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Gregory Fernando Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, $24.95). Pp. 368. ISBN 978 0 253 21979 4.

A disproportionate number of American philosophers, including Richard Rorty, have been bird-watchers. Why is this? On the surface, the bird-watching may simply replicate the philosopher's function as an observer and analyst of society, gradually building a life list of increasingly esoteric observations. In addition, the world of birds offers a contained, predictable taxonomy, predictable in the sense that bird behavior is generally a programmed response, following enduring laws of survival and genetic coding. Along the lines of this ornithological analogy, philosophy, especially moral philosophy, has sought to define a convenient set of rules for ethical behavior – a short list of universal laws, or a utilitarian/consequentialist call for calibrating more pleasure than pain, or a handy set of virtues such as honesty, courage and wisdom.

But the world off-campus is much messier than these neat taxonomies suggest, and perhaps even more so in modern, pluralist democracies engaged within a global economy. In his "reconstruction" of traditional moral philosophy, John Dewey developed an ethics grounded in experience and tailored to the contingencies and conflicts of inclusive democratic societies. As Gregory Pappas suggests, for Dewey "the primary focal point for philosophical inquiry" should be the "rough and tumble" of "our own everyday, concrete experience" (xii). In *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience*, Pappas provides an authoritative account of that Pragmatic ethics, while placing it in the context of Dewey's philosophy as a whole, especially the moral conception of democracy as a way of life. The key question for Dewey is not "how shall I live?" but "what can I do" to simultaneously "achieve the self" and achieve "a more perfect union"? – not so much the art of life as the crafting of an open-ended experience, balancing the ethical with the political and aesthetic.

For Pappas, "a growing awareness of the reductionistic and myopic character of modern ethics" (2) encourages the recuperation of Dewey's Pragmatism. The hermetic aridity of much moral philosophy makes it an easy target for Pragmatic critique, but then what has Pragmatism to offer as an alternative? A great deal, according to Pappas's persuasive account. For him, "Dewey's ethics is the key to understanding his wider philosophy" (4), which in turn offers "a more radical and richer view of democracy" (218) – a large claim. Some would argue that Dewey's philosophy involves an equilibrium, a balancing of the ethical with the political, aesthetic/religious, and education, a four-legged stool, but the latter legs have been well covered, for example in Steven C. Rockefeller's *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (1991). For Dewey himself, the best one-volume distillation of his philosophy was *Democracy and Education* (1916), the last chapter of which offers a sense of his approach to ethics. Other works include *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), "Three Independent Factors in Morals" (1930), and the still readable textbook didaction, *Theory of the Moral Life* (1960; first published 1932).

Pappas's encompassing view fills a void in our understanding of the role of ethics for Dewey's overall philosophy. Earlier full-length accounts of his ethics have their

merits, but also a narrower focus: for example, in *Dewey's Ethical Thought* (1995), Jennifer Welchman offers more of an intellectual background, illuminating the influences of both British empiricism and nineteenth-century idealism in the early evolution of Dewey's ethics. Pappas's overview and analysis demonstrate how Dewey's approach to ethics offers a way "to regulate, ameliorate, educate, and enrich" our experience, "without the need for something antecedent, supernatural, or external to itself" (13). What is required is "the cultivation of balance between virtues typically associated with experimentation, intelligence, and democracy" (13). As Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* offered an account of how to live virtuously in the relatively static, stratified, limited realm of the city-state, Dewey's more open-ended account might serve the needs of a more pluralist, inclusive, and dynamic modern democracy.

Pappas divides his overview into three intertwined parts. Part One, "Moral Theory and Experience," situates Dewey against the traditional approaches to moral philosophy that he endeavored to reconstruct into what might be called a theory of experience. Part Two, "Moral Theory and Moral Practice," offers a grounded survey of Dewey's "what" and "how" of modern ethical practice; the chapter "Character and Conduct: Dewey and the Great Divide in Ethics" offers an informed survey of the general arguments in the field and Dewey's remapping of the territory. Part Three, "The Ideal Moral Life," seeks to show the richness of Dewey's vision of "democracy as a way of life" and "as a form of moral association" (218). Arguing for Dewey's relevance for today's postmodern culture of celebrity, consumption, and privatization, Pappas describes him as "a philosopher concerned more with the problems of a society that is democratic in form, but not in spirit" (218), a philosopher of democracy who pays "attention to habit, character, interaction, communication, and the qualitative dimension" of our shared experiences (219).

Put a dozen boys out on a pitch, toss out a ball of any shape and size and the lads will soon have a set of norms, known either immediately and intuitively, or reflectively developed in a short while. The norms would likely combine elements of foundationalist ideals, utilitarian effectiveness, and sporting habits, a well-grounded synthesis of justice, duty, and virtue. (Deweyean democratic virtues of mutual sympathy, openness and piety would inhibit the unfolding of a *Lord of the Flies* scenario.) This sporting analogy for ethics reinforces Pappas's essential point, that the best ethics for democracy emerge on the playing fields of experience. John Dewey's philosophy articulates that promise, while Gregory Pappas's work marks the maturing of the awareness of its relevance for modern democracies in search of themselves.

Utah State University ROBERT W. KING