewey's name for thinking's regular and organized response to problematic situations, and is the fourth bead in our thread. As in both earlier and later works, Dewey provides an instrumentalist account of knowing as a kind of activity, concepts as tools, and truth as provisional validation for a fact, theory, or strategy proposed to solve a problem.

DE details the generic pattern of inquiry and the variety of habits and practices which function in it (including communication, imagination, emotion, facts, logic, etc.) The instrumentalist account of inquiry—especially the emphasis on future action—is probably the most identifiably "pragmatist" element in DE (continuing the line established by Peirce, James, and other pragmatist predecessors) but Dewey's use also anticipates much more development of the notion, particularly in his 1938 *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.

Sociality and normativity. If we pause to consider the threaded "beads" so far, Dewey's conception should be plain: a school is where students and teachers experience situations

which invite, even demand, thinking minds to inquire. Here, it must be underscored that these activities are done together. In contrast to many long-held assumptions (especially philosophical ones), inquiry is not an isolated, purely cogitative process. By and large, inquiry is both social and normative (or value-laden). The social and normative nature of inquiry forms the fifth bead in our thread.

These considerations, combined with the situated and experiential nature of thinking, propelled DE's claim that that schools must reflect the community and be a miniature community. Only in a communal setting can inquiry be realistically practiced and developed, including moral inquiry. The school-as-community is a natural site of moral and democratic education.

Institutions: "education," "democracy," and "philosophy." The ultimate aim of education was the growth and enrichment of experienced meaning. Once it is understood that there can be no measures, aims, or values which transcend experience, the problem becomes how to find, make, and sustain what works for individuals and communities. This burden, to put it colloquially, "takes a village," and so the larger mission of "education" cannot be confined to schools, but must inform the objectives of many social institutions. Thus, the sixth and final bead in our thread is DE's reconstruction of the meanings of three major institutions: "education," "democracy," and "philosophy." Dewey's analysis of these forces—especially their interrelationships and practical import—achieved a new level of profundity and formulated many views which, over the coming decades, he would mature but not contravene.

With this overview in mind, we move now to a focused examination of experience, the first pivotal concept in DE with profound connections to the rest of his corpus.

EXPERIENCE IN DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

Perhaps the most important philosophical chapter in all of DE is chapter 11, "Experience and Thinking," which lays out a fundamental account of experience and its profound importance for education. By misunderstanding what experience is, education has, by and large, misunderstood children's psychology and has created systems which too often skirt their social, emotional, and intellectual needs. Drawing upon earlier works, such as the seminal 1896 "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology,"³ DE devotes many pages to experience and the notion

would remain pivotal to Dewey's work for the remainder of his career.⁴ In germ, experience for Dewey was meant to provide philosophy with a different way of seeing our relationship to the world, and to one another. It was, if you will, an evolutionary and ecological rebuttal to a tradition obstinately committed to categorizing and ordering—with the ambition of univocity and ultimacy—the main elements of being, e.g., substances, properties, relations, subjects, and objects. That's wrong, Dewey says: "Experience...is not a combination of mind and world, subject and object, method and subject matter, but is a single continuous interaction of a great diversity (literally countless in number) of energies."⁵ One need only look at how science advances to realize that experience is not merely a report passively received from worldly objects radically external to us; rather, experience shows we are already enmeshed and indicates the many ways we are being invited toward future, intelligent, interaction with our environment. "Experimental science," Dewey writes, "means the possibility of using past experiences as the servant, not the master, of mind. It means that reason operates within experience, not beyond it, to give it an intelligent or reasonable quality. Science is experience becoming rational. The effect of science is thus to change men's idea of the nature and inherent possibilities of experience."⁶

While it is tempting to write an essay just on "experience" in DE, I limit focus here to three aspects Dewey develops: (1) experience as experimental (2) experience as direct or reflective and, (3) the significance of "present" experience for education.

Experience as Experimental

Rejecting the philosophical and psychological current of his day, Dewey argued that experience is not primarily the cognitive contents of consciousness; rather, experience involves alternation between acting and being acted upon, "an active-passive affair."⁷ In other words, experience may be considered as the deliberate attempt to control future events using available resources (physical and conceptual). No Heraclitean flux, experience exhibits phases of doing (or trying) and undergoing; these phases become "experimental" once an agent looks to relate the details of what is tried with what happens (cause and effect). Understanding gained about specific relationships and continuities creates "knowledge" and makes future action significant. Mere activity does not constitute experience....

Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it. When an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance. We learn something.⁸ An experience, then, becomes meaningful, it “sheds light,” when it connects things, people, events, etc. and provides greater control over future experience. (An “epiphany” describes an especially productive experience of this sort.)

Education, as Dewey saw it, was ignoring the basic need of all people to have meaningful experiences, ones that foster connections between “doing” and “undergoing.” Too often, educators were operating classes according to the old-fashioned stimulus-response psychology. As the “Reflex” paper showed, little can be learned about conduct without an ultra narrow focus. Only by expanding our view of conduct’s more extensive continuities (including ongoing activities) can we appreciate the meaning of any isolable action. DE used this important lesson about context to understand the dynamics and challenges on the educational scene. As experiencing beings, children are engaged in a continuous circuit of activity; their life-worlds precede and exceed the classroom. And because education is not just observing but teaching children, it becomes incumbent upon educators to incorporate some appreciation of the rich context already constituting students as individual persons; otherwise, it will prove impossible to create experiences that engender meaningful, educative connections.

Experience as Direct and Reflective

Another extraordinarily important aspect of experience in DE is what Dewey calls “direct experience” (in contrast to “indirect” or “reflective” experience). Much experience, Dewey emphasizes, is not reflective; it is had (undergone) rather than known. This distinction in DE can be found (in varying forms) both earlier and later in his corpus; sometimes it is ‘had,’ ‘direct,’ ‘immediate,’ ‘undergone,’ or ‘primary’ experience. What is always generic, regardless of label, is that it is characterized by minimal reflection or regulation; it is qualitative, felt.

Indirect experience, in contrast, is variously called ‘known,’ ‘indirect,’ ‘mediated,’ ‘reflective,’ and ‘secondary.’ Indirect (or knowing) experience abstracts away from direct (or had) experience,

and how it abstracts is always selective and purposeful, searching out certain connections or relations.⁹

In DE, Dewey explains why direct experience is crucial to learning and growth. Educators mistakenly believe that learning can take place if students are exposed to information and are given an external motive, such as a potential reward or punishment. But such indirect experience, Dewey argues, is ineffectual. Genuine learning occurs best through engagement (“genuine situations”) which inspire motivation utilizing interests already present in students. Explaining the contrast in connection to educator’s methods, Dewey notes that direct experiences (especially projects involving group inquiry) possess “urgency, warmth, and intimacy” while indirect experiences (as found in textbooks, maps, formulae, and other symbolization) possess merely a “remote, pallid, and coldly detached quality.”¹⁰

It is not that indirect (representative) experience has no place—clearly, there are many recondite things one eventually needs to learn. The crucial issue in instruction is with the timing of their introduction: “Before teaching can safely enter upon conveying facts and ideas through the media of signs, schooling must provide genuine situations in which personal participation brings home the import of the material and the problems which it conveys.”¹¹ Teaching with direct experience is not just a pedagogical but a moral obligation, an acknowledgement of the real dignity of the child as present right now. As a living creature, a child “lives as truly and positively at one stage as at another, with the same intrinsic fullness and the same absolute claims....[L]iving has its own intrinsic quality and...the business of education is with that quality.”¹² Dewey lambastes those who portray children as incomplete, as undergoing a “merely transitory” stage; such denial (of the child’s actuality) provides a pretext for the adult world to superimpose its perspectives and values.¹³ (An eschatological move, as it simply transposes the Christian view—earthly life as merely preparatory for the afterlife; as not inherently meaningful—onto children living now. See MW9:59) While it is true that education does need to prepare children for the future, the danger is that this requirement obliterates awareness that the child’s present is now and the future is still to be made—with much of that task falling to this child!¹⁴ Dewey, influenced by R.W. Emerson, James and George Herbert Mead, wrote often about the “present,” in both earlier and later works. In some cases he distinguished the lived from the specious present; in other cases the aim was to rescue history from irrelevance and reconnect it with present needs.¹⁵

Two further aspects of direct experience in DE connect with Dewey's corpus.

The first concerns its analyzability. While we can devise occasions producing direct experiences, we cannot fully analyze or explicate what's been arranged. "It is not possible," Dewey writes, "to define these ideas except by synonyms, like 'coming home to one,' 'really taking it in,' etc., for the only way to appreciate what is meant by a direct experience of a thing is by having it."¹⁶ This remains a deep and important claim, and Dewey adduces additional grounds for it in works written over subsequent decades.¹⁷

The second aspect concerns direct experience's connection to moral instruction. As with others kinds of development, acquiring what we might call "moral knowledge" (or character development) begins in the crucible of direct knowledge. Dewey writes [I]t is knowledge gained at first hand through the exigencies of experience which affects conduct in significant ways. In truth, the problem of moral education in the schools is one with the problem of securing knowledge--the knowledge connected with the system of impulses and habits. For the use to which any known fact is put depends upon its connections.¹⁸

Because all choice involves a comparison of a better or worse, "morality" involves potentially all our acts. Deliberation is humanity's constant burden, and for this reason Dewey rejects a rigid dualism between "moral" and "non-moral" acts (or characters). As sites of action, then, schools are necessarily tasked with (at least part) of students' moral education. The operative question becomes how this should be done. Here again, direct experience is integral, because it is through direct experience that we are able to assimilate and gain sympathy with another's experience. We do this with by communicating, by stretching imagination to see meaning from another's perspective. Words alone cannot create this, for "meaning depends upon connection with a shared experience" as we engage in "joint activity by the use of things."¹⁹ The need for direct experience in moral education adds to the argument that schools must create community. For only an interacting community can provide the situations in which develop moral character.

SITUATION IN DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

Let us now take up the notion of a “situation,” the second pivotal concept in DE with profound connections to Dewey's corpus. As with “experience,” “situation” is a term Dewey uses in both ordinary and philosophical ways. After briefly reviewing how “situation” appears DE and in other works, I will focus in more detail as to how DE uses the notion. DE, we'll see, deploys situations to address student interest and motivation, the sources of aims and criteria in problem solving, the nature of thinking per se, and morality (including habits, values, judgments, and theorization).

One of the earliest philosophical uses of “situation” is in connection with Leibniz's monads (1888, EW1); much more relevantly, it also appears in 1891's “Moral Theory and Practice.” There, Dewey is already telegraphing much later works (such as “Three Independent Factors in Morals”) by denying the usefulness of grand moral nouns (Justice, Love, Truth) in favor of adverbial modifiers about how acts must respond to the “whole situation” (justly, lovingly, and truly).²⁰ “Situation” is used extensively in 1910's *How We Think*, in DE (of course), and then appears regularly in later texts. The most conspicuous appearances—those doing most to develop the term, philosophically—are in *Experience and Nature*, *Art As Experience*, and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.²¹

What is a situation? While DE is not a metaphysical book, and there are no extended analytical treatments of situations, the term appears often and diversely enough that we learn a lot, nevertheless. “Situation(s)” is paired with numerous modifiers, depending on a given discussion's broader purposes. Modifiers may assign to situation dimensions that are ontological (whole situations, and also: concrete, actual empirical, real, genuine, life-, complex, complicated, novel, new), temporal (developing, changing), psychological (reflective, intellectual, practical), inquiring (incomplete, indeterminate, uncertain, doubtful, confused, perplexing), social (social, inclusive, common, joint, shared); normative (significant), and sociological (industrial, out-of-school). What is the job of “situation” in DE? Mainly, it provides educators with a justification (logical, psychological, pedagogical, and moral) for reconstructing curricula and methods to be more radically experimental, interpersonally caring, and socially relevant to actual students.

Nevertheless, as we will see, much of what DE says about situations advances earlier thinking and prefigures later developments.

Student Interest. Teaching typically poses problems for students to solve. The timeworn challenge has been how to inspire and sustain interest. Often, students are blamed for lack of interest—they're labeled "lazy," "distracted," or "unmotivated." Sometimes, lack of interest is medicalized and prescriptions become an integral part of the "learning strategy." The timeworn answer for interest has been some form of conditioning (a mixture of carrots, sticks) which is institutionalized (grades, ranks, awards, etc.) so as to buttress the structure's authority, long term.

To a great degree the problem lies not with students, but with educators' ignorance about the origins of interest. The remedy is not to fault students nor invent more powerful carrots or sticks; rather, educators must understand that "the stimulus resides in the situation with which one is actually confronted" so they may seek "objects and modes of action...connected with [students'] present powers."²² This means the creation of whole situations, informed by some knowledge of the student's personality, background, tastes, and emotional makeup. Such whole situations "are not, however, physical affairs. Intellectually the existence of a whole depends upon a concern or interest; it is qualitative, the completeness of appeal made by a situation."²³ In such situations, the teacher's focus is not mainly upon the subject (which they must know, cold) but "upon the attitude and response of the pupil" according to their "present needs and capacities."²⁴

This point is especially salient, today. No technology that merely states an idea—whether live lecture, book reading, interactive computer program, etc.—can match the efficacy of genuine, shared situations. Dewey writes, Only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand, seeking and finding his own way out, does [the student] think. When the parent or teacher has provided the conditions which stimulate thinking and has taken a sympathetic attitude toward the activities of the learner by entering into a common or conjoint experience, all has been done which a second party can do to instigate learning.²⁵ The creation of a genuine situation requires profound care, and conditions must ensure that participants' individuality factor in, or the the pedagogy will not work. For various reasons (driven, especially, by economics and class), there is precious little opportunity for this kind of education; as a result,

conditions become more alienating: students become more inured, teachers suffer a loss of autonomy (to standardized tests, administrators, bureaucracy) and even, Dewey says, lose their sense of humor!²⁶

Aims and Criteria in Problem Solving. Let us assume that a teacher has created a genuine situation and students are engaged in problem solving. Here, the skeptic asks, “Where do the means for the solution come from? Mustn’t the teacher show the students the means? Isn’t education all about the methodical revelation of already understood connections between means and ends?” Dewey’s response is that while such rehearsals have a place, consider the originary situation which gave birth to the problem and ask yourself “How did those inquirers find their clues?” The answer, again, is that the situation is the source of the means, criteria, and clues to problems. Any problem happens at a novel point in time, and is always to some degree unique. Strategies relying solely upon rigid custom or random guessing neglect empirical attention to the actual situation; unsurprising, then, they prove ineffectual in the long run.

Consider this illustration of the need to return to the whole situation. In many fictional murder mysteries one clue (a suspect, a motive, a proposed sequence of events) is over-emphasized; this myopia sidelines the detectives until they realize they need revisit the initial situation (crime scene, e.g.) anew.²⁷ (Of course the audience has been screaming for this move for some time!) The point is that, in all these cases, the source of the missing clues, relevant means, and live possibilities come from the initial problem itself—it is “the perplexities of the situation [that suggests] certain ways out.”²⁸ Dewey’s earnest advice (to go back to the situation) applies to all inquirers, whether they are in education, the sciences, and especially philosophy.²⁹

Thinking. “Situation” is fundamental to grasping Dewey—and DE—for another, perhaps elusive, reason. Education is supposed to be, as Dewey put it in an earlier book title, “how we think.” But without problematic situations, there is no thinking! To see why, apply the organism-in-environment model to thinking as the way-we-get-along-in-the-world. Thinking is not something done apart from circumstances but within them, in response to them. I may describe a “situation I am in” but “in” means “amidst.” I am doing-and-undergoing-amid-things, and one aspect of my doing is thinking. In the same way my breathing involves the atmosphere, my thinking involves whatever perceptual, conceptual, and physical elements are in play. Just as there is no chess without a board and opponent, there is no “thinking” without a problematic

situation. All creatures are organisms-in-environments and all thinkers are experiencers-in-problematic situations.³⁰ We can also think about thinking. To do that, I reflectively survey the various situations I have experienced; I notice patterns, apply labels. Wearing a psychologist's hat, I call certain experienced patterns "thinking" and others "emoting"; wearing a logician's (or ontologist's) hat, I'm disposed to call some patterns "objects" and others, "relations." I can also wear my ethicist's hat to label "goods" and "evils." And so forth.

There is nothing wrong with this reflective surveying, abstracting, and labeling of experience; indeed, these are all inquiries, and they can prove useful. But the ability to distinguish and label does not change what is basic: the situation.³¹

Moral habits, values, and judgments. As explained earlier (in connection to direct experience), education has a vital role to play in moral development. But this is not, as DE points out, a special section of the curriculum requiring special methods but integral to education's mission to empower growth, to discover, make, and sustain meaningful experience. "Morals," as Dewey puts it, "concern nothing less than the whole character."³² This happens interactively, via created situations. To be "in charge" of children—say, in a mathematics or language or biology class—is at once to be responsible for their development as human beings; this is true regardless of whether particularly controversial "ethical" dilemmas or principles are selected for special attention and discussion. Morality is taught as a general consequence of the teaching of habits. "All habits," Dewey writes in *Human Nature and Conduct* are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self."³³ A student may have certain habits or attitudes, such as compassion, which contribute to growth; in that case, the school can put them to work in projects (or "occupations" as Dewey calls them) which reinforce and connect them more delicately to other habits. Other habits may be destructive of growth and, again, the school's task is to reconstruct these habits so they, again, contribute to growth. Habits are not like personal property, exclusive to a self.

A habit is transactional—it comes from and is ingredient to situations: "Habits enter into the constitution of the situation; they are in and of it, not, so far as it is concerned, something outside of it."³⁴ I may have a habit of eating sweets after dinner, but this habit isn't isolated; my body's chemistry, the family who joins in, or the properties of the food all contribute to the habit. This transactional relationship between self, habits, and situation means that education of

habits—including those we would call moral habits or character—requires schools and teachers to pay careful attention to whether or not they are creating genuine situations for their student. Dewey writes, “A curriculum which acknowledges the social responsibilities of education must present situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together, and where observation and information are calculated to develop social insight and interest.³⁵ As mentioned earlier, exercising that responsibility means helping students understand the meanings of different kinds of conduct by helping them grasp the potential implications of that conduct. But a true grasp of those implications cannot come from a lecture or (in a religious context) a sermon; genuine knowledge can only be created through situations which is, again why, schools must create and function as communities.

Values and Valuation. DE offers an account the nature of values and valuation (value judgment). These support his practical proposals about moral education, and again “situation” plays a crucial role. One profound mistake about values is that they are somehow independent of everyday conduct; on that assumption, education mistakenly takes its challenge to be inducing (persuading, cajoling, coercing) students into following moral codes or rules. DE argues that moral values (and aims) are the results of inquiries, which themselves emerge from (and return for application to) problematic situations. Even a child given two pieces of a candy in the presence of a sibling with none can face a problematic situation; “ill at ease” about situation, they have to think about what to do. The situation is “indeterminate,” a quandary. They may, of course, apply the rule (or value) handed down from their parents which says “Always share.” But while this solution provides one route (from indeterminacy to determinacy), it requires neither personal investment nor perspicuous analysis of the “actual empirical” situation (as Dewey calls it). The solution lacks authenticity. An authentic solution involves inquiry—observation, hypothesis, reflection, testing out—which, in its generic logical form, is a continuous behavior no different in kind to other situations not singled out as “moral.”³⁶ The situational account of values in DE also yields the conclusion that there is not, and cannot be, an ultimate hierarchy of ends or values: “In the abstract or at large, apart from the needs of a particular situation in which choice has to be made, there is no such thing as degrees or order of value.”³⁷ This rejection of a hierarchy of values (or, for that matter, of virtues) is present in both earlier and later works.³⁸

Moral theories. Finally, DE’s moral account (incorporating experience, situation, and inquiry) significantly advances Dewey’s argument against a range of ethical theories, such as those

staked either upon “motives” (e.g. Kant) or “consequences” (e.g. Mill) or “character” (e.g. Aristotle). He criticizes these theories’ “sharp demarcation of the motive of action from its consequences, and of character from conduct.”³⁹ Such monocausal approaches stem from a tenacious dualism between mind and activity.⁴⁰ Dewey’s criticism of traditional theories’ reification of traits of conduct is remarkably mature in DE, but finds later expression most notably in his 1930 “Three Independent Factors in Morals” (LW5).

FINAL THOUGHT: ART AND AESTHETICS IN DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

Upon rereading DE, I was surprised by the sheer number of analogies involving art, and the significance placed upon making and appreciating the arts. I wish to mention three aspects featured in DE, along with their connections to other works. These aspects are (a) aesthetically meaningful experience, (b) artistry as a functional model for teaching, and (c) the economic/class dualism common to both aesthetic and educational dualisms.

Aesthetically meaningful experience. DE presents aesthetic activity, especially art-making, as a model for educators. Because aesthetic experience fluidly incorporates thinking, feeling, and making, it can produce experiences of the most meaningful sort. While enjoyment of these experiences is, in itself, valuable, they are also valuable pedagogically because they can show students (via a direct experience) how good experience can and should be. The idea that such meaningful (“aesthetic”) experience does exist and that it could come to qualify a far greater portion of daily life is perhaps the primary point of Dewey’s *Art as Experience* (LW10). But in DE, we already see him explicating aesthetic experience as a central part of what schools must do!⁴¹

Play and recreation, as aesthetically meaningful experiences, play a large role in DE, their function made natural by connection established between education, happiness, and growth. Art’s role here is integral: “Education has no more serious responsibility than making adequate provision for enjoyment of recreative leisure; not only for the sake of immediate health, but still more if possible for the sake of its lasting effect upon habits of mind. Art is again the answer to this demand.”⁴²

Artistry as a functional model for teaching. In actual society, artistry manages to function despite the pervasive dualisms hampering education. Artistry, done well, ensures that personal inspiration informs the activity's end, and that means and ends are co-dependent.⁴³ DE seizes artistry as a model, proposing that if teaching could become more artistic—by adopting artists' flexibility and creative initiative—educators might better avoid the anesthetic extremes of readymade recipes or mere personal caprice.⁴⁴

Economic/class dualism. DE also discusses, at length, the underlying historical inheritance which shackles both artists and educators, namely economic class divisions (between “leisure” and “laboring”) which have metastasized into those mentioned throughout DE and in many other works in his corpus. These have permeated daily life and are responsible for much suffering and injustice; Dewey sees, in both the arts and education, a valuable opportunity to reconstruct these divisions.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

By all accounts, John Dewey lived a meaningful life which integrated philosophy, education, and politics. In many ways, *Democracy and Education* provides a handbook sketching the how these elements can sustain one another. Democracy, we learn, is more than political machinery—it is a “mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.”⁴⁶ Education helps shape the habits (intellectual, emotional, and imaginative) necessary to this mode of life, while philosophy's role is critical and hypothetical “defining difficulties and suggesting methods for dealing with them,” and discovering a “more comprehensive point of view” especially when there is “need of integration in action of the conflicting various interests in life.”⁴⁷

But while philosophy may help education and democracy imagine new perspectives and directions, DE makes clear that philosophy needs education for its reality-checks. The “educational point of view” —called, in *Experience and Nature*, the “denotative method” — is for philosophy what the “genuine situation” (described throughout DE) is for teachers and students: the experiential starting point where rubber meets road. The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice.⁴⁸

Because change is the only constant, each generation must reinvent democracy to respond to novel conditions, needs, and challenges. While DE states that education's job is to "liberate the young from reviving and retraversing the past," education provides a similar function for philosophy.⁴⁹ For philosophy's vitality as philosophy rests on its continued relevance to a changing social democracy; it must find new ways to intercede, constructively, in the many realms which comprise culture. Education is philosophy's trainer—it commits philosophy to the practical regimen needed for vitality: "Education is the laboratory in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and are tested."⁵⁰ More than anything, perhaps, this last statement helps us to see why education and philosophy were more than intertwined themes for Dewey, but the symbiotic organs energizing the body of his thought.

NOTES

In "Reflex," Dewey criticized the reflex arc framework for explaining behavior by artificially segregating sensory stimulus, central nervous system response, and action as "a patchwork of disjointed parts, a mechanical conjunction of unallied processes." (EW5:97) He argued this analysis misdescribed how live creatures actually interact with their environment. Following William James' *Principles of Psychology* (which characterized experience as a continuous stream rather than a series of isolated perceptual impressions and relations) Dewey argued that conduct, too, can be seen as a continuous stream. In place of the reflex-arc model, Dewey proposed that organisms subsist in a continuous circuit of coordination with their environment. Instead of starting analysis of behavior with this "stimulus" or that "response," we start with the act-in-context. Rather than a "seeing" then "reaching," we consider an agent (a child, say) already active in an environment (a living room with a candle) who acts (e.g., seeing-for-reaching). "The real beginning is with the act of seeing; it is looking, and not a sensation of light....What precedes the 'stimulus' is a whole act, a sensori-motor co-ordination." (EW5:97, 100). Compare DE's account of the infant at MW9:280. 4 Experience features prominently in *Experience and Nature* (LW1), *A Common Faith* (LW9), *Art as Experience* (LW10), *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry* (LW12), and *Experience and Education* (LW13), among others. 5 MW9:174 6 MW9:233 7 MW 9:147 8 MW9:146 9 While the distinction appears in many works, one might begin with "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism" (MW3), "Qualitative Thought" (LW5, especially pp. 211–2), *Experience and Nature* (LW1, especially 26-7), and

Logic: The Theory of Inquiry (LW12, especially 74-5). Dewey puts the point nicely, in "In Reply to Some Criticisms": "Things that are had in experience exist prior to reflection and its eventuation in an object of knowledge; but the latter, as such, is a deliberately effected re-arrangement or re-disposition, by means of overt operations, of such antecedent existences." (LW5:212) 10 MW9:241 11 MW9:242 12 MW 9:56 13 MW 9:73 14 About education's tendency to displace the present for some future (often utilitarian) goal, Dewey comments, "The mistake is not in attaching importance to preparation for future need, but in making it the mainspring of present effort. Because the need of preparation for a continually developing life is great, it is imperative that every energy should be bent to making the present experience as rich and significant as possible. Then as the present merges insensibly into the future, the future is taken care of." (MW 9:61) 15 See "Emerson: The Philosopher of Democracy" (MW3), "Experience, Knowledge, and Value: A Rejoinder" (LW14); on history, see DE, ch. 16, "Experience and Objective Idealism" (MW3), and "Some Comments on Philosophical Discussion," (MW 15). 16 MW9:241. 17 See discussion, e.g., in Experience and Nature (LW1:18) and Logic: The Theory of Inquiry (LW12:74-5). 18 MW9:365-6 19 MW 9:19, 33 "The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey's Democracy and Education" 6/17/15 26 of 31 20 See EW3:101, 105ff. 21 See, for example, Dewey's discussion in Logic of the primary ontological place held by "situations" and especially how "a universe of experience" is the precondition and controlling presence of "a universe of discourse." (LW12:74) Dewey's discussion of situations in "Qualitative Thought" is similarly instructive, not least because this article displays a similar tension between Dewey's declaration that situations cannot be made explicit and his willingness to discuss their "internal complexity" and "permeating qualitative unity." See LW5:246-9, passim. 22 MW 9:54 then MW9:133. 23 MW9:206 24 MW9:192 25 MW9:167 26 "But in instruction and discipline, there is rarely sufficient opportunity for children and youth to have the direct normal experiences from which educators might derive an idea of method or order of best development. Experiences are had under conditions of such constraint that they throw little or no light upon the normal course of an experience to its fruition. 'Methods' have then to be authoritatively recommended to teachers, instead of being an expression of their own intelligent observations....The effect of this situation in crippling the teacher's sense of humor has not received the attention which it deserves." (MW9:175, 345, 346) 27 Overemphasis on a single object or event is discussed (in the context of logical objects) in the 1938 Logic: "What is designated by the word 'situation' is not a single object or event or set of objects and events. For we never experience nor form judgments about objects and events in isolation, but only in

connection with a contextual whole. This latter is what is called a “The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey’s Democracy and Education” 6/17/15 27 of 31 “situation.” (LW12:72) We tend to forget the ‘contextual whole’ and for that reason Dewey reminds us that “An object, logically speaking, is that set of connected distinctions of characteristics which emerges as a definite constituent of a resolved situation and is confirmed in the continuity of inquiry. This definition applies to objects as existential.” (LW12:513) Even the distinctions, which provide the criteria which establish the boundary conditions for objects, are themselves rooted in situations: “Distinctions and relations are instituted within a situation; they are recurrent and repeatable in different situations.” (LW12:74) 28 MW9:156; see also 175. 29 Those wanting to follow this a bit should look at Dewey’s discussions of the “denotative method” in EN; it is, in effect, Dewey’s DE recommendation of “genuine situations” directed, this time, at philosophers. (See LW1, especially around pp.19, 61, and 386). 30 As Dewey puts it in DE, “To say that thinking occurs with reference to situations which are still going on, and incomplete, is to say that thinking occurs when things are uncertain or doubtful or problematic. Only what is finished, completed, is wholly assured. Where there is reflection there is suspense. The object of thinking is to help reach a conclusion, to project a possible termination on the basis of what is already given.... Since the situation in which thinking occurs is a doubtful one, thinking is a process of inquiry, of looking into things, of investigating.” (MW9:155) 31 Situations are, if you like, founts of what we call reason, emotion, and will but these are not originally separated. While this sounds counterintuitive to anyone who is habituated to everyday psychological terms, it is just not the case that the “intellectual,” “emotional,” and “volitional” aspects of our conduct are somehow real apart from the functional use we make in calling them such. They are all created by abstracting from situations in which they exist, so to speak, “The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey’s Democracy and Education” 6/17/15 28 of 31 intermixed with everything else. (This is why we often feel something intensely without knowing what we feel. It is not just that we don’t have a name for it, we have not yet finished deciding what to designate and characterize in our experience!) As Dewey puts it, “Interest and aims, concern and purpose, are necessarily connected....While such words...indicate an attitude of personal preference, they are always attitudes toward objects--toward what is foreseen. We may call the phase of objective foresight intellectual, and the phase of personal concern emotional and volitional, but there is no separation in the facts of the situation....But they are always responses to what is going on in the situation of which they are a part....They are literally bound up with [a situation’s] changes....Instead of marking a purely personal or subjective realm, separated from

the objective and impersonal, they indicate the non-existence of such a separate world....Interest, concern, mean that self and world are engaged with each other in a developing situation.” (MW9:131, 132) 32 MW 9:366 33 MW14:21 34 MW6:120 35 MW9:200 36 In language closely prefiguring the 1938 Logic’s extensive use of “indeterminate” and “determinate” situations, Dewey writes in DE, “A person who does not have his mind made up, does not know what to do. Consequently he postpones definite action so far as possible....There is not first a purely psychical process, followed abruptly by a radically different physical one. There is one continuous behavior, proceeding from a more uncertain, divided, hesitating state to a more overt, determinate, or complete state.” (MW9:357) 37 MW9:248 “The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey’s Democracy and Education” 6/17/15 29 of 31 38 On ends or aims, see DE: “Foreseen ends,” Dewey writes, “are factors [for control] in the development of a changing situation....They are subordinate to the situation...not the situation to them. They are not ends in the sense of finalities to which everything must be bent and sacrificed. They are, as foreseen, means of guiding the development of a situation.” (MW 9:182). On values, see, e.g. “The Logic of Judgments of Practice” (1915): “I do not believe that valuations occur and values are brought into being save in a continuing situation where things have potency for carrying forward processes.” (MW 8:34) and, later, the 1938 Logic LW12: 169. 39 MW9:356 40 Dewey writes, “Since morality is concerned with conduct, any dualisms which are set up between mind and activity must reflect themselves in the theory of morals.... The first obstruction which meets us is the currency of moral ideas which split the course of activity into two opposed factors, often named respectively the inner and outer, or the spiritual and the physical.... In morals it takes the form of a sharp demarcation of the motive of action from its consequences, and of character from conduct....Different schools identify morality with either the inner state of mind or the outer act and results, each in separation from the other.” (MW9:356) 41 I must quote this DE passage at length because it so completely iterates the main message of the later Art as Experience: “This enhancement of the qualities which make any ordinary experience appealing, appropriable--capable of full assimilation--and enjoyable, constitutes the prime function of literature, music, drawing, painting, etc., in education. They are...the chief agencies of an intensified, enhanced appreciation. As such, they are not only intrinsically and directly enjoyable, but they serve a purpose beyond themselves. They have the office, in increased degree, of all appreciation in fixing taste, in forming standards for the worth of later experiences. They arouse discontent with conditions which fall below their measure; they create a demand for surroundings coming up to their own level. They reveal a

depth and range of meaning in experiences which otherwise might be mediocre and trivial. They supply, that is, organs of vision. Moreover, in their fullness they represent the concentration and consummation of elements of good which are otherwise scattered and incomplete. They select and focus the elements of enjoyable worth which make any experience directly enjoyable. They are not luxuries of education, but emphatic expressions of that which makes any education worth while." (MW9:246-7) 42 MW9:213 43 See MW 9:113 44 DE: "Flexibility and initiative in dealing with problems are characteristic of any conception to which method is a way of managing material to develop a conclusion....the method of teaching is the method of an art, of action intelligently directed by ends....The assumption that there are no alternatives between following ready-made rules and trusting to native gifts, the inspiration of the moment and undirected 'hard work,' is contradicted by the procedures of every art." (MW9:177) 45 See DE: "To split the [educational] system, and give to others, less fortunately situated, an education conceived mainly as specific trade preparation, is to treat the schools as an agency for transferring the older division of labor and leisure, culture and service, mind and body, directed and directive class, into a society nominally democratic." (MW9:328) It is worth noting, also, that Dewey's critique of museums in *Art as Experience* (1934, where he called it the "museum conception of art"), is already fully present in DE. 46 MW9:93 "The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*" 6/17/15 31 of 31 47 MW9:336 48 MW9:338 49 MW 9:79 50 MW9:339