7 Toward a Pragmatic Communitarianism

The time will come when it will be found passing strange that we of this age should take such pains to control by every means at command the formation of ideas of physical things, even those most remote from human concern, and yet are content with haphazard beliefs about the qualities of objects that regulate our deepest interests; that we are scrupulous as to methods of forming ideas of natural objects, and either dogmatic or else driven by immediate conditions in framing those about values.

The Quest for Certainty

Despite or perhaps because of its success as an academic textbook, the 1908 *Ethics* raised as many questions about Dewey's ethics as it answered. Dewey was undoubtedly to blame for at least some of the confusion. He operated throughout the text on an understanding of scientific and of moral judgment that he had worked out five years earlier, in "The Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality." This 1903 monograph had appeared in a relatively obscure University of Chicago publication and thus was neither widely available nor widely read. Since Dewey did not bother to restate his position in *Ethics*, few of its early readers would have been aware of precisely what he meant by urging that ethics adopt experimental techniques or how exactly *Ethics* contributed to the establishment of an experimental ethical science. Consequently, the significance of the text's structure must have been obscure to many of its readers.

As a result, *Ethics* lent itself to a variety of misinterpretations. The most common and probably the most frustrating to Dewey himself was the reduction of his pragmatic constructivism to a sort of Hobbesian ethic by the exaggeration of the 'instrumental' character of his moral principles, rules, and judgments. Readers unfamiliar with Dewey's conception of scientific judgment and the instrumental role fundamental

principles play in warranting provisional hypotheses could hardly be expected to understand what Dewey actually meant the instrumental role of moral principles to be. Consequently, they not unreasonably supposed that Dewey's moral rules and judgments were merely means to the same sort of end Hobbesian agents pursue—the satisfaction of active dispositions. So read, Dewey's elaborately constructed ethical theory necessarily begins to unravel. If moral principles and rules are interpreted as merely instrumental to the satisfactory expression of private ends, rather than as instruments of collective scientific inquiry, Dewey's belief in moral agents' obligations to adopt or abide by particular moral principles or rules becomes incomprehensible. The fact that it is usually in one's interest to abide by the moral principles and rules current in one's society hardly constitutes an obligation to do so. As a result, Dewey began to seem to have a problem with his account of moral obligation.

Whether a pragmatic ethics could support a plausible social and political theory also came into question. Dewey argues in *Ethics* that a pragmatic moral community of individuals pursuing harmonious, stable, and social forms of conduct and character will necessarily be egalitarian in its attitudes to persons and democratic in its political organization. Democratic rule by an egalitarian community, he believed, would afford individuals greater opportunities to realize their goals than any other form of political association. But if we think of moral rules and principles as merely instrumental to the satisfaction of individual preferences, then to a pragmatic community, democracy might simply be one among many social and political instruments to be adopted or rejected as the inclinations of the majority warrant—rather than the one form of political organization a pragmatic moral agent would be justified in accepting. If one imagined that moral principles, intermediate generalizations, and rules are all about the best means to the satisfactory expression of private dispositions, one would not feel bound to reject any principle of social organization that served one's private ends. If tyranny would better serve one's private interests or those of one's family or class, so much the worse for egalitarian democracy.

It was such a view of pragmatism and its ethics that led Bertrand Russell to protest in 1909 that pragmatism was inimical to both morality and liberal democracy. He wrote:

> The hopes of international peace, like the achievement of internal peace, depend upon the creation of an effective force of public opinion formed upon an

> estimate of the rights and wrongs of disputes. . . . But the possibility of such a public opinion depends upon the possibility of a standard of justice which is a cause, and not an effect, of the wishes of the community; and such a standard of justice seems incompatible with the pragmatist philosophy. This philosophy, therefore, although it begins with liberty and toleration, develops, by inherent necessity, into an appeal to force and the arbitrament of the big battalions.[1]

Even friendly critics, better informed about Dewey's conceptions of scientific and moral inquiry than Russell, not infrequently accused Dewey of being overly optimistic about the practicality of his pragmatic constructivism. These charges became more widespread in the two decades following publication of *Ethics* as Dewey argued for the application of pragmatic techniques to contemporary political and social problems. The charge came, broadly speaking, in two forms, both given peculiarly bitter voice in Randolph Bourne's famous 1917 essay, "Twilight of Idols."[2] The first charge echoes an objection made many years earlier by Josiah Royce that Dewey 'too gayly' ignores the possibility of moral tragedies, situations having no satisfying resolution, whose evils no amount of inquiry, reflection. or science can evade or control.[3] For Bourne, Dewey's hope that the First World War would serve liberal political forces was evidence that his philosophy had "no place for the inexorable."[4] Wars, Bourne argued, are not natural forces to be controlled or directed for human betterment like fire, electricity, or water. Wars are disasters to be avoided if possible, grimly endured if not, but never welcomed as instruments of social change.

The second charge is related to the first. Just as pragmatism promises too much, it demands too much of the ordinary person. As Bourne puts it: "a rational nation would have chosen education as its national enterprise. Into this it would have thrown its energy though the heavens fell and the earth rocked around it. But the nation did not use its isolation from the conflict to educate itself. It fretted for three years and then let

1. Bertrand Russell, "Pragmatism" (1909), reprinted in *Philosophical Essays* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966), p. 110.

2. Randolph S. Bourne, "Twilight of Idols" (1917), reprinted in Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915–1919*, ed. Carl Resek (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 53–64.

3. The charge was made regarding Dewey's *Outlines of a Critical Ethics* and is discussed in Chapter 3, above.

4. Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," p. 59.

war, not education, be chosen."[5] Societies do not function as impartial rational entities. So, Bourne insists, it is foolish to expect a modern political society to decide policy questions in accordance with the rational and impartial standards of inquiry Dewey has constructed for their use. Pragmatism's social philosophy is thoroughly impractical.

Bourne's second argument would later be taken a step further by critics and former allies, such as Walter Lippmann.[6] It is not only foolish to expect rational principles of inquiry to be overriding in the formation and implementation of public policy. It is foolish to expect them to be overriding in the average individual's formation and selection of long-term life plans and projects. Human beings are emotional and passionate beings first and rational second. Moreover, relatively few people are conversant with scientific principles of inquiry, and fewer still could put them to work. Education might gradually increase the number capable of making pragmatically justifiable moral decisions, but it could never undo differences in natural talents or abilities. Nor could education guarantee that one would always have adequate time to make rational, reflective decisions in particular cases. Thus a pragmatic moral community could function only if those with the ability, training, access to information, and time to pursue inquiries act as moral experts, guiding and advising the majority. Or in other words, a pragmatic ethics is an impractical basis for social philosophy, if by that we mean, as Bourne did, a *liberal* social philosophy. Pragmatism could in principle be workable, but only if democratic decision making is abandoned in favor of a benevolent dictatorship of technocrats, including experts in the techniques of inquiry, diagnosis, and treatment of moral problems.

In a letter of 1915, Dewey acknowledged that the 1908 *Ethics* had not provided clear solutions to these sorts of objections. He writes, "I have not given or tried to give any 'solutions.' But it doesnt [*sic*] seem to have occurred to the objectors that to say that the moral life is a sries [*sic*] of problems and that morality *is* their solution as they arise would naturally preclude me from proffering solutions."[7] But in the 1910s and

5. Ibid., p. 56.

6. See, for example, Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, [1922] 1965), and *The Phantom Public* (New York: Macmillan, 1925). Others had evidently gotten a similar point across to Dewey even before Lippmann's books appeared. Dewey's 1922 *Human Nature and Conduct* replies to those, among others, who object to his ethics "as placing too much emphasis upon intelligence" (*Human Nature and Conduct, MW* 14:171).

7. The quotation is taken from a letter of May 6, 1915, to Scudder Klyce, Scudder Klyce Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., excerpt reprinted in Abraham Edel and Elizabeth Flower, introduction to *Ethics* (1932), *LW* 7:xxxiii.

1920s, Dewey did indicate how he thought solutions could be arrived at and what relation the methods of ethics bore to the methods of the natural sciences. In some instances, he even went so far as to proffer solutions: specifically, democracy and education, both of which he saw as integral to the moral resolution of the obstacles life presents to the development of satisfactory character and conduct. Increasingly, Dewey was concerned with trying to test the practical bearings of his solutions by getting them put into practice. He became heavily involved in promoting progressive educational and political reforms, through lectures, addresses, reviews, and popular essays, most notably perhaps his essays for the newly founded *New Republic* magazine.

As a result, much of Dewey's output in these two decades was popular and applied. Nevertheless, this period was philosophically fruitful as well. Dewey made use of his lectures, essays, and addresses to experiment with illustrations, refinements, and reformulations of his more controversial conceptions and their application to contemporary philosophical debates. Eventually, all these experiments resulted in the systematic naturalistic reinterpretations of human nature, metaphysics, art, and epistemology that constitute the major works of his mature pragmatic philosophy for which he remains best known: *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Experience and Nature* (1925, 1929), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938). It was not until 1915, however, that Dewey began crystallizing the results of his tentative reformulations into systematic form. "The Logic of Judgments of Practice," a two-part article in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, was the first significant fruit of his labor. The second was his 1916 text, *Democracy and Education*, to which Dewey referred in 1930 as "for many years that in which my philosophy, such as it is, was most fully expounded."[8]

FACTS AND VALUES: "THE LOGIC OF JUDGMENTS OF PRACTICE"

"The Logic of Judgments of Practice" might best be described as a revised and considerably expanded version of "The Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality." As its title implies, "The Logic of Judgments of Practice" discusses the nature and manner of confirmation of practical judgments generally, including but not limited to the overtly

8. See John Dewey "The Logic of Judgments of Practice," *MW* 8:14–82; and *Democracy and Education, MW* 9. The quotation is from Dewey's autobiographical essay, "Absolutism to Experimentalism," *LW* 5:156.

ethical. As in the earlier paper, Dewey opens by attempting to rebut the presumption that practical judgments about what is to be done differ in kind from nonpractical judgments of fact, in that the former are conditional or hypothetical in a way the latter are not. He argues that judgments of fact are all conditional upon the acceptance of various presuppositions, usually unstated, about the procedures appropriate for the assertion of an observation as 'fact' and for the confirmation of such assertions. Thus, he maintains, "all propositions which state discoveries or ascertainments, all categorical propositions, would be hypothetical, and their truth would coincide with their tested consequences" (*MW* 8:22). Here Dewey is careful to distinguish his notion of confirmation from that of his fellow pragmatist, William James. With Russell in mind, Dewey writes that his is "a type of pragmatism quite free from dependence upon a voluntaristic psychology. It is not complicated by reference to emotional satisfactions or the play of desires"[9] (*MW* 8:22). In other words, he will look to precisely the same sorts of consequences to confirm both practical hypotheses and predictions and their nonpractical, scientific counterparts.

Dewey then elaborates on a point, virtually taken for granted in the earlier paper, that 'values' are to be understood as analogous to 'facts.' He attributes misinterpretation of his position on value to a misunderstanding of the analogy intended. First, values, like facts, are to be viewed as constructs, not as items of immediate or direct 'knowledge by acquaintance.' Just as, in the past, observations had been confused with sensations, facts with unconfirmed anecdotes, so also, Dewey argues, values have been confused with immediate, unreflective instances of liking, prizing, or esteeming things, persons, or events. "As against all this," he writes, "the present paper takes its stand with the position stated by Hume in the following words: 'A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence; and contains not any representative quality'" (*MW* 8:24). The experience of prizing, esteeming, liking, disdaining, or loathing is, relatively speaking, an immediate, direct subjective response to a situation or its constituents, on a par with the subjective experiences of feeling, hearing, smelling, and so forth. Such experiences, Dewey argues, never constitute knowledge. Attention to, that is, selection of, an immediate apprehension of warmth, for example, from the interpenetrating whole of one's immediate ongoing experience transforms the apprehension into an 'observation' or 'per-

9. Russell is referred to on the same page.

ception' of warmth. Such an observation is merely anecdotal until confirmed by another intellectual process, reading a thermometer, perhaps. Only after some such confirmation does the observation become a 'fact.' So although one may have felt warm before one actually checked a thermometer, it was not a fact (i.e., *known*) that one was warm before the thermometer was checked. Since facts are intellectual constructs, they obviously cannot exist before they have been constructed. Likewise, Dewey argues, a value—say, the goodness, beauty, efficiency, or rightness of a given act—comes into being only as a result of a series of intellectual processes.

Consider the following example. Walking along the pier at your favorite seaside resort, you approach a seafood stand and, on impulse, order a lobster roll. So far, an impulse has been transformed into a string of perceptions or observations—that you are hungry for something to eat and that what you are hungry for is a lobster roll. You do not yet know if your perceptions are correct. You cannot know this until you have found some way of verifying your perceptions. Now suppose you receive a lobster roll and consume it eagerly. It could then be said to be a fact that you had been hungry and that what you had been hungry for was a lobster roll. Could it also be said that the lobster roll was 'good' to you? Or more specifically, could it be said that the lobster roll had a value for you? Dewey's answer would be negative. Although you *enjoyed* the lobster roll, it has as yet been of no *value* to you. Before it can be said to have a value, the immediate experience of enjoyment must be in some manner tested and approved.

For example, suppose that in answer to your request for a lobster roll, you were told that you could have one if you were prepared to wait fifteen minutes. Faced with a dilemma, you pause to weigh the pros and cons of the alternate possible responses you might make. As you do so, you determine the relative worth of your options. If you opt for the lobster roll, then as far as you are concerned the lobster roll is both a good and a good superior to the rival possibilities of ordering something else or ordering nothing at all. Dewey writes: "In this process, things *get* values—something they did not possess before. . . . At the risk of whatever shock, this doctrine should be exposed in all its nakedness. To judge value is to engage in instituting a determinate value where none is given" (*MW* 8:35). Just as nothing is a fact for Dewey until it has been verified, nothing is or can have a value until it has been reflectively evaluated.

Further, values, like facts, are revisable. In situations where determi-

nate values do present themselves as a result of previous considerations, those values may be revised, rejected, falsified, or confirmed in light of subsequent events. For example, suppose two hours after consuming a lobster roll, you feel the first stages of what is evidently going to be a serious bout of indigestion. You suddenly realize that this is not the first time that indigestion has followed your consumption of lobster rolls. What before you had put down to an unfortunate choice of lobster-roll vendors, you now recognize as the consequence of your eating lobster rolls. These reflections will probably lead you to revise your earlier assessment of the value of lobster rolls in general and the specific lobster roll you had eaten two hours before. What you had hitherto regarded as an unqualified good, you may now consider good only in moderation, if you continue to think of it as good at all.

To use the language of this 1915 paper, what we uncover or discover through a dramatic rehearsal of our options in a problematic situation are not 'values' or 'goods' or 'evils' (except or unless some of these options have been valued on previous occasions). What one uncovers or discovers is simply what one's specific subjective responses to one's situation are. We learn which options are attractive, repellent, or indifferent to us. But until our options have been rationally weighed or valued, they have no value. In the case of specifically moral situations and their options, the options we immediately like, prize, or enjoy will be evaluated in terms of their potential to serve as constituents of a good life and character, by means of pragmatically established theoretical moral principles and intermediate generalizations of the sort Dewey discussed in *Ethics*—and subject, of course, to subsequent confirmation.

Dewey's thesis that no option has a value until it has been 'valuated' was at least one source of the crude instrumentalist interpretation of his ethical theory. As Dewey notes, what he is calling 'valuation' has traditionally been characterized as "a process of applying some fixed or determinate value to the various competing goods of a situation; that valuation implies a prior standard" (*MW* 8:36). In other words, we can value our options in a problematic situation because we already know what is of value. All we have to do is determine whether our options possess the qualities we already know to be of value or how well or ill they would serve as means to what we know to be of value. Whatever our own particular theories of value, it will never be the case that reflection on the information gained from a dramatic rehearsal of our options will result in the discovery or justification of intrinsic value. Dramatic rehearsal can at most be a vehicle for determining which of our incompat-

ible options is most valuable as a means to our intrinsically valued ends. If one approaches Dewey's theory of moral deliberation and judgment from such a perspective, one will naturally conclude that this theory selects between options solely for their instrumental value.

The crude instrumentalist interpretation of Dewey's theory of moral deliberation thus misses the central point of that theory: the rejection of the thesis that we can know in principle (at least) what we value intrinsically in advance of choices of action. Dewey rejects the presumption that it is in principle possible to ascertain, by a purely a priori analysis of human nature and its essential properties, what the ideal life or character would be, in terms of which particular courses of action could be assessed. This is, he insists, precisely the same sort of presumption that so long retarded the advance of physical science. Ancient theories of knowledge, for instance, explained one's ability to identify a tree as a member of a given species by virtue of one's possession of an ideal model or conception of that particular species of tree, with which the present specimen is compared. Likewise, it was by virtue of one's possession of an ideal model or conception of a given sort of tree that one could evaluate the quality of a given specimen in terms of its conformity or nonconformity to the ideal type. But as Dewey points out, these theories of knowledge have long since been abandoned by modern physical science. It is time moral science did the same. "Physical knowledge," he argues, "did not . . . advance till the dogma of models or forms as standards of knowledge had been ousted. Yet we hang tenaciously to a like doctrine in morals for fear of moral chaos" (*MW* 8:44).

Granted, it is often the case that the problematic situations one encounters can be resolved by reference to the judgments or standards of value agents bring with them into the situation. But it does not follow from this that there is never a time when agents have to construct their values deliberately. Nor does it follow that their constructions of values are different in kind from their constructions of facts about physical objects. On the contrary, Dewey insists, one and the same method is used in each case: "Only by a judgment of means—things having value in the carrying of an indeterminate situation to a completion—is the end determinately made out in judgment" (*MW* 8:37).

Recall that for Dewey, knowledge of a physical object is knowledge of the operations by which that object may be produced. By analogy, one's knowledge of values or valuable ends of action is knowledge of the operations by which those valued ends can be constructed. To believe, for example, that human beings evolved from lower animal species is

not to *know* that they did so, unless one also knows of some mechanism that can have brought the change about. Similarly, for Dewey, to believe that a certain possible goal or objective is a value, a valuable end of action, is not to know this is the case, unless or until one also knows of means adequate to bring that end about. Not infrequently, he argues, our beliefs about what our ends or values are in problematic situations are radically altered when we consider what in practice is involved in their pursuit. Means are not simply instruments for the realization of ends. Means define and constitute ends, every bit as much as the natural selection of genetic traits defines and constitutes biological evolution.

For a modern scientific theory of ethics, as Dewey conceives of it, means and ends must be reciprocal. Moreover, ends not only are the means involved in their accomplishment; ends are themselves means to the completion of particular projects that then form the basis from which new projects spring. As a result, the decision to identify a particular act or event in a life as a 'means' or as an 'end' is like the decision to identify a particular event in a chain of events as a 'cause' or an 'effect'—appropriate for certain purposes and inappropriate for others. In reality, nothing is exclusively one or the other.

Reading back to the 1908 *Ethics*, we see that the putative end of human action, the good life, cannot be conceived of as a discrete thing, event, quality, or state. It must instead be conceived of as a series, a series of challenges overcome giving rise to new challenges. Each new end is a new construction, the outcome of a process of investigation and discovery of the materials and opportunities of one's circumstances, subject to eventual confirmation. Naturally, then, whatever our ends have been or are next to be, we will have reason to want them to be harmonious and stable, yet flexible and personally and socially enriching rather than the reverse.

PHILOSOPHY, DEMOCRACY, AND EDUCATION

"The Logic of Judgments of Practice" explained and expanded Dewey's conception of the relation of facts to values, of scientific and practical judgment. It was not particularly concerned with the philosopher's role in the construction of either. This topic is discussed in *Democracy and Eduction*, a book that might as well have been titled 'Democracy as Education' and subtitled 'The Vocation of Philosophy.' What is most fully expounded in this text is less Dewey's philosophy than his emerging conception of philosophy.

Before his break with idealism, Dewey had seen philosophy as the highest expression of the urge to know. Philosophy's vocation was the complete and ordered comprehension of the world, a comprehension to which the special sciences made their several, piecemeal contributions. Subsequent transformations in his conception of knowledge and science made it impossible for Dewey to continue to maintain this conception of philosophy or its relation to the special sciences. Since he no longer thought of the world as an eternally perfect creation of an eternally conscious mind, he no longer believed it possessed of an unchanging order that it could be the business of philosophy to transcribe. Philosophy would either have to find itself a new vocation or join the growing ranks of trades and crafts made redundant by modern technological and scientific development. *Ethics* points the way Dewey believed ethical philosophy must go if it was to survive in the modern world. Ethical theory, that is, ethical philosophy, must become the theoretical wing of a practical science largely conducted by professional experimental scientists. Anthropology, sociology, psychology, and physiology investigate the materials of human conduct and character. These sciences will formulate hypotheses about how particular objectives may be reached, under what circumstances, with what effects, and at what costs. And tests will be performed to confirm hypotheses. But knowledge of what can be done does not determine what should be done. Nor indeed is it philosophy's job to determine what should be done. The determination of what should be done is the fundamental project of society at large. Philosophy's contribution is the development of procedures and principles of assistance in the collective social construction and evaluation of ideals (ends) of human flourishing and the materials and means of their construction.

Ethical philosophy's job, one might say, is to teach us to think rationally and critically about conflicting and incommensurable values. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey takes this approach a step further. As he depicts them, every branch of philosophy operates at the intersection of positive science and human culture. He writes:

> Positive science always implies *practically* the ends which the community is concerned to achieve. Isolated from such ends, it is a matter of indifference whether its disclosures are used to cure disease or to spread it; to increase the means of sustenance of life or . . . to wipe life out. If society is interested in one of these things rather than another, science shows the way of attainment. Philosophy thus has a double task: that of criticizing existing aims with re-

> spect to the existing state of science, pointing out values which have become obsolete with the command of new resources, showing what values are merely sentimental because there are no means for their realization; and also that of interpreting the results of specialized science in their bearing on future social endeavor. (*MW* 9:339)

As the theoretical wing of the social sciences, philosophy has a twofold vocation: critical and constructive. First, philosophy, in all its branches, will analyze and critique human objectives (whatever these may be) and their relation to available resources and materials—in particular, pointing out what those objectives really mean by reference to the practical bearings of a social commitment to them. Second, because science and technology run ahead of our understanding of their use and significance, philosophy will assist in the design of new institutions and practices by which new ideas and powers can be put to humanly fruitful use.

Philosophy, as Dewey now conceives of it, is in a sense analogous to architecture: neither art nor science, but involving application to the design both of new constructions and of improvements to or replacements for old ones. The analogy, however, is not complete. Whereas architecture (at the practical level at least) is taken up with the design of particular constructions, philosophy is concerned with the design of designs, the general principles by which particular designs may be guided and evaluated. Thus Dewey argues, "The most penetrating definition of philosophy which can be given is, then, that it is the theory of education in its most general phase" (*MW* 9:341). From Dewey's pragmatic perspective, philosophy is general education in the principles of thought as a doubt-inquiry or problem-solving process. Ethical philosophy, specifically, is education in the principles of thought appropriate to the rational resolution of doubts or problems about values.

The apparently irreverent, 'engineering' approach to the problems of collective action and social organization of Dewey's pragmatic ethical philosophy has always been worrying to those who, like Russell, doubt that a pragmatic community would recognize or respect minority rights and interests whenever their sacrifice would permit a more efficient engineering of social harmony and prosperity for the majority. Would a pragmatic community respect individual autonomy in its design of social institutions, if a benevolent paternalism augured better? For the same reason, pragmatism's commitment to democratic political organization has been questioned.

The 1908 *Ethics* had not improved matters as far as Dewey's con-

temporaries were concerned. After his construction in Part II of the theoretical principles for the rational evaluation of hypothetical courses of action, individual and social, one would have expected Dewey to demonstrate the effectiveness of the principles in Part III by using them to select (among others) principles of social justice. One's expectations would most likely have been heightened by the thought that Dewey was politically liberal, of a camp to which, as John Rawls has put it, "justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought."[10] But those expectations would have been disappointed. In his contributions to Part III, the chapters entitled "Social Organization and the Individual" and "Civil Society and the Political State," Dewey talks primarily about the dependence of individual personal development and flourishing on social institutions. Then he rather baldly proposes that we use this relationship to *test* the practical effectiveness of given social institutions and their particular practices: "The Test is whether a given custom or law sets free individual capacities in such a way as to make them available for the development of the general happiness or the common good. This formula states the test with the emphasis falling upon the side of the individual. It may be stated from the side of associated life as follows: The test is whether the general, the public, organization and order are promoted in such a way as to equalize opportunity for all" (*Ethics, MW* 5:431). For reasons he does not explain in *Ethics,* Dewey evidently thinks it is freedom, rather than justice, that is the first virtue of social institutions. More specifically, it is "effective freedom" meaning both freedom *from interference* by others as well as freedom *to command* resources essential for the realization of one's desires and aims, that is Dewey's first virtue of social organization.

Were he compelled to state what exactly his conception of justice was, Dewey would probably say that it was simply the rational choice of institutions or acts. Societies and their members are more or less just as their institutions and actions more or less contribute to effective freedom. That is, institutions and acts are just to the extent that it is rational for a group collectively to adopt them. If what we most fundamentally want (whatever else we want) is what we are due, then what we are most fundamentally due (whatever else we are due) is freedom. But someone might object that it is not yet clear that what we want (whatever else we want) *is* what we are due from others. If effective freedom is the freedom or liberty to contribute to the general happiness or the com-

10. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 3.

mon good, might it not seem just or reasonable to enhance individuals' effective freedom through compulsion? If, for example, children could be raised more efficiently if their mothers were prevented from holding jobs outside the home, would not these mothers be made more effectively free by these restrictions? And if equal opportunity for all is likewise an opportunity to contribute to the public good, might not a totalitarian social system assigning duties to each citizen as governmental experts see fit maximize equal opportunity and thus be more just than liberal, democratic alternatives? Dewey would certainly reject these suggestions. But it is not at all clear from the arguments of the 1908 *Ethics* why the reader should agree. *Democracy and Education* supplies the missing rationale. Nondemocratic, authoritarian social organizations are less rational, and therefore less just, because of the inferior education they provide their citizens.

The aim of education, Dewey holds, is to promote the growth and development of the individual. Too often the nature of this objective is misunderstood. People imagine that the object of education is to transform an immature, unfinished individual into a mature, finished individual, that is, "the fulfillment of growing is taken to mean an *accomplished* growth: that is to say, an Ungrowth, something which is no longer growing" (*Democracy and Education*, *MW* 9:47). Yet surely this is a contradiction in terms. All living things are continually growing: growing new structures or replacements, internal and external, and in the case of higher living things, growing in experience and in the range of adaptive responses to the challenges of the surrounding environment. The end of growth is the end of life. Dewey reasons: "When it is said that education is development, everything depends on *how* development is conceived. Our net conclusion is that life is development, and that developing, growing, is life. Translated into its educational equivalents, this means (*i*) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that (*ii*) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming" (*MW* 9:54). The goal of education is thus the goal of human life and conduct: the development of dispositions and habits of character that cooperate to afford stability, flexibility, harmony, and enrichment of one's character and activity over time and through the inevitable changes of circumstances.

Education, that is, guided or directed development and growth, is not a product of schools alone. On the contrary, all the social institutions with which anyone interacts are educative. A culture's law, art, religious traditions, etiquette, fraternal associations, sports, and political institu-

tions each educate the society's members to view themselves and their futures in certain ways, from within that particular culture's world view. So whenever one evaluates an institution alone or the fundamental principles of organization underlying an entire society's social institutions, one must rationally consider what the effects of the education that institution or set of institutions is liable to have on the collective social enterprise of constructing the conditions of rewarding personal life. Dewey argues:

> The problem is to extract the desirable traits of forms of community life which actually exist, and employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement. Now in any social group whatever, even in a gang of thieves, we find some interest held in common, and we find a certain amount of interaction and cooperative intercourse with other groups. From these two traits we derive our standard. How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association? (*MW* 9:89)

A gang of thieves, for example, has relatively few interests in common and must either live apart from its victims or hide its true interests and activities from the surrounding community. Opportunities for enriching interactions with one's fellow gang members will be relatively few, and opportunities for enriching associations with outsiders are liable to be fewer still. And when such opportunities do arise, the need to keep one's true interests hidden will necessarily inhibit deep or lasting involvements with outsiders. As Dewey puts it, "the education such a society gives is partial and distorted" (*MW* 9:89), in comparison to other, more open associations, institutions, and group practices. The effects of participation in gang culture are well known and well documented. Nevertheless, gangs typically operate within societies. Thus the gang's education of its members is counteracted in part by the educative effects of the surrounding culture. More pervasive and thus more profound in their effects on attitude and outlook are the fundamental principles of association of that surrounding culture. Thus to safeguard our own and others' educational interests, it makes sense to consider the educational opportunities different types of social organization afford their members.

When we do, Dewey believes, we will see that of all the forms of social organizations so far developed in the modern world, the alterna-

tive we are most warranted in accepting will be egalitarian democracy. Aristocracy, oligarchy, monarchy, and authoritarian dictatorships all invariably have the effect of dividing the interests of different classes within the society and turning them against one another. Association and interaction across class lines is thus curtailed and, with these, the opportunity to learn and benefit from free association with others' ideas and experience. Authoritarian regimes, he suggests, seem particularly prone to try to limit association and communication across their countries' borders and to cultivate in their citizens a feeling of having been set apart—superior to, or at least different in kind—from other peoples. The effect of the cultivation of such attitudes is that even those who are able to travel freely outside their own country will have their minds relatively closed to the ideas and the technical innovations they meet with elsewhere.

By contrast, mutual participation in the design of the principles of association typical of a democratic society, Dewey argues, increases educational opportunities for all by increasing contact, interactions, and shared interests between social classes and national borders. He states:

> The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. . . . But there is a deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. The . . . points of contact . . . secure a liberation of powers which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests. (*MW* 9:93)

If we are as a group to achieve our goal of a richly fulfilling personal and social life, our principles of association, whatever they may be, must be principles freeing us to grow and develop, to educate ourselves in our own and our society's possibilities. Democratic principles of association maximize our freedom and our opportunities to grow and develop. Thus liberal democracy is the one basis of social organization that

Dewey believes a pragmatist could rationally approve (consider justified) for himself and others.[11]

Intellectual growth requires experimentation. So what we must want whatever else we want is the freedom to experiment with our lives. And what we are due is whatever we must want everyone else to have whatever else they want. And that too is the freedom to experiment. The development of personal life, of personality itself, as Dewey often reminds us, is a social project. If we stunt the freedom of one to innovate and experiment (beyond the limits necessary to protect the freedom and safety of others), we stunt the growth and the development of the whole community.

So what we are each due is effective freedom, that is, the absence or removal of any legal or social obstacles to free access to social participation and command of resources adequate to allow us to participate in meaningful ways. Equal command of resources for meaningful participation, however, does not in Dewey's opinion entail equal command of the wealth or other benefits gained by a society or its members. Although his theory of social justice is communitarian, it is neither communist nor a variety of radical egalitarianism. Dewey believed the wealth or other benefits an individual gains through the development of his or her capacities should be his or her own. He only insists that the differences in social outcomes be determined by differences in individual capacities and tastes, not by such artificial differences as birth, class membership, race, and so forth. Inequalities of social outcome are only unjustifiable for Dewey if they are the results of inequalities in the ad-

11. Democracy as it existed in the United States in 1915 or as it exists today was not the sort of democracy Dewey had in mind here. The freedom that makes democratic principles of social design rationally desirable in Dewey's eyes is the *effective* freedom a society's members receive. And effective freedom means not only the absence of legal restraints to participation in all of a society's collective functions but also the *command of resources* at least minimally adequate for active participation. The United States, Dewey thought, promoted freedom primarily in the negative sense. Legal barriers privileging certain classes were nonexistent or being removed. But, the educational resources minimally adequate for active participation in public and private life were not (and are not now) being made available to each and every citizen. Consequently, individual freedom to pursue rewarding careers, influence public policy, and enjoy public amenities such as libraries and museums were effectively unequal. Before the United States could become truly democratic and just in its liberation of its members, the inequalities in individuals' opportunities to participate in social intercourse would have to be removed. Dewey says: "School facilities must be secured of such amplitude and efficiency as will in fact and not simply in name discount the effects of economic inequalities, and secure to all the wards of the nation equality of equipment for their future careers" (*Democracy and Education*, *MW* 9:104).

vantages (especially the education and training) society provided each individual at the outset of his or her career.

Contra Russell, then, Dewey's pragmatic constructivism can provide a theoretical foundation for liberal democratic institutions and for the protection of minority group freedoms against the tyranny of the majority. And if Dewey is correct, it secures a form of social democracy that seems no more likely to resort to gunboat diplomacy than any other—and possibly less. A pragmatic community will presumably see the maintenance of friendly relations with other communities as in its own long-term best interests. And since friendly relations of the sort most likely to contribute to social and personal growth are relations between equals, a pragmatic community would have particular reason to resist temptations to subjugate and make enemies of its neighbors. Or in other words, such conduct would be unreasonable and therefore unjustified in Dewey's conception of justice.

OPTIMISM, MELIORISM, AND HUMAN NATURE

The charge that Dewey's ethics was overly optimistic, as we noted above, really incorporated two charges. Dewey was said to have (1) underestimated or even ignored the existence of inexorable forces that give rise to moral tragedies and (2) overestimated the rationality of the average person so enormously that a pragmatic community could only save itself from democratically bringing about its own destruction if its affairs were taken out of the hands of the unreflective majority and left to the ministrations of a trained, rational or scientific elite. The first is ultimately a metaphysical objection on which Dewey offered occasional comments throughout his work, up to the publication of his 1925 *Experience and Nature*. The second was a more largely psychological or anthropological charge, to which Dewey replied in 1922 with *Human Nature and Conduct*.[12]

The issue of what exactly a pragmatic philosophy can make of what Dewey called 'the generic traits' of nature and our experience of it lies outside the scope of this book and has in any case received considerable and useful comment elsewhere.[13] For that matter, it lies outside the

12. Dewey's reply is continued in later works, most notably perhaps *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), *LW* 2.

13. For a text that specifically links Dewey's pragmatic metaphysics with his later theory of value and value judgments, see James Gouinlock, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Value* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972).

scope of the criticisms made by commentators such as Bourne who were more concerned with the inexorability of tragic consequences, given the initiation of certain chains of events (like war), than with the necessary existence or inexorability of particular forces in nature, human and nonhuman. As Bourne saw it, Dewey is committed to the thesis that reflective and rational intelligence can, by means of its grasp of any given situation, influence that situation or its outcome for the better. Bourne argues that this is surely false for the sort of situation war represents. Writing in 1917, he comments, "I find the contrast between the idea that creative intelligence has free functioning in wartime, and the facts of the inexorable situation, too glaring."[14] Intelligent foresight, in his view, is not sufficient to manage war or the effects that follow in its train: prejudice, hatred, and injustice. It is the irrevocability of these evils once the practice of warfare is allowed to flourish that Bourne argues Dewey's ethics and its followers too gaily ignore. As a result, pragmatic moral agents who optimistically act in the belief that situations can always be managed for the better will find themselves faced with tragic outcomes that a less optimistic, nonpragmatic philosophy could have helped them avoid. There are situations all of whose possible resolutions are disastrously bad. And if pragmatic ethical theory cannot cope with this fact, then pragmatic ethical theory had better be abandoned.

The charge is of course true—at least in part. As Dewey himself made clear in his 1920 *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, his philosophy allows no room for inexorable or irrevocable evils in human events.[15] He denies their existence. According to Dewey, desires to express given dispositions in given ways receive their valuations only when considered in light of an agent's long-term projects and the obstacles and materials the immediate situation provides. Consequently, the value of any given desire or any mode of its expression will be unique to the problematic situation at hand whether that value is positive or negative. He remarks: "*Moral* goods and ends exist only when something has to be done. The fact that something has to be done proves there are deficiencies, evils in the existent situation. This ill is just the specific ill that it is. It never is an exact duplicate of anything else. Consequently, the good of the situation has to be discovered, projected and attained on the basis of the exact defect and trouble to be rectified" (*MW* 12:176). No desire or contem-

14. Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," p. 55.
15. See John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, *MW* 12.

plated course of action has a value independent of all situations. And since the number and variety of problematic situations in which a desire or course of action may be an option are infinite (in principle), so also must be the values any desire or course of action can have. Nothing, then, not even war, is inexorably good or evil. But this does not mean that a pragmatic moral agent cannot or should not search for and act upon warranted generalizations about values where these can be constructed: for example, the generalization (if warranted) that the burdens of war usually outweigh the benefits. Denial of the inexorable does not entail denial of the probable. A moral agent who insists on choosing improbably successful options in problematic situations is stupid, not optimistic.

Does it follow, then, that there will always be a way out of every problematic situation that is acceptable to the agent involved, that there be no moral tragedies from a pragmatic perspective? Dewey's answer is that, on the contrary, a pragmatic ethical theory is the only theory that truly recognizes the possibility of moral tragedies. Dewey argues that it is a virtue of a pragmatic approach to value that it is not "under obligation to find ingenious methods for proving that evils are only apparent, not real, or to elaborate schemes for explaining them away or, worse yet, for justifying them. It assumes another obligation:—That of contributing in however humble a way to methods that will assist us in discovering the cause of humanity's ills" (*MW* 12:181). Pragmatic moral agents facing problematic situations are not assured, as their Kantian, utilitarian, or intuitionist counterparts are, that any 'right' course of action exists to be discovered. The pragmatic moral agent has no infallible way of determining which options open are certainly wrong or certainly right. It is entirely possible that lack of time for reflection or lack of the ability or resources to make use of the time available will make it impossible for an agent to reach a decision he or she will retrospectively approve as correct. In this respect, the pragmatic moral agent is in the same boat as the physical scientist. It is always possible that the project of inquiry will fail and that it will fail through no fault of the inquirer.

Yet the absence of a guarantee that each problematic situation can in principle be resolved successfully is no reason for pessimism. No matter how tragically a given situation may turn out, there is always the hope that *that* sort of tragedy may be avoided in future. If the evils of life, natural and artificial, cannot certainly be avoided, they can, as a rule, be ameliorated. For this reason, Dewey rejected both optimism and pessimism in favor of 'meliorism': "Meliorism is the belief that the spe-

cific conditions which exist at one moment, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good, in any event may be bettered. It encourages intelligence to study positive means of good and the obstructions to their realization, and to put forth endeavor for the improvement of conditions. It arouses confidence and a reasonable hopefulness as optimism does not" (*MW* 12:181–82). If we presume, as most people do presume, that further improvements to the quality of human life are possible above and beyond those already achieved, Dewey's ethical philosophy is not unduly optimistic. Or if it is, it must be for reasons other than his denial of the existence of inexorable goods and evils.

After his 1887 *Psychology*, Dewey had avoided writing metaphysical prolegomena to his ethics, preferring to appeal directly to experience in defense of his views. For those who desired them, *Psychology* existed, and Dewey regularly referred interested readers to the work throughout the 1890s. By 1908, when *Ethics* appeared, *Psychology* was badly out of date. The pressure of criticisms and of confusions about his pragmatic constructivism evidently convinced Dewey that a new text was needed. Or rather, two new texts were needed: *Experience and Nature*, his prolegomenon to philosophy in general, and *Human Nature and Conduct*, his prolegomenon to philosophical ethics.[16] Thus *Human Nature and Conduct* complements rather than supersedes *Ethics*. Unlike *Ethics*, *Human Nature and Conduct* does not seek to justify or defend Dewey's first principles of a theoretical science of ethics or the manner of their construction. Instead, it tries to establish that human beings are the kind of agents who could have a theoretical science of ethics and at the same time be its subjects. The text defends a conception of *Homo sapiens* as a product of evolution, an animal species whose behavior is susceptible to the same sort of ethological studies that are used to elucidate the behavior of lower forms of animal life. If and when human nature is approached as simply another naturally occurring phenomenon, Dewey was confident that it would become clear that human beings are capable of scientific management of their own social behavior by democratic and nonpaternalistic means.

This is not to say that Dewey expected the study of human nature to reveal each human being to be the sort of 'omnicompetent' individual of eighteenth- and early-twentieth-century liberal moral and political thought. To the contrary, he expected wide varieties of interests, skills,

16. See John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (1925) *LW* 1 and *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *MW* 14.

and abilities, as well as accomplishments, to appear. From Dewey's perspective, variations in skills and abilities are not problematic per se, because they do not have any particular negative implications for the justification of social democracy. Given his view of society, we can readily understand why this would be. Social organizations offer their members a multitude of stations to be filled and, in addition, areas of social blank space where new stations can be created. Presumably, no two sets of stations constituting individual ways of life are ever exactly the same or employ exactly the same skills and interests. It is not therefore necessary that individuals be identically competent, since they will not be called upon to fulfill identical social duties. Inequalities in native talents—physical, intellectual, or emotional—do not entail inequalities in individuals' effective freedom, their ability to contribute to the overall social good or to construct for themselves fulfilling personal lives.

But this is hardly a controversial claim. Critics of the practicality of a pragmatic community did not imagine that possession of identical capacities and interests were required for a social democracy to work: only the possession of *comparable* rational faculties and skills. And that this condition was being met they thought they had excellent reason to doubt. Contemporary experimentation in intelligence testing performed on army recruits during the First World War seemed to show that as much as 70 percent of these average young American men were rationally or mentally deficient. To the reigning social Darwinism of the day, these results, albeit preliminary, pointed to basic and probably irremediable inequalities in intellectual ability too significant to be ignored.[17] The average man simply could not be relied upon to have that average intelligence or judgment necessary for constructive participation in the establishment of social policy and projects. Education might perhaps soften the sharp distinction between individuals, but it could hardly be expected to erase what social Darwinism considered native, inborn capacities.[18] Psychoanalytic theory indirectly reinforced the notion of in-

17. On intelligence testing in this period, see Daniel Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence: Psychologists and the Military in World War I," *Journal of American History* 55 (1968): 565–81. On the relation of contemporary intelligence testing to the development of Dewey's social theory, see Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, esp. chap. 9, "The Phantom Public."

18. It is not unusual to find the same point being made in more recent discussions of the probable effect of trying to institute Dewey's sort of egalitarian, democratic ideal. Antony Flew has argued that an ideally democratic society will not "thereby preclude 'stratification by classes'; for even the sort of group which sociologists would be prepared to admit as a social class can in its recruitment be wide open to the rising talents. It can be open

eradicable mental differences between individuals through its account of human psychology as determined by inborn, unchanging instincts and the traumas engendered by their clashes with the surrounding cultural environment. Psychoanalysis aimed to provide relief from dissatisfaction and frustration by helping clients understand how events and their instinctual drives had shaped their characters. In other words, the aim was to make one *feel* better about the character one had developed, but not necessarily to *be* better or to have a better character as a result. In this way, the idea that education and understanding were relatively ineffectual in altering or improving an individual's character or mental capacities was inadvertently bolstered by the latest scientific theory of psychological treatment.

If in fact significant differences in native human mental capacities exist which education cannot eradicate or substantially alter, it was argued, democratic rule by a fully and freely participating community is a pipe dream. Granted that democratic organization will foster cooperative interactions within and without the community that would further each member's growth, the growth being achieved by many if not the majority might well be negligible. And if the most is to be made of the opportunity to bring about even negligible growth, decisions about what and how to learn (that is, with whom and how individuals will interact inside and outside their own community) will have to be taken out of the hands of the mentally deficient to have any chance of success. For the most part, it is already and rightly out of their hands as a result of the inability of the relatively incompetent to collect or efficiently employ the resources and power necessary to participate meaningfully in republican American policy making. Thus, unless or until some way of equalizing human intellectual abilities and skills has been achieved, a benevolent paternalism is the only form of social organization on which a pragmatically minded community can reasonably rely.

Although the social Darwinism of the 1920s has long since fallen out of favor, the objection may yet seem pointed. Dewey expects his ideal community to conduct its deliberations about public policy on the same

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downwards too, to the lack of talents. To the extent that actual social classes are in fact thus open, both upwards and downwards, and to the extent that any relevant natural endowments are hereditable, the children of these open social classes are bound to become as such members of a group of people distinguishable from other groups of people by an average difference in respect of those particular endowments." (Antony Flew, "Democracy and Education," in *John Dewey Reconsidered*, ed. R. S. Peters (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 88.

sort of scientific basis he recommended to individuals. In effect, a democratic community is or ought to be a scientific community of inquiry, investigating the obstacles to human flourishing with a view to their amelioration. Now scientific communities of inquiry are meritocracies in which those with the most significant abilities, skills, and accomplishments decide for the average practitioner what questions are worth studying, whose techniques are worth using, which laboratories are worth funding, and which individuals are worth cultivating as future leaders of their fields. If science is not a participatory democracy, how could a pragmatic society, modeling itself on the scientific community, be a participatory democracy either?

Human Nature and Conduct functions as a prolegomenon to Dewey's ethics by clearing the ground of such doubts about whether human nature as we find it is capable of sustaining liberal democratic social institutions in the collective pursuit of the progressive amelioration of the ills of human life, without resort to eternal or immutable values, transcendental reasoning, or a moral 'sense.' Of these, Dewey evidently saw "the tendency, especially among psychologists, to insist upon native human nature untouchable by social influences and to explain social phenomena by reference to traits of original human nature called 'instincts'" as the most serious obstacle to be overcome.[19] The bulk of the book is devoted to debunking the explanatory value of 'instincts' for the elucidation of human behavior. Dewey argues that much of the behavior popularly attributed to instinct appears to have been acquired. Human nature gives evidence of few biologically determined or instinctive activities. Infants perform some acts instinctively, no doubt. They reach, suckle, cry, and follow movements with their eyes without conscious thought or direction. Unlike the instinctive behavior of lower animal species, infants' instinctive behavior does not produce organized or purposeful actions. A human infant, Dewey argues, is simply a mass of uncoordinated impulses, each in itself nothing but "a physical spasm, a blind dispersive burst of wasteful energy," which is for the infant "as meaningless as a gust of wind on a mudpuddle apart from a direction given it by the presence of other persons, apart from the responses they make to it" (*Human Nature and Conduct, MW* 14:65). For the infant gripped by an impulse, any outlet will do. No particular act is dictated by any particular surge of energy. Parents' responses make impulses meaningful by

19. At least, that is how in retrospect he characterized his thinking. See Dewey's foreword to the 1930 Modern Library edition of *Human Nature and Conduct, MW* 14:230.

associating them with various forms of changes in the infant's circumstances. The results are habits, tendencies, or dispositions to act in specific ways under particular sets of environmental circumstances.

In themselves, impulses have no distinguishing features. They come to be distinguished by reference to the consequences to which they give rise in particular situations. So, Dewey argues, "any impulse may become organized into almost any disposition according to the way it interacts with surroundings" (*MW* 14:69). A surge of energy that allows one runner to pass a leader in the last moments of a footrace is 'courage.' An identical surge of energy experienced by an examinee on seeing another examinee finish her test and leave the room is 'anxiety.' Again, to experience a similar surge of energy at the sight of a stranger walking toward one on a dark and lonely road is 'fear.' The impulsive surge is in itself the same in each case. It is the situation that determines what character we assign it and what value we assign to the character of the person who gives the impulse free reign in the situation at hand. So Dewey holds that there are few if any separate, discriminable 'instincts' determining human nature or behavior. What instinctive behavior we manifest after earliest infancy is a matter of our socialization. Dewey concludes that our instincts are themselves social products.

Moreover, Dewey does not consider our instincts, our settled dispositions to act in regular ways in recurring situations, to be the only contributions our socialization makes to the formation of our characters. Intelligence is itself in large part a social product, according to Dewey, and like our instincts, as readily modifiable. Intelligence is just a name for all those habits or dispositions to act in ways that inform us about the qualities of objects we meet with in the world. In Dewey's words: "Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done" (*MW* 14:124). Reason, he holds, is an activity, rather than a property, of persons. More precisely, reason is a settled or habitual tendency to respond with disciplined curiosity and reflection to situations disrupted by novel or mysterious things or events and with which our other dispositions to act are inadequate to deal. Rationality or reason, on this view, is a set of strategies for coping with sources of doubt and uncertainty, whether mundane or abstruse: "The elaborate systems of science are born not of reason but . . . of impulses to handle, move about, to hunt, to uncover, to mix things separated and divide things combined, to talk and to listen. Method is their effectual organization into continuous dispositions of inquiry, development and testing. . . . Reason, the rational attitude, is the resulting dis-

position, not a ready-made antecedent which can be invoked at will and set into movement" (*MW* 14:136).

Variations in intelligence or rationality among individuals may reflect variations in native endowments, at least in part. But it is likely that the more significant contributing factor is variation in the educational influences to which society exposes its younger members. Some are born and mature in circumstances that foster the development of a rational attitude to problems; others are not. Some are introduced to formal tools and techniques of logical and scientific analysis with a view to making their application habitual; others are not. If much of the variation in intellectual competence is a product of educational and social practices, it should not be beyond the scope of these same institutions to address them. Although we do not yet fully understand how to go about rectifying or ameliorating the imbalances our current educational and social practices create, it is neither impossible nor unlikely that the advancing social sciences could construct significantly better and more successful methods of cultivating rationality in all.

Dewey recognized that "it sounds academic to say that the substantial bettering of social relations waits upon the growth of scientific social psychology" (*MW* 14:221), that is, the science of the social construction of personality and its constituents. But if by the bettering of social relations we mean the realization of liberal values, especially effective freedom to participate in and contribute to social action, then Dewey was prepared to concede that true participatory democracy could not be established until the social and human sciences had evolved into practical sciences whose research into the material of human nature could be fruitfully applied to the education and training of an intelligent, cooperative community. In the meantime, presumably, paternalistic social institutions will continue to exist. But though the sorts of improvements needed will not occur immediately, there is no reason in principle why they should not occur. And thus there is no reason in principle why a pragmatic community's normally endowed adult members should not each be capable of sufficient rationality to be fit to participate in the direction of public policy as well as their own private affairs. Certainly, experts in the nature and administration of social institutions will be necessary for the endeavor to succeed. But it will be their analyses and advice that will be necessary, not their rule. The charge that Dewey's social philosophy rests on overoptimistic estimates of average human intelligence or rationality may be rejected as unfounded.

There remains the question of whether the means and ends Dewey is

recommending may not turn out to be self-contradictory. Or if means define ends, we may wonder whether the ideal social state can truly be the sort of robust participatory democracy he imagines. Dewey sees the pragmatic community as essentially a community of scientific inquiry into human flourishing. Yet scientific communities of inquiry do not appear to operate democratically. For example, the question of whether a given disease is caused by a virus or a bacterium is not a matter to be settled by majority vote. Further, opinions simply are not equally valued within scientific circles. So if a pragmatic community were to organize itself as, broadly speaking, a scientific community of inquiry, its internal organization would be hierarchical and paternalistic, rather than egalitarian and democratic.

Dewey did not specifically deal with this sort of objection in *Human Nature and Conduct*, but from the material supplied by this and earlier texts an answer can readily be constructed. First, we must remember not to confuse 'science' with 'basic research,' basic research being only one form scientific inquiry takes. Physicists, analytical chemists, clinical psychologists are all practitioners of science. But so also are physiologists, pharmacists, civil engineers, and psychiatric social workers. The amateur astronomer who carefully searches the heavens and records her observations may not be among the upper echelon of her field of interests, but to the extent that she follows scientific procedures and subjects her results to scientific methods of confirmation, she is a practitioner of science. What is more, her observations are of precisely the same value as any other astronomer's observations in and of themselves. All observations are in and of themselves equally valuable (or valueless) as potential facts. Credentials do not make an observation better or worse, more or less significant. In this respect, then, science is egalitarian. All and any data, so long as they are properly obtained, must receive equal consideration, whatever the source. And if an interpretation of any given phenomenon does not recognize a given observation as factual, the rationale must in principle be adequate to persuade even those who supplied the rejected observation to agree to its rejection. Certainly, greater respect, esteem, and funding go to those whose abilities set them apart from run-of-the-mill scientific workers. But this does not in itself entail that science is or must be inherently nonegalitarian in its operations.

Similarly, the outcome of each individual's dramatic rehearsals about the future directions in which his or her society may go yield 'observations' of the desired traits of each option. Provided those moral observa-

tions are made with reasonable care and in accordance with objective standards of investigation, each individual's observations are of equal significance in themselves. And if any given valuation of those options does not recognize any particular observation as reporting a value, the rationale for the refusal must in principle be adequate to persuade even those who supplied the rejected observation to agree to its rejection. In themselves, a pederast's observations are no less potential values than are a Mother Teresa's. Only consideration of the role to be played by desired options and the dispositions they express, in light of the social good of enhancing the effective freedom of all, determines the relative desirability of or value of what is desired. As in the physical sciences, greater respect, esteem, and even funding would probably go to those whose abilities to value options rationally and objectively set them apart from run-of-the-mill moral inquirers. Nevertheless, it does not follow from this that the average moral inquirer's input counts any less than the input of individuals of more pronounced ability or achievement. Nor does it follow that a pragmatic community organized as a community of inquiry into human flourishing must inherently descend into paternalistic rule by a hierarchy of moral specialists.

Take, for example, an issue from contemporary public debate in the United States: whether equality of public funding for public schools at the primary and secondary levels should be ensured by governmental redistribution of resources from richer to poorer school districts (on the presumption that the money involved is sufficient to ensure more than adequate funding for all). How would a pragmatic community decide the justice of equalizing public funding for public education? It would begin by collecting the relevant data: say, by polling public opinion, holding public hearings, and so forth. The views of all as to the attractiveness (or the reverse) of making accidents of birth irrelevant to the quality of the education one receives and the attractiveness (or the reverse) of the means by which this outcome might be achieved would be collected. Next, the data collected would have to be interpreted; the options people found attractive would have to be valued in terms of their relations to other existing and projected social commitments and values. In favor of the equalization of public funding would be the increase in the effective freedom of those who would otherwise attend ill-funded and inferior schools. Against the plan would be the fact that fewer decisions about the allocation of school tax money would be in local hands—a decrease in the negative liberty, or liberty from interference, of individuals contributing to public education. And so it would

go, point by point. Finally, a hypothesis would be formed about the best way to enhance the effective equality of education at the least possible cost to individual negative freedoms. This hypothesis, whatever exactly it might be, would then have to be tested—say, by demonstration projects around the country—and the results carefully studied. If the results actually obtained are in line with the outcomes predicted, then the hypothesis would be warranted. If not, the hypothesis would have to be reconsidered and revised or rejected. What reason endorses is from Dewey's standpoint what justice demands. And if reason endorses some form of pooling and redistribution of funding for public education, then this is what justice demands.

To make this scheme work, one must have in place (1) developed social sciences adequate to formulate and perform tests of hypotheses about social institutions, existing and proposed, and (2) a public committed to and sufficiently educated in scientific procedures to understand and apply the results of those tests. These conditions certainly had not been met in the America of 1922. But Dewey believed that "through the development of physical science, and especially of chemistry, biology, physiology, medicine, and anthropology we now have the basis for . . . a science of man" (*MW* 14:222) capable of meeting the first condition. Commitment of educational resources to bettering public understanding of scientific principles and procedures of inquiry, evidence, and explanation would make it possible to satisfy the second. So to Dewey, it was by no means impossible that in the relatively near future a genuinely liberal democratic and pragmatic moral community could come into being, nor was it an unrealistic goal toward which to work. Although the accomplishment of such a community would not, Dewey warned, bring about the millennium: "It would enable us to state problems in such forms that action could be courageously and intelligently directed to their solution. It would not assure us against failure, but it would render failure a source of instruction. It would not protect us against the future emergence of equally serious moral difficulties, but it would enable us to approach the always recurring troubles with a fund of growing knowledge which would add significant values to our conduct even when we overtly failed—as we should continue to do" (*MW* 14:11).

Although Dewey's acknowledgment of the possibility (even the probability) that a pragmatic moral agent's most conscientious efforts to resolve moral situations will result in failures, that tried and tested principles of action will have to be revised over time, and the policies built

upon them reversed or abandoned, should be sufficient to remove the charge that his ethics is over-optimistic, it has at the same time been grounds for complaint that his ethics is not optimistic enough. To the "anti-empirical school in morals," as Dewey called it (*MW* 14:222), the conception of ends as an endless series, a means-end continuum, would have been profoundly dispiriting. If every end once attained simply turns out to be a means to yet another end, surely progress is an illusion. Unless human beings are measurably advancing toward a final goal, how can they be said to be progressing? Or as Dewey put it, if life is nothing but a series of problematic situations, whose solutions only give rise to new problems, "does not this reduce moral life to the futile toil of a Sisyphus who is forever rolling a stone uphill only to have it roll back so that he has to repeat his old task?" (*MW* 14:144).

From the seriousness with which this objection is addressed in *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey evidently believed it to be widely held. Nevertheless, he had relatively little patience for it. The question of the relation of means to ends he considered one of fact, not to be decided by reference to personal tastes. And the idea that moral life and action can be effectively 'guided' or given purpose by fixed, final ends was simply sentimental nonsense. First, as in "The Logic of Judgments of Practice," Dewey argues that ends and means are reciprocal, because means define ends. Moreover, every means is an end, and vice versa. For example, to a real-estate developer, building a house is a means to the end of making a profit. But the house will never get built if the developer views the house as merely a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Before getting a profit can be the end of the developer's activity, building the house must become his end. Laying a foundation, framing the walls, raising the roof must each in their turn be his end if the house is to be completed. Only after it is finished and ready to be turned over to a buyer can the building of the house be merely a means to a further end. So also, Dewey argues, to a mariner at sea, getting to harbor is an end. But it is an end because it is a means to some other activity: selling goods, meeting a contract, picking up freight, taking a vacation. When we consider the practical bearings of our ends, he argues, we should see that it is a mistake to think of our aims or objectives as 'ends of action.' We do not cease to act upon obtaining our ends. Dewey suggests we instead think of our ends as 'ends of deliberation,' on the grounds that what the selection of an end ends is deliberation about what our next course of action should be.

One might argue that the sorts of ends discussed above are not truly

ends of action precisely because they are reciprocal with means. These so-called ends, getting to a harbor, making a profit, building a house, are all instrumental to the achievement of our ultimate ends, ends that are never a means to anything beyond themselves. Dewey replies that the notion of an end that is not also a means is vacuous. It may once have seemed meaningful; "when men believed that fixed ends existed for all normal changes in nature, the conception of similar ends for men was but a special case of a general belief" (*MW* 14:154). But we do not now believe in a world furnished with occult qualities, attracting objects to their proper place in the great chain of being. Nor can we doubt that for living things like ourselves, an end to struggle and exertion represents the end of life. Our understanding of the world no longer supports the idea that human life has an end, a unique function to fulfill, by reference to which individual lives can be graded.

But although there is no universal a priori meaning or end to human life and action, Dewey argues, there is no lack of motivation to carry on living and struggling to improve our lives. He states:

> We content ourselves with remarking that we find in this conception of a fixed antecedent standard another manifestation of the desire to escape the strain of the actual moral situation, its genuine uncertainty of possibilities and consequences. We are confronted with another case of the all too human love of certainty, a case of the wish for an intellectual patent issued by authority. The issue after all is one of fact. The critic is not entitled to enforce against the facts his private wish for a ready-made standard which will relieve him from the burden of examination, observation, and continuing generalization and test. (*MW* 14:166)

Moralists had been claiming for centuries that human life has a purpose, end, or value in itself with which precise and certain evaluation of particular acts and dispositions can be made. So Dewey expected that a sense of anticlimax would attend an ethical theory that did not. But a feeling of anticlimax is hardly grounds for pessimism or despair. Because life has no intrinsic value from a pragmatic perspective does not entail that it is valueless. It simply means that life has no value until it is valued. And to say that life has no intrinsic meaning does not entail that it is meaningless, only that its meaning has still to be constructed. "In the largest sense of the word," Dewey writes, "morals is education. It is learning the meaning of what we are about and employing that meaning in action" (*MW* 14:194). As a result, our lives and their meaning for

us grow continually deeper and more complex. Dewey dismissed the suggestion that the belief that the meaning and value of our lives is up to us will give rise to general despair of life and morality. He remarks:

> Men have constructed a strange dream-world when they have supposed that without a fixed ideal of a remote good to inspire them, they would have no inducement to get relief from present troubles, no desires for liberation from what oppresses and for clearing-up what confuses present action. . . . Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Sufficient it is to stimulate us to remedial action, to endeavor in order to convert strife into harmony . . . and limitation into expansion. The converting is progress, the only progress conceivable or attainable by man. (*MW* 14:195)

If progress means the eradication of evil or unhappiness, then a pragmatic community will not in fact progress. But then, it could be argued, neither will the nonpragmatic community that looks to the realization of a priori values or categorical imperatives for moral progress. No moral theory will eradicate suffering or wickedness. But if progress means "increase of present meaning" through increased understanding of the structure of present experience and increased capacity to influence or control the meaning of future experience, then a pragmatic community will progress. As for the question of whether the pragmatic moral agent is a sort of modern Sisyphus, Dewey's answer is both yes and no. The agent is a modern Sisyphus if we define progress as significant movement toward the realization of some ideal of moral perfection. The agent is not if we recognize that each new endeavor or project is colored and enriched by the meaning and value created by the projects that went before. Unlike Sisyphus, Dewey argues, pragmatic moral agents "are not caught in a circle; we traverse a spiral" (*MW* 14:225). Whether and how we take advantage of this relationship is up to us to decide.

Philosophers are rarely allowed to have the last word on their own work. Dewey has not proved an exception. In his foreword to the 1930 Modern Library edition of *Human Nature and Conduct*, he wrote that "were it not for one consideration, the volume might be said to be an essay in continuing the tradition of David Hume" (*MW* 14:228). In my introduction, I noted that Dewey's critics had one view of what his one divergence from Hume was, Dewey another. Among his admirers, there is a third. Although this third group has generally agreed with Dewey that the one consideration is *not* a violation of Hume's dictum with re-

gard to deriving an 'ought' from an 'is,' they have their own view about what the one consideration is. Dewey identifies it as Hume's atomistic individualism, which Dewey rejects in favor of a more Hegelian, organic conception of personality or selfhood as a social construct. To many of his admirers, such a departure looms so large as to dwarf the significance of any similarities that may remain between Hume's and Dewey's moral and social theories. In which case, the one significant difference between Hume's and Dewey's projects is—everything. For this reason, presumably, Dewey's conceptions of virtue and vice, of social institutions as educative, and of the community as the ground of the realization of virtue is frequently characterized as Aristotelian. It might fairly be said that Dewey encouraged this identification. Such was his lifelong antipathy for British empiricism that he was rarely able to find a good word for any one of its representatives. Thus when Dewey looked to the history of moral philosophy for earlier examples of naturalistic ethics with which to illustrate his own, he gravitated toward ancient rather than modern moralists, in particular to Aristotle.

Indeed, one might well imagine that Dewey would find more to his taste in Aristotle's than in Hume's conceptions of human nature and conduct. Aristotle considered human beings naturally and inherently social. The realization of distinctly human character in isolation from social contacts he considered impossible. Hume, by contrast, operated in a tradition that sought to explain the existence of human societies as the creations of individual human beings, whose humanity predates any form of social cooperation. Furthermore, Aristotle sees moral character as a social construct. Individuals are habituated to good and virtuous conduct by the laws and the customs of their societies. Indeed, Aristotle goes so far as to hold that one cannot become virtuous unless one is already possessed of involuntarily developed virtuous dispositions. Only the man who is already good will be a reliable judge of what is good or of why it is good. Whereas, as Dewey points out: "[Hume] saw the part played by the structure and operations of our common nature in shaping social life . . . [but] failed to see with equal clearness the reflex influence of the latter upon the shape which a plastic human nature takes because of its social environment."[20]

But it does not do to exaggerate the differences. Hume was as fully persuaded as Aristotle that humanity's "very first state and situation may justly be esteem'd social." Hume dismisses "the suppos'd *state of*

20. Foreword to the Modern Library edition, *Human Nature and Conduct*, *MW* 14:229.

nature" as "a mere philosophical fiction, which never had, and never cou'd have any reality."[21] And although the social sciences of his day, as Dewey points out, provided Hume with little scientific justification for believing that society shaped human nature as profoundly as human nature shapes society's, nevertheless he recognized that the relationship was reciprocal. His rejection of the possibility that individuals created a social contract in a presocial state of nature was based in part upon his appreciation of the effect of socialization on human nature. For example, Hume believed: "In order to form society, 'tis requisite not only that it be advantageous, but also that men be sensible of its advantages; and 'tis impossible, in their wild uncultivated state, that by study and reflection alone, they should ever be able to attain this knowledge."[22] To enter into social life, in other words, human beings must already have been socialized. Thus there can never have been a time when human beings were not naturally social. And their socialization must begin before they attain an age at which the question whether to ally themselves with a particular community can ever be entertained. Hume explains: "Custom and habit operating on the tender minds of the children, makes them sensible of the advantages which they may reap from society, as well as fashions them by degrees for it, by rubbing off those rough corners and untoward affections, which prevent their coalition."[23] Equally, it will not do to exaggerate the similarities between Dewey's and Hume's conceptions of human nature and the role and function of morality in human life, but significant similarities exist. There is, for example, considerable common ground between Dewey's and Hume's respective accounts of moral decisions and choices. Hume anticipates Dewey's depiction of human acts and projects as the outcomes of human passions and dispositions to act rather than from the agency of a will governed by a faculty of reason.[24] Moreover, Hume's theory that many, if not all, virtues and vices are artificially constructed is nearer to Dewey's view than is Aristotle's. For Dewey, the expression of any particular disposition to action is desirable (thus virtuous) if it enhances an individual's freedom

21. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2d ed., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 493.

22. Ibid., p. 486.

23. Ibid.

24. For example, Hume holds that "society is absolutely necessary for the well-being of men; and [moral conventions] are as necessary to the support of society. Whatever restraint they impose on the passions of men, they are the real offspring of those passions, and are only a more artful and refin'd way of satisfying them. Nothing is more vigilant and inventive than our passions" (*Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 526).

to construct harmonious, flexible, stable life projects that further enhance the individual's capacity to participate in his or her community's life. Dispositions to action are undesirable (vicious) if they tend to promote the reverse. The virtuousness or viciousness of, say, a disposition to recycle one's used aluminum cans and glass bottles is always largely determined by the context in which one operates. Thus such a disposition may be virtuous in one context and yet lack any moral significance in another. Dewey does not identify virtuous dispositions by their essential characteristics. Nor is there any internal structure, as in Aristotle's ethics, by which a Deweyan agent can evaluate a disposition independent of a specific social context. Hume's artificial virtues, dispositions to behave justly, truthfully, and modestly, and the like, notoriously depend for their value on the social context of action.

Hume could take this view of the vices and virtues in part because, like Dewey, he had rejected the belief that success in the search for mankind's summum bonum depends upon the achievement of success in the search for man's essential self. Hume was notoriously skeptical about the existence of an unchanging, essential self.[25] But even if such a self existed, it would be ultimately unknowable on Hume's empiricist methodology. Since we cannot know what the essential self of man is, we cannot hope to discover the one, true 'good life for man.' Morality for Hume, as for Dewey after him, is melioristic. Morality ameliorates the ills of human life by removing or reducing obstacles to social cooperation. And since every success clears the way for further improvements, at no point will the challenges to moral ingenuity ever be complete or completely solved.

Hume's rejection of 'natural law' as instantiated in human nature or the natural world is a third important point of comparison. Human beings, Hume insists, "*invented* the . . . fundamental laws of nature, when they observ'd the necessity of society to their mutual subsistance."[26] Morality is an adaptive response to a precarious, sometimes hostile environment. And the fact that some fundamental conventions are so ubiquitous as to seem 'natural' to all mankind, Hume argued, is readily explained. It is simply a matter of objective fact that some conventions work better than others. Moreover, some are simply indispensable to any sort of cooperative living. As Dewey notes, for Hume, morality is for the most part a project of social engineering, incorporating "all of the

25. See Hume, "Of Personal Identity," in *Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 251–63.
26. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 543.

social disciplines as far as they are intimately connected with the life of man and as they bear upon the interests of humanity."[27]

This is not to suggest that Hume is a proto-pragmatist. He is no more a proto-pragmatist than he is a proto-utilitarian. Dewey and the utilitarians each made their own use of Hume's ideas. Neither usage gives more insight into Hume's own intentions than the other. What I am suggesting is that Hume's communitarian social philosophy may give us insights into Dewey's pragmatic ethics that Aristotle's does not. To read Dewey's ethics and moral psychology as a sort of pragmatic Aristotelianism is to highlight the lasting effects of Dewey's early involvement with teleological metaphysics, idealist theories of self-realization, and the neo-Hegelian conception of science and philosophy as methods of uncovering categories inherent in our common-sense experience of the world. Traces of all these early beliefs are indeed to be found more or less transformed in Dewey's mature ethical theory.

On the other hand, to read Dewey as a pragmatic Humean is to highlight the nonteleological, antimetaphysical aspects of Dewey's thought, including the temporality and fragility of the values we cherish and pursue, their origin and dependence on the character of our transactions with our physical and social environments, and finally, the possibility of enhancing those values through the creative application of the latest insights and techniques of modern experimental science. It is, in addition, to highlight the centrality of education in Dewey's social philosophy. Whereas the Aristotelian agent can in principle complete his or her education—that is, know once and for all what the good and the right and the virtuous are—the Deweyan agent cannot. Life, as Dewey sees it, is a process of continual change, the context of action ever varying. Completion of one's moral education is thus unthinkable. The Deweyan agent can have no such aspiration. Since the social and physical environments in which human communities operate are not static, communal strategies for ameliorating the ills of the situations to which they fall heir will require continual reconstruction, renovation, and replacement. Commitment to an ideal of lifelong education and personal and social growth must be the hallmark of any viable pragmatic community and of the role of the moral philosophers within it.

For these sorts of reasons, I believe that Dewey's own assessment of the relation of his work to Hume's is fundamentally correct. Dewey's moral philosophy does continue the tradition of Hume, as much as, if

27. Foreword to the Modern Library edition, *Human Nature and Conduct*, *MW* 14:228.

not more than, the tradition of Aristotle. At the same time, we need not reject Dewey's more famous remark about his general philosophical development: "I should never think of ignoring, much less denying, what an astute critic occasionally refers to as a novel discovery—that acquaintance with Hegel has left a permanent deposit in my thinking."[28] Dewey's pragmatic ethics is a synthesis of antithetical elements drawn from both British empiricism and nineteenth-century idealism, from William James and F. H. Bradley, J. S. Mill and G. S. Morris, David Hume and G. W. Hegel.

28. "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," *LW* 5:154.