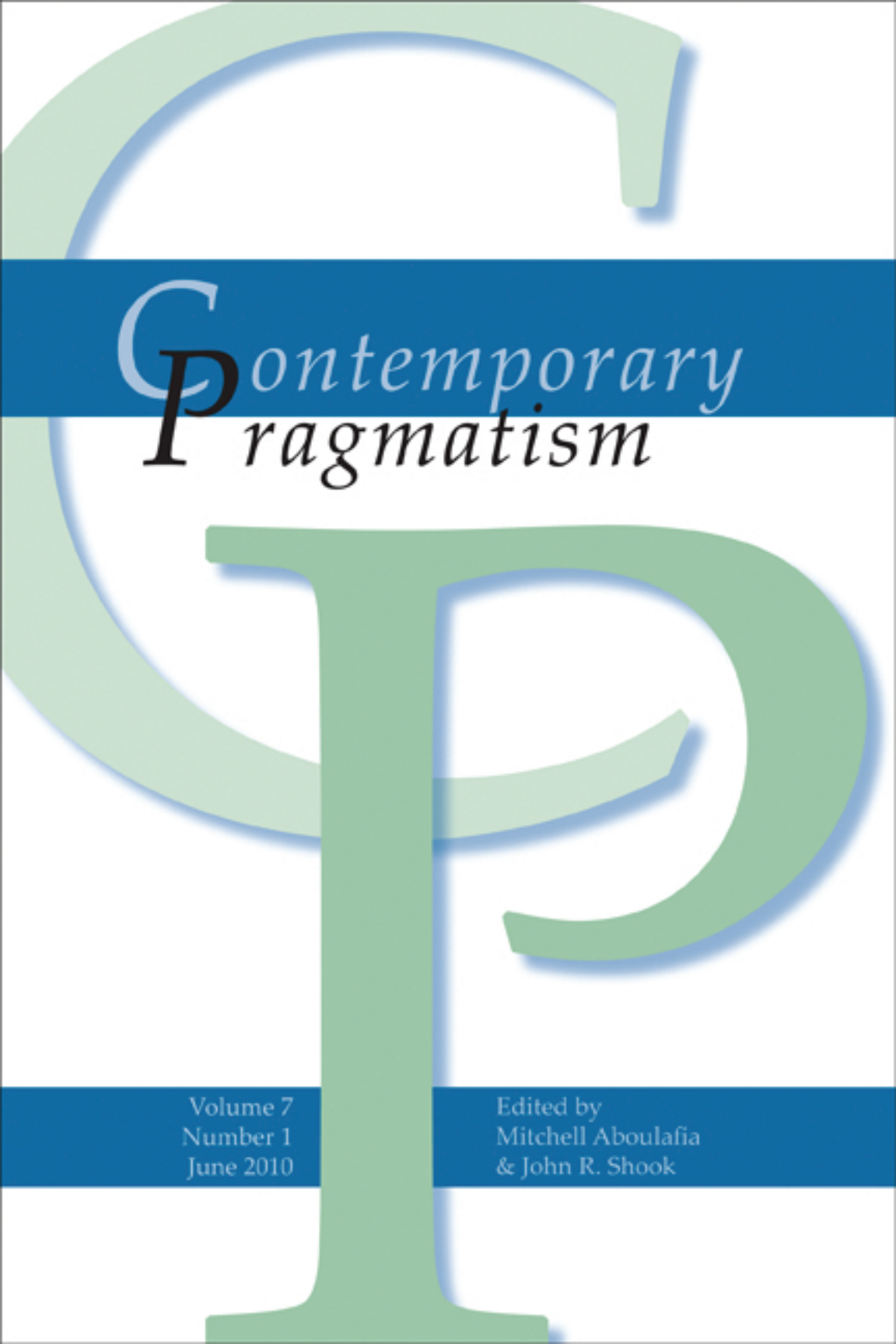

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Introduction: Revisiting The Public and Its Problems

Melvin L. Rogers

This special section of *Contemporary Pragmatism* is about John Dewey's book *The Public and Its Problems*, published in 1927. Scholars consistently turn to this work when assessing Dewey's conception of democracy and what might be imagined for democracy in our own time. This special section contains four articles by James Bohman, Eric MacGilvray, Eddie Glaude, and myself.

Published in 1927 and reissued in 1946 with an added subtitle and introduction, *The Public and Its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry* is not John Dewey's (1859-1952) only work on politics. Indeed, at least three other works of political theory would follow: *Individualism: Old and New* (1930), *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), and *Freedom and Culture* (1939). Still, *The Public and Its Problems* is his richest and most systematic meditation on the future of democracy in an age of mass communication, governmental bureaucracy, technological complexity, and pluralism that implicitly draws on his previous writings and prefigures his later thinking. In this work, he argues for the importance of civic participation, elucidates the meaning and role of the state, the proper relationship between the public and experts in decision making, the extent to which democracy can be understood as a moral ideal or a set of institutional mechanisms, and the source of democracy's legitimacy. In fact, it is this work, above all else, to which scholars consistently turn when assessing Dewey's conception of democracy and what might be imagined for democracy in our own time. This is because these themes remain as important today as they did when Dewey first engaged them, and for this reason *The Public and Its Problems* is worth careful consideration.

As many readers of this journal will undoubtedly know, Dewey came to prominence in the late nineteenth century as a philosopher, but it was his writings on education, ethics, religion, democracy, and contemporary issues in the twentieth century that garnered him both national and international fame as a public intellectual of the highest order. If America was viewed as the modern experiment in democracy, then Dewey was its greatest defender and most reflective critic. As historian Henry Commager observed in 1950, attesting to

the importance of Dewey's voice: "So faithfully did Dewey live up to his own philosophical creed that he became the guide, the mentor, and the conscience of the American people; it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that for a generation no issue was clarified until Dewey had spoken."[1]

While it is true that Dewey achieved a level of respect unmatched by his contemporaries, it is a mistake to read him as the spokesperson for his time. It has been clear since Robert Westbrook's magisterial intellectual biography, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, that Dewey was not a proponent of a crass corporate liberalism that came to dominate American society beginning in the late nineteenth century.[2] Rather, he was its most perceptive critic who sought to articulate the moral demand of democratic liberalism. Properly understood, democratic liberalism locates the individual within, even as it provides him or her with resources to guide the diverse network of social relationships in which he or she is located. As Dewey argues in *Liberalism and Social Action*:

> The notion that organized social control of economic forces lies outside the historic path of liberalism shows that liberalism is still impeded by remnants of its earlier *laissez-faire* phase, with its opposition of society and the individual. The thing which now dampens liberal ardor and paralyzes its efforts is the conception that liberty and development of individuality as ends exclude the use of organized social effort as means.[3]

Although for Dewey liberalism and modern democracy are closely related and he often yoked the two together, it is a mistake to see them as involving the same logic. Liberalism, he maintains, involves a deep appreciation for liberty and the individual, and is specifically concerned to constrain the use of state power. Liberalism's origins are located in a desire to make the state and its officials responsive to the needs of the people – a view quite contrary to the outlook that defined monarchial, ecclesiastical, and totalitarian regimes throughout human history. Democracy, however, emphasizes the equality of individuals before the law, the shared political identity of the rulers and the ruled, and views the people as not merely a group to which authority must be responsive, but as the source of political authority itself.

In *The Public and Its Problems*, but especially in *Individualism, Old and New* and *Liberalism and Social Action*, Dewey is critical of the extent to which liberalism, with its atomistic psychology and narrow understanding of individuality, undermines the communal dimension of democracy. As he argues in the last of the three works: "There still lingers in the minds of some [liberals] the notion that there are two different 'spheres' of action and of rightful claims; that of political society and that of the individual, and that in the interest of the latter the former must be as contracted as possible."[4] For him, the problem centers on balancing the relationship between the two, no matter how difficult, in the service of collective problem-solving. "Liberalism," he writes, "has to assume the responsibility for making it clear that intelligence is a social asset

and is clothed with a function as public as is its origin, in the concrete, in social cooperation."[5] Dewey's aim in *Liberalism and Social Action* is not simply to address the contradictions of the 1930s – a deep depression amid technological advance, a noble belief in equality and liberty amid various forms of exclusion and oppression – by locating the responsibility of economic and social forces within the domain of democratic oversight.

But Dewey is simultaneously providing an elucidation of democratic liberalism (hereafter simply referred to as democracy) that defines the entirety of *The Public and Its Problems* published several years earlier, whether democracy applies to the market economy, the schools, or social relations more broadly. The upshot is a vision of civic participation whose stability and moral direction are internally generated and open to contestation and refinement by the members who will be affected by the outcome. As Westbrook explains in his assessment of Dewey's work:

> Among liberal intellectuals of the twentieth century, Dewey was the most important advocate of participatory democracy, that is, of the belief that democracy, as an ethical ideal, calls upon men and women to build communities in which the necessary opportunities and resources are available for every individual to realize fully his or her particular capacities and powers through participation in political, social, and cultural life. This ideal rested on a "faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished..."[6]

In Dewey's estimation, the creative potential of a democratic community is constitutively connected to contestation as the community revises and develops its institutional structures and values. Here he extends his philosophical outlook – his antifoundationalism, experimentalism, and contextualism – to elucidate the importance and value of democracy. In other words, the legitimacy of democracy partly derives, he believes, from the extent to which it allows the widest application of inquiry to the problems that confront collective organization.[7] His vision of participation should therefore not be reduced to a minimalist view of democracy that is confined exclusively to voting, reliance on experts and elites, or some adversarial view of politics. He resists all such accounts as primary descriptions of democracy.[8]

In *The Public and Its Problems* specifically, Dewey rejects as false the assertion advanced principally by journalist and social critic Walter Lippmann (1889–1974) that democratic life can simply be managed by experts without any costs to collective governance, and, indeed, freedom itself. This obscures, Dewey maintains, two important aspect of political life. First, how we come to understand political problems and respond implies a kind of local knowledge and communal vision that is beyond the purview of experts. Lippmann's approach, he further argues, "ignores [the] forces which have to be composed and resolved before technical and specialized action can come into play" (313).

Second, and perhaps more importantly, a vision of democracy grounded in governance by experts misses the very reasons for democracy's emergency – namely, to "counteract the forces that have so largely determined the possession of rule by accidental and irrelevant factors, and in the second place an effort to counteract the tendency to employ political power to serve private instead of public ends" (287). A failure to have the public constitutively involved in decision making will inevitably be unable to remain attentive to public ends. This will leave the public at the mercy of political power rather than in control of directing that power toward beneficial ends.

For Dewey, this vision of democratic self-governance demands that political judgments by citizens be tested based on the extent to which they can withstand contrary arguments, reasons, and experiences. Forming the will of the democratic community, for Dewey, is a process of thoughtful interaction in which the preferences of citizens are both informed and transformed by public deliberation as they struggle to decide which policies will best satisfy and address the commitments and needs of the community.[9] It must be the case, he argues, that a vision of a shared life (rather than some narrow idea of self-interest) informs the extent to which citizens are willing to participate in this practice. But this shared life is substantively informed and enriched through the exchange that deliberation makes possible. It is no wonder that many see Dewey as an important spokesperson for deliberative democracy in our own time.[10] This does not mean, for him, that through deliberation we will be saved from error or some darker fate; indeed, his philosophical outlook rejects this kind of certainty. But it does imply that when we are no longer responsive to each other and the world about us we can be sure that error will most likely follow.

In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey ties the idea of representative government and the role of experts to deliberation among the citizenry. For him, this is the basis for a dynamic democratic self-governance and it ensures that justification of one's actions do not come uncoupled from being accountable to the public. This, he further maintains, mitigates any blind faith we might otherwise place in political institutions or experts, even as he acknowledges that both are essential given the complexity of political problems. In *Freedom and Culture* – a work that elucidates the cultural outlook necessary for sustaining democracy against the tide of totalitarianism – Dewey thus urges citizens to abandon "the ideas that lead [them] to believe that democratic conditions automatically maintain themselves, or that they can be identified with fulfillment of prescriptions laid down in a constitution."[11]

The striking aspect of Dewey's political philosophy is precisely this radical character. His vision of democracy, as indicated above, does not exclusively refer to specific institutional arrangements and political procedures. They are important, and he often mentions those institutional features most conducive to democratic life. But such arrangements, he explains, do not exhaust the meaning of democracy. For him, then, democracy implies an *ethos* that "extends to matters of the mind, heart, and spirit."[12] This ethos finds its

antecedent conditions in Thomas Jefferson's (1743–1826) belief that democracy's aim always exceed its actualization, and defense in thinkers like Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935), W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968), for whom democracy denotes a vehicle for constantly pushing and prodding the nation to reimagine its self-understanding and mode of being with respect to the status of women and African Americans. To borrow from one of Dewey's titles, democracy is always a "task before us."

In light of the problem-oriented character of inquiry and his own belief in the on-going development of political life, he is clear that democracy denotes an orientation toward the problems of collective organization, even as democracy precludes a final resolution to political life. There is, he argues, no way for us to transcend the domain of politics, even as he believes there are better and worst ways to see our way through the ongoing problems it entails. And as with his philosophical outlook, so his view of democracy demands an interventionist spirit on the part of citizens, even as it cautions humility regarding the outcomes that follow from acting in the world. Reading Dewey puts us in touch with a political sensibility we must continue to cultivate, and which we can never afford to abandon.

In this special issue of *Contemporary Pragmatism,* James Bohman, Eric MacGilvray, Eddie Glaude, and myself attempt to critically engage *The Public and Its Problems*, both its possibilities and limitations. Collectively these essays point to what remains alive in Dewey's thought, and those aspects of his thinking that are in need of supplementation or expansion.

NOTES

1. Henry Commager, *The American Mind* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 100.

2. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); see also James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Political Thought*, *1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). For a helpful description of corporate liberalism, even if mistaken regarding Dewey's relationship to it, see R. Jeffrey Lustig, *Corporate Liberalism: The Origins of Modern American Political Theory, 1890-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

3. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), *LW* 3: 90. Citations to the *Early*, *Middle*, or *Later Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–1990) are given by *EW*, *MW*, or *LW* followed by volume and page numbers.

4. *LW* 3: 17.

5. *LW* 3: 70.

6. Westbrook, *John Dewey*, pp. xiv–xv.

7. For more on this point see Hilary Putnam, "A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy," in *Pragmatism in Law and Society*, ed. Michael Brint and William Weaver (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 217–247.

8. See, for instance, Dewey, "Ethics of Democracy" (1888), *EW* 1: 227–249; *Freedom and Culture*, *LW* 13: 151–152; "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us" (1939), *LW* 14: 228.

9. Dewey discusses the importance of deliberation in several places throughout his work. See *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *MW* 14, chaps. 16 and 17; *Ethics* (1932), *LW* 7: 298–301; *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *LW* 12, chap. 9.

10. A number of thinkers specifically invoke the contemporary tradition of "deliberative democracy" when discussing Dewey, even if they disagree on how best to understand his connection to this contemporary debate. See, for example, Richard Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); Putnam, "A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy," pp. 217–247; Westbrook, *John Dewey*; Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tied of American Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995); Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: an old name for some new ways of thinking," in *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Society Thought, Law, and Culture*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 83–127, Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); James Bohman, "Realizing Deliberative Democracy as Mode of Inquiry: Pragmatism, Social Facts, and Normative Theory," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18.1 (2004): 23 Kloppenberg,43; Festenstein, "The Ties of Communication: Dewey on Ideal and Political Democracy," *History of Political Thought* 18 (1997): 104–124, Festenstein, "Inquiry as Critique: On the Legacy of Deweyan Pragmatism for Political Theory," *Political Studies* 49 (2001): 730–748, Festenstein, "Deliberative Democracy and Two Models of Pragmatism," *European Journal of Social Theory* 7 (2004): 291–306; Axel Honneth, "Democracy as Reflective Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today," *Political Theory* 26 (1998): 763–83; William Caspary, *Dewey on Democracy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); Noelle McAfee, *Democracy and The Political Unconscious* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), chaps. 6 and 8.

11. Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, *LW* 13: 87, see also *LW* 13: 102. For a modern variant on this point see Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1996), pp. 31–45, "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy," in *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, eds. J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 30–58. For specific worries about Wolin's understanding of democracy see Melvin L. Rogers, *The Undiscovered Dewey: Religion, Morality, and the Ethos of Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 5.

12. For a brief, but very good account of this tradition in American political thought, see Thomas A. Spragens, Jr. "Populist Perfectionism: The Other American Liberalism," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 24.1 (2007): 141–163, at p. 145. For interpretations of this ethos in Dewey see John J. Stuhr, "Democracy as a Way of Life," in *Philosophy and Reconstruction of Culture: Pragmatic Essays After Dewey* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 37–57; Rogers, *The Undiscovered Dewey*, chaps. 3–5.

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The Problem of African American Public(s): Dewey and African American Politics in the 21st Century

Eddie S. Glaude Jr.

Dewey's account of the eclipse of publics in *The Public and Its Problems* has special relevance to the contemporary challenges of post-soul politics. The civil rights movement has transformed social conditions, so that continued uncritical reference to it as a framework for black political activity blocks the way to innovative thinking about African American politics. Conceptions of community that have informed African-American politics in the past have given way to a fractured and fragmented public unable to identify itself. I argue for a view of community and democracy that takes seriously the complexity of racialized experiences in the U.S., and instantiates new forms of communication to form democratic dispositions capable of addressing the challenges of our current moment.

> Have the past struggles succeeded?
> What has succeeded? yourself? your nation? Nature?
> Now understand me well – it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.
> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

> The old saying that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy is not apt if it means that the evils may be remedied by introducing more machinery of the same kind ... . But the phrase may also indicate the need of returning to the idea itself, and of employing our sense of its meaning to criticize and remake its political manifestations.
> John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*

> Do we have to begin consciousness with a battle heroines and heroes like you have already fought and lost leaving us with nothing in our hands except what you have imagined is there?
> Toni Morrison, *Nobel Acceptance Speech*

Ours is a complicated historical moment. One marked by enormous progress and profound setbacks. We have witnessed over the last few decades a rapid

expansion of the black middle class, the emergence of African American CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, and the election of the first African American – Barack Obama – president.[1] By some measures, African Americans have finally found their place within mainstream American society. We no longer, some argue, need to retreat to racial enclaves for comfort and security. No longer, they might add, do we have a need to appeal to race in matters of politics. We have, for the most part, arrived.

But the tremendous progress evident in black America stands alongside the bleak reality that many African Americans have fallen beyond the pale. We have witnessed over the last few decades an expansion of the black "underclass." Large numbers of African American men and women find themselves caught within the intricate networks of the prison industrial complex: from 1954 to the present day the black prison population has grown by 900 percent.[2] Many African American children suffer from the chronic ills that attend growing up in poverty. Black babies, for example, are two-and-one-half times more likely than white infants to die before their first birthday.[3] To be sure, a substantial number of African Americans are caught within a vicious cycle of poverty and violence that betrays any claim that all is well throughout black America.[4] These realities, some argue, demand continued struggle. We can ill afford, they might add, to ignore the relevance of race in matters of politics. Even with Obama's success America remains fundamentally shaped by white supremacy.

To be sure, the phenomenon of Barack Obama has, in some significant way, precipitated a crisis in African American politics. For some, Obama's candidacy, not to mention his election, represented the end of an era where the traditional languages of racial protest gave way to a more effective, or at least supposedly more effective, language of governance and coalition; his success marked our entrance into what some called a post-racial America. Obama and many who supported him vehemently rejected such characterizations. For them, the grim realities of racism continued to cut short the life chances of many African Americans. Nevertheless, his candidacy did in fact represent an end to a certain style of political engagement. The figures of Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton seemingly receded into the shadows while new and younger faces began to emerge and assume the mantle of black leadership.

What was striking about this moment involved, among other things, the fact that many groped for a language to describe the transition. And, what was revealed with remarkable clarity as they searched was a startling inability on the part of so many people to talk about race and racism without falling into the rather easy trap of thinking solely in terms of intentional prejudice and the cruder forms of identity politics. Obama's candidacy and its extraordinary success made clear that the many challenges confronting black America required an imaginative and immediate shift in our political lexicon – that our traditional "vocabularies of struggle" are in need of recalibration in light of the particular conditions of our current circumstances. This effort goes far beyond the rather

narrow debate between those who would deny or accept the relevance of race to political matters. Instead, the central concern rests with how we address the actual problems African American communities confront, realizing that those communities fracture and fragment in varying ways and along different fault lines. What are our mobilizing tropes in light of this differentiation? And how do they inspire us to respond passionately and intelligently to the problems at hand?

Time and again, appeals to racial identity and solidarity mask, often to the detriment of the most vulnerable, the competing interests informing the political and moral choices of African Americans. Competing interests are collapsed into a form of racial politics that presumes, dangerously so, black unity: that black individuals see themselves as necessarily in solidarity with other black individuals solely on the basis of race. This assumption, more often than not, results in a form of racial politics which relies heavily on a set of tropes that signal to those willing to listen that black interests, whatever they may be, are in jeopardy. We need only invoke the images of the past, the struggle for black freedom, or the many persons who gave their lives for freedom to orient ourselves appropriately to any political matter. These tropes stand in for democratic deliberation; they, in effect, do our thinking for us. But such invocations blind us to a crucial insight:

> that democratic and participatory value must be the cornerstone of credibility for the notion of black politics; group consensus must be constructed through active participation. Even then, it is important to realize that often there will be no universal racial consensus on key issues; that some conflicts derive from irreconcilable material differences. Unity is always on specific terms and in pursuit of specific objectives....[5]

By my pragmatic lights, African American politics, if they are to be genuinely democratic, must, like the nation in general, embrace the full complexity of the racialized experiences of black folk. That complexity betrays any facile racial politics that ultimately fails to exemplify black democratic energies necessary for a fundamental transformation in this nation.

I hold the view, and it is an admittedly controversial position, that the *post-soul* generation has lost its way politically, in part, because our political imaginations have been captured by the symbolic significance of the black freedom struggle of the 1960s. This state of affairs is all the more troubling given that the conditions that shaped and informed this historical period have been fundamentally transformed by the movement's successes. In making this claim, I rely on John Dewey's account of publics in his 1927 book, *The Public and Its Problems*.

Dewey's view avoids some of the more troublesome aspects of Jürgen Habermas's early account of publics.[6] He does not assume, for example, that deliberation in the public sphere requires that we bracket the fact that some of us are wealthy and others are poor; that we are diverse in terms of gender,

sexuality, ethnicity, and race; and that, in some cases, individuals are differentially treated because of these identities. These differences and the problems that may arise from them may even call multiple publics into existence that challenge restricted conceptions of the common good. And, for Dewey, this does not undermine democratic life but, instead, is a reflection of its vibrancy.

Dewey argued that publics come in and out of existence all the time. As we confront difficult and different social problems, as economic shifts and technological innovations transform our lives, the way we have traditionally gone about our business may no longer be effective and may even lapse into incoherence. Forces impact the form and content of our public deliberation and often lead to a disconnect between the way we talk about problems and the actual problems we face. Under these conditions an eclipse of a public has taken place. Our task as social critics during such moments is to ask hard questions about the public under such conditions, to ascertain the various forces behind its eclipse, and to devise means and methods of organizing an emergent public into effective political action relevant to current social needs.

I suggest that Dewey's account of the eclipse of publics has special relevance to the contemporary challenges of post-soul politics, highlighting the enduring significance of *The Public and Its Problems*. More specifically, I argue that the conditions that called the civil rights movement into existence have been fundamentally transformed by that very movement, and that continued uncritical reference to it as a framework for black political activity blocks the way to innovative thinking about African American politics. In pursuing this view, I begin with a brief account of the challenges confronting post-soul politics. I argue in particular that invocations of the trope of the black freedom movement function in at least three ways: (1) as an indication of black piety; (2) as a characterization of the continuity between current and past racial realities; and (3) as a means to justify and authenticate the authority of a black political class. Each function is backward-looking in its orientation and, in some cases, inhibits the organization of an emergent public.

I then turn to a more detailed discussion of John Dewey's account of publics. I give specific attention to Dewey's account of the emergence of the "great society" and the centrality of the "great community" to his view of democracy as a way of life. I suggest that conceptions of community that have informed African-American politics in the past have given way to a fractured and fragmented public unable to identify itself. I argue for a view of community and democracy that takes seriously the complexity of racialized experiences in the United States and instantiates new forms of communication aimed at producing democratic dispositions capable of addressing the challenges of our current moment. I end by exhorting young African Americans to involve themselves actively in defining the contours of a post-soul politics without succumbing to the temptation of a nostalgic longing for a time of black political action long passed. I urge them instead to take up the tools of their moment to

identify an emergent public and to confront directly the social needs and opportunities it presents.

1. The Challenges of Post-Soul Politics

I should say a few words about what I mean by post-soul politics. On the one hand, the term simply refers to the period after the civil rights movement and black power era. It includes under its description the political activity of those persons born after the major legislative victories of the civil rights movement (the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act), who came of age during the Reagan years, and those who are currently considered part of the Hip Hop generation. On the other hand, post-soul refers to conditions and sensibilities. As Nelson George writes, "the term ... defines the twisting, troubling, turmoil-filled, and often terrific years since the mid-seventies when black America moved into a new phase of its history."[7] That new phase consisted in many African Americans experiencing unprecedented inclusion in American society, which altered the nature of their political commitments and actions. It also involved heightening levels of poverty and unimaginable violence. The post-soul generation experienced "the change from urban industrialism to deindustrialism, from segregation to desegregation, from essential notions of blackness to metanarratives on blackness, without any nostalgic allegiance to the past, but firmly in grasp of the existential concerns of this brave new world."[8] These changes gave their politics a different tone and timbre (their art a particular resonance) even as this generation of African Americans struggled to come to terms with the inheritance of the civil rights movement and black power era. But this struggle with the past has overwhelmed, in some ways, the post-soul generation, and it is to this that I now turn.

1.1. Black Piety

For many, invocations of the black freedom movement and its signature exemplars situate our efforts in a tradition of struggle and sacrifice. That tradition sanctions our practices and authenticates our current struggles by likening them to a continuous history of African Americans fighting for freedom. It also, at least ideally, habituates us to act justly toward our fellows as we struggle for a more inclusive democracy. That is to say, the trope of the black freedom movement carries with it a certain conception of character, of who we take ourselves to be as we confront unjust practices. When civil rights leaders, for example, invoke "the movement" they, in effect, refer to a story about black America's sojourn in the United States. That story ostensibly narrates the political and ethical lives of African Americans by establishing a tangible connection between the kinds of beliefs we currently hold and choices

we now make with a history of black political action in the face of white supremacy in the United States.

This history often provides a set of interpretative tools for making sense of racialized experiences in America. Most young African American men, for example, have been told how to behave in the presence of police officers. We are told to speak respectfully, to appear non-threatening, and to keep our hands in full view of the officer at all times. This information typically reflects the funded experiences of perilous encounters with the police over time. In addition, most young African Americans have been told of the importance of voting. The point is usually made by reference to the fact that people, African Americans in particular, have died for the right to vote and participation in the electoral process honors their sacrifice. In both instances, knowledge acquired from past experiences orients the young and provides them with a kind of common sense aimed at securing desirable ends and at avoiding certain consequences. Invocations of the story of the black freedom movement and its central characters work toward these ends. Moreover, the stories seek to orient us to fight racism in the United States and they provide examples of virtuous political action.

From Martin Luther King, Jr., Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, to Jesse Jackson, these figures exemplify, as the story is told, the courage and moral fortitude necessary to confront racial apartheid in America and to secure the demands of a long-suffering people. Invocations of the story aim then in two directions simultaneously. First, references to the black freedom movement often seek to call forth, in those who hear and listen to them, a particular political orientation – that the listener take up a calling to fight for or, minimally, support civil rights. That support shapes the person's choices and guides her actions. She, in effect, dedicates her life to fight for justice or, minimally, supports those who do so. But such invocations also refer to loss and sacrifice. Many died for our current freedom and recognition of this fact obligates us to act consistent with the magnitude of their sacrifice. African Americans memorialize the loss of heroic individuals in their valiant fight for or continued support of civil rights, and the obligation to do so carries the additional burden of showing fidelity to the dead. Uses of the trope of the black freedom movement involve, then, appeals to a conception of black piety in which African American individuals are indebted to the black freedom struggle as an undeniable source of their being. In this view, appropriate expressions of gratitude and loyalty ought to be directed towards those sources and exhibited in habits and character as African Americans confront unjust practices.

I should distinguish this use of black piety from my earlier formulation in *Is it Nation Time?*[9] There I argued that one of the distinguishing features of the black power era was a conception of black piety grounded in a particular understanding of blackness, which bound African Americans to one another, oriented them to a past in need of recovery, and provided a ballast for their lives by way of a reverent attachment to the sources of their individual identities. My

use of black piety here, however, does not locate obligation in the idea of blackness as such but, rather, in the notion of struggle on behalf of African Americans and principles of justice. The distinction matters. The differences in the conception of black piety point to the substantive differences between the civil rights movement and the black power era. One version of the story holds that the latter represents a turn away from universal principles of justice informing African American struggle and a turn towards a problematic understanding of the black subject that easily slips into a form of racial chauvinism.

Despite this difference, however, I want to describe both as instances of black piety. Both views can end up disciplining, though not necessarily so, the political choices of African Americans, and they do so by reference to the putative sources of African American existence. When Shelby Steele, John McWhorter, or in some cases, Barack Obama put forward a view that runs counter to some notion of racial common sense, they are condemned as somehow betraying black people. (This was particularly evident in criticisms of Obama's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2008.) They are in effect impious. That is, they have turned their backs on all of the heroes and heroines who sacrificed and made possible their success, or they are simply labeled Uncle Toms or race traitors. Whether the standard of judgment involves a tradition of black struggle or, more specifically, a troublesome conception of blackness, both views of piety can constrain our ability to re-imagine black political action, precisely because they presume what that action ought to entail prior to experience. Our eyes remain fixed on the past and its exemplars who have already charted the path for us. Indeed, the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X (and those who claim a direct connection to them) tower over our political imaginations, making us seem like insignificant little people among a tradition of giants.

Members of the post-soul generation need not diminish the greatness of King, Malcolm, and all of those who sacrificed for our current freedoms to assert our own significance to the struggle for democracy. Their lives, with all of its power and limitations, model a standard of excellence that helps us instantiate excellence in our own lives. But we can not be overwhelmed by the power of their presence to the point that we deny our own voice. Exemplars are a curious lot. They both inspire and potentially enslave. We must therefore be careful to strike the right balance between admiration and self trust – that we do not succumb to the temptation of idolatry, which blinds us to our own unique excellences and potential greatness.[10] Instead, our orientation to the past and its exemplars must consist in a lively relation, one in which our thinking remains open-ended and imaginative recovery of the past aids, and not obstructs, efforts to invade successfully the future.

1.2. Continuity within Change

An appropriate conception of black piety presumes the importance of tradition to the formation of individual character, and it assumes that this tradition offers useful resources for the successful invasion of the future. But too often invocations of the black freedom movement proceed on the basis of a one-to-one correspondence between the political realities addressed by the freedom struggles of the 1960s and the current experiences of African Americans. One might hold the view that no matter the particulars racism, whether evidenced in *de jure* segregation or in various schemes to "whiten" New Orleans, is essentially the same and warrants a similar response. One might continue by arguing that the most efficacious form of struggle against racism remains that of mass demonstrations. We know that when large numbers of African Americans "took to the streets" in the 1960s to challenge racial segregation the nation, with the aid of television and print media, took notice and matters changed significantly. Descriptions of our contemporary problems as continuous with the black freedom struggle of the 1960s aim then, in most cases, to encourage us to act, in both form and content, consistent with that struggle. As such, we are constantly urged, reasonably given prior successes, by a wide range of black leaders to march and march again.

I should not be too glib. Mass mobilization of citizens publicly protesting government policies remains a crucial feature of American democratic life, and much has been achieved as a result. But too often African American communities find themselves encouraged to "take to the streets" not so much because of its efficacy, but because our descriptions of the problems demand that we do so. When we liken an event to Selma or invoke the death of Emmett Till, we in effect prescribe our response: we must act as black folk have always acted in the face of such terror (and the standard characterizations of those actions since the 1960s involve the act of marching). But such a position tends to narrow and constrain the exercise of intelligent inquiry essential to democratic action, precisely because we find ourselves habitually oriented to talk about and respond to the varied problems of African Americans in certain ways.

We forget that the power of marching as a technique of struggle stemmed, in part, from the organization of public space. In the South, for example, Jim Crow ordered public space in such a way as to reflect prevailing racial norms. Jim Crow restrooms and water fountains, back-door entrances to restaurants and shopping stores, established customs regarding walking on sidewalks, all prescribed how African Americans could navigate public space. To ignore these rules and restrictions was to risk one's life. In such a context, organized marching constituted a subversive act: it directly challenged the prevailing laws and norms of Southern communities. In our current moment marching is not so powerful. The sight of black bodies marching in Washington, D.C. or downtown in communities across the country does not quite jolt the

imagination as it once did. I am not suggesting that marching as an instance of our right to assemble ought no longer to be a mode of political action. I simply insist that when we do march that we do so because it presents the most efficacious form of political redress regarding the particular problems faced.

1.3. Authority of a Black Political Class

Appropriate analogies of current and past racial realities serve to orient us more intelligently to the problems we face. They aid us in our efforts to make sense of racialized experiences by assimilating, in some cases, the unfamiliar to the familiar. The analogy may reveal something that would otherwise remain hidden. It may provide examples of courage or some other virtue. Or, it may clarify a dimension of the problem that enables us to resolve it more effectively. In either instance, the work of the analogy is forward-looking; it orients us in such a way that we are able to address a particular problematic situation with a bit more than luck, because the analogy, appropriately used, tells us something about the situation and about the kinds of action required to address it. But too often analogies made between the 1960s and our current moment obscure matters rather than clarify them. It may be the case that black leaders who frequently use the analogy do so to connect our current struggles with a tradition that offers resources to aid us in our efforts, but too often the analogies work to justify their presence at the front of the march and their title as a black leader. In these instances, uses of the trope of the black freedom movement serve to justify and authenticate a black political class. Many national "black leaders" assert their authority to represent African American communities by appealing to either their participation in the struggles of the 1960s or by exploiting their connection to someone who did. Of course, such appeals often narrow the range of who can be considered a national black leader. Unless a member of the post-soul generation, for example, bears the imprimatur of someone who was a part of the black freedom movement (or is a child of an established member of the black political class), she will have to struggle mightily to acquire the requisite gravitas to be taken seriously as a leader.

The problem, however, is much deeper than who carries the designation of black leader. Uses of the trope of the black freedom movement to justify the authority of a black political class reveal a much more troubling conception of African American politics: what Adolph Reed powerfully calls a politics of racial custodianship.[11] This politics proceeds on the basis of a certain assumption about political stratification within African American communities: that there exists within black communities a viable distinction between the "masses" of African Americans who need representation and an elite class of black folk (the better classes) whose role is to represent them. But Reed rightly notes that "the term 'the masses' does not refer to any particular social position or constituency."[12] It does not help us understand the actual interests of those who are underemployed or those who are self-described hip-hop heads. The

word does little to capture the various commitments of those who struggle over high rents and those who are homeowners. Indeed, "the category assumes a generic, abstract – and thus mute – referent. It therefore reproduces the nonparticipatory politics enacted by the mainstream black political elite. The masses do not speak; someone speaks for them."[13]

However, this form of politics does not emerge simply because of the selfish pursuits of black elites. The realities of Jim Crow shaped the form and content of black political activity in determinate ways. The denial of the vote and the real threat of violent reprisal for any public opposition to prevailing racist norms exerted enormous pressures on the form of public deliberation within African American communities: compromise and silence became, for some, tools of the political trade. Moreover, the realities of white supremacy helped generate a conception of the group in which overriding collective interests represented by black elites defined the political agenda of black America. These elites could then settle on political agendas supposedly on behalf of the race without substantive deliberation and act without constraint or accountability. The politics of racial custodianship then emerges out of a political context shaped by civic exclusion, the threat of racial violence, and the assumption of racial corporate interests that downplay substantive public deliberation and effectively dismiss the need for true accountability.[14]

Of course, *de jure* segregation is no more, and the threat of violent reprisal for publicly-held positions is no longer sanctioned by the state. Yet the politics of racial custodianship remains and its central trope is the black freedom movement. African American political leaders across the United States invoke "the movement" to mobilize African American constituencies. In doing so, they often rely on a conception of black piety that obligates African Americans to act politically in certain ways and not in others. They sometimes presume a generic politics of racial advancement predicated on a correspondence between African American experiences then and now. And many continue to justify their place as representatives or as brokers of black interests to the state. In each instance, the diversity of African American life is obscured, and the democratic values of accountability and open debate are denied. When this happens it becomes difficult to imagine the formation of democratic dispositions so necessary for a vibrant democratic life – dispositions that appreciate, as Dewey argued, "the values of social life, to see in imagination the forces which favor our effective cooperation with one another, to understand the sorts of character that help and that hold back."[15] Instead, we find ourselves, time and again, urged to follow uncritically those who would have us believe that they in fact represent *the* African American community. But many have come to see that such a politics simply fail to speak to our current moment and the complexity of African American conditions of living? What does such a moment signal? How are we to understand it in relation to the way we conceive of a post-soul politics? These questions, I believe, require an understanding of a national black public. What is this black public? And how are we to understand it under present conditions?

Pragmatism and, specifically, John Dewey can offer some resources to begin an answer.

2. John Dewey and the Eclipse of a Public

In 1927, John Dewey wrote that "Optimism about democracy is to-day under a cloud" (304). (Citations are to *The Public and Its Problems*, vol. 2 of *The Later Works of John Dewey*, 1982.) He was responding, in part, to prevailing sentiments about participatory democracy. Walter Lippmann had expressed in his important books, *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925), that participatory democracy was not viable, because the opinions of everyday, ordinary citizens could be easily manipulated and consent manufactured by elites. To assume that ordinary Americans could in fact engage in genuine deliberation about their conditions of living and the workings of government given the quantity of information needed to do so effectively was, in Lippmann's view, to fall into the worst kind of romantic thinking about the capacities of one's fellows. The realities of modern life – its technology and commerce – simply left ordinary Americans bereft of time to become politically informed. As such, deliberative democracy was merely a pipe dream, and Lippmann suggested in its place a technocracy in which disinterested experts, persons who did not suffer from the irrationality so painfully evident among politicians, represented the best interests of American citizens too caught up in the daily demands of modern living.

Dewey acknowledged that the technological, economic, and bureaucratic developments of modern American life had fundamentally transformed the nature of social interaction among citizens. Americans were busy working, shopping, and pursuing the American dream. He conceded Lippmann's claim that the public in light of these developments seemed lost or certainly bewildered. But Dewey rejected Lippmann's conclusions. The problem was not with the incapacities of everyday, ordinary people nor was the problem inherent to the very notion of democracy. Matters were bad, but not quite hopeless. Instead, what was required was a better understanding of the emergence of American democracy and a more intelligent pursuit of conditions that would enable it to flourish under continuously changing conditions. As Dewey put the point, many "assume that democracy is the product of an idea, of a single and consistent intent" (304). The challenge involves recognizing the various ways ordinary Americans, in response to their environment, have forged a democratic way of life that we now associate, mistakenly, with liberal institutions. In other words, we have become quite taken with abstractions associated with democracy and less attentive to the actual doings and sufferings of those who provide its content. Democracy, on Dewey's view, is not reducible to universal suffrage, free and frequent elections, or congressional and cabinet government. Instead, "political democracy has emerged as a kind of net consequence of a vast multitude of responsive adjustments to a vast number of situations, no two of

which were alike, but which tended to converge to a common outcome.... Much less is democracy the product *of* democracy, of some inherent nisus, or immanent idea" (287–288). When seen in this light we come to understand democracy as a historical phenomenon that is continuously reenvisioned, and it is here that Dewey's account of publics takes on added significance.

Dewey asserted that publics "consist of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (245). Initially, we my find ourselves, under some circumstances, directly affected by a particular transaction. We work diligently, perhaps with the aid of friends, to secure consequences that favor us and to rid ourselves of others that do not. This mode of action is principally pre-political in the sense that it illustrates what we, as social creatures, do in the face of problematic situations. Such transactions are direct and their effects are primarily local. But when transactions affect people indirectly, Dewey argued, a more general public emerges with designated individuals (officials) and material agencies (the state). These individuals and state institutions assume the task of conserving and protecting the interests of those affected. Both officials and the state emerge in response to human needs. As Dewey writes:

> Men [sic] have looked in the wrong place. They have sought for the key to the nature of the state in the field of agencies, in that doers of deeds, or in some will or purpose back of the deeds. They have sought to explain the state in terms of authorship. Ultimately all deliberate choices proceed from somebody in particular; acts are performed by somebody, and all arrangements and plans are made by somebody in the most concrete sense of somebody (247).

Here the state is denied transcendental status. Instead, it is the consequence of efforts to protect the shared interests of those similarly-situated. Officials are not disinterested elites or professional representatives. They are "indeed public agents, but agents in the sense of factors doing the business of others in securing and obviating consequences that concern them" (247).

On this view, we could find, especially among oppressed or marginalized groups, various individuals and institutions performing "state-like functions" – particularly given the United States failure to accord specific groups proper public standing. I have argued elsewhere, for example, that African American churches in the early 19th century performed this role in securing and evading consequences that specifically concerned African Americans.[16] But this use of Dewey raises a worrisome question about his overall account of the state. It would seem that the multiplicity of publics and the varied interests that call them into being complicate how we understand the emergence and subsequent function of the state. After all, a state contains many publics with interests that may "bump up" against one another: with each public comes a set of interests

and public agents doing the business of others in relation to those interests. How Dewey accounts for the inevitable conflict among publics and the relation of those conflicts to the formation of the state is not readily apparent. My use of the phrase, "state-like function," attempts to finesse this problem by resisting the claim that "states" actually emerge in these instances. Instead these moments mark the occasion for democratic deliberation (or revolution) and, ideally, the expansion of the state to incorporate those previously excluded.

But, in the end, very little is at stake in Dewey's supposed failure to offer a more robust account of the state. The burden of his argument rests with his effort to disentangle democracy from the accumulated developments of liberalism – developments that indeed threaten the conclusion, one which Lippmann draws, that ordinary Americans are in fact irrelevant to the workings of democracy. Dewey emphasizes instead the ways everyday Americans are committed to democracy as a way of life, which goes beyond liberal institutions to the very way in which individuals evidence certain values in their interactions with their fellows. He insisted that we could only escape the reduction of democracy to a form of government, an *external way* of thinking as he called it, when "we realize in thought and act that democracy is a personal way of individual life; that it signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life."[17] Such an orientation entails embracing our responsibility to share in forming and aiding the activities of the various groups or associations within which we find ourselves; it demands "liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common" (238).

The machine age changed matters. It expanded and intensified the scope of indirect consequences, splintered and fragmented established forms of association, and formed "immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis" (314). Personal communal life gave way to the impersonal "Great Society," which left us with abstract and highly-mediated forms of social interaction. Americans *felt* indirect consequences but, under these conditions, failed to *perceive* them. As Dewey noted, "they are suffered, but they cannot be said to be known, for they are not, by those who experience them" (317). The challenge was to move from impersonal, shallow interactions to more meaningful forms of association: from the "Great Society" to what he called the "Great Community."

Democracy remains vibrant in the habits of thought and actions of people; it is expressed through the practices ordinary citizens share in association or community with their fellows. The machine age required a re-imagining of community in light of the new technologies that, at once, eclipsed prior communal formations and would aid, if intelligently utilized, in forging more meaningful forms of social interaction. Communication across various divides was necessary if genuine communal life was to take shape. But, again, this necessitated breaking through established political forms. It required the sort

of undertaking that human beings engage in when confronted with problems. Dewey's view of the public foregrounds this sort of undertaking and keeps us mindful that our democracy is in constant need of attention and care. It also helps us understand the fundamental challenges confronting what some call "subaltern" publics.

3. The Eclipse of a Black Public

Given the persistent legacies of white supremacy in the United States, the actions of many American whites in relation to African Americans have had far-reaching implications and have necessitated conjoint action on the part of African Americans to secure some consequences and avoid others. In short, a *national* black public has everything to do with responding to the persistence of racism in American society under particular conditions. From the national black convention movement of the early nineteenth century to more recent efforts around Hurricane Katrina and the campaign of Barack Obama, African Americans have sought forms of and created forums for political redress in light of the perceived effects of actions that extend beyond those immediately involved.

There have been, at least, three national black publics since the dawn of the twentieth century. The first involves what I call *Mass Migration and the Problem of the Color Line*, the period between 1903 and 1935 (from the publication of W. E. B. DuBois's *Souls of Black Folk*, the beginning of the Great Migration, to the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy). This period of black political activity was marked by the immediate effects of the consolidation of the white south and the subsequent mass migration of large numbers of African Americans from rural areas to urban centers, from South to North. This public was eclipsed as international pressures and domestic retrenchment (World War II, the Great Depression, and the Cold War) fundamentally impinged on the form and content of black political engagement. The second national black public, what I am calling *Black Internationalism and Forgotten Radical Possibilities*, emerged between 1937 (with the Spanish Civil War and, later, World War II). This public was eclipsed by the onslaught of the Cold War and the ascendance of cold war black politics with the Brown v. Board of Education decisions in 1954 and 1955. This period, one that involved the emergence of the United States as a global power and the beginnings of "third world" decolonization, was characterized by political languages reflective of broad global political patterns, economic crises, as well as pressures to limit the scope of black protest to the domestic domain. The third national black public, *Civil Rights, Black Power and the Age of Reagan*, emerged with the mass mobilization of African Americans protesting legal segregation in the aftermath of the Brown decision, the murder of Emmett Till, and the defiance of Rosa Parks in 1955. This public was eclipsed in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan. This late period was obviously characterized by the successful

challenge of Jim Crow, the rise and decline of the Black Power era, and a subsequent white backlash.[18] The perimeters of all three national publics were defined by the legality of white supremacist practices, which necessitated conjoint action and involved a wide-range of discourses about collective racial advancement. In each instance, African American conjoint action changed, because of demographic shifts, international conflict, mass mobilization of black citizens, and the changing nature of race and racism in our country. Struggle remained a consistent feature of these publics, but that struggle looked differently under different conditions.

During no other period in African American history was a national black public as active and vibrant as that of the 1960s and 1970s. This period resulted in the end of legal segregation, unprecedented growth in the black middle class, and the powerful expression of black cultural pride. It was also a moment marked by cities burning, violent encounters between the state and black citizens, and a palpable sense of white fatigue with regards to matters of race and civil rights. Indeed, the successes and failures of this moment stand alongside the tremendous transformations within African American communities and American society that have so complicated and intensified contemporary racial politics in the United States that a national black public cannot currently identify and distinguish itself. Some even ask the question is there such a thing as a black public under present conditions.

In his brilliant work, *Black Visions*, Michael Dawson isolates a number of developments that affected the form and content of the black public during this period. Intensified state repression and internal ideological fragmentation contributed to the ruin of many Civil Rights and Black Power organizations. The Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), among other federal programs, systematically targeted and harassed black leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and organizations like the Black Panther Party. This program also sought to fuel internecine conflicts between black militant organizations, resulted in the arrest of many local and national leaders on trumped-up charges, and in some cases was involved in the assassination of targeted individuals. State repression often resulted in wholesale paranoia among many black activists. Black nationalists and leftist organizations increasingly experienced substantive internal rifts, which involved ideological consolidation and purging within their respective groups. This left many organizations weak and, in some instances, destroyed them outright. This contestation took place as much of what was left of the civil rights movement began to transform itself into what now can be called the civil rights establishment, an effective lobbying organization whose sole purpose was (and continues to be) to secure the gains of "the movement," and a vast cadre of black elected officials (BEOs) emerged as "a buffer class that helped delegitimate protest and circumscribe acceptable political discourse within the black community."[19]

Transformations in the political economy, Dawson maintains, also eroded the institutional basis of the black public. The shift in the U.S. economy from

manufacturing to low-wage service industries adversely affected black laborers in the sense that the moderate wage base of many African Americans provided by manufacturing industries was decimated as the shift to flexible accumulation weakened labor unions (just one in seven African Americans currently belong to a union), transformed work forces, and increased the likelihood that African Americans would experience discrimination in labor markets.[20] Manufacturing losses in many northern cities were particularly devastating. William Julius Wilson notes that "between 1967 and 1987, Philadelphia lost 64 percent of it manufacturing jobs; Chicago lost 60 percent; New York City 58 percent; and Detroit, 51 percent."[21] Of course, global economic competition exacerbated matters in that the increasing demand for high-skilled labor left low-skilled African American workers on the margins of the new economy driven by technological innovation and the transition from hard to soft goods.

Dawson rightly notes that these transformations in political economy in tandem with the successes of the civil rights movement deepened class divisions within African American communities throughout the nation. The decline in manufacturing jobs – the primary vehicle for many African Americans to achieve middle class status – destabilized the black working class. Indeed, "from the fourth quarter of 1974 through the fourth quarter of 1992, there were only five quarters in which black unemployment was below 10 percent."[22] Long term unemployment among African Americans is now at its highest in twenty years and, what William J. Wilson powerfully describes as the disappearance of work, has left many African Americans living in concentrated poverty. The collapse of the civil rights coalition in the aftermath of the successful dismantling of legal segregation revealed white America's fatigue with regards to racial matters as well as the deep economic divisions within African American communities. To be sure, the legality of segregation which necessitated conjoint action and enabled a conception of racial corporate interests was now no more and the internal fissures that were always present within African American communities began to evidence themselves in powerful and poignant ways. Class cleavages, strident criticisms of patriarchy and homophobia, and mainstream aspirations on the part of many black leaders all illustrated the difficulty of presuming a set of issues that define *the* black agenda. Moreover, the impact of that other important piece of legislation in 1965, the Hart-Cellar Immigration Reform Act, complicated how the very idea of "black" community could be conceived. Between 1960 and 1984 some 604,104 immigrants from the Anglophone Carribean and 141,109 from Haiti would come to the United States, greatly affecting the form and content of black cultural expression. After all, DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican immigrant, introduced us to the "break beat" and aided in the creation of the genre of music called rap. Dawson goes as far as to say that "[t]aken together, the disintegration of the institutional bases of the black counterpublic since the early 1970s and increasing black skepticism regarding the existence of a bundle of issues and strategies that define a black agenda

should lead us to question whether we can assert that a subaltern counterpublic exists – and if it does, how healthy is it?"[23]

But this question reveals more about the limitations of Dawson's approach than the actual problems faced. The concern is not whether a public exists but, rather, in what ways are conjoint actions under present conditions calling a new public into existence and what blocks its emergence. Dawson is closer to the mark when he writes:

> The dismantling of the formal structures of segregation ... combined with the increasing importance of identities based on other structures of stratification require that a black subaltern counterpublic would have to be reconstituted on a new understanding of the issues, including those of patriarchy and economic oppression will move to the fore. Without such a broadening of what is understood to be the "black agenda," a unifying set of discourses and political agenda will not come to be.[24]

I am not so sure the aim should be a unifying set of discourses apart from particular problems that may necessitate broad base political action. But I do agree, and here I would prefer to use Deweyan language, that we have witnessed the eclipse of a black public and we need to devise means and methods of organizing an emergent public. Economic realities (both local and global), technological developments (we now live in the computer age), various identity formations (class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity), and political transformations (we live in a post Jim Crow era) have splintered and fragmented established forms of association among African Americans. We find ourselves instead awash in the Great Society, where the conception of "black community" that once informed notions of racial obligation and ideas about general racial advancement persist primarily in nostalgic longings for a time passed or in invocations of a politics formed in a context in which such notions of community actually made sense. But under present conditions this idea of black community and its attendant notions of group interests obscure the complex experiences that inform the varied political commitments and interests of African Americans, blocking the way to the formation of a black public more reflective of current conditions of living.

The challenge involves moving from a conception of black community that orients African Americans politically prior to experience – a view which often assumes bad conceptions of black identity, history, and agency – to an understanding of black community consonant with an idea of "Great Community." This view of community orients African Americans in such a way that democratic dispositions are forged, through new information and communication technologies, in intelligent and meaningful interaction with others. These interactions are genuinely informed by the stories of a blues people whose mere presence reveal the remarkable irony at the heart of our way of life, stories that shape our character as a nation and orient us to others in

particular ways. In other words, the idea of great community has as a constitutive feature the tragedy of race, and the idea of black community reflects deep commitments to expanding democratic life and enlarging the possibilities for individual self-development.

This view of community will require breaking existing political forms.[25] That is to say, it will require a reconceptualization of "black political activity as a dynamic set of social relations and interests that converge on some issues as consequential for broad sectors of the black population and that diverge from others, based on other identities and interest aggregations."[26] To achieve this, it will require a reorientation to the black freedom movement, one that will free us to engage our contemporary problems imaginatively, intelligently, and in full view of the variety of African American political interests.

4. A Post-Soul Politics for the Twenty-First Century

Two features of Dewey's account of publics are particularly relevant to my discussion of the challenges of a post-soul politics. First, Dewey contextualizes the emergence of publics. He maintains that publics are historical phenomena that emerge in the context of specific attempts to address particular problems. As such, he avoids the tendency to reify political formations and to think of them as existing apart from the interests and habits that call them into being. Instead, Dewey urges us to situate historically political formations in the activity of groups as they seek to address indirect consequences. Contextualizing is particularly important in those moments when emergent publics can not be identified because of the recalcitrance of extant political forms that block the way to more imaginative and intelligent political action. Second, Dewey's view conveys a profound faith in the capacities of everyday people. Although he agrees with much of Lippmann's position, he never gives up on the importance of participatory democracy. He argues instead for a more appropriate form of education that would aid in the formation of individuals with democratic character and that would equip them with the tools necessary for substantive and intelligent civic action. The answer to a bewildered public then is not to appeal to a form of custodial politics but, rather, to expand democratic life and broaden the ground for individual self-development.[27] We must contextualize and historicize publics, and we must insist on the importance of the voices of everyday, ordinary Americans to democratic flourishing. This advice is particularly relevant to those who "do" African American politics – especially given the overwhelming success of Senator Obama. Something, however, blocks the way.

The 1960s stand, negatively or positively, as a point of reference for all forms of political activity in our contemporary moment. Like the American Revolution, the Great Depression, and World War II – events that defined a generation – the black freedom struggle of the 1960s represents a defining moment for black America against which all other attempts at political

insurgency are measured. And, in some ways, rightfully so: the successes of the Civil Rights Movement fundamentally changed the racial landscape in America. An emergent black middle class found greater access to America's wealth, and black America discovered a new sense of self-worth as their mass struggles produced tangible, though highly qualified, results. On one level, black America had never really experienced anything like the mass struggles of the Sixties. The abolitionism of the antebellum period was relatively small. The movement of Marcus Mosiah Garvey during the early 20th century had a different ideological orientation: his was not an argument over the soul of America. Garvey could care less. Yet, ironically, the historical anomaly of the struggles of the 1960s has become the standard model of political engagement for Black America (and for a generation of white Americans who were also defined by that period).

The Sixties occupy, and I mean this in its military sense, our political imaginations. This is the case not only because of the significance of the events, but also because of its *proximity* to our contemporary moment. African Americans who have the battle scars of living in and fighting against racial apartheid in the United States are still alive. Mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts who remember Jim Crow are reminded of those experiences by living memories of humiliation. They have raised us, and imparted to us their wounds and a reasonable skepticism about the moral capacity of some of their fellow white citizens. Leaders who came of age during that time of struggle remain a vital force in American politics and, in some cases, a profound obstacle to innovative thinking. In the end, my point is simply this: those who struggled in the 1960s did not have the symbolic weight of "the 1960s" to contend with. We do. Old strategies and personalities continue to define how we engage in race-based politics. Yet, these old strategies and leaders stand alongside new problems and personalities that are not reducible to that moment of struggle. We live in a different time – Obama's candidacy and election confirms that – a moment made possible by the extraordinary efforts of past generations. But our task is different, because the conditions have changed. We must imagine a politics that revels in the diversity of African American life, which esteems the democratic virtue of free and open debate, and insists on the capacities of everyday, ordinary folk to engage fully in what the rap artist, Talib Kweli, so brilliantly calls the beautiful struggle. What this politics will look like depends on the particular problems faced and the various forms of solidarity forged in the midst of securing some consequences and avoiding others.

NOTES

1. The three corporate executives are Richard Parsons of Time Warner, E. Stanley O'Neal of Merrill Lynch, and Kenneth Chenault of American Express.

2. Of the 2.1 million inmates in American prisons, 910,000 are African American. Moreover, one out of every three black males born today will spend sometime in prison.

One out of 18 black females born today can expect to spend time in prison (six times the rate for white women). See *The Covenant with Black America*, ed. Tavis Smiley (Chicago: Third World Press, 2006), pp. 53–54.

3. W. Parker, "Black-White Infant Mortality Disparity in the United States: A Society Litmus test," *Public Health Reports* 118 (July-August 2003): 336. Also quoted in *The Covenant with Black America*, p. 8.

4. 12.7% of the United States population lives below the poverty line – about 37 million people. As of 2004, 9.4 million African Americans live in poverty. See David Wessel, "Changing Attack in Poverty Tactics, An Old Debate: Who is at Fault," *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 June 2006.

5. Adolph Reed Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics n the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 49.

6. I am aware that Habermas revisits his conception of the public in his book, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, and corrects many of the mistakes evident in his earlier formulation. In fact, he comes to a position much like that of John Dewey's. But African American theorists, in the main, continue to refer to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and offer criticisms of the view put forward there. Nancy Fraser's important criticisms of Habermas loom large in this regard. See her insightful essay, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Postsocialist Condition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

7. Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation: The Explosive, Contradictory, Triumphant, and Tragic 1980s as Experienced by African Americans (Previously Known as Blacks and Before that Negroes)* (New York: Viking, 2004), p. ix.

8. Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

9. Eddie S. Glaude Jr., "Introduction: Black Power Revisited," in *Is It Nation Time?*, ed. Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 1–21.

10. This point was greatly influenced by my colleague Jeffrey Stout's work. See his *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 173.

11. The main argument of this section is completely indebted to the work of Adolph Reed, Jr. See his *Stirrings in the Jug*, p. 18. Also see chapters two and three.

12. *Ibid*, p. 16.

13. *Ibid*, p. 16.

14. *Ibid*, pp. 18–20.

15. Dewey, "The Moral Significance of the Common Schools Studies" (1909), *MW* 4: 208. Citations to the *Early*, *Middle*, or *Later Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–1990) are given by *EW*, *MW*, or *LW* followed by volume and page numbers.

16. Glaude, *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), chap. 2.

17. Dewey, "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us" (1939), *LW* 12: 226.

18. A wonderful book charting the confluence African American political activism and white backlash is Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

19. Michael Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 40.

20. *Ibid*, p. 38.

21. Wilson Julius Wilson, *The Bridge over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 31.

22. *Ibid*, p. 38.

23. *Ibid*, p. 41.

24. *Ibid*, p. 42.

25. Compare the following to Dewey's claim in *The Public and Its Problems*: "The new public which is generated remains long inchoate and unorganized because it cannot use inherited political agencies. The latter, if elaborate and well institutionalized, obstruct the organization of the new public. ... To form itself, the public has to break existing political forms" (255).

26. Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug*, p. 50.

27. Dewey's understanding of the importance of education to democracy underscores the fact that his "faith" in the capacities of ordinary folks isn't naïvely utopian. We are able to act intelligently because we have been (or should be) equipped to do so. This is why Dewey believed *Democracy and Education* was the best account of his overall moral and political philosophy.

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Dewey's Public

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The idea of the "public" is used in two different ways in Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems*: first, as a conceptual tool for thinking about the nature of politics, and second, as a hypothesis about the democratic aims that might be achieved through political association over time. By attending to this distinction we can better understand the connections between Dewey's political thought and his larger philosophical position, and the ways in which the former might be called into question by those who share the latter.

1. Dewey's Hypothesis

John Dewey had two aims in writing *The Public and Its Problems*. The first was to show how and under what conditions it might be possible to think intelligently and critically about politics, or any other field of human endeavor, in a world where traditional values and ideals no longer seem to fit the way that the world actually works. This question, about the relationship between facts and values, is one that arises in some form in all of Dewey's major works. The second aim was to show that democracy is still a meaningful political ideal in a world that is so complex, and changing so quickly, that the average citizen cannot hope to understand or act effectively in more than a small corner of it. This is a question about the practice of politics, and while Dewey had always been concerned with defending the promise of democracy, it was not until the 1920's that he directly confronted the question of whether democracy as he understood it is possible at all in the modern world. *The Public and Its Problems* is his most sustained attempt to answer this question in the affirmative.

As the title of the book suggests, the idea of the "public" lies at the center of both of these lines of inquiry. However, this idea is used in two rather different ways. Dewey begins the book with an extended and somewhat exasperating discussion of the nature of the state, which he takes to be the fundamental concept in traditional political thought. His aim in these difficult early chapters is to deflect political inquiry away from the abstract question of defining the origins or ends of the state in general, and toward the more concrete question of what specific purposes the state has served in different historical contexts. His answer to this question, simply put, is that every state – or, more

precisely, every political institution, whether it is called a "state" or not[1] – exists in order to solve the problems of some public, where a public is defined as "all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of [social] transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (245–246). A given state takes the form that it does because of the nature of the problems that it was designed to solve, and it will change its form – though usually only gradually, belatedly, and in a piecemeal fashion – if and when it is asked to solve a different set of problems. It follows, Dewey argues, that the sources of political change are not to be found in the realm of politics itself, but rather in the extra-political realm of voluntary association among human beings, where political problems are generated and become salient in the first place.

Dewey concludes that instead of studying "the state" as if it were a single institution with an essential nature or purpose, we should instead treat the study of politics as the study of the public or publics whose problems a particular state was designed to solve. "By its very nature," he argues, "a state is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, and searched for. Almost as soon as its form is stabilized, it needs to be re-made" (255). This line of argument could be taken to point in two different directions, and in a crucial passage at the end of chapter 1 Dewey explicitly chooses one of them over the other. He first calls it a matter of "actual and ascertainable fact" that social behavior has consequences not only for the people who are directly concerned, but also for various third parties, and that the people who are indirectly affected, once they become aware of this fact and once the consequences become serious enough, will try to exercise "control over the actions which produce them ... by some indirect means" (257). Dewey takes it as given, in other words, that "publics" in his sense of the word – what we would now call "interest groups" – exist, and that some institution performing the functions of a state is therefore a necessary feature of any large-scale human community. He then introduces the "hypothesis" that guides the rest of his discussion: that "those indirectly and seriously affected for good or for evil form *a* group distinctive enough to require recognition and a name," that for the purposes of his discussion "the name selected is *The* Public," and that this hypothesis is "sufficient to account ... for the characteristic phenomena of political life" (257–258, emphasis added). In other words, the analysis of democracy in *The Public and Its Problems* rests on the hypothesis – it is clearly labeled as such – that in every human society there is an identifiable group whose interests represent the interests of the whole, and that the proper aim of political life is to see to it that the interests of this group – The Public – are pursued. Dewey reminds his readers of the tentative nature of this claim in chapter 5, where he reiterates that his "study [is] an intellectual or hypothetical one," and warns that "[t]here will be no attempt to state how the required conditions might come into existence, nor to prophesy that they will occur" (333).

With this shift from the idea of "*a* public" to the idea of "*the* public" Dewey takes a position on what is perhaps the oldest and most contentious question in the history of political thought: the question of whether there is such a thing as a "common good" that the citizens of a given polity can be expected to recognize and pursue together, or whether political life is instead fundamentally a matter of balancing the competing and irreconcilable interests of various groups and individuals against one another. According to the first point of view, the aim of political life is to make it possible for citizens to identify their shared interests and find effective mechanisms for pursuing them. This is the position that Dewey adopts, although he embraces the more distinctly Hegelian claim that the identity of the public, and thus the nature of the common good, changes as human societies evolve over time.[2] According to the second point of view, politics is nothing more or less than a struggle for power between different groups: it is, as the political scientist Harold Lasswell famously put it, a question of "who gets what, when and how."[3] Needless to say, we will think about the nature of the state, and of democracy itself, very differently depending on which of these views we adopt: from the former point of view the state is an expression, however imperfect, of the shared aspirations of a given political community, while from the latter point of view it is simply a mechanism of social control that various political factions seek to use in order to pursue their own particular ends.

The implications of Dewey's "hypothesis" become clear when he turns in the second half of the book to the problems of the public as they appear in modern democracies. The discussion there does not center, as we might expect, around the question of what specific ends the state should pursue, or how exactly political institutions should be redesigned so that those ends can be pursued more effectively. In fact, the almost complete lack of attention to these questions is one of the most striking and peculiar features of the book. The discussion centers instead around the question of why "the" public – the overarching social group whose interests represent, by hypothesis, those of society as a whole – has not mobilized to answer these questions for itself. Dewey's answer, in a nutshell, is that the public has failed to recognize itself *as* a public, and that when it does so the question of ends and means – and the broader question of whether democracy itself is possible under modern conditions – will answer itself. In the meantime, there are "too many publics" (314) – or, alternatively, "the" public is "amorphous and unarticulated" (317) – so that "the prime difficulty ... is that of discovering the means by which a scattered, mobile, and manifold public may so recognize itself as to define and express its interests." "When these conditions are brought into being," Dewey concludes, "they will make their own forms," and "[u]ntil they have come about, it is somewhat futile to consider what political machinery will suit them" (327).

Dewey's belief that the shortcomings of modern democracy result from a lack of perception or self-understanding on the part of the public – that the problem of democracy is, as he puts it, "primarily and essentially an intellectual

problem" (314) – accounts for the rather frustrating and elusive character of his argument. After all, by suggesting that the challenges of modern democracy are challenges that the public not only must but will solve for itself once it has grasped the nature of the problem, Dewey sidesteps the question that people have often turned to his book to answer: the question of whether these challenges *can* be met under modern conditions, and if so how. Given that a number of his contemporaries were offering powerful arguments to the effect that democracy in the modern age cannot reasonably hope to be anything more than the rule of an elite checked by the periodic votes of a largely apathetic and ignorant citizenry – or, worse still, an endless struggle for power between the many and the few – we might be forgiven for expecting a more specific program of action from such an uncompromising defender of a more inclusive and far-reaching democratic ideal.

The problem that is posed by *The Public and Its Problems*, then, is how Dewey can portray himself as a concrete and practical thinker and yet fail to provide any concrete or practical answers to the questions that he raises. I believe that the solution to this puzzle lies in the fact that, as I pointed out at the beginning, Dewey had two different aims in writing *The Public and Its Problems*: first, to say something about the nature of political inquiry, and second, to say something about the promise of democracy under modern conditions. As we will see, the premises that he relies upon in pursuing the first line of argument limit the conclusions that he is able to draw in pursuing the second. In the next section of this essay, then, I will explore the philosophical roots of Dewey's approach to political inquiry, and in the final section I will show how two of Dewey's contemporaries – the journalist Walter Lippmann and the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr – drew on similar premises to reach very different political conclusions. By paying attention to the hypothesis on which Dewey's defense of democracy is built, and to some of the ways in which that hypothesis might be called into question, we will be better able to determine whether and to what extent his analysis can help us in thinking through the challenges facing democrats today – challenges that are, after all, similar in many respects to the ones that he identified nearly a century ago.

2. Experimentalism and Democracy

Dewey's philosophical writings, like the modern philosophical tradition more generally speaking, center around the question of whether and how human beings can be said to have reliable knowledge about the world.[4] Traditionally this question has been answered in one of two basic ways. On the one hand are the empiricists, who argue that all knowledge is based on experience – or more precisely, on the input of our sensory organs – and that our ideas are somehow built out of the impressions that this sensory data makes on our mind, which is conceived, in John Locke's famous metaphor, as a blank slate. On the other hand are the idealists, who argue that the only reliable knowledge that we have

concerns the state of our own minds, and that our knowledge of reality is somehow derived from our knowledge of these mental states: a view that is famously expressed in René Descartes' claim that the one thing we can know for certain is that we are thinking, and thus that we exist. Each of these lines of argument raises its own characteristic difficulties: the empiricists have trouble explaining how our various sense-impressions, each of which is unique and unreliable taken in itself, can be made to add up to a coherent and accurate picture of the world, and the idealists have trouble explaining how a mind that knows only itself can be sure that it has genuine experiences of the outside world at all. Both positions, then, invite a kind of skepticism about the possibility of "real" knowledge.

Dewey argues that this debate is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what knowledge is. In particular, he points out that empiricists and idealists share an allegiance to what he calls the "spectator notion of knowledge"[5]; that is, they begin by assuming that the aim of knowing is to ensure that our ideas copy reality, and then immediately get bogged down in the unanswerable question of how we can be sure that they have done so in any given case. Dewey argues instead that we should think of knowledge in pragmatic terms: the aim of knowing is not to *copy* the world but rather to *use* it for various purposes.[6] For example, the question of whether I know what a car is cannot be answered in the abstract, as if I could somehow know that my perception of the car represents it as it "really" is. The answer to this question depends instead on what I am trying to use the car to do: I might want to know, for example, whether I can afford to buy a particular car, or why it will not start, or whether it has enough gas to get to where I am going. The test of whether I have reliable knowledge in each of these cases is simply whether or not I am able to *use* that knowledge to achieve my goals, whatever they might happen to be.

By turning our attention to the question of why we want knowledge in the first place, Dewey hopes to establish that the question of whether we have adequate or reliable knowledge only arises in those specific cases when we are uncertain about what we should do. As long as I am driving the car smoothly to my destination, the question of whether I know what I am doing simply will not arise for me – indeed, I may not be conscious of what I am doing at all. However, if I try to start the car and find that my key will not turn in the ignition, or if I start the car and it lurches and dies, or if I start driving and find that traffic is going in the "wrong" direction, then the adequacy of my existing knowledge will be called into question, and in order to go on I will have to learn something new about the situation that I am in (rather quickly, in the last case!). In particular, I will have to come up with a theory that explains why the problematic situation that I am facing has arisen and suggests how it might be solved, and I will then have to act in such a way that this theory can be tested in practice. Maybe I could not turn the key because I was using the wrong one, or maybe this is not my car. Maybe the car lurched and died because I forgot to

engage the clutch, or maybe something is wrong with the engine. Maybe this is a one-way street, or maybe people drive on the opposite side of the road in this country. Again, these are all theories whose validity can be tested in practice, and as soon as I hit upon a theory that succeeds in removing my practical doubts then the problem of whether I have genuine knowledge will no longer arise for me: I will be able to go on driving without thinking about it.

The question for Dewey, then, is not how we can be said to have reliable knowledge at all – how we can know that we know – but rather how we can acquire *better* knowledge in those specific cases when our existing knowledge proves to be inadequate in some way. He argues that the most systematic and reliable means of doing this is found in the experimental methods of modern science, which have brought the practice of articulating theories and testing them in practice to such a high degree of sophistication, and have expanded our ability to predict and control empirical phenomena to such an extent, that the world has been transformed almost beyond recognition in just a few hundred years. Of course, Dewey is hardly alone among modern thinkers in praising science as a means of acquiring reliable knowledge about the world. His more distinctive claim – which is also one of the central claims of *The Public and Its Problems* – is that while the rise of modern science has revolutionized our understanding of the material world, our approach to moral questions remains mired in traditional, pre-scientific ways of thinking. According to Dewey we will have to learn to take an experimental approach to these kinds of questions if we are going to respond intelligently to the challenges that we face in the modern world.

What, then, does it mean to take an "experimental" approach to morality?[7] In order to understand Dewey's position on this question we have to return again to the idea of the problematic situation. For Dewey all judgments, both factual and moral, involve hypothetical claims about the future, in the sense that they are based on predictions that if we act in a certain way then our purposes will be achieved. We have already seen how this experimental method can be applied to everyday questions of fact: *if* I use this key, *then* the car will start; *if* I engage the clutch, *then* it will not lurch and die; *if* I drive on the opposite side of the road, *then* I will not be going against the flow of traffic, and so on. The test of whether these judgments are correct or not is simply whether they lead to the expected consequences when I act upon them; that is to say, whether they serve the practical purposes for which they were made. Dewey goes on to observe, however, that factual questions only appear as questions in the first place because we bring certain purposes to experience. It follows that by treating a particular situation as problematic I am in fact making a series of value judgments: that it is *important* that I get to a particular destination; that driving a car is the *best* available means for me to do so; that it is therefore *worthwhile* for me to do what is necessary to get the car running properly, and so on.

We have to make value judgments because we often want different and incompatible things at the same time: I want to get from one place to another – say, from my house to the grocery store – but I also want to take a nap, finish the book that I am reading, and go out to see a movie. I want to drive my car, but I also want to save money, reduce pollution, and get more exercise. We therefore have to distinguish between the things that we *value* – all of the things that we happen to want, for whatever reason – and our value *judgments* – our decisions about which of these things we should actually pursue all things considered. Dewey argues that judgments of value are like judgments of fact in the sense that they both involve predictions about the future: "all moral judgments," he argues, "are about changes to be made," and "the right, the true and good, difference is that which carries out satisfactorily the specific purpose for the sake of which knowing occurs."[8] In other words, when faced with uncertainty about which goods we should pursue, we try to anticipate which course of action will best help us to realize our purposes overall, and then act in such a way that this theory can be tested in practice. Of course, we do not and cannot consider *all* of the courses of action that are available to us; instead, we draw on various habits of behavior which not only guide us in making the choices that we have to make, but also ensure that some courses of action do not appear to us as choices at all. If I am trying to get from one place to another then I may have to decide whether to drive or ride a bicycle, but I will probably not seriously consider stealing a car. If someone cuts me off on the road then I may have to decide whether and how to show my anger, but I probably will not seriously consider doing them physical harm. These moral habits, Dewey argues, are no less the product of experience and education than the analogous habits of behavior that I draw upon in operating the car itself: both help me to realize my goals smoothly, and I will be unlikely to question or change them, or even to be aware of them at all, as long as they continue to serve this function.

Needless to say, the practical success or failure of our habits depends in large part on the beliefs and expectations that other people bring to social life. In our society most people believe that theft and physical violence are, with the possible exception of cases of self-defense or self-preservation, not acceptable ways of solving problems. It follows that if I choose to act in these ways I will place myself in a less cooperative relationship with society as a whole than if I had acted otherwise. To be sure, I may find myself part of another community – such as the "robber band" that Dewey imagines in *The Public and Its Problems* – and this community may provide me with some of the benefits of social cooperation that law-abiding society now denies me. Nevertheless, if I live in a generally law-abiding society then it is safe to say that the social resources that are available to me as a law-abiding citizen will be greater than those that are available to me as an outlaw. As Dewey puts it, "the robber band cannot act flexibly with other groups; it can act only by isolating itself," whereas "a good citizen finds his conduct as a member of a political group enriching and enriched by his participation in family life, industry, scientific, and artistic associations"

(328). To state the point in general terms, if my ability to flourish as a human being depends on the fact that I am a member in good standing of *some* larger community – and Dewey emphasizes that if it were not for the benefits of social cooperation then human beings would be little better than brutes (300) – then it follows that the *extent* to which I am able to flourish will depend on the nature and extent of the community to which I actually belong.

Of course, Dewey does not simply offer a defense of social conformity. If it is true that individuals have an interest in following the norms and practices of the larger community to which they belong, it is also true that the community has an interest in seeing that its members develop to their full potential so that they can contribute as much as possible to the good of the whole, and that in order to achieve this end existing norms and practices will sometimes have to be changed. Thus "[f]rom the standpoint of the individual" democratic citizenship "consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. "From the standpoint of the groups," by contrast, the aim is to achieve the "liberation of the potentialities of members ... in harmony with the interests and goods which are common" (328). Dewey concludes that we should not think of moral inquiry as the search for a complete and infallible code of conduct that will tell us how to act once and for all, any more than we should think of empirical inquiry as the search for a complete and infallible picture of the world as it "really" is. Rather, our existing moral beliefs and habits are the product of our past efforts to choose between conflicting values, and we should be willing to change those beliefs and habits in light of what we learn from making new choices. Indeed, this is Dewey's definition of freedom: "that power of varied and flexible growth, of change of disposition and character, that springs from intelligent choice."[9]

To take an "experimental" approach to morality is to take into account the potentially radical implications of this line of argument. On the one hand, we have the moral beliefs and habits that we have by virtue of the fact that we live in and were educated by a certain kind of community; indeed, Dewey holds that "social arrangements, laws, institutions ... are not means for obtaining something for individuals, not even happiness. They are means of *creating* individuals."[10] On the other hand, by making moral choices in the present we cultivate new beliefs and habits, and thus make our community into a different – and, we hope, a better – kind of community over time. This raises the question of whether there are any overarching moral principles that might guide us in making these kinds of choices. Here Dewey argues that the ultimate end of moral behavior is individual growth, which he defines as the capacity to have ever richer and more meaningful experiences: indeed, he goes so far as to argue that growth so understood is "the *only* moral end,"[11] and that the proper aim of moral inquiry is to identify the social conditions under which this kind of growth is possible. This commitment to individual growth leads Dewey to make two related claims about the proper aims of social and political life, each of which is

fundamental to the argument of *The Public and Its Problems*. The first is that we should promote forms of social organization that allow for the greatest range and variety of voluntary associations, on the grounds that this kind of pluralism will leave room for the cultivation of the greatest range and variety of social goods. The second claim is that we should promote those forms of social organization that allow for the greatest range and variety of contacts *between* people of differing beliefs and ways of life, on the grounds that it is precisely these kinds of contacts that stimulate us to grow as individuals.[12] For Dewey, this commitment to pluralism and communication is nothing more or less than a commitment to democracy itself, and so he draws the striking conclusion that "democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life," but is instead "the idea of community life itself ... carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected" (328).

3. The Public as a Problem

We have seen that the argument of *The Public and Its Problems* is built on the claim that the state does not have any essential nature or purpose; it is just the name that we give to whatever institution is charged in a given society with looking out for the interests of the third parties – the "publics," in Dewey's terms – who are adversely affected by the indirect consequences of social behavior. We have also seen that Dewey's analysis turns on the fact that he moves from the idea of *a* public as *any* group that is so affected to the "hypothesis" that there is such a thing as *the* public which represents the genuinely inclusive interest. Dewey uses this "hypothesis" to argue that once the public in this more specific sense becomes aware of itself and its unifying interests it will discover and create the necessary means for pursuing them, so that the "Great Society" becomes a "Great Community."[13] He concludes that the challenge of democratic politics under modern conditions is not to design political institutions that make it possible for the state to adjudicate between the various "publics" that exist in a given polity, but rather to design instruments of communication that make it possible for *the* public to become aware of its unifying role and of the obstacles that stand in the way of its realization. This is what it means to say that the problem of democracy is "primarily and essentially an intellectual problem" (314).

We can now see that Dewey's "hypothesis" about the inclusive nature of the public has its roots in a theory of inquiry which aims to show that it is both possible and desirable to bring the same experimental methods to the study of human values that have proven to be so successful in the study of the material world. He begins with the observation that we conduct inquiry in the first place because our goals have been frustrated in some way, and that we have goals simply because we value certain things that we do not already have. Because our values conflict with one another, it follows that moral questions – questions about which values we *should* pursue – have a central role to play in empirical

inquiry. Because the question of which values we should pursue depends in large part on what kind of community we belong to, and because we can make our community into a different kind of community by pursuing certain values rather than others, it follows that political questions – questions about what kind of community we *should* make for ourselves – have a central role to play in moral inquiry.

The defense of democracy that we find in *The Public and Its Problems* is built, then, on the claim that a direct analogy can be drawn between the problem of harmonizing our conflicting values in such a way that we can best grow and flourish as individuals, and the problem of designing a "Great Community" in which all people are able to grow and flourish in this way. To be sure, Dewey is not a blindly utopian thinker; he is careful to emphasize that "democracy in this sense is not a fact and never will be" (328). Nevertheless, he insists that the idea of the "Great Community" – the idea of reconciling the apparently conflicting interests of the various "publics" that exist in a given political community – is one that is both coherent and worth pursuing, and it is with this claim that any criticism of his position can most fruitfully begin.

There are a number of ways in which such criticism might be carried out. Most obviously, we might deny that moral and political norms can or should be treated "experimentally" in the way that Dewey suggests: we might argue, for example, that there are certain principles, such as the sanctity of private property or the principle of one person, one vote, that we are bound to respect regardless of what any particular person or group may happen to think, and regardless of the consequences that may be thought to follow from adhering to them. The burden would then be on us to show why these principles, whatever they might happen to be, should be insulated from criticism in this way. However, it is possible to raise questions about Dewey's defense of democracy even if we accept his flexible and forward-looking approach to moral and political inquiry, and I will focus here on two such lines of argument, each of which was offered by one of Dewey's distinguished contemporaries and interlocutors. The first, which was advanced by the progressive journalist Walter Lippmann, accepts Dewey's claim that there is such a thing as "the" public interest with which public policy ought to square, but denies that the public itself is in a good position to discern what this interest is and how it should be pursued. The second line of argument, which was defended by the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, holds that Dewey is wrong to suggest that the various groups in a given society can be expected to recognize and pursue a common set of interests at all. If Lippmann argues that the public is inherently irrational, Niebuhr holds that it is inherently plural and conflictual, and that democratic ends therefore cannot be achieved through the mere dissemination of intelligence but only by the direct exercise of power – and perhaps of violent power – on the part of the excluded or oppressed.

Lippmann was the author of nearly two dozen books on public affairs, most notable among them the seminal *Public Opinion* (1922), which Dewey

praised as being "perhaps the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived ever penned."[14] He was becoming increasingly conservative over the course of the 1920's, and became still more so in his later career. However, during the 1910's and early 1920's he was regarded as one of the most brilliant and promising progressive thinkers of his generation, and thought of himself as an adherent of the experimental approach to political life of which Dewey was the leading proponent. Dewey calls attention to the similarity in their positions at the end of his review of *The Phantom Public* (1925) – Lippmann's "sequel" to *Public Opinion* – pointing out that "Mr. Lippmann makes effective and penetrating use of the pluralistic tendencies of contemporary thought, including the theory that intelligence operates not of its own momentum but to adjust conflicts and resolve specific difficulties," and crediting this approach with giving "his book a reach and force which distinguish it from almost all other contemporary writing in the field of affairs."[15] Dewey similarly acknowledges his "indebtedness" to Lippmann's work in *The Public and Its Problems* (308n), and there can be little doubt that the latter book was intended at least in part as a response to the pessimistic assessment of the prospects of modern democracy that Lippmann had set forth.[16]

Despite its title, *Public Opinion* has very little to say about the actual views that citizens hold about public affairs. In fact, its central claim is that the average person holds few if any stable and coherent opinions about public affairs which it would be worthwhile for social scientists to study or for political leaders to take into account. Lippmann is not interested in public opinion itself, but rather, like Dewey, in the broader question of whether and how democratic government might be possible under modern conditions. In particular, he calls into question what he sees as the central assumption of the democratic tradition: the claim that citizens have clear views about public affairs, and that they can use these views to evaluate the behavior of their leaders, hold them accountable for their actions, and thereby guide the polity toward the common good. Once we come to terms with the incomplete and fragmentary nature of what is called public opinion, Lippmann argues, then we have to drop this idealized story about how democracy works and go about designing political institutions that make it possible for the ordinary citizen to play a responsible, though necessarily limited, role in the formation of public policy. He concludes that "the common interests very largely elude public opinion entirely, and can be managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality. This class is irresponsible" – that is to say, unaccountable – "for it acts upon information that is not common property, in situations that the public at large does not conceive, and it can be held to account only on the accomplished fact."[17]

For all of his skepticism about democracy "as currently conceived," Lippmann nevertheless shares Dewey's view that the aim of democratic government should be to pursue the "common interests" of the public. He differs from Dewey in his assessment of whether the public can be expected to form a

coherent view of what these interests actually are, still less to act intelligently on the basis of such a view. He is therefore less concerned than Dewey is with creating the conditions under which an informed public could become politically active, and more concerned with ensuring that the "specialized class" of "responsible administrators" has the latitude and the resources that it needs to do its job with "the least possible interference from ignorant and meddlesome outsiders."[18] In *Public Opinion* he proposes that an "intelligence section" be created within existing governmental bureaucracies: a team of statisticians, accountants, auditors, and other technocrats who are responsible for providing public officials with reliable information on the basis of which they can act, as well as an independent means of judging the efficacy of their actions.[19]

In *The Phantom Public* Lippmann retreats even from this relatively modest proposal, arguing that "there is only one common interest: that all special interests shall act according to [a] settled rule," and that "the public should not ask *what* rule because it cannot answer the question." The aim of democratic government, he now suggests, should be to prevent the public from disrupting the existing political equilibrium, and this means that there must be an established set of procedures in place for handling political disputes, and a clear set of criteria for determining when those procedures have been violated. Only in such cases should the public be allowed to intervene, and even then it should enter into the substance of the dispute only as far as is necessary to ensure that it is resolved in an orderly way. In any large and complex society, Lippmann concludes, "it is idle ... to talk about democracy, or about the refinement of public opinion," because "the public can do little more than at intervals to align itself heavily for or against the régime in power, and for the rest to bear with its works, obeying meekly or evading, as seems most convenient."[20]

By restricting his conception of the common interest in such a way that it does not refer to any substantive end that the polity might pursue, but only to the maintenance of order and stability, Lippmann raises the question of why those who do not benefit under the existing rules – or who benefit less than they might – should associate their own interests with the preservation of the status quo. In other words, if we no longer believe, as Dewey and the Lippmann of *Public Opinion* do, that the aim of democracy is to identify and pursue a good that all citizens can be expected to value in common, then why should we not conclude that democracy is just a mechanism for adjudicating between the competing interests that exist in a given society, and that democratic politics is therefore nothing more than a struggle for power – a struggle that might, if the stakes are high enough, be carried out by less peaceful means? Lippmann, with his increasingly conservative outlook and his strong commitment to and the rule of law, does not directly consider this possibility even in *The Phantom Public*, and he was soon to turn his attention, in *A Preface to Morals* (1929) and subsequent works, toward the search for transcendent moral principles that could provide a firmer grounding for political order under modern conditions.

Others, however, were quicker to grasp the potentially revolutionary implications of this new model of democratic politics. Among the most prominent proponents of this point of view in the period following the publication of *The Public and Its Problems* was the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr made his name as a defender of a "neo-orthodox" brand of Christianity which placed an emphasis on the "fallenness," the inherent corruption and wickedness, of human nature. He argues that the utopian desire, found among many thinkers and activists on the political left, to "perfect" human society is a symptom of human pride, and is therefore bound not only to fail, but to breed cynicism and despair, or else frustration and a fanatical tendency toward repression, in those who try to put it into practice. He calls instead for a commitment to social justice that is tempered by a sober assessment of the extent to which human beings are inherently imperfect and immoral, especially insofar as they act as members of larger groups.[21]

Niebuhr's "Christian realism" offers a more radical dissent from Dewey's defense of democracy than Lippmann's democratic elitism, rejecting as it does the very possibility that there might be an inclusive public interest for democratic polities to pursue even at the level of rules and procedures. And unlike Lippmann, Niebuhr called attention to his differences with Dewey and offered sharp criticisms of the older thinker, first in the introduction to his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932) and then in a series of essays that were published over the course of the 1930s. Striking at the very heart of Dewey's position, Niebuhr argues that "the most persistent error of modern educators and moralists" – he names Dewey as the foremost example – "is the assumption that our social difficulties are due to the failure of the social sciences to keep pace with the physical sciences which have created our technological civilization": the assumption, that is, that our present state of confusion and conflict results from a failure to take a properly "experimental" approach to moral and political inquiry. This error leads these thinkers to draw what he regards as the equally erroneous conclusion that "with a little more time, a little more adequate moral and social pedagogy and a generally higher level of human intelligence, our social problems will approach solution."[22]

Niebuhr's rejection of Dewey's conception of democracy was not motivated by a general hostility either toward Dewey's progressive political commitments or toward the idea of applying experimental methods of inquiry to political problems. Rather, he argues that Dewey's approach to political problems "fails to take account of an important difference between the physical and the social sciences," namely, that "the physical sciences gained their freedom when they overcame the traditionalism based on ignorance, but the traditionalism which the social sciences face is based upon the economic interest of the dominant social classes who are trying to maintain their special privileges in society." "Complete rational objectivity in a social situation is impossible," he argues, because "reason is always, to some degree, the servant of interest in a social situation." He concludes that the problem of democracy is not only or

even primarily an "intellectual problem," as Dewey suggests; rather, in political life "conflict is inevitable, and in this conflict power must be challenged by power." To hold otherwise is to become the victim of a naïve – and, Niebuhr suggests, characteristically middle-class – faith in the power of reason to effect social change.[23]

How, then, does Dewey respond to these distinct and powerful lines of criticism? Insofar as *The Public and Its Problems* can be read as a response to Lippmann, the response hinges on the claim that the development of the capacities of each individual depends upon, and is indeed a function of, the existence of a genuinely inclusive community; one in which the widest variety of social groups are allowed to flourish and interact with one another. It is on the basis of this assumption that Dewey is able to argue that the intelligence of the ruling class is a function of the extent to which *all* citizens have been integrated into the life of the political community, and that it is therefore a mistake to think that social problems can be solved by the kind of benign elite that Lippmann envisions in *Public Opinion*: "in the absence of an articulate voice on the part of the masses," he argues, "the best do not and cannot remain the best, the wise cease to be wise" (364). If we accept this line of argument, then it follows from Lippmann's own premises that we should not try to insulate the public from direct participation in public affairs, but rather take whatever steps might be necessary to see that it is effectively integrated into the political life of the community.

Dewey's response to Niebuhr, which is confined to two short essays, is carried out on a much smaller scale, and is striking, giving the fundamental and somewhat intemperate nature of Niebuhr's criticisms, for its rather cautious and concessionary tone. Dewey begins by admitting that "those who contend that intelligence is capable of exercising a significant role in social affairs ... can readily be made to appear ridiculous," and that past experience has shown that in moments of social and political crisis "the influence of intelligence is negligible." His own position rests, he says, on the hope that the future could be different: "even if it be an illusion," he argues, "exaltation of intelligence and experimental method is worth a trial. Illusion for illusion, this particular one may be better than those upon which humanity has usually depended." The only alternatives, he suggests, are "dogmatism, reinforced by the weight of unquestioned custom and tradition, the disguised or open play of class interests, [or] dependence upon brute force and violence."[24]

We have seen that Dewey's theory of inquiry requires that when we are faced with a problem of any kind we articulate various possible courses of action and then go about testing them in practice, with an eye toward achieving the most coherent and fruitful harmonization of our conflicting values that we can. What is striking about his responses to Lippmann and Niebuhr when we read them with this theoretical background in mind is the extent to which, like the argument of *The Public and Its Problems* itself, they depend on "hypothetical" claims about a future that we might realize in common if we act

in a certain way in the present. It is certainly possible to imagine, as Lippmann does, a society in which the well-being of the public depends on the enlightened rule of an elite that possesses superior wisdom and experience, and to imagine, as Niebuhr does, a society in which the flourishing of an excluded and oppressed public requires that the dominant social class compromise or give up its own distinctive mode of flourishing. And it is certainly possible, as Dewey admits, that this is all that we can reasonably hope for given the constraints of human nature and of the social world that we have made for ourselves. In other words, Dewey's experimental approach to moral and political inquiry is compatible in principle with forms of elitism, exclusion, and conflict that fall far short of the ideal democratic community that he envisions. The distinctively democratic character of his analysis does not arise from his experimentalism taken in itself, but rather from the hypotheses – or, as he strikingly puts it, the "illusions" – on which his own democratic experiment is built.

We are brought back, then, to the fact that Dewey had two aims in writing *The Public and Its Problems*: first, to articulate a critical methodology for the study of politics, and second, to articulate a democratic ideal that is suitable for the modern world. As I pointed out at the beginning of this essay, the idea of the "public" plays a central role in both of these lines of inquiry, but is used in a different sense in each of them. We are now in a better position to see how the two lines of inquiry fit together. With respect to the study of politics a public is simply any group that finds itself confronted with a specific political problem; that is to say, a problem having to do with the coordination of social behavior and the provision of social goods. Dewey, Lippmann, and Niebuhr belong to a "public" in this broad sense, insofar as they share a common perception that the principles and aims of democracy have to be fundamentally rethought in order to meet the challenges of modern social life. By Dewey's own account, however, there is nothing that determines in advance where a given line of inquiry, political or otherwise, is going to lead: this is something that can only be worked out over time as we test various courses of action in practice. We might endorse Dewey's hypothesis that the problems of democracy would best be solved by expanding and deepening the associational ties that bind our political community together, but we might also hold, with Lippmann, that the problem would best be solved by turning the responsibilities of democratic governance over to a class of experts, or, with Niebuhr, that we should face up to the inherently conflictual nature of political life and cast our lot with the class or group that seems to us to have justice on its side.

If we frame the question in these terms then we should be less puzzled by the fact that Dewey does not provide any conclusive arguments in favor of his own democratic ideal. His aim was both more modest and more far-reaching: to persuade his contemporaries – or at least those among them who belonged to his own democratic "public" – that his democratic ideal was worth pursuing; that "his" public could, under the right circumstances, become "the" public. In other words, *The Public and Its Problems* should be read, as Dewey put it in a notable

essay on his own philosophical method, as an appeal to "a desired future which our desires, when translated into articulate conviction, may help bring into existence."[25] The proper measure of his achievement, then, is the extent to which his book speaks as profoundly to the inarticulate desires and convictions of our time as it did to his own.

NOTES

1. In a long footnote Dewey argues that "while modernity is a property of those *structures* which go by the name of states, yet all history, or almost all, records the exercise of analogous *functions*": *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981–1991), vol. 3, p. 276n (original emphasis). All internal page references are to this edition of Dewey's text.

2. For an argument that Dewey's political thought more generally is essentially Hegelian in character see chapter 5 of my *Reconstructing Public Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004). For a more detailed account see part one of Steven C. Rockefeller's *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), as well as chapter 2 of R. W. Sleeper's *The Necessity of Pragmatism: John Dewey's Conception of Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

3. Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).

4. On Dewey's theory of knowledge and inquiry see especially the essays "Does Reality Possess Practical Character?" (1908), in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–1983), vol. 4, pp. 125–142 and "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" (1917), *Middle Works*, vol. 10, pp. 3–48, as well as the books *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Middle Works*, vol. 14 and, for the most extended and technical statement, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *Later Works*, vol. 12.

5. This expression is used in "Need for a Recovery," p. 41.

6. Dewey aptly summarizes the syncretic aims of this line of argument by saying that "the time has arrived for a pragmatism which shall be empirically idealistic": ibid., p. 21.

7. On Dewey's moral and ethical theory see especially the essay "The Logic of Judgments of Practice" (1915), *Middle Works*, vol. 8, pp. 14–82, and chapter 10, entitled "Existence, Value, and Criticism," of *Experience and Nature* (1925), *Later Works*, vol. 1, as well as part 2 of his *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (1932, co-authored with J. H. Tufts), *Later Works*, vol. 7, and the *Theory of Valuation* (1939), *Later Works*, vol. 13, pp. 189–251.

8. Dewey, "Does Reality Possess Practical Character?", pp. 132, 134.

9. Dewey, "Philosophies of Freedom" (1928), *Later Works*, vol. 3, p. 111.

10. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Middle Works*, vol. 12, p. 191 (original emphasis).

11. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 181 (emphasis added).

12. See for example Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Middle Works*, vol. 9, pp. 92–93, and *Ethics*, pp. 302–303. For a useful analysis of Dewey's political thought that focuses on the relationship between social pluralism and individual growth see Alfonso J. Damico, *Individuality and Community: The Social and Political Thought of John Dewey* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978) and, more recently,

Axel Honneth, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today," trans. John M. M. Farrell, *Political Theory* 26 (1998), pp. 763–783.

13. Dewey borrows the term "the Great Society" from Graham Wallas' book of that name (New York: Macmillan, 1914), and the term "the Great Community" from Josiah Royce's book *The Hope of the Great Community* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

14. Dewey, review of *Public Opinion* (1922), *Middle Works*, vol. 13, p. 337.

15. Dewey, "Practical Democracy" (1925), *Later Works*, vol. 2, p. 220.

16. I discuss the relationship between Lippmann's and Dewey's pragmatic theories of democracy in more detail in my "Experience as Experiment: Some Consequences of Pragmatism for Democratic Theory," *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (1999), pp. 542–565.

17. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1997 [1922]), p. 195.

18. Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993 [1925]), pp. 188–189.

19. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, part 8 *passim*.

20. Lippmann, *Phantom Public*, pp. 96, 174–175 (emphasis added).

21. Niebuhr's pessimistic view of human nature is most thoroughly laid out in his *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941/1943). For a recent defense of the claim that the aims of democratic theory should be "chastened" in this way see Patrick J. Deneen, *Democratic Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), which offers a critique of Dewey's conception of democracy, and a defense of Niebuhr's, in chapters 6 and 9, respectively.

22. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1932), p. xiii.

23. *Ibid*., pp. xiv–xv.

24. Dewey, "Intelligence and Power" (1934), *Later Works*, vol. 9, p. 108. Dewey criticizes Niebuhr's political program more directly in his "Unity and Progress" (1933), *ibid*., pp. 71–75.

25. Dewey, "Philosophy and Democracy" (1919), *Middle Works*, vol. 11, p. 44.

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Participation through Publics: Did Dewey answer Lippmann?

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John Dewey's *Public and its Problems* provides his fullest account of democracy under the emerging conditions of complex, modern societies. While responding to Lippmann's criticisms of democracy as self-rule, Dewey acknowledges the truth of many of the social scientific criticisms of democracy, while he defends democracy by reconstructing it. Dewey seeks a new public in a "Great Community" based on more face-to-face communication about nonlocal issues. Yet Dewey fails to consistently apply his own reconstructive argument, retreating to a communal basis for democracy. I offer an extension of Dewey's argument in this direction in which "publics" and not "the public" offer the best basis for reconstructing democracy.

A common interpretation of *The Public and its Problems* is that Dewey sought to defend democracy from its many social scientific and psychological detractors, including Walter Lippmann. He does so not by weakening the democratic ideal to fit contemporary circumstances in the manner of Robert Dahl's "pluralist" conception of democracy. Rather, he seeks to strengthen it, so that democracy is once again a participatory ideal and an ethos that applies to all modern associations and institutions rather than "mere majority rule." This motivation can be stated in Jane Addam's dictum – perhaps the statement of the democratic faith common to the Progressive Era – that "the only cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy." But as Dewey takes up Addams' "common faith," he immediately introduces several qualifications that are particularly important in the context of thinking about skepticism about the fate of democracy. Democratic institutions cannot improve simply by "introducing more machinery of the same kind as that which already exists" (325) (Citations are to *The Public and Its Problems*, vol. 2 of *The Later Works of John Dewey*, 1982.) Just how we arrive at new frameworks and machinery indicates the need for philosophical work to free democratic theory from the conceptual straight-jackets of its current historical exemplars. The goal, as Dewey puts it, is "to criticize and remake its political manifestations" (325). Thus, Dewey does not defend the majoritarian form of democracy that these critics so vehemently

attacked, so much as argue that democracy at this particular juncture was undergoing a fundamental transformation.

Decades before the writing of *The Public and its Problems,* Dewey had already noted in "The Ethics of Democracy," that even as democracy "has never had such an actual hold on life as at present," its defenders "have never been so apologetic, and its detractors so aggressive and pessimistic."[1] Putting its critics in the service of democratic renewal, Dewey even gave a surprisingly mild and affirmative review of *The Phantom Public* as well as his acknowledgement in a footnote of his indebtedness to Lippmann, "for ideas involved in my entire discussion, even when it reaches conclusions diverging from his" (308). Lippmann's claims were "in need of further analysis." In this essay, I want to assess Dewey's complex strategy of acknowledging the truth of many of the criticisms of democracy while at the same time defending democracy by reconstructing it.

Dewey's reconstruction of the democratic ideal can be assessed in three steps. First, I argue that Dewey's basic argument involves redefining publics as the basic units of democracy in place of an amorphous "people." The main advantage of this account is that it transforms the unitary "people" with its metaphysical baggage of sovereignty into multiple publics in which citizens have opportunities to participate indirectly in virtue of being affected by decisions. Among the advantages of this approach is that expertise and the division of labor are imported into democracy itself rather than replacing it from the outside. Second, I consider Dewey's rather curious silence about the social psychology of democratic skepticism. Rather than leaving such problems of democracy unanswered, Dewey had the resources in his view of social science and moral psychology to supply strong empirical evidence for popular participation through publics. However, his main strategy is to consider the problem with the public not as a matter of its capacity for rationality, but in the new circumstances of the Great Society, governed by immense and impersonal forces. Finally, I turn to Dewey's rather puzzling claims that the emergence of a "Great Community" based on the revival of face-to-face communication as the only means to remove the biggest obstacles for realizing democracy through publics. The difficulty here is that Dewey fails to consistently apply his own reconstructive argument and instead retreats to a communal basis for democracy that does not exploit the new social circumstances that give rise to skepticism about democracy to begin with.

1. Democracy through Publics: Epistemic and Political

Lippmann and critics of democracy saw rule by experts as replacing rule by the people. It is then puzzling that in *The Public and its Problems* Dewey seems to valorize expert knowledge in arguing that many issues of governance are "technical matters" to be settled by "inquiry into facts" that "can be carried out only by those especially equipped" (313). Such knowledge cannot be demanded

of citizens, who are after all only laypersons and hence lack skills and authority needed to carry out such inquiry and are thus epistemically dependent on experts. Moreover, "the very size, heterogeneity, and mobility of urban populations" make them unlikely to be able to form themselves into the subjects of democratic legislation (320–321). The view of democracy that falls prey to such criticism is merely "political democracy," democracy as it is realized in formal institutions with representation and voting as the basic mechanisms of the expression of public opinion. In *Liberalism and Social Action*, Dewey criticizes aggregative practices of democracy, such as voting and majority rule, for presupposing that intelligence is merely individual in origin and function. Such practices distort deliberation "with their complete ignoring of occupational groups and the organized knowledge and purposes that are involved in the existence of such groups, manifests a dependence upon a summation of individuals quantitatively..."[2] Indeed, simply initiating debate and deliberation is not enough, since "unorganized discussion," no matter how free and open, alone may only generate the clash of opinion; nor will simply introducing public debate and discussion within individualist methods be sufficient to overcome the crisis of democracy.

The alternative is to think of democracy not merely as a procedure, but as form of inquiry, starting from the long-standing successes of scientific practice as a socially organized and cooperative endeavor for achieving useful knowledge. Even with this notion of inquiry as the basis for democracy, Dewey rejects the idea that experts have special epistemic authority in decision making. In fact, the epistemic constraints on democratic inquiry make it inherently "unsettled and pluralistic" in ways that the physical sciences are not. Because social inquiry cannot avoid controversies about the "efficacy of different methods or procedures," experts cannot claim full epistemic authority. "The plurality of alternatives is the effective means for rendering inquiry more extensive (sufficient) and more flexible, more capable of taking cognizance of all the facts that are discovered."[3] This pluralism is precisely what makes social inquiry democratic and useful for problem solving. While the fact of complexity makes expertise unavoidable, even for cooperative and democratic forms of experimentation and inquiry, it is the public that engages in inquiry from many different points of view. The significance of the vote is precisely that it "compels prior recourse to methods of discussion, consultation, and persuasion" (325). While Dewey agrees that majority rule is "as foolish as its critics charge it to be," deliberation as a method can never be "merely majority rule" (365). Dewey devotes a whole chapter to "The Problem of Method," which shows the political and epistemic limits on expertise when there is a public that can emerge out of the complex division of labor. Even with the knowledge of the facts that experts provide, it is the public who must be able to judge the significance of such knowledge for matters of common concern, which is itself the product of debate, discussion and persuasion (351–374). In other words, the public does not, contrary to Lippmann, have to be made up of "omnicompetent individuals."

Rather, it has a specific task in the division of labor in democratic decision making, and that task of judgment at the level of the formulation of policies that are part of the experimental phase of inquiry cannot be the monopoly of scientists and experts.

How might the public perform this function? Recall Dewey's definition of a public. A public consists of "all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (245). Members of a public are then not the direct participants (who have full awareness of themselves as engaging in some collective enterprise), but those who are indirectly affected by "enduring" and "extensive" consequences of modern social and political arrangements that can be organized across expanses of space and time. Publics can form around political practices, say those of a state; or around other sorts of practices in which authoritative decisions are made with such indirect consequences. In order to show how Dewey's account of the democratic divisions of labor in modern societies is possible and even epistemically superior to rule by experts, two examples seem relevant: the public that formed around practices of testing experimental drugs during the first phases of the HIV epidemic; and second, the public that formed around attempts to stop deforestation in East Asia, including Nepal.

These examples show that the point of public deliberation is not to find the "right authoritative perspective" but to have all such perspectives interact and inform each other within the public and in that way open up deliberation, as it is currently constituted, to correction. Various experiments have been constructed to show how subjects find solutions to problems through novel information that is accessible only through the interaction across multiple and mutually correcting perspectives.[4] It could be argued that such correction occurred in the early days of the HIV epidemic when patients had no say about the regime for testing experimental drugs. From the perspective of patients, the highest possible standards of statistical significance in random controlled trials were simply unacceptable as a social policy. In deliberation that included the perspectives of patients (who also make up the pool of participants in tests and as such must restrict their use of other possible remedies), doctors, researchers, and policy makers, standards of validity were balanced with other values such as quicker availability of drugs, safety, and effectiveness. In a similar case, Bina Argarwal has studied the effects of the exclusion of the perspective of women from deliberation on Community Forestry groups in India and Nepal.[5] Because women had primary responsibility for wood gathering in their search for cooking fuel, they possessed greater knowledge of what sort of gathering was sustainable and about the location of trees that needed protection. Mixed groups of guards thus would be a much more effective method of enforcement and epistemically superior to any implementation that only employed one perspective.

In both cases, it becomes clear that the public, as those affected by indirect consequences, is inherently diverse, so that the difference between a public and a "mass" in Lippmann's sense is precisely that publics are made up of diverse citizens and groups with different perspectives. Indeed, the diversity of perspective is what provides the epistemic benefits of deliberation by publics which makes possible the recognition that there are common interests. Or as Dewey describes the benefits to judgment of the perspectives of the public: "The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker knows how the trouble is to be remedied" (364). Expertise of this sort is not manifested in the framing and executing of policy, where the experts know neither where "it pinches" nor the common interests around which the public has formed. Instead, the epistemic benefits of democracy derive from a practice of deliberation in which many different perspectives are brought to bear in an ongoing process of formulation, testing, and revision. If all citizens fully deliberate together, each from their own perspective, they do not attempt to occupy the role of Adam Smith's "impartial spectator," who formulates reasons through the eyes of some neutral third person.[6] Mill's great achievement is to argue for the epistemic benefits of deliberation among citizens, who participate in discussion without having to renounce their concrete identities, interests, and opinions. Policies formed by interaction among publics and experts could then be robust in two related senses: first, they should be formed so as to include a wide range of perspectives from within the public, and second, they should be tested and revised in ongoing public inquiry.

In this way, Dewey has the following response to Lippmann. The way to improve the method of deliberation by publics is not to ignore the division of epistemic and deliberative labor, but to use it properly. Expertise is one form of knowledge, a form of knowledge that is only one aspect of democratic modes of inquiry. Expert knowledge often fails to promote the common good because it is isolated from the public and thus does not have access to those perspectives which would inform a considered judgment about what that good is and how it can be brought about. Omnicompetent individuals are not the ideal participants in public deliberation for the following reason: if each of the members of a public had to know everything that the group as a whole knows, they would all then know *less* than the group as characterized by the division of labor between experts and the public. Experts themselves often cannot test the knowledge of other experts. The problem for complex societies is not that knowledge produces dependence; such dependence is pervasive. Rather the problem is that it produces deference. As Dewey was fond of pointing out, the average layperson knows more abut physics today than did Isaac Newton. For this reason, the asymmetries between experts and publics are not fatal to participatory democracy, so long as publics can form to test the indirect consequences of expert knowledge. Recent events have shown that the Federal Reserve, long thought to be entirely immune from public influence, suffers from errors of

judgments and biases about the indirect effects of its policies, regardless of their real or imagined expertise.

This argument provides a powerful alternative to Lippmann's claims for the efficacy of technocratic elites and exclusive deliberation among the "knowledgeable." In the next section, I turn to other ways in which this argument can be expanded, using Dewey's moral psychology that is implicitly at work in *The Public and its Problems* to provide a further antidote to skepticism about the public's capacity for judgment. Contemporary cognitive psychology reinforces Dewey's lessons about the epistemic value of pluralism and a program for strengthening public deliberation supported by empirical inquiry. What is needed (and available) is a progressive psychology of deliberation that improves democratic practices. Nonetheless, Dewey does not think that it solves "*the* problem of the public," even if it describes a solution to one of its problems. The problem goes deeper, to the very possibility of the formation of publics that has been presupposed in the argument against the sufficiency of expert knowledge for effective governance. The specific epistemic problem of the public is not related to expertise, but to self-knowledge. Before turning to this problem of the public, it would be useful to see why it is that plural public deliberation is epistemically superior to deliberation by experts alone. Dewey does not make this argument explicitly in *The Public and its Problems*, so here we must turn to his moral psychology.

2. How Dewey Could Have Answered Lippmann: Overcoming Social Psychological Skepticism about Democracy

Contrary to Lippmann and the other skeptics of the role of citizens in democracy, Dewey conceived of social science in general and moral psychology in particular as serving the end of democratic reform. Dewey could admit that modern conditions challenged the rational capacities of citizens to solve problems; that is why reform and new publics and new political forms are needed. The aim of reform-oriented social science was not merely to point out such failures, but to show how and under what circumstances citizens' capacities for judgment and deliberation would work well and even be improved. Dewey's social epistemology is fundamentally populist, in the sense that seeks to establish that for particular questions and under the right conditions ordinary citizens are as capable of making good judgments as experts and other elites, if not better. This means that the aim of his social science of human judgment is the improvement of this capacity for all citizens, to bring about such conditions in which these possibilities are realized and the limitations of human thought are overcome. Thus, the challenge that Dewey faced in the social psychology of Walter Lippmann and others is twofold. First, Lippmann and some contemporary social psychologists claim that the inherent tendency of human reasoning not only to be mistaken, but also so systematically mistaken that it undermines epistemic populism or epistemic egalitarianism. Second, if

tendencies to violate the classical ideal of rationality are universal and innate, then the practical hope of improving human judgment and of eliminating biases is chimerical. Although never put in directly political terms, such claims are commonplace among naturalized social psychology of human reasoning in the "biases and heuristics" research program.[7] For many practically oriented cognitive scientists today, Kahneman and Tversky are latter day Walter Lippmanns, presenting a fundamental challenge to any practice that assumes basic human rationality. Looking at contemporary approaches that attempt to improve human judgment rather than show its inherent defects, we get a good idea how Dewey could have answered Lippmann. This work fits well with Dewey's overall goals for social science and psychology, in which "increased knowledge of human nature would directly and in unpredictable ways modify the working of human nature, and lead to the need for new methods of regulation, and so on without end" (358).

Contrary to the assumption made many empirical approaches that human behavior is rational, Kahneman and Tversky see their results as challenging "the descriptive adequacy of rational models of judgment and decision-making."[8] This kind of research program required a particular methodological focus, "on errors and the role of judgment biases," often with regard to statistical and logical reasoning. While often cautious in their conclusions, Fischoff, Lee, and others point out that Kahneman and Tversky often are willing to overgeneralize their claims beyond the scope of their particular experiments, which others have argued often encourage the occurrence of errors in the subjects.[9] The important methodological counterattack to such experimental claims challenges the supposed ubiquity of biases on the basis of such purely experimental data; if they are not overgeneralized, then they are highly context specific and do not show an inherent or general irrationality. In a similar vein one could also inquire into "the conditions under which heuristics are valid."[10] In such cases, the experimenter engages in what Fischhoff calls, using an engineering metaphor, "destructive testing," to see if there are conditions under which "a bias fails" with "the result of improving cognition."[11] The alternative to this more practical approach is to argue that the only way to improve inductive inferences is by giving people "inferential guides" to formal reasoning so that they are able to apply theoretical understanding of statistics and probability to everyday life, as if we were all experts.[12] But this agent-centered research overlooks practical implications of those contexts and conditions that promote rational rather than irrational decision making. Thus, experimental cognitive psychology could take a Deweyean turn and attempt to promote and facilitate rational and nonbiased judgment, as well as show the ways in which judgments under less than perfect conditions can be "debiased" and improved. In contexts in which the bias fails to influence inferences, the result is improved judgment, making such debiasing efforts highly practically significant. If rationality is conditional upon features of the context, then so is irrationality. Seen as dependent on both objective and subjective conditions, experimental results can guide improvements in

judgments and deliberative procedures. One such procedure to lessen the effects of bias without undermining democracy is to see it functioning in a broader temporal context. Thus, opportunities to test could be distributed temporally across institutions, so that one type of deliberative body could test the decisions of another type of deliberative body.

Psychologists who engage in research with this ameliorative and practical aim call their normative conception of social research "applied cognitive psychology" (or ACP). ACP is a program consistent with the tenets of nonreductive naturalism insofar as it seeks not only debiasing, but also the practical goal of promoting norms of rationality in various decision making procedures. The key to such research is context sensitivity, a feature that Dewey identified as lacking in moral theories and necessary for all attempts to improve moral judgment. With regard to many of the fallacies that Kahneman and Tversky found to be common in the reasoning, Gigerenzer found that people were able to perform logical and statistical tasks, so long as the task is "debiased." For example, subjects' performances greatly improved simply by posing questions in which probabilities are expressed as frequencies. In Dewey's terms, frequencies better spell out the context in such a way that people can see what is at stake, what the situation is, and what in it is problematic. Furthermore, conflicts, obstacles or dangers do not necessarily remain invariant across contexts and thus may not be easily generalized. By analogy to the natural sciences, Dewey argues that a course of surer development would begin "when the dialectic of concepts ceased to be employed to arrive at conclusions about existential states of affair and was employed instead as a means of arriving at a hypothesis fruitfully applicable to particulars, so it will be with the theory of human activities and relations."[13] If this is the case intelligent reasoners will be bad at judgments that lack the specificity and features of a problematic situation, in which the description of the problem is open to revision along with proposed solutions. Thus, Dewey's contextualism takes people to be reasoners who determine standards of correctness within particular situations, with particular problems and solutions. Practical moral thinking and judgment is always in interaction with a specific situation and social environment, and this ecological constraint should also extend to experimental methods as well.

One could formulate this response in more Deweyean terms by affirming that the social context of judgment provides an unavoidable practical constraint on understanding human judgment. Without some sense of the problematic situation in which judgment is operating, it is hard to see responses as "rational" and "intelligent" and thus as predictive of anything like a permanent tendency of human reasoning within an extended social environment. As an experiment with the purpose of uncovering internal features and tendencies of the agent, it is entirely unclear, when the contextualist constraint is honored, that there is in fact a "massive failure" to follow logical rules. At the same time, Tversky and Kahneman admit that the experiment was constructed so as "to elicit conjunction errors, and as such does not provide an unbiased estimate of the

prevalence of these errors."[14] Gigerenzer and his colleagues conducted experiments that attempted to assess whether or not there are central conditions that debiased judgments of the sort discussed by Kahneman and Tversky. Their results show the way in which a methodology sensitive to context specificity can demonstrate the way in which "we arrive at rational or irrational judgments in specific contexts of reasoning," including contexts in which subjects do the tasks particularly well.[15]

Such research sees a fallacy at work in taking various judgments to be inherently biased; to be inherently biased can only mean that there is some failure of rationality inherent to the human cognizer. This research shows, to the contrary, that improving judgments is not necessarily a matter of modifying such inherent features of human nature (as Dewey might put it), but of understanding the sensitivity to judgments to various environments and modifying the environment of choice and judgment so that people are able to reason better. Thus, an awareness of context sensitivity is a necessary requirement for improving human judgments on important moral, social, and legal matters, and proponents of Applied Cognitive Science think that a practically oriented study of human judgment could improve it by focusing on different conditions and environments as well as on possibilities of various debiasing techniques for more recalcitrant problems. Of course, such a study raises the same progressive questions as Dewey's moral psychology (i.e., What is the status of the social scientist in proposing standards? How do we define the limit of various heuristics? How do we construct particular techniques of institutions which improve human reasoning?). ACP provides a contemporary analogy to the type of interactive and normative naturalism that is central to Dewey's theory and his response to similar arguments for the cognitive limitations and bias of ordinary citizens among democratic realists such as Walter Lippmann. Dewey too sought to move away from global appraisal of human rationality to understanding specific cognitive processes in order to guide action. ACP studies normative phenomena nonreductively (that is, as normative phenomena), while at the same time offering evaluations of their rationality that are meant to also permit agents to improve them. For example, various debiasing techniques have been used practically to overcoming the self-serving bias, a major cause of impasses in negotiations.[16] This sort of ameliorative psychological and social science is still naturalistic in the same sense that Dewey demanded: that such normative evaluations and proposals are themselves subject to experimental testing and contextual evaluation.

Even while it captures the pragmatist conception of the goal of inquiry into cognitive processes, ACP may seem to give too much importance to the norm of rationality in comparison with Dewey's ethical naturalism. Most proponents of ACP take the standards of rationality to be given in the experiment. In probability experiments, the standard of rationality is whether the subject gets the right answer, where this is more or less a matter of reliability as an independent standard rather than the performance of specific calculations or

judgments that show how the answer was given. Here, Dewey is a more radical contextualist, rejecting the idea of given standards of correctness and insisting that they only be fixed contextually. Despite his clearly normative conception of reason, Dewey thoroughly naturalizes it in a Humean way, saying that in fact "we do not act *from* reasoning" as a source of ends.[17] As beings that he admits are "always biased," we act out of deliberate choice only "when we want incompatible things" and thus forced to choose among them. In such cases, Dewey defines rationality in terms of the outcome of deliberation, the creation of a unified preference out of competing preferences. Reason is not opposed to impulse, habit or desire; rather, reason aims at "a happy cooperation of a multitude of dispositions, such as sympathy, curiosity, exploration, experimentation, frankness, pursuit (to follow them through), circumspection (to look at the context, etc.)."[18] The result is that reason or the rational attitude is never simply a "ready made antecedent," but rather an outcome, the "resulting disposition."[19] As an achievement term, rationality broadens rather than narrows one's life with the constant potential problem of the need for integration, often by transforming habits and accommodating impulses into an organization of various competing dispositions.

It is obvious that Dewey is here primarily talking about moral reasoning, although the term must be given a very broad sense to include all matters of practical choice. Dewey thinks that the issue here concerns naturalizing reason as related to moral choice under the constraints of contextualism that places "moral problems" within problematic situations. Is this account normative in the sense of ACP? Unlike ACP, moral psychology has a bootstrapping problem that makes the reliabilistic standard of evaluation useless (short of mere stipulation of the appropriate standard). For Dewey, rationality as such is not the standard, but the achievement of any one of many contextually appropriate outcomes that unify the particular problematic situation. Here we might then appeal to Dewey's consequentialist formulations of such an outcome, where what should be done has the best overall consequences. However, Dewey rejects any particular specification of what outcomes are the best in advance of inquiry. Thus, when Dewey says, that we should "judge an idea or an act by its consequences," he is not proposing that objective consequences are the only relevant facts in any situation, or even the main ones. Instead, his solution is procedural and methodological, in that an agent or agents ought to employ the method of empirical inquiry in order to make vivid the consequences and values at stake in any particular conflict. Thus, the appeal to consequences concerns the basic method of observation and testing, the experimental method of all the sciences. In advance of inquiry, we cannot know what the consequences are, much less the way to produce the best ones. Furthermore, evaluating consequences is also unavoidably contextual, where general rules are always subject to provisos. Dewey's naturalism here is methodological. At the same time, this procedure is also inherently contextual, since what moral deliberation

aims at is the solution to a particular problematic situation, where the outcome is then tested by the same mode of experimental moral inquiry.

Before turning to issues of deliberation as moral inquiry, we might first ask if there are any analogous debates in contemporary cognitive psychology that lead to a similar contextualist idea of rationality. We might here examine a concept of "ecological rationality" as a way of articulating Dewey's thorough-going contextualism about norms, including norms of rationality. On the standard account, heuristics are simply poor and often defective substitutes for optimizing and formalizing procedures; but such a conception depends on conceiving rationality as a property of an individual agent, rather than as a set of tools for interacting with any given environment. Recall Dewey's maxim that improving human judgment more often than not means improving the social conditions or environment under which decisions are made. His interactive view makes judgment not merely a capacity of classically rational individual agents, but includes a wide range of situational and contextual factors. According to Goldstein and Gigerenzer, a heuristic is ecologically rational to the extent that it "exploits information structures in the environment," even when time and knowledge are limited, so as to be "powerful enough to model both good and poor reasoning."[20]

Ecological rationality might prove useful with regard to several issues of moral and political psychology that Dewey confronted. Lippmann charged that the democratic ideal espoused by Dewey and other participatory democrats was too demanding and required "omnicompetent citizens." Omnicompetent citizens would be fully informed reasoners; in a word, they would be classically rational and equipped with a store of expert knowledge across many domains. As opposed to this requirement of effective participation, consider the "recognition heuristic" as an example of ecological rationality. When making inferences using it, people see recognition as correlating with a particular criterion, say the recognition of the name of a city with its population size. One might want to know which universities have the highest endowments and use a "mediator," such as a newspaper. The method is then to take the size of endowment to be correlated on the number of times the university is mentioned in the newspaper. In this case the newspaper is a "mediator" in the environment with "the dual property of reflecting, (but not revealing) the criterion and being accessible to the senses."[21] In Dewey's terms, such mediation takes the form of "habits" that have incorporated "some part of the objective environment."[22] Similarly, as Arthur Lupia shows, voters may correctly use party affiliation as providing just such an ecological correlation to various political beliefs, in order to decide whom to vote for in the absence of further information.[23] Both ecological correlations prove to be highly accurate, and in these cases social institutions structure the environment in such a way that recognition is highly correlated to the appropriate criterion. Thus, changing or controlling the environment makes people smarter without necessarily promoting various moral and political virtues, however desirable these may be. Skeptics such as Lippmann are

answered not by appeal to some inherent or populist rationality, but by facts about how institutions can be structured so as to promote environments for good, but frugal decision making.

Dewey's thoroughgoing contextualism is thus the solution to a number of skeptical difficulties of moral philosophy understood as a theoretical rather than a practical enterprise. Improvements to human judgment are an institutional task, and moral inquiry aims not only to reach the appropriate sort of unity among conflicting claims, but also to engage in moral inquiry to the various sources of such problematic situations, including various failures of rationality and biases. Such inquiry is not a matter of experts or social scientists, however important such social science may be. Rather, it is a product of the deliberation of moral agents, particularly in their role as citizens. Dewey's naturalism would suggest that it is possible to mount a defense of the claim that ordinary deliberation may accomplish these ends, particularly when linked to inquiry where the environment is not informationally responsive. Such a defense would primarily be instrumental, that the deliberation of all those affected by a decision would be superior to any other possible method of inquiry. An interactive or ecological approach to such issues already provides some defense of such a claim, to the extent that it says that such a procedure would be the best only if certain social or environmental conditions are met. Are these conditions best described as the emergence of the Great Community? Dewey thought that this question presupposed another: How is it that a public can recognize itself as a public under the objective conditions of modern society? This is not a problem of capacity but of conditions that objectively undermine such self-knowledge.

3. Self-Knowledge and the Problem of the Public

By discussing the relation between Dewey's moral psychology of judgment and recent work in cognitive science, we have shown that the diagnosis of the inevitable ignorance and bias of the public is not a general social fact. Indeed, many of the factors that work against biases and other failures of rationality are conditions that democratic institutions promote, such as the way in which framing effects are less likely for deliberation in heterogeneous groups. "The intellectual problem of the public" that Dewey refers to repeatedly in this essay is something quite different, and this indicates that Lippmann did not grasp the real problem of the public: that the newly emerging public does not recognize itself as a public and for that reason cannot avail itself of the means of organization that would be necessary for it to become effective in a complex democracy. In describing his endorsement of Jane Addams's dictum that "the only remedy for the ills of democracy is more democracy," Dewey argues that the achievement of a new form of democracy means going beyond "political democracy," democracy narrowly understood as majority rule and representation. However enlarged the state has become, Dewey still thinks of democracy solely within the national frame. Contrary to Dewey, his fellow

pragmatist George Herbert Mead is quite optimistic about the application of democratic norms and ideals in large, even multi-national, publics that will be able to solve problems across borders: "Could a conversation be conducted internationally? The question is a question of social organization."[24] Dewey is not so sure. For Dewey, the "primary problem of the public" is "to achieve a recognition of itself" as a public (283). Large scale and complex forms of social political organization establish new conditions that call forth the formation of a public; yet, at the same time, they produce circumstances that are themselves epistemic obstacles for the public to recognize itself as the public that it already objectively is. This is the third way in which Dewey answers Lippmann: Lippmann and other social psychological skeptics of democracy have misidentified the fundamental problem as having to do with the capacities of individuals to deliberate rationally. While "the problem of a democratically organized public is primarily and essentially an intellectual problem" (314), the eclipse of the public is, paradoxically, not that it has disappeared; rather, it is that there are "too many publics and too much of public concern for our existing resources to cope with," and this very deficit also blocks the formation of a new public (314). A public is only a public if it recognizes that it is one.

Dewey is certainly correct in this critical assessment that self-knowledge is a condition of possibility for a public. To the extent that a "mass" remains "inchoate" and "diffuse," then it cannot regard itself as a public. Thus, a public not only sees itself as a public, but also all others with whom it communicates as members of the public, and thus as a public within a larger public. For this reason the explicit identification of the public as a public is a necessary condition for a public not only to exist at all, but also "an antecedent condition of any effective organization on its part" (314). The obstacles to this identification are unprecedented, increasing scope and scale coupled with the impersonality of forms of integration. Dewey's description is still remarkably resonant today, especially if we substitute "globalization" for "the machine age" in the following description: "the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified, and complicated the scope of indirect consequences, formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resulting public cannot identify and distinguish itself" (314). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that for Dewey a public is constituted by indirect consequences rather than direct participation, raising the epistemic burden on publics to identify themselves by indirect consequences the origin of which they may not be directly aware if it is impersonal and complicated. Once formed, publics can see themselves as participants in the public sphere itself, but this is not because they participated directly in producing the consequences and problems around which they form. It would seem then that publics are not something in which one participates, and Dewey emphasizes that publics typically act indirectly through officials and other institutional actors show that publics become authoritative only if they are connected to institutional actors.

Granting the definition of publics through indirect consequences, Dewey's underlying assumptions make solving the "intellectual problem of the public" more difficult than it need be. First, at any historical point, publics already exist in interaction with existing institutions. Existing institutions form publics so that both conditions of recognition are met: that people are aware of those indirect consequences that make them a public objectively; and that this same group is aware of itself qua public. Dewey is attempting to formulate this complex set of conditions when he says that "when indirect consequences are recognized and there is an effort to regulate them, something with traits of a state comes into existence" (244). The problem here is that new publics need to form to "break existing political forms" even as the old public which formed these institutions is passing away (255). The older institutions thus are no longer useful and can even obstruct the formation of a new public: they neither regulate the necessary indirect consequences, nor allow the public to recognize itself as a public. It might be that the state itself is the political form that needs to be broken. However, Dewey seems to have come closest to developing the proper transnational alternative strategy of democratization when he responded to Walter Lippmann's criticism of the "phantom" public in modern, complex societies: instead of regarding them as separate spheres, he argued for the ongoing interaction between institutions and the publics that constitute them (255, 314). The capabilities of citizens may sometimes outstrip the institutions that frame their normative powers, as happens when the public for whom they were created no longer exists (as was the case for the rural and agrarian public of early American democracy). Given complex and overlapping interdependence, many citizens now see the need for new institutions based on the emergence of new indirect consequences. This means that the problem is not one of forming a new public de novo, but rather out of the existing interactions between publics and institutions, which transform both when successful. Dewey's insistence that such self-knowledge is necessary prior to this kind of interaction, rather than emerging out of it, seems unmotivated. In the case of the HIV epidemic, patients became aware of themselves as a public, and then interacted with medical institutions to regulate the indirect consequences of experimentation. Prior to this interaction, the public of medical institutions consisted only of experts. Furthermore, patients formed the conception of themselves as part of a public as they interacted with these institutions. This interaction was the source of their recognition of themselves as a public for these institutions.

The second problem with Dewey's analysis is that he sees publics as fundamentally unitary: the mechanism of change is that one bigger unitary public replaces the existing, narrow unitary public, to the extent that it is able to "identify" itself as a public. However, as Dewey himself argues that older publics are too homogeneous for complex social reality, the older idea of the state also seems to make the same error when faced with issues of size and complexity. The task of self-knowledge that Dewey describes is simply too large for any one public with its officials and representatives. It will require new

forms of political authority and new public spheres, precisely because they provide a useful structural analogue that could help in solving the difficult problems of the structural transformation of the conditions of democracy. Whether in institutions or in publics, the transformation is from a unitary to a disaggregated or distributive form. In the case of authority, the unitary state form has already been disaggregated into a multiplicity of principal/agent relations. In the case of the public sphere, the transformation is from a unitary forum to a "distributive" public, of the type best exemplified in computer-mediated network forms of communication that may also provide an analogue for novel forms of democracy. Publics will be formed and interact with each other and with a variety of institutions and their actors. Thus, a variety of new institutions must be formed as they interact with a diverse set of publics if they are to solve the problems of indirect consequences. With emerging forms of communication and authority that "decenter" the public sphere; it is a public of publics rather than a distinctively unified and encompassing public sphere in which all communicators participate. But no one public and no one institution, even those that gain "traits of the state," would be able to solve these problems on its own. States may continue to play a role, as do publics that interact with states, but such publics are no longer unitary as the state no longer plays an exclusive constitutive role. Dewey's rejection of purely "political democracy" should have led him to a broader account of the possibilities for the formation of deliberative publics, as indirect consequences begin to cut across existing political boundaries.

Dewey thinks that the very scale of modern society requires integration by a unitary public. His reasoning here seems to rely on the idea of congruence: the formation of these new immense and impersonal structures of "Great Society" have so invaded and partially disintegrated the small communities of former times without generating a "Great Community" (314). This disintegrative process gives rise to the epistemic problem that inhibits the publics from recognizing themselves as publics, since these forces are "so vast, so remote in initiation, so far reaching in scope and so complexly indirect" that they cannot be known from the standpoint of "older publics, in being local communities, largely homogeneous with each other." (322). What is needed then is proper forms of communication to create "a Great Community" that transcends these epistemic limits through a new, "subtle, delicate, vivid, and responsive art of communication." (350). Despite his calls for a Great Community as the result of "free and full intercommunication," Dewey insists that such communication must be face-to-face communication within a local community (367). For Dewey it is clear that whatever the larger ramifications and connection of such communication, it must ground itself in local communities. This restoration of local community is the solution to the most urgent problem of the public, since only then will the public be able to "find an identity." Even if not spatially congruent with the immense Great Society, such local communities will be able to transcend these limits and form the basis for an expanded public through its

"larger relationships," which will provide an inexhaustible and flowing fund of meanings on which to draw (370). Thus, such communicatively established publics are able to go beyond their epistemic limits by shared communicative experience so that they can see themselves as part of a larger public, yet also be able to have the meaningful social relationship upon which discussion and deliberation depend. Dewey insists over and over again that the problem of the public, of securing "diffused and seminal intelligence can be solved only to the degree in which local communal life becomes a reality," on the condition of course that this is the new "flexible and multicolored" local community (371). As a microcosm of the Public at large, it is able to attain self-knowledge of itself as a public through communication.

Does the Great Community provide the epistemic conditions necessary to solve the intellectual problem of the public? It is half a solution to the extent that it goes beyond the idea that *individuals* must somehow attain this kind of self-knowledge. Rather than individuals, the ultimate unit of knowledge is social, a function of association and communication as well as socially transmitted methods. This argument only takes us part of the way to the solution, as evidenced in the ambiguities of Dewey's solution to the problem of the Great Society. Because such a public is necessarily singular, its unity can only be realized across various local communities, each of which is a microcosm of the public as a whole. They do not realize the advantages of the division of labor that Dewey saw as necessary to solve complex social problems. Social intelligence is clearly distributed across the publics in such a way as to provide the epistemic advantages of plurality: that all know more than each; each is dependent on the knowledge of all. Thus, the idea of an omni-competent individual is not even a plausible counterfactual, since it is the community as a whole that knows and not any of its members qua individuals. Even if individuals can be aware of this epistemic dependence, it is nonetheless the community which is the knower in an irreducibly distributed rather than unitary or collective sense. Thus, Lippmann is wrong to think that experts, even the community of experts, are epistemically superior to the public as a whole, since experts too are epistemically dependent as much as any participant who possesses socially distributed knowledge.

In this sense we can complete the thrust of Dewey's main argument against Lippmann in the problem of the public: for the public to identify itself as public, social relationships must be reorganized democratically and distributively. Here Mead is correct: the problem of whether or not publics can recognize themselves as publics in large scale societies is not a matter of community but of social organization. Here we may think of the European Union as a kind of model in which deliberation about policy takes place at various levels which mutually inform and correct each other. One such level is local, but there is no reason to believe that self-knowledge of the required sort is produced only at this location. Indeed, this self-knowledge is distributed throughout the whole, and to that extent it is not always necessary that the self-

knowledge of publics be identical across publics even if all must recognize themselves as publics and interact with each other on this basis. While responsive institutions are not mere machinery, this would be an instance of using democracy to create better democracy. Such a process enables the emergence of a new type of public, the core requirement of democratic renewal on Dewey's analysis.

4. Conclusion: Does Dewey Answer Lippmann?

In his review of Lippmann's *The Phantom Public*, Dewey accepts that changes in the scale and complexity of modern societies have undermined overly strong versions of the democratic ideal. At the same time, he suggests that Lippmann's argument makes a fundamental error. Without an "account of the inherent problems and dangers the Great Society has brought with it," we cannot see that the weaknesses of democracy "are symptomatic rather than causal," as something that could be remedied if the right social forces were put into play. Whether or not Lippmann's own specific proposals are correct, "the further organization of society is the only way out."[25] As *The Public and its Problems* makes clear this organization could only occur when the public overcomes an epistemic difficulty brought about not only by the immensity and impersonality of new social mechanisms, but also the variability of their indirect consequences. Given that publics are not formed through direct participation in various decision making processes, the formation of publics that recognize themselves as publics becomes difficult with increasing scale and complexity. Lippmann's diagnosis is thus incorrect: he proposes psychological explanations for the incapacities of publics to form and be effective. I have suggested by reference to current cognitive psychology that Lippmann and other contemporary skeptics of democracy have overstated these psychological incapacities given that their target was some overly strong classical conception of rationality. Not only does recent empirical work suggest that we can improve individual judgment by institutional means, the awareness of various mechanisms that lead to faulty judgment can improve deliberative practices. Dewey thinks that in many respects Lippmann's criticisms while important for formulating a feasible "chastened" ideal of democracy, miss the mark to the extent that the fundamental problem of the public is related to the objective circumstances of the Great Society rather than to weaknesses in rationality of individuals.

Dewey's analysis of the social facts of scale and complexity in *The Public and its Problems* fits well with his conception of social inquiry, where facts are understood practically as "problematic situations." In cases in which the "facts" challenged the very institutional basis of modern political integration, practical inquiry must seek to extend the scope of political possibilities rather than simply taking the facts to fix the limits of political possibilities once and for all; they are "resources" as well. For this reason, social science is practical to the

extent that it shows not only how political ideals that have informed these institutions are not only still possible, but also feasible under current conditions or modification of those conditions. Our democratic ideals have been shaped by outdated "local town-meeting practices and ideals," even as we live in a "continental nation state" whose political structures encourage the formation of "a scattered, mobile, and manifold public" and interdependent communities that has yet to recognize itself as a public and form its own distinct common interests (327). Thus, the solution is a dual transformation both of what it is to be a public and of the institutions with which the public interacts. Such an interaction will provide the basis for determining how the functions of the new form of political organization will be limited and expanded, the scope of which is "something to be critically and experimentally determined" (281). In democratic inquiry, facts "have to be determined in their dual function as obstacles and as resources," as problems that also hold out the possibility of transforming the conditions that make the problematic situation an obstacle to democracy.[26]

Dewey's discussion of the problem of the public is for this reason modest, precisely because he frames the issue as a practical problem. As a problem of social analysis, the resources and obstacles available to solve the problem seem clear enough: with the reorganization of society, the public will become organized as a public; however, this reorganization will itself be brought about by the public itself as it comes to see new patterns of indirect consequences. Despite his optimism, Dewey does not really make clear whether this is a vicious or a virtuous circle. While the results for Dewey were not in, I have suggested that the appeal to the Great Community and to the need for face-to-face communication at the local level underestimates the very transformation in social circumstances that is the basis of his entire argument. Despite his analysis of the present as a transformational moment in the constitution of publics, Dewey held on to the idea of a unitary public and appealed to robust local and global interactions as the means by which local communities become enriched enough to form public across various communities. But this leaves a large institutional deficit for the organization of these interactive publics. Such publics do not seem to fit the older mould of a homogenous public; they are distributed rather than unitary, so that the members of various local communities in Dewey's Great Community will not all belong to the same publics. In this sense, Dewey misdiagnoses the problem of *publics* as the problem of the *Public*, and thus argues that there can be "too much public" under modern conditions. In order to accommodate such a variety of publics, political organization must become more diverse and multileveled, the goal of which Dewey clearly saw, even if "the creation of adequately flexible and responsive political and legal machinery has so far been beyond the wit of man" (255). The "problem" is not that publics do not recognize themselves as the Public, but rather one of representation: how it is that diverse publics will be able to represent the interests of all those affected once we give up the congruence of the unitary public? The simple appeal to democracy will not answer this question, so long

as democracy, too, remains unreconstructed. Perhaps Dewey's greatest achievement in *The Public and its Problems* is to see that the idea of the public is the way to frame these issues that are still faced by democracies today. Modern complexity and scale make publics the site of participation. Since we cannot really now participate directly in the variety of arenas and forums that make up any modern society, participating in a public is the only alternative, however indirect it might be in operating the levers of decision making. Without publics, democracies do not have the means for knowing the indirect consequences of decisions and policies that are needed to test and revise them.

NOTES

1. Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy" (1888), *EW* 1: 227. Thanks to Adam Ring for pointing this passage out to me.

2. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), *LW* 11: 50–51.

3. Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *LW* 12: 500.

4. Examples include such puzzles as the familiar case of the three people facing each other and who must (without directly communicating) figure out the color of the paint (red or green) on their own face, when given only the information that there is at most one with green. In fact, they all have red paint on their face. They can see the faces of the others but not their own. Initially, the task seems impossible, since seeing the others with red paint is both consistent with one's having red and consistent with one's having green. However, by taking the perspective of the others into account, they realize that the others cannot figure out the color on their own head, and thus gain new information, viz., that one's color cannot be green. For if one's own color is green, then the others would have been able to deduce that their own color is red. In this case, each gains novel information i* by recognizing the knowledge or ignorance of others in an initial state of information i, where i* otherwise would have been inaccessible without the uptake of alternative perspectives responding to i. Thanks to Joe Salerno for this example.

5. See Bina Agarwal, "Conceptualizing Environmental Collective Action: Why Gender Matters," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 24 (2001): 283–310.

6. Adam Smith expresses this ideal in this way when considering two people with conflicting interests: "Before we can make any proper comparison of opposite interests, we must change our position. We must view them, neither from our place nor from his, neither with our own eyes nor with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connection to either, and who judges impartially, between us." Cited in Lorraine Daston, "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective," *Social Studies of Science* 22 (1992): 605. Mill, to the contrary, argues that the business of government "is best left to those who are directly interested."

7. Carole Lee, "Applied Cognitive Psychology and the Strong Replacement of Epistemology by Normative Psychology," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 38 (2007): 55–75. See also James Bohman, "Ethics and Moral Inquiry: Dewey on the Moral Psychology of Social Reform," *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

8. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "On the Study of Statistical Intuitions," in *Judgment under Uncertainty,* ed. Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 494.

9. Lee, "Applied Cognitive Psychology," pp. 58–59.

10. See Baruch Fischhoff, "Debiasing," in *Judgment under Uncertainty*, p. 423.

11. Fischhoff, "Debiasing," p. 423.

12. See Richard Nisbett, David Krantz, Christopher Jepson and Geoffrey Fong, "Improving Inductive Inference," in *Judgment Under Uncertainty*, pp. 445–462.

13. Dewey, *Theory of Valuation* (1939), *LW* 13: 320.

14. Kahneman and Tversky, "On the Reality of Psychological Illusions," *Psychological Review* (103): 582–591; on these methodological problems, see Lee, 61ff.

15. For a discussion of the origin of Applied Cognitive Psychology as a practical and ameliorative research program, see Lee, pp. 62–3.

16. See L, Babock, J. Lowenstein and S. Issacharoff, "Creating Convergence," *Law and Social Inquiry* 22 (2006): 913–925.

17. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *MW* 14: 139.

18. *MW* 14: 136.

19. *MW* 14: 136.

20. M. Goldstein and G. Gigerenzer, "Model of Ecological Rationality: The Recognition Heuristic," *Psychological Review* 100 (2002): 75.

21. Goldstein and Gigerenzer, "Model of Ecological Rationality," p. 79.

22. *MW* 14: 38.

23. For a discussion of such a heuristic, see A. Lupia and M. D. McCubbins, *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

24. George H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), pp. 270–271.

25. Dewey, "Practical Democracy" (1927), *LW* 2: 219.

26. Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *LW* 12: 493, see also 499–500.

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Dewey and His Vision of Democracy

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In this essay, I maintain that Dewey's 1888 article "The Ethics of Democracy" is the most immediate thematic and conceptual predecessor to *The Public and Its Problems*. Both texts revolve around a number of key themes at the heart of Dewey's thinking about democracy: the relationship between the individual and society, the legitimacy of majoritarianism, and the significance and meaning of political deliberation. When these themes are taken together we come to understand the anti-elitist core of Dewey's political thinking.

John Dewey wrote *The Public and Its Problems* in the spirit of debate and disagreement about the meaning and future of democracy, particularly with the journalist and political commentator Walter Lippmann (1889–1974) in mind. The Dewey-Lippmann debate is a staple of American political thought, but it has achieved wider currency as many scholars continue to discover the universal importance of their disagreements about democratic decision making and its relationship to public opinion. The challenge that both democracy and Dewey faced in the figure of Lippmann – a challenge that centered on the viability of popular sovereignty and any faith placed therein – was not new to Dewey. He had encountered similar doubts decades earlier after reading *Popular Government* published in 1885 by jurist and historian Sir Henry Maine (1822–1888).[1]

It is worth turning to Maine's text and Dewey's response in his 1888 essay, "The Ethics of Democracy." Although Dewey published a number of important works between 1888 and 1927 in which democracy figures as a central theme,[2] I argue in this essay that "The Ethics of Democracy" is the most immediate thematic and conceptual predecessor to *The Public and Its Problems*. This is not simply because each work owes its existence to an intellectual provocateur. Independent of the similarities in motivation for writing each text, I maintain that both revolve around a number of key themes at the heart of Dewey's thinking about democracy: the relationship between the individual and society, the legitimacy of majoritarianism, and the significance and meaning of political deliberation. When these themes are taken together we come to understand the anti-elitist core of Dewey's political thinking. More strikingly, we encounter his belief that the moral appeal of democracy rests with a vision of

political life as never finally settled and therefore always open to revision and contestation. "The Ethics of Democracy" thus provides the wider context for understanding his later engagement with Lippmann, even as *The Public and Its Problems* marks a number of advancements in Dewey's thinking. To place these two works in conversation is to confront Dewey's vision of democracy and what in his political thinking remains of importance for us today.

1. Maine, Dewey, and the Confusion of Democratic Life

Maine's challenge to democracy is part of a much larger set of criticisms during the Victorian period – attacks that either condemned democracy wholesale or reduced it merely to a form of government unable to realize the sovereignty of the people.[3] Maine's specific argument rejects the view, which he associates with the political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), that the people participate in the formation of every policy. In this view, Maine argues, all citizens feel themselves to be at one with decision-making because they do not see those decisions at odds with their deeply felt interests.[4] This is at the core, says Maine, of what is meant by the sovereignty of the people and is simultaneously the source of democracy's confusion.

Maine attacks this vision of "the people" acting politically as a fiction. In his view, rather than being derived from the true will of the people, political consensus is formed as a result of corruption and manipulation: "I cannot but agree ... it is absurd to suppose that, if the hard-toiled, and the needy, the artisan and the agricultural labourer, become the depositaries of power, and if they can find agents through whom it becomes possible for them to exercise it, they will not employ it for what they may be *led* to believe are their own interests."[5] Maine's point is simple: It is impossible to form a common or general will out of a multitude of disparate interests, and what appears to be the common will is in fact the will of a few or one portion of society. "The modern enthusiasts for democracy," he explains, "mix up the *theory*, that the Demos is capable of volition, with the *fact*, that it is capable of adopting the opinions of one man or a limited number of men."[6] In Maine's view, it is only possible to generate widespread agreement on the most basic questions. "A very slight addition of difficulty," he remarks, "at once sensibly diminishes the chance of agreement, and, if the difficulty be considerable, an identical opinion can only be reached by trained minds."[7] In this regard, argues Maine, it is invariably the case that the masses will be easily controlled.

Although Maine's political preference clearly points toward aristocracy – indeed, he attributes to aristocracy "the progress of mankind"[8] – he is not without acknowledging the source of democracy's stability. For him, that stability rests not with the production of a common will, but is derived principally from the institutional structures that are grafted onto democracy and that increases political control, something he believes is sorely missing from the English system. But his point is clear: stability comes from without and implies

the frailty of democracy if left to its own devices. He pursues this issue directly in essay four of *Popular Government*, "The Constitution of the United States." Much in line with the trajectory of the book, Maine contends that what holds the United States government together is a system of delegation and conservative checks and balances within a constitutional structure that appropriately constrains the excesses of the masses on the one hand and their tendency to be duped by those that might undermine the entire system on the other.[9]

In "The Ethics of Democracy" Dewey seeks to address this indictment and so prefigures a number of themes he will revisit in *The Public and Its Problems*. He addresses the criticism by identifying Maine's account of democracy with a narrow and faulty premise regarding the relationship between humans and society.[10] For Dewey, the initial problem with Maine's view is that he begins with the assumption of humans as solitary units. Society correspondingly appears not as a unified whole with differentiated parts, but rather as a mass of unconnected elements. This is precisely why Maine rejects the idea that we can identify political decisions with something called "the people." "Vox Populi [Voice of the People]," he says, "may be Vox Dei [Voice of God], but ... there never has been any agreement as to what Vox means or as to what Populus means."[11]

But Maine also rejects, in several places of his text, this explanation of human society as based on *a priori* speculation.[12] Despite this, Dewey contends, Maine nonetheless rests his own view of democracy on the sociological presuppositions of the social contract theory, and thus misrepresents the relationship between the individual and society. But as Dewey explains, a theory which takes humans as situated beings whose identities take shape in society "has wholly superseded the theory of men as an aggregate, as a heap of grains of sand needing some factitious mortar to put them into semblance or order."[13]

Understanding the basis of democracy in this way allows Dewey to shift the discussion away from defending the very idea of democracy to elucidating how best to understand it. His reference to "factitious mortar" quoted in the last passage is significant in this regard. If political society is not held together by a false will imposed externally for the sake of order, it must, he concludes, imply unity that makes the idea of "the people" intelligible to the citizenry. For this reason, he goes on in the essay to adopt a view of society as "a social organism" in which the function of the various parts, like the human body, is conducive to overall harmony.[14] The point of the metaphor is to provide a way to imagine the State as embodying purposes, the character of which are both shaped by and expressed in the actions of citizens.

Dewey concedes that society is not possessed of "one interest or will." He argues, for example, that there are a diversity of interests, "struggle[s] and opposition[s] and hostilit[ies]".[15] There are, he says, "classes within society, circles within the classes and cliques within the circles."[16] Nonetheless, Dewey seems to attach a strong unity to social life that does not appear to take seriously the political differences that Maine believes calls into question that unity.

Given the weight he attaches to unity in understanding democracy, readers of Dewey's essay confront an important difficulty not simply in his political philosophy, but in democracy more generally. Dewey seriously downplays the persistence of conflict. Nor does he acknowledge that conflict among competing claims will often implicate a political community in decisions where loss is inevitable. In fact, according to him, conflict appears to lead necessarily to unity. After all, to liken the body politic to a human organism means that different parts function to the benefit of the whole. And when we think of parts of our bodies not functioning properly, we typically see those parts as sick or abnormal. But it is not at all clear that a citizen's attempt to cultivate their personality or realize some specific vision of this or that public policy will be amenable to the body politic. And yet, it is often inappropriate to label that citizen as sick or abnormal. It may simply be the case that the citizen's way of seeing things is just as legitimate, even if it cannot be reconciled with the drift of the community.[17]

The problem here is that while he acknowledges the fact of conflict, he does not properly emphasize the *mechanism* that can potentially dissolve it or make the persistence of conflict consonant with a political system in which the people can be said to rule. The social organism metaphor is flawed, even as Dewey uses it to show the kind of political integrity democracy's image of "the people" entails. The metaphor obscures precisely what it should illuminate. And by the turn of the twentieth century, Dewey abandons the metaphor altogether as a theoretical tool to describe society. In a 1939 biographical sketch, he explains that his earlier commitment to Hegelian unity required a transformation far more attentive to the ways conflict empirically defies the dialectical movement toward social harmony: "[T]he Hegelian emphasis upon continuity and the function of conflict persisted on empirical grounds after my earlier confidence in dialectic had given way to skepticism."[18] Notice that he retains his Hegelian commitments, but they have a very different source. Dewey's use of "empirical grounds" is meant to register the persistence of uncertainty that figures prominently in both his social theory and reflection on knowledge formation once he embraced Darwinian evolution.[19]

This, however, is not the view in his 1888 essay, "The Ethics of Democracy." For if politics involves real winners and losers, important questions emerge for those who defend democracy: How do members of society lose in a way that makes them feel part of "the people" that have supposedly won? How can the sacrifice of the minority – namely, that individuals and groups often give up political goods they believe they deserve – legitimize democratic action without simultaneously breeding a high-level of resentment and distrust that will destabilize democracy? How do we retain the idea of "the people" that the social organism metaphor implies, while addressing the remainders of disappointment that come with political life?[20] Maine puts the question this way: If "the People" make a sound, "is it a sound in which the note struck by minorities is entirely silent?"[21]

2. Removing Confusion: Dewey, Majoritarianism, and the Openness of Democracy

In "The Ethics of Democracy" Dewey does not employ, as I did in the previous section, the language of sacrifice, but his reflections on majority rule show that he is very much attuned to these questions and concerns. In fact, he shows that his commitment to the necessity of unity does not completely overtake his more chastened moments of reflection regarding political life.

> There still appears to be in majority rule an instrument for putting all on a dead level, and allowing numerical surplus to determine the outcome. But the heart of the matter is found not in voting nor in the counting the votes to see where the majority lies. *It is in the process by which the majority is formed*. The minority are represented in the policy which they *force* the majority to accept in order to be a majority; the majority have the right to "rule" because their majority is not the mere sign of a surplus in numbers, but is the manifestation of the purpose of the social organism. Were this not so, every election would be followed by a civil war.[22]

In his view, a decision is not merely the result of a calculation in which one group – 51% of the community – has the votes to carry the title majority. We often reduce democratic decision making to this calculus and this is precisely the view at work in Maine's account. This misses, Dewey argues, the prior process majority rule entails. For decision making is a "process by which the social organism weighs considerations and forms its consequent judgment: that the voting of the individual represents in reality, a deliberation, a tentative opinion on the part of the whole organism."[23] Deliberation, then, to appropriate Dewey's words, is "the instrument for putting all on a dead level." The very position the majority comes to occupy is formed, for that position to be deemed legitimate, through an antagonistic exchange with the minority.

This means several things. First, it indicates that at the normative level political minorities occupy equal station with those that form the majority. "In shaping the policy," Dewey explains, "which emerges from the conflict the minority acts a part scarcely less important than the majority."[24] Second, this antagonistic exchange implies that while majority decisions do not wholly satisfy the minority, leaving some residue of resentment, such decisions, if they are to have legitimacy, cannot alienate the minority from the process of decision making.

These are not trivial observations; they go to the heart of understanding democracy. For if there is alienation, Dewey argues in the last line of the quoted passage, "every election would be followed by a civil war" – that is, a conflict so deep that it warrants dividing the nation between friends and enemies and so destroying the integrity of the community. The absence of civil war after every election, Dewey reasons, means that in a representative system "the governors

and the governed" do not form "two classes" (as Maine believes) but are rather "two aspects of the same fact" – namely, the ruling people.[25]

The integrity of democracy hinges on the extent to which the minority never feels alienated from the process of decision making. But instead it can see its sacrifice as part and parcel of forming the will of "the people." Because the status of the minority is not perpetual, and as a result the minority does not exist under the weight of a permanent majority, the idea of sacrifice becomes an institutionalized ritual of decision making in which members struggle to give voice to "the people." But it is the deliberative process itself that generates hope that sacrifice will be redeemed through the constellation of new political acts. The normative significance of this process is that while the voice of the people is always unified, its tenor and content is never permanently settled – that is, in a democracy no embodiment of power, whether in the law, public agencies, or a majority opinion, is beyond reproach. This is not simply part of the political meaning of democracy for Dewey, but is the source of its moral appeal.

By conceiving of democracy in this manner, Dewey also articulates the anti-elitist element at the core of his account. This differs dramatically from Maine's political preference. Consider the comparison Dewey draws between democracy and aristocracy:

> What distinguishes the ethical basis and ideal of one from that of the other? It may appear a roundabout way to reach a simple end, to refer to Plato and to Greek life to get data for an answer; but I know of no way in which I can so easily bring out what seems to me the truth. The Platonic Republic is a splendid and imperishable formulation of the aristocratic ideal. ... But the Republic is more; it seizes upon the heart of the ethical problem, the relation of the individual to the universal, and states a solution. The question of the Republic is as to the ideal of men's conduct; the answer is such a development of man's nature as brings him into complete harmony with the universe of spiritual relations, or, in Platonic language, the state.[26]

As the passage suggest, Dewey sees in aristocracy a longing that is much akin to democracy – namely, a desire for "unity of purpose, the fulfilling of function in devotion to the interests of the social organism."[27]

The key difference between the two, he argues, is that aristocracy expresses a deep skepticism about the abilities of individuals to recognize the importance of their relationship to the community. Moreover, aristocracy simply turns the responsibility of governance over to the elites. But such a view, he argues, fails "because the practical consequences of giving the few wise and good power [are] that they cease to remain wise and good."[28] As Aristotle originally noted, and Dewey concurs, the wise cannot help but to regard themselves as the exclusive site for knowledge.[29] They fail to be attentive to those on whose behalf they serve. The result is not only that they diminish rather

than expand their perceptual and problem-solving abilities, but they risk becoming a force for domination rather than freedom. Because Dewey regards the good of society as legitimate to the extent that it is self-consciously recognized by the members of the community, his understanding of democracy locates itself in the freely willed actions (whether in support or contestation) of its members.

The themes struck in 1888 – the relationship between individual and society, the significance of deliberation, the relationship between minority and majority, and the anti-elitist core of Dewey's political thinking – reach a higher pitch in *The Public and Its Problems*. When taken together these themes throw into greater relief Dewey's mature thinking of democracy and its radical and enduring quality.

3. Lippmann and The Crisis of Democracy[30]

By the 1920s democracy had fallen on hard times.[31] Several factors were at work. First, Darwinian evolution in the last decade of the twentieth century undermined the religious backdrop of American culture. Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) version of evolution so thoroughly connected contingency to existence that many came to believe they were helpless in trying to create a just society. If God was dead, to whom should one turn for guidance? This question implied a crisis not simply in religious certainty, but a crisis in authority more broadly understood.

Secondly, while World War I elevated America's status as an international force, it did so alongside an already waning belief in progress that had otherwise defined the Progressive Era. American intellectuals did not abandon the belief in progress as such, but that belief was severely chastened by the devastation of the War. It made clear that retrogression was as likely as the progress that many thought was inevitable.

Third, new studies in human psychology and politics, extending from the 1920s to the 1930s, undermined the very premise upon which democracy rested – namely, that ordinary individuals were capable of collectively governing themselves if given the opportunity. What Maine had argued polemically in the 1880s, a new breed of scholar would maintain in the 1920s, but now with the support of empirical facts. By the beginning of the 1930s, Harold Laswell (1902–1978), a leading American political scientist could declare: "The findings of personality research show that the individual is a poor judge of his own interest."[32] Amid the constant evidence that public opinion was irrational, that the people were easily duped, and that partisan politics exacerbated these problems, many believed that if democracy continued it would have to be grounded in something other than the shifting desires of ordinary people. The emergence of democratic realism constituted a fundamental shift away from the idea of deliberation that was central to the Progressive Era.

Searching for a new basis of authority, grappling with the possibility of retrogression, and the irrationality of the public, many turned to a vision of democracy based on scientific expertise and administrative efficiency. "The world over," explained the Australian sociologist Elton Mayo (1880–1949) in 1933, "are greatly in need of an administrative elite."[33] No thinker better prefigured the reflections of Lasswell and Mayo than Walter Lippmann; he elucidated the irrationality of the democratic public in his two works *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1927), while simultaneously offering an attenuated vision of democracy. Understanding the meaning of Dewey's argument as found in *The Public and Its Problems* requires that we first explicate Lippmann's position.

There is no better place to begin for understanding how Lippmann conceives of the problem of democracy than with the epigraph that opens *Public Opinion*. It is worth citing this epigraph at length, coming as it does from another critic of democracy – namely, Plato:

> Behold! Human beings living in a sort of underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all across the den; they have been here from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them; for the chains are arranged in such a manner as to prevent them from turning round their heads. At a distance above and behind them the light of a first is blazing, and between the first and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have before them, over which they show the puppets.
>
> I see, he said.
>
> And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying vessels, which appear over the wall; also figures of men and animals, made of wood and stone and various materials; and some of the prisoners, as you would expect, are talking, and some of them silent?
>
> This is a strange image, he said, and they are strange prisoners.
>
> Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the first throws on the opposite wall of the cave?
>
> True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?
>
> And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would see only the shadows?
>
> Yes, he said.
>
> And if they were able to talk with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?[34]

The problem at the heart of the allegory is fundamentally epistemological. It points to our inability to achieve knowledge because we mistake shadows for

what is real. Lippmann (not Plato) uses this as a way to preface and constrain any faith placed in the "omni-compentent" citizen – that is, the view of the "individual citizen fitted to deal with all public affairs" and who is "consistently public-spirited and endowed with unflagging interest."[35] But what is striking about Lippmann's use of this epigraph to open his book is its ending. It leaves the reader with a question that at once makes central one of democracy's fundamental vehicles for ascertaining knowledge – namely, discussion and deliberation – and simultaneously frames Lippmann's investigation. Indeed, the entire book becomes an extended answer to the question, even as the setup of the allegory – the fact that the cave dwellers are transfixed by shadows on the wall – undercuts any possibility of believing that knowledge about the world is ascertainable by the masses.

Lippmann's criticism is in keeping with much of the psychological literature of the time; indeed, it seeks to extend the "truth" of the allegory. His argument on this point comes in two steps. The first relates to what he calls stereotypes and the second is about the manipulation to which the symbolic content of those stereotypes is potentially subject. Stereotypes are value-laden conjectures about the world that arrange our experiences. They are part of a wider social network in which individuals exist and find existential security against contrary worldviews; in fact, he argues, the functioning of stereotypes do not rely on perpetual cognitive awareness.[36] As he says: "The subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. ... And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception."[37] This is particularly so in industrial societies because people are asked to reflect on issues of which they can have no firsthand experience.

Given the importance he accords stereotypes, not merely for individual identity, but also for political behavior, Lippmann worries about the extent to which they can be manipulated in the context of public life. Not only do stereotypes work to "censor out much that needs to be taken into account" about complex political phenomena, but they are uniquely susceptible to control given their already existentially charged content.[38] "The stereotypes," Lippmann explains, "are loaded with preference, suffused with affection or dislike, attached to fears, lusts, strong wishes, pride, hope."[39] Most individuals, he says earlier, employ stereotypes with a level of "gullibility" that prevents them from seeing the partiality of their position and this blunts their responsiveness to new, and, at times, contrary information. And individuals who seek to win political power use symbols that are indexed to the passions that infuse stereotypes; they play on our passions and on the fear of insecurity and uncertainty involved.[40] The political entrepreneur does not, in Lippmann's analysis, take his or her point of department from the opinion of the public – in fact, they give to the public its opinion. It is in this sense that public opinion, not being formed by the public, is merely a phantom.

There is an important shift in Lippmann's argument. It is not simply the case that citizens do not have enough time or enough interest to engage the complexity of political phenomena, but more importantly, even if these were not the problems, citizens are inherently resistant to information that would call into question their deeply held beliefs. This is precisely why discursive exchange among the citizenry cannot lift citizens above their private or narrow interest: "There is nothing so obdurate to education or to criticism as the stereotype. It stamps itself upon the evidence in the very act of securing the evidence."[41] Here the significance of being transfixed by the shadows reemerges in Lippmann's criticism. He doubts that citizens remain "curious and open-minded" such that we are ready to rethink our beliefs if good reasons emerge.[42] The fact that citizens do not remain curious and open-minded is, for him, bound up with the process of socialization by which we come to acquire the stereotypes that we do: "No wonder, then, that any disturbance of the stereotypes seems like an attack upon the foundations of the universe. It is an attack upon the foundations of *our* universe, and, where big things are at stake, we do not readily admit that there is any distinction between our universe and the universe."[43] If this is so, Lippmann concludes in the more somber *Phantom Public*, "the public must be put in its place ... so that each of us may live free of the trampling and the roar of a bewildered herd."[44] These considerations ground Lippmann's alternative – elitist – vision of democracy.

But strikingly, he also argues that political decisions by elected representatives are in need of prior supplementation and clarification. It is worth turning to two passages from *Public Opinion*, one from chapter 16 relating to his views on Congress, and the second from chapter 1 relating to representative government proper:

> The congress of representatives is essentially a group of blind men in a vast, unknown world. Since the real effects of most laws are subtle and hidden, they cannot be understood by filtering local experiences through local states. They can be known only by controlled reporting and objective analysis. And just as the head of a large factory cannot know how efficient it is by talking to the foreman, but must examine cost sheets and data that only an accountant can dig out for him, so the lawmaker does not arrive at a true picture of the state of the union by putting together a mosaic of local pictures.[45]

> [As such] representative government, either in what is ordinarily called politics, or in industry, cannot be worked successfully, no matter what the basis of election, unless there is an independent, expert organization for making the unseen facts intelligible to those who have to make the decisions. I attempt, therefore, to argue that the serious acceptance of the principle that personal representation must be supplemented by representation of the unseen facts would alone permit a satisfactory

> decentralization, and allow us to escape from the intolerable and unworkable fiction that each of us must acquire a competent opinion about all public affairs.[46]

For him, insofar as representatives seek to track various perspectives among their constituents to create a better picture of political reality they will be misguided. Given the way he understands stereotypes and their hold on us, partial perspectives will either cancel each other out if they diverge or reinforce each other. In either case, the net result is an incomplete picture that corrupts decision-making. The alternative that Lippmann recommends is one in which the unseen facts are "managed only by a specialized class" of social scientific experts who are distinct from the "men of action."[47] Presumably, locating decision making outside the purview of experts obstructs the extent to which they may employ their knowledge for ends that reach beyond public oversight. Their role, he explains, is to examine and report on the unseen political phenomena that are blocked from view by our stereotypes. They direct their results to political officials, rather than the public, and take their point of direction from these same individuals.

Yet, Lippmann's language in the first passage suggests much more than mere reporting, indicative of his example of the factory owner and his relationship to the foreman and the accountant. The accountant provides not only facts, but an interpretation of the current financial condition of the company, its short and long term problems given current operations. If we reason from this example to his understanding of the role of experts in politics, it is not an exaggeration to say that for Lippmann experts give shape to the problems that are only dimly perceived by both citizens and political officials. The cognitive authority he attaches to experts thus slides into a kind of political power that shapes the landscape in which political officials and the citizenry function from the outset. To be sure, he frees citizens from an oppressive fiction, but is it at the expense of much that we find morally appealing about democracy?

4. Dewey and the Return to the Problem of Elitism

Dewey does not deny the brilliance or force of Lippmann's critique: "The figures of the scene are so-composed and so stand out, the manner of presentation is so objective and projective, that one finishes the book almost without realizing that it is perhaps the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived ever penned."[48] He agrees with Lippmann's discussion of stereotypes and the poverty of the public's knowledge in decision making. And he, too, is unconvinced by a view of democracy that envisions citizens as omni-competent. Yet he takes issue with both the emphasis Lippmann places on educating "official and directors" over and against the public, and his corollary belief that experts do not need to be informed by or receive input from the

public.[49] The problem here, for Dewey, is not simply the role envisioned by Lippmann for experts, but rather, and consistent with the view expressed forty years earlier, the problem of power implied by their role in democracy. As he says more forcefully in *The Public and Its Problems*: "No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few" (365). (Citations are to *The Public and Its Problems*, vol. 2 of *The Later Works of John Dewey*, 1982.) Lippmann's criticism was so perfectly directed, that it seemingly left little room for reflection regarding a solution – a view which led to Lippmann's elitism.

In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey is sensitive to the worry Lippmann advances, and, even the need for a division of epistemic labor between experts and the larger public that worry implies. Dewey's position, however, is located in a larger framework regarding the relationship between experts and citizens that keep in view the problem of power, and which sees citizens not merely as authorizing power, but as genuinely authoritative in decision making. The desire to keep in view the issue of power partly helps explain his defense of democracy and his distinct and important descriptions of the role of the *public* and the *state*. For Dewey, it is democracy's ability to better address the problem of power compared to other political ideals that might well prove to be its staying power.

For Dewey, the vast complexities of the modern age have radically transformed the meaning of democracy and the role of the ordinary citizen. The various innovations in communication and transportation, the global scale of warfare, and the ever changing dynamics of a market economy make reliance on experts simply unavoidable. "We have," explains Dewey, "inherited, in short, local town-meeting practices and ideas. But we live and act and have our being in a continental national state" (306). As a result, the view of the omni-competent citizen can only appear as an illusion. But what is important in the context of democratic decision making, he argues, is that we understand that how and why we rely on experts is itself a public judgment that makes social inquiry genuinely cooperative. Part of the aim of Dewey's text, then, is to reimagine our relationship to expertise, both those of persons and systems, which acknowledge modern complexity and therefore the central role of experts. But he absorbs the role of experts within his vision of democracy, without conceding much of what we find morally appealing in democracy.

The above point emerges when he describes the relationship between experts and the citizenry, revisiting themes expressed in his review of Lippmann's work. In fact, the passage to which we will now refer sends us back to some of his reflections in 1888:

> The final obstacle in the way of any aristocratic rule is that in the absence of an articulate voice on the part of the masses, the best do not and cannot remain the best, the wise ceases to be wise. It is impossible for highbrows

> to secure a monopoly of such knowledge as must be used for the regulation of common affairs. ...
>
> The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied (364).

For Dewey, the hypotheses we form for responding to political problems are only as good as the methods we employ – that is, the extent to which the methods make us receptive to data from various parts of the environment. But problems themselves, as he argues, frame and guide our inquiry; they imply the existence of a complex horizon of value and meaning that is now fractured and in need of creative valuation to restore continuity. So Dewey's point is not simply that without the input of the wearer of shoes the shoemaker will respond in a way that would not address the existing pinch. Rather, without input from the individual experiencing the pinch, the expert shoemaker will not have the subject matter to initiate or guide his inquiry.

In contrast to Lippmann, Dewey views the role of experts as ancillary to that of citizens, in essence undercutting the turn to technocrats that we see in Lippmann and articulated by later democratic realists. As he says of experts: "[T]heir expertness is not shown in framing and executing policies, but in discovering and making known the facts upon which the [inquiry] depends" (365). Dewey is making two critical points. The first point is that expertise, properly understood, is always tethered to a more "technical" field of investigation. As he understands it, experts come to gain cognitive authority and so become bearers of knowledge because of the audience with which they engage and interact. Citizens are thus authorities just to the extent that it is their problems that create the framework in which expertise functions. The complexity and texture of those problems, he maintains, come into view through a deliberative exchange among citizens that draws out existing and emerging concerns and worries. All of this guides them as they determine what they, as a political community, will make of the information provided. But it also means that there will rarely be complete agreement on who the experts are and this will cut against any argument for blindly deferring to some perceived "expert" authority.

The second point of the quoted sentence is to indicate that if something like "expertise" of political affairs exists, it will have to emerge from deliberation within the public. Central to this process are questions not merely about how we understand the problem from the outset (e.g., Who are the subjects of this problem? What may be the long-term results if the problem is allowed to persist?), but about the implication of various proposals suggested to alleviate the problem (e.g., What are the value or economic trade-offs in choosing this or that proposal?). For Dewey, answering these questions – that is, arriving at knowledge – implies a kind of collective artisanship to social inquiry that draws on the specific experiences of individuals, expert knowledge, facts

about the problem in question, and potential risks of action. Since citizens are uniquely situated to offer knowledge of their own experiences, their role in the design and implementation of policies is unavoidable if we are to address the problem at hand.

The significance Dewey accords deliberation among citizens yields another point regarding the fact of conflict in modern societies that sends us back to "The Ethics of Democracy." As he says in *The Public and Its Problems*: "Differences of opinion in the sense of differences of judgment as to the course which it is best to follow, the policy which it is best to try out, will still exist" (362). Writing now in his post-Hegelian period, Dewey can more easily concede this point. And he amplifies the claim years later in *Liberalism and Social Action*, arguing that deliberation works to bring "conflicts [among citizens] out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised" in understanding the depth and complexity of the political problems and policy proposals.[50] To say that deliberation brings conflict out into the open is not to deny that one result of this process may be a deepening of dissonance. Indeed, we will often have conflicts among groups that will need to be mitigated with the least amount of cost to democratic commitments. But, he explains in *The Public and Its Problems* how he understands the centrality of deliberation: "But opinion in the sense of beliefs formed and held in the absence of evidence will be reduced in quantity and importance. No longer will views generated in views of special situations be frozen into absolute standards and masquerade as eternal truths" (362). For him, the genuineness of deliberation holds out the transformative possibility of un-stiffening our commitments – our commitments matter, he argues, but they should never grip us so tightly that they are beyond revision and contestation.

Coextensive with democratic decision making are both the transformative role that underwrites how we come to understand political problems in their various dimensions and that contributes to the possibility of forging shared values for action, and informational purposes of communication in contextualizing expert knowledge. These two elements, Dewey argues, mean that lay and expert knowledge gains whatever vitality it has from being forged through deliberative process that makes each responsive to the other. Without the participation of citizens – understood by Dewey as substantive input – justification of one's actions would come uncoupled from being accountable to the public.

There is a practical upshot to Dewey's argument. For example, where decision making is based less on the continuous input from public hearings, town hall meetings, advisory councils, and other deliberative bodies, there is greater reason to be concerned about the ends to which those decisions aim and the background interests from which they proceed. Moreover, there is reason to be equally suspicious of bureaucratic processes that are resistant to expanding decision making power by taking a bottom-up approach.[51] Of course there may be good reason not to take such an approach, as for example when we think

about the obstacles that limited resources and time pose for political decision making. Here Lippmann's point about the obstacles to broad-based inclusion is inescapable. But Dewey's argument implies that the burden of proof must rest with those who seek less rather than more inclusive arrangements.[52] So to the extent that experts guide political power without taking direction from the public in the form of deliberation, the entire decision making process loses in legitimacy what it gains in suspicion.

5. Democracy as a Mechanism for Managing Power

The considerations above, which directly engage Lippmann, are part of how Dewey understands the historical emergence of democracy as a way of broadening the use of political power. Indeed, he defends this view in *The Public and Its Problems*. Throughout the work, Dewey consistently emphasizes the fortuitous emergence of political democracy (chap. 3). He resists the idea that democracy was fated to happen. By political democracy he means "a mode of government, a specified practice in selecting officials and regulating their conduct as officials" through universal suffrage, that emphasizes the publicity of decision making (286). Despite its contingent emergence, Dewey argues that democracy's development nonetheless represents an "effort in the first place to counteract the forces that have so largely determined the possession of rule by accidental and irrelevant factors, and in the second place an effort to counteract the tendency to employ political power to serve private instead of public ends" (287).

In keeping with his discussion in *The Public and Its Problems* and *Liberalism and Social Action*, he sees democratic liberalism emerging in an attempt to block political power from being exercised arbitrarily: "I would not minimize the advance scored in substitution of methods of discussion and conference for the method of arbitrary rule."[53] The use of power is arbitrary, for him, when it cannot be substantively informed by those over whom it will be exercised. In such instances, Dewey argues, freedom itself is threatened. So legitimate political power is not merely restrictive – that is, it does not merely constrain freedom – but more significantly, it makes freedom possible by giving citizens control over the forces that govern and enable their lives. Political power thus refers to both the role individuals play in "forming and directing the activities" of the community to which they belong, and also the possibility that is open to them for "participating according to need in the values" that their community sustains (328).

Dewey's defense of democracy is important for redefining the meaning of political participation, signaled by the last bit of quoted text. Democracy, as he describes it, defines members not simply by virtue of the actual participation with which citizens engage in determining social possibilities, but also by the potential participation that remains open to them if need so arises. For him, to the extent that power functions to determine social possibilities, those

possibilities cannot be of such a nature that they preclude the future contestability and development of how power functions. Hence the following remark: "The strongest point to be made in behalf of even such rudimentary political forms as democracy has already attained, popular voting, majority rule and so on, is that to some extent they involve a consultation and discussion which uncover social needs and troubles" (364). To be attentive to such needs and troubles means that "policies and proposals for social action [should] be treated as working hypotheses, not as programs to be rigidly adhered to and executed" (362). As he had argued decades earlier, to say that we hold in reserve the power to contest indicates that the legitimacy of decision making hinges on the extent to which citizens do not feel permanently bound by those decisions in the face of new and different political changes. Of course Lippmann would not deny this, but for Dewey he is unable to flesh out a meaningful view of contestation that relies on the necessary input of the public.

Given that *The Public and Its Problems* is, at least in part, concerned with diminishing the use of arbitrary power, Dewey not only seeks to position us to identify when political actors may potentially fail to subject their actions to democratic oversight, but he also positions us to highlight why they may refuse. This will often point more directly to material, social, and institutional incentives that discourage one from engaging in deliberation and genuine problem solving. Such conditions highlight the extent to which power has become concentrated in the hands of a few to the disadvantage of broad-base inclusion, and allow us to recognize, at the very least, when we have exhausted the quest to transform our institutions from within and when we must stand in an more oppositional relationship to them. The result is that citizens, Dewey argues, will have to create, through protest or violence, a new space where inquiry may once again thrive in the service of collective problem-solving. His argument on this point relates directly to his descriptions of the public and the state; indeed, his account of the relationship between the public and the state brings into view the normative work his concern with managing power does for democracy and how it potentially enables a more radical politics.

6. Returning to the Openness of Democracy

The view of democracy that Dewey defends and which informs *The Public and Its Problems* is fundamentally linked to how he understands the function of the public and its relationship to the state. In *The Public and Its Problems* he envisions the public as the permanent space of contingency in the sense that there can be no *a priori* delimitation, except as it emerges from individuals and groups that coalesce in the service of problem-solving, and that therefore require the administrative power of the state to address their concerns. He envisions publics as standing in a directive and supportive relationship to the state and its representative and administrative institutions. But insofar as the state is resistant to transformation because of reification, publics then function in a more

oppositional role that builds their power external to the state. As was the case in 1888, Dewey's view of democracy entails a kind of openness in which its substantive meaning – that is, what concerns the community addresses and what ends it pursues – is always in the process of being determined.

The place to begin our discussion is with Dewey's understanding of the public as described in chapter 1 of *The Public and Its Problems*. "The public," he says, "consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (245). The emergence of the public is prompted by a set of transactions within society whose impact on a group of individuals is of such a nature that it requires focused action that cannot otherwise be provided by them. This need not imply that the association of individuals that comes to comprise the public was in existence prior to the problem; it will often be the case that the indirect consequences of transactions now perceived as problematic determine the members that comprise the public.

We need to be clear at this point. For Dewey, society is an arrangement of individuals who simultaneously belong to distinct and overlapping associations, what we often refer to as civil society. In civil society, information and pressures get communicated across those associations. In such pluralistic conditions, problems and conflicts are bound to emerge, some of which may very well come from the functioning of governmental regulation or activities of the market economy. The result of such problems is that groups within civil society are politicized and so become a public. To say they become politicized only means that indirect consequences have affected individuals to such an extent that a distinct apparatus is needed to address their concerns. The associated group that emerges may already be in existence, albeit in a nonpolitical mode (e.g. religious organizations, professional associations, or cultural organizations), in civil society. Or it may be the case that the public is comprised of multiple associations that were already in existence, having no discernible relationship to each other until the problem emerged. The problem helps focus what is shared and provides the point of departure for collective problem-solving, even as its members debate and argue over how best to address the problem.

A concern should emerge at this point regarding Dewey's account of the public. On the one hand, he speaks of "the public." Yet he seems quite clear that multiple groups and associations of individuals advance claims requiring systematic care (280–281). In fact, he cautions those theorists that make use of the definite article, saying that "the concept of the state, like most concepts which are introduced by 'The,' is both too rigid and too tied up with controversies to be of ready use" (241). The use of "the" when used in conjunction with "public," suggests a homogenous domain in which the whole of society is directed through a deliberative mechanism, while the absence of the definite article points to a space that is internally plural in which deliberation is context-specific. How does Dewey address this ambiguity?

Dewey's answer seems to be that "the public" denotes a space of pluralism in which the indirect consequences of various and distinct groups require systematic care. In other words, it is a space not quite reducible to civil society, but not yet identifiable with governmental institutions, in which claims regarding the need for systematic care are acknowledged by citizens and around which they consolidate their identity. There is no privileged access to mutually recognized concerns or solutions – that is, they must be built up discursively – and so all members stand on equal footing. Citizens seek to translate their power of voice as a specific public into state power. State power becomes the administrative component that can effect change. So "the public" refers to a space internally differentiated among specific publics.

In explaining the meaning of systematic care, Dewey invokes the image of the state precisely to institutionalize claims built up from *the* public that consolidate into *a* public. He writes the following: "[T]he state is the organization of the public effected through officials for the protection of the interests shared by its members" (256). So the translation of claims and grievances into state power requires officers and administrators who are charged as trustees of a public, holding fiduciary power: "Officials are those who look out for and take care of the interests thus affected" (246). For Dewey, this means that publics, whether on the local or national level, do not only supervise how power functions, but in many respects determine and influence the ends to which it will be put: "A public articulated and operating through representative officers is the state; there is no state without a government, but also there is none without the public" (277). Hence, the state, although important for Dewey is nonetheless a "secondary form of association" (279). In other words, although the activity of political institutions – that is, the formation of laws, statutes, and binding regulations, or the establishment of administrative agencies, for example – will often be the result of those officials and representatives, this only comes about for Dewey because the direction and purpose of these institutions is determined elsewhere. Although functioning at the fringes of the state, the public is nonetheless configured as the site from which opinion- and will-formation originate and which is institutionalized via the state.[54]

Dewey's account of the relationship between publics and the state specifically rejects the notion of a unified deliberative public that makes claims in the name of "the people" and that is beyond contestation. Here, once more, we return to themes of 1888. The public refers to a space of difference in unity that functions only if we see it as indeterminate. This much Dewey explains when he says that scholars have looked for the state in the wrong place:

> They have sought for the key to the nature of the state in the field of agencies, in that of doers of deeds, or in some will of purpose back of deeds. They have sought to explain the state in terms of authorship. Ultimately all deliberate choices proceed from somebody in particular; acts are performed by somebody, and all arrangements and plans are

> made by somebody in the most concrete sense of somebody. Some John Doe and Richard Roe figure in every transaction. ... The quality presented is not authorship but authority, the authority of recognized consequences to control the behavior which generates and averts extensive and enduring results of weal and woe (247).

His point is that connecting the state *as* state to particular authors who comprise *a* public undercuts the extent to which *the* public can function as a sensory network for emerging problems that can then be managed by state institutions. Focusing on authorship for understanding the state ironically fixes the latter and imputes to the public a substantive unified identity that, as Dewey argues, is out of step with a pluralistic society.

So for Dewey there can be no permanent closure of the public itself with a fixed identity from which the state can be inferred, even though there will be specific delimitations of particular publics. The latter – delimitations of particular publics – implies that state institutions and the substantive decisions that follow from those institutions (at both national and local levels of governance) will very well come into existence in response to the specific claims of *a* public, as for instance, those arguing for health-care reform, more equitable distribution of monies for public education, or better safeguards on businesses whose waste by-products are contaminating a local reservoir. The former point, that which relates to the public as such, means that insofar as the claims of a particular public are instantiated in the state, they cannot exclude the possibility of addressing developing needs that require systematic care. To be sure, all developing needs may not be legitimate in this regard, but the first step in assessing their legitimacy, Dewey believes, will have to rest with the extent to which addressing those needs might potentially implicate us in relationships of domination.[55] Still, Dewey's point is that the public is that space in which the democratic state attempts to see widely and feel deeply in order to make an informed judgment. All of this means that for him, a democratic public and by that fact a democratic state is radically inclusive in theory, even though such inclusiveness means the emergence of distinct and exclusive publics.

In many ways Dewey's discussion of the public has as its goal an inclusive state apparatus.

> There is no sharp and clear line which draws itself, pointing out beyond peradventure, like the line left by a receding high tide, just where a public comes into existence which has interests so significant that they must be looked after and administered by special agencies, or governmental officers. Hence there is often room for dispute. The line of demarcation between actions left to private initiative and management and those regulated by the state has to be discovered experimentally (275).

Experimentally determining the nature and scope of the state means we are attempting to envision supplemental appendages that need to be added to address the concerns of a particular public. But we are also implicitly testing the extent to which preexisting institutions are amenable to transformation. Insofar as such institutions are not, Dewey envisions the public as standing in a more oppositional rather than supportive and guiding relationship to the state. In this instance, the claims of specific publics may ultimately point to the entrenched resistance and limitation of state institutions. As he explains of political development, "progress is not steady and continuous. Retrogression is as periodic as advance" (254). In this context, the public potentially stands in an uneasy relationship to the state, especially in its attempts to democratize the functioning of the state. Dewey captures this point where he worries about the extent to which state institutions ossify around a set of interests and so become unresponsive to new and emerging publics, the result of which generates a revolutionary impulse.

> These changes [relating to associated relationships] are extrinsic to political forms which, once established, persist of their own momentum. The new public which is generated remains long inchoate, unorganized, because it cannot use inherited political agencies. The latter, if elaborate and well institutionalized, obstruct the organization of the new public. They prevent that development of new forms of the state which might grow up rapidly were social life more fluid, less precipitated into set political legal molds. To form itself, the public has to break existing political forms. This is hard to do because these forms are themselves the regular means of instituting change. The public which generated political forms is passing away, but the power and lust of possession remains in the hands of the officers and agencies which the dying public instituted. This is why the change of the form of states is *so often effected only by revolution*. (254)

We should not understate the importance of this passage in *The Public and Its Problems* precisely because it points to the radical character of Dewey's outlook. His claim is not simply that emerging publics cannot use existing state institutions because they are insufficient to address developing needs. Rather, existing institutions may be inimical to those new needs. Here, we may think, for example, of the legally instantiated power of white males in the American context – power that formed in direct resistance to the demands of women and black Americans seeking equal and fair access. We can diversify our examples to include other rebellious groups: labor unions on behalf of workers, environmental organizations, and farmers, just to name a few. To be sure, these movements exist on a scale that slides from reform movements aimed at transformation of legal or institutional norms (e.g., trade unions and green organizations) to radical associations looking to redescribe the value system

upon which institutional structures are based (e.g., civil rights movement and women's rights movement). But in all situations, Dewey argues, the claims of the public cannot flow fluidly into the administrative power of the state. Instead, publics must seek to build power externally, the result of which functions as a counterweight to public(s) that are entrenched via the state and wield arbitrary power.

Given his larger account, Dewey's point is that the public is always already internally differentiated. That is, the term refers to both the substantively smooth incorporation of publics into the state, and the possibility of insurgent publics whose character is determined by virtue of state resistance and illegitimate acts of political authority. These publics emerge not simply to offer oppositional interpretations of their problematic situations and the needs involved, but to see a transformation in the state that substantively addresses those problems and needs. This is precisely why Dewey says in that last sentence that when the power of the state ossifies, transformation often comes about through revolution. The idea of revolution follows from the logic of democratic openness, the belief that democracy's legitimacy – indeed, its moral appeal – is fundamentally tied to the contestable use of political power. For Dewey, this is what makes democracy both a regime for achieving political goods, and an ideal never fully realized.

As we continue our commitment and defense of democracy, this may in fact be his lasting contribution – namely, a view that sees democracy as always a task before us, but as nonetheless containing the resources within itself to imagine beyond its specific limitations.

NOTES

1. Sir Henry Maine, *Popular Government* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1885/1976).

2. See, for instance, Dewey, "Christianity and Democracy" (1892), *EW* 4: 3–10; "Democracy in Education" (1903), *MW* 3: 229–240; *Democracy and Education* (1916), *MW* 9; "Democracy and Loyalty in the Schools" (1918), *MW* 15: 158–164; "Philosophy and Democracy" (1919), *MW* 11: 41–54.

3. For a good discussion of the specificity of these attacks see Benjamin Evans Lippincott, *Victorian Critics of Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1938).

4. Maine, *Popular Government*, see essays II–III.

5. Ibid., p. 65.

6. Ibid., p. 105 (emphasis added).

7. Ibid., p. 104.

8. Ibid., p. 63, see also p. 190.

9. Ibid., pp. 197–249.

10. Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy," (1888), *EW* 1: 231.

11. Maine, *Popular Government*, pp. 187.

12. Ibid., pp. 160–61.

13. *EW* 1: 231.
14. *EW* 1: 232.
15. *EW* 1: 232.
16. *EW* 1: 233.
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18. Quoted in Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 3rd edn, ed. Paul A Schilpp and Lewis E. Hahn (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), p. 18.
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21. Maine, *Popular Government*, p. 187.
22. *EW* 1: 234 [emphasis added].
23. *EW* 1: 235.
24. *EW* 1: 235.
25. *EW* 1: 239.
26. *EW* 1: 240–241.
27. *EW* 1: 243.
28. *EW* 1: 242.
29. See Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Bk. 3, chaps. 10–11.
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33. Elton Mayo, *The Human Problem of an Industrial Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 177.
34. Cited in Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1922/1997), p. vii.
35. Ibid., p. 173.
36. Ibid., p. 64.

37. Ibid., p. 59.
38. Ibid., p. 64.
39. Ibid., p. 74.
40. Ibid., p. 133.
41. Ibid., p. 65; see also Lippmann, *Phantom Public* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1927/2004), pp. 26–27.
42. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 66.
43. Ibid., p. 63.
44. Ibid., p. 145.
45. Ibid., 182.
46. Ibid., p. 19.
47. Ibid., pp. 195, 236.
48. Dewey, "Review of Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*" (1922), *MW* 13: 337.
49. *MW* 13: 344.
50. *LW* 11: 56.
51. As the reader will note, Dewey himself did not work out what this would look like from an institutional perspective, even as he tries to provide guidance for such an inquiry. For a Deweyan-inspired approach that focuses on institutional reforms see Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, "Introduction," in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Government* (New York: Verso, 2003); Fung, "Deliberative Democracy, Chicago Style: Grass-Roots Governance in Policing and Public Education," in *Deepening Democracy*, pp. 111–143; Fung, *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).
52. See Eric MacGilvray, *Reconstructing Public Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), chap. 4.
53. *LW* 11: 50.
54. For a contemporary variant on this argument see Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
55. The logic of the argument seems to point necessarily in the direction of open or more porous borders. This view must be cautiously embraced, since all norms must be pragmatically assessed so as to keep in view other imperatives.

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Dewey, Religion, and the New Atheism

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This article explores the conflict between those who find value in religious commitment and others who recommend the complete abandonment of religion. It examines John Dewey's reflections on religion in order to assess its possible resources for addressing this specific conflict. Dewey's discussion highlights deep human impulses that a secular perspective should address. But this should be accomplished not through his proposed broadening of religious life, but by promoting these impulses and the community life that responds to them as shared human needs and ideals that go beyond religious commitment.

> The future of religion is connected with the possibility of developing a faith in the possibilities of human experience and human relationships that will create a vital sense of the solidarity of human interests and inspire action to make that sense a reality.
> – John Dewey (1930), *LW* 5: 273–4

1. Introduction

The question of the value of religious commitment remains, to put it mildly, an important one. Religious extremism provides a clear example of the negative influence organized religion exerts in various parts of the world. However, many people continue to locate a source of positive guidance within the set of modern rituals and practices found in religion. Their religious commitment may take a number of different forms, including the acceptance of a supernatural interpretation of religious doctrines, and what Kitcher (2007, 133) calls 'spiritual religion', where the Bible or other religious texts are viewed as providing a set of moral examples from which to pattern human life and interrelations. When viewed as intimately tied to social practices, rather than as simply the beliefs of separate, isolated individuals, these commitments can be further seen as providing a larger sense of community and shared perspective that contributes to the overall meaning of individual lives. This ongoing social import of religious practice conflicts with another prevalent attitude, recently given pointed expression in what has been called the 'New Atheism'.[1] These commentators

emphasize the intellectual bankruptcy of religious creeds and doctrines, while further arguing that this very fact undermines all forms of organized religion. From their critical perspective, the proper inference to draw from the demonstrated falsity of religious doctrine is a full-blown secularism, or an even more militant atheistic stance that recommends the complete abandonment of all things religious.

This conflict is not simply an intellectual clash between alternative systems of belief, since, for example, in the case of spiritual religion the literal truth of religious doctrine is rejected. Rather, as I have suggested, it turns on how there remains a continuing attachment to the value of engaging in the religious life, here described in terms of its social role and function, despite an intellectual discrediting of religious orthodoxy that finds little importance in any form of religious commitment. The issue can be brought into clearer focus once we note that the critical approach of the New Atheism tends to focus on religious institutions and doctrines, while offering little discussion of the value many find in religious communities and practices. As a result, their thoroughgoing intellectual dismissal of religion fails to fully engage the question of its possible social import. In addition, their criticisms not only ignore the positive functions many find in the religious life, but emphasize, more or less explicitly, that a secular viewpoint can provide all the significance and value that is indeed fundamental to human existence and fulfillment (Dawkins 2006, 345–374). But for those who see this secular viewpoint as a general assault on those religious communities that give their lives meaning, this remains an obscure option at best. It is difficult not to view the strategy of the New Atheism as continuing to encourage the sort of cultural divisions that generate more fundamental disputes over matters of public concern in the areas of science, religion and democracy.[2] Without a more explicit attempt to recognize the importance of the social dimensions of religious practice, this specific form of the conflict between religion and secularism, and the more pressing public disputes it generates, remains intractable. The challenge is this: is there a way to articulate a perspective that recognizes the social import of religious practice while not remaining exclusively tied to either a religious or secular commitment. Such a stance could portray community values and ideals in terms that both religious and secular groups could recognize as important precisely because they are not promoted as the sole reserve of one group. These ideals could then be seen as shared, while still being understood as providing the kind of social support and meaning that many religious individuals recognize as vital to their daily lives. Without such a perspective, secularists cannot help but see religious commitment as outdated and unnecessary, while the religious will continue to view the secularist option as a meaningless alternative to their own commitments.[3]

This essay examines aspects of John Dewey's reflections on religion in order to assess its possible resources for addressing this specific challenge. I enlist the help of this American pragmatist for several reasons. He shares the secular rejection of the orthodoxy surrounding religious doctrine expressed by

the New Atheism, yet this does not result in a further blindness to the social value many assign to religious practice. Instead, Dewey argues for a broadening of the religious life, one that cultivates the "attitudes that lend deep and enduring support to the processes of living" (*LW* 9: 12).[4] He further attempts to relocate the religious life within the natural and social transactions that make up human existence and experience. When viewed from this perspective, the vital function of religion is found with its tendency to further the demands of human communal transactions. It is the democratic ideals of mutual cooperation, communication and action that Dewey seeks to emancipate from religious orthodoxy and further promote *as* religious ideals to be further cultivated within modern life (Campbell 1995, 270; Randall 1940, 126–136). In addressing what he saw as the 'crisis' of religion, his discussion is especially attuned to the value that is associated with the social elements of religious commitment.

After reviewing the relevant social dimensions of his attempt to reconstruct the 'religious', I consider an objection that questions the point of retaining a religious label for functions, ends, and values that are depicted as naturally and socially grounded. While this argument has force against Dewey's specific proposal for broadening our conception of the religious, I argue that it rests on a rugged individualism that is foreign to his approach, and which further prevents us from properly locating what remains of ongoing importance in his account. Dewey's aim in his religious writings was to locate and make explicit an intermediate conception of the religious life, one wedged in between the inconsistencies of liberal theology and defeatist forms of militant atheism.[5] My aim here is to tease out some central elements of Dewey's emphasis on the social import of religious communities in order to bring into more explicit view some possible shared ideals across a sharp secular-religious divide.[6] Instead of accepting Dewey's religious characterization of the ideals found in community life, I view his proposal as highlighting social values that are not exclusively tied to either a secular or religious perspective. Importantly, this emphasis on the value of community life is ignored by the militant stance of the New Atheism, and which contributes to our inability to recognize these ideals as transcending the commitments of a secular or religious view. The contemporary interest of Dewey's religious proposal is found with its promotion of the social importance of religious commitment, since this helps to make explicit a set of ideals or ends that both the secular and non-secular can identify from within their respective vantage points. I conclude by suggesting that these democratic ideals of mutual cooperation and participation might then be further used as a potential vehicle for more effective dialogue across what appears to be an intractable secular-religious divide.

2. Dewey's Reconstruction of the Religious Life

The promotion of the religious life that Dewey envisions is most fully presented in his *A Common Faith*, where he argues for a separation of the religious from

the supernatural interpretation found in traditional religious doctrines. He seeks to uncover the "vital core" of religious commitment and to offer further suggestions for promoting this central attitude in ways relevant to modern life (Campbell 1995, 270; *LW* 9: 41, 44, 47–48). He argues that the historic function of religion was to provide a sense of community that helped to integrate human interaction toward common ideals, purposes and action (Campbell 1995, 270–271). Religion, he emphasizes, was a "symbol of the existence of conditions and forces that gave unity and a centre to men's views of life." However, the various institutions and doctrines which have become attached to this basic value of community have hampered its continued growth and potential (*LW* 5: 71). He further explains:

> Consciousness of the whole has been connected with reverences, affections, and loyalties which are communal. But special ways of expressing the communal sense have been established. They have been limited to a select social group; they have hardened into obligatory rites and been imposed as conditions of salvation. Religion has lost itself in cults, dogmas and myths. Consequently the office of religion as sense of community and one's place in it has been lost. (*MW* 14: 226, also see *LW* 9: 8)

The multiplication of religious institutions has led to cultural divides resulting in separation, isolation, and conflict (Dewey *MW* 4: 175; *LW* 9: 55–56). Consequently, the core historic function of religion as a source of unity and human community has been lost. Preserving this feature of the religious life requires its separation from the supernatural interpretations and institutions that have tended to obscure its true significance (*LW* 9: 4). This emphasis on the ideal of community and its place within religion is, not surprisingly, connected to Dewey's vision of democracy as a way a life. Randall elaborates on this central Deweyan theme when he explains that "Life ... achieves its richest significance when human beings undertake and undergo things together, with that conscious interplay of finding out each other's interests and views that attends a community of purpose" (Randall 1940, 109; *MW* 12: 200–201). Dewey thinks it appropriate to view this sense of being at one with both nature and humanity generally as a religious ideal. This active adjustment to our natural and social surroundings provides a greater sense of the unity with the conditions that surround us, a felt connection that can be accurately characterized as religious in purpose and function (Randall 1940, 118–9; *LW* 9: 12–13).

Dewey's criticisms of organized religion are directed at their anti-religious consequences, notably the sectarian tendencies and emphasis on the private, special interests of a small group. He presents the orthodoxy and organized institutions surrounding religion as set against what is open, public, and common, what Randall describes as "that which can be tested and communicated in 'ordinary ways'" (1940, 121). The religious unification of life

Dewey envisions is to be found in our common and public experience, in ways that he further thinks are illustrated in both science and democracy (Randall 1940, 122). He explains that his writings on religion were: "devoted to making explicit the religious values implicit in the spirit of science as undogmatic reverence for truth in whatever form it presents itself, and the religious values implicit in our common life, especially in the moral significance of democracy as a way of living together" (*LW* 14: 79). The social unity that Dewey promotes as a central religious function is found in both scientific and democratic communities which then serve as concrete examples of the value of cooperative, shared experience and endeavor.

It is this critical setting and further understanding of religion's central community function which sets the agenda for Dewey's positive reconstruction of the 'religious'. This requires, in part, the philosophical reinterpretation of various religious terms, concepts, and symbols that can still be used to promote this function, but which are currently given supernatural interpretations (Campbell 1995, 275). We have already noted Dewey's emphasis on separating the 'religious' from religion. Here, he notes the difference between a religion, which signifies a specific set of beliefs and doctrines, and the adjective 'religious' that refers to an attitude that one can take toward every object and every purposed end or ideal (*LW* 9: 8). By specifying the religious elements in human experience, Dewey focuses on consequences rather than causes. Different kinds of experience may result in the sort of function that he deems religious, thereby making the experience itself a religious one. 'Religious' attitudes are to be reinterpreted as those that provide deep and enduring support to our lives, where experience has yielded an improved adjustment to life and its surrounding conditions (*LW* 9: 11). In such cases, there is a unification of the self and of the self to the environment, which provides a lasting sense of meaning and value and further supports us through difficult and trying times (Rockefeller 1998, 139; *LW* 9: 11–13).

Dewey thinks that many individuals have achieved this type of self-unity and connection to their local environment through their devotion to an ideal end or cause. This source of religious value is connected to those ideals that guide us in our actions and which help us to find continuing support and meaning in our lives: "Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles ... because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality" (*LW* 9: 19). Such ideals are not mere fantasies, since they receive further support and unity through human action, and thereby become concretely realized through their application to daily affairs. The pursuit of such ideals is further explored with Dewey's attempt to rethink our use of the term 'faith'. He contrasts his version of 'moral faith' with religious conceptions of faith, which are presented as substitutes for knowledge and as a sign or vision of things to come (*LW* 9: 15). To abandon the intellectual ambitions of this sense of faith, and its further attempt to give rational support to religious doctrines, would allow us to develop a moral faith in our joint abilities to reach common ends and

ideals. In clarifying the nature of this moral faith he explains: "Conviction in the moral sense signifies being conquered, vanquished, in our active nature by an ideal end; it signifies acknowledgment of its rightful claim over our desires and purposes. Such acknowledgment is practical, not primarily intellectual" (*LW* 9: 15, 23). So conceived, our moral faith involves being motivated by an end that is the product of our vision of ideal possibilities. Dewey is explicit here in noting the practical import of this faith and its motivating force over our actions. It is through active relations to our environment that this conviction becomes most explicit, conferring a sense of meaning and significance to our life as a whole. When commitment to such ends has the further function of generating a unified sense of ourselves, and of our relations to others and the world, the result is, once again, a religious commitment to an inclusive vision of ideal possibilities. Dewey is here characterizing religious devotion in 'worldly' terms through its intimate connections to the welfare of others and the further realization of conditions that promote such interests. And this is, as we have seen, illustrated within a democratic and scientific vision of human life. Religion is not in conflict with scientific or democratic institutions, rather they help to further strengthen our resolve in a religious devotion to inclusive human ideals (Rockefeller 1998, 138–141).[7]

While some commentators have difficulties reconciling Dewey's emphasis on personal faith and religious attitudes with his further insistence on a 'religion of shared experience' (Randall 1940, 140), his reconceptualization of moral faith and religious attitude are intended to have a social import not found in their sectarian religious formulations. Two points are especially relevant here. First, this moral faith and religious attitude are portrayed as having broad application within human experience, which means that the significance and value they give human life can also be widely experienced and shared. Secondly, the universal character of such instances of moral faith and religious attitude relies on what would appear to be an obvious but important fact about human beings, namely, that regardless of whether we are secular or religious, we all require a Deweyan 'moral faith' in working towards unseen ends if our lives are to be viewed as meaningful and significant. Once again, this faith has a practical import since it focuses on our active engagement in 'life projects' where we attempt to accomplish certain ends that further attach value to our lives. Dewey's rethinking of these concepts and their proper use, specifically with their wide application in human experience and explicit connection to the value-giving ends expressed through human action, results in his social rendering of the value found in the religious life.

This positive rethinking of the sources of religious value is completed with Dewey's discussion of the social functions of religion and its place within our modern secularized communities (*LW* 9: 40–58). In seeking to lay bare the social dimensions surrounding the religious life, Dewey is primarily interested in promoting changes to human habits and practices, rather than institutions (Campbell 1995, 279; Randall 1940, 112). He claims that the rise of secular

institutions has overshadowed the place of religion leading to its gradual separation and isolation from society. One is no longer born into a religious community, but into a religious background that clearly competes with the various secular institutions that we all participate in. For Dewey this change in what he calls the "social center of gravity of religion" is unprecedented, causing religious belief to be viewed as personal and not as tied to the "very nature of social organization" (*LW* 9: 44). Religious institutions have responded to this increasing social isolation by reaffirming the very religious doctrines that have caused its separation from modern life and its secular institutions. This has helped to further obscure our view of what remains valuable within religion, specifically, its emphasis on the inclusive demands of community. Dewey's reinterpretation of the 'religious' and of 'faith' is intended to counter this tendency and help broaden our understanding of religious life so that its contributions to the promotion of community ideals can be rightfully seen. The import and value of religious life would no longer be compartmentalized within specific religious doctrines and all elements of social life could be seen as expressive of the religious value of inclusive community.

Dewey sees the values embedded in religion as connected to the unity of purpose and action that have helped to create the social conditions that enrich human life. But their lingering commitment to religious orthodoxy has hampered the full expression of these values, separating them from the social context where they can still contribute to human life. By indicating how religious values can survive their separation from outdated doctrines, Dewey thinks that we can view our common pursuit of shared ideals as a source of religious value and meaning. So conceived, the example of the religious life would represent a devotion to democratic and cooperative values, rather than personal private beliefs. It would reject the idea of individual salvation in an otherworldly place, it favor of fostering the common human good by emphasizing an integrating sense of 'community' (Campbell 1995, 280; *MW* 14: 227). By helping to locate human ideals within the larger communities we share, and by making such relations explicit, it would help to contribute to the increased fulfillment of all its members.

3. Evaluating Dewey's Religious Proposal

Dewey's response to the 'religious' crisis of his time emphasizes that the value of religious commitment is found with its role in helping to foster a sense of community. We have seen that this has been obscured from two directions. From within religion itself, through its own orthodoxy and sectarian influence, and through a process of increasing secularization that has made religious belief a personal, private affair distinct from social institutions. Dewey argues that only by separating the example of the religious life from its institutions and orthodoxy can its historic community function be made explicit once again. However, this alignment of religious value with the ideals of mutual cooperation

and purpose seen most explicitly in Dewey's view of democracy may appear to undermine his very attempt to present them as religious. One might be inclined to endorse the democratic ideals of mutual cooperation without taking on board the religious attitude he thinks should accompany it. Rather than defend Dewey's general attempt to broaden the religious life in this way, I will argue that his emphasis on the social dimensions of religion provide a vehicle for locating a shared ideal that both the secular and religious can recognize as valuable. The importance of his religious proposal is found in the way it highlights shared aims and ideals that are not exclusively tied to a religious or secular viewpoint. We are open to endorse the importance of the community ideals he promotes without this requiring a further commitment to the widening of the religious life that Dewey envisions.

My guiding suggestion is that the contemporary relevance of Dewey's religious proposal is found with its emphasis on the value generated by the social function of religious communities. This feature of religious commitment remains central to many members of such communities, but is further ignored by the perspective of the New Atheism. Commenting on this aspect of Dewey's view, Kitcher has suggested that it indicates a position where spiritual religion and secular humanism might converge, precisely with his attempt to broaden our conception of religious attitudes and life (2007, 161). Here, Kitcher adds, the challenge is to chart a way to address the human purposes religion serves while not accepting its dangerous falsehoods. A secular humanism needs to respond to deep human impulses or locate a "cosmopolitan version of spiritual religion" that does not slide back into a parochial form of supernaturalism (Kitcher 2007, 162).

But the secular humanist may raise the following objection.[8] As we have seen, Dewey's view attempts to relocate the value of the religious life within natural and social transactions. The core importance of religious commitment is now depicted in terms of its support of communal interaction based on common ideals, which are grounded in the social and natural interconnections that form our larger human environment. But after having shown that such ideals are the result of natural and social conditions why should we further insist that they be viewed *as* religious? It may seem that this naturalization of religious values and ideals thereby demonstrates why they no longer need to be viewed in religious terms.

The secular humanist would then see Dewey as an ally in the attempt to show how the meaning and value often associated with religious ideals can be found elsewhere, within the very social and natural conditions humans find themselves in (Eldridge 1998, 129). This objection does not, as it may appear at first glance, simply assume the identification of the religious with the super-natural; something that Dewey attempts to undermine. It asks for an explicit explanation concerning what it is about this religious perspective that promotes types of value, and meaning that a secular humanist view cannot (Kitcher 2007, 154). What is it about the ethical, moral dimensions of secular humanism that is

lacking and needs the additional resources found in Dewey's reconception of the religious life?

There are two sides to this objection that are intertwined, but can be usefully distinguished. The first issue concerns Dewey's intellectual reworking of the religious life through his redefining 'faith' and 'religious' in terms of our interactions with others and our local environment. This, it might be argued, demonstrates that the values and ideals of community when attached to the religious connotation of such terms is not mandatory. They can retain their value as ideals while being fully depicted in 'worldly' terms. But, this suggests that we have been given no independent reason to still characterize them as *religious* values and ideals. The general naturalist orientation of Dewey's mature philosophy would also seem to support to this conclusion. From the perspective of the New Atheism, we should conclude that Dewey's naturalization of religious value, instead of promoting a new sense of religious value, helps to further support a complete intellectual dismissal of religious commitment. This might be further seen to lend critical support to a second issue that focuses more specifically on the need for such value within our daily lives. Here, the objection turns to the practical application of this proposal and emphasizes that Dewey has shown that we no longer need to see these values *as* religious in order for us to view them as important or worth striving for. Even if we are sympathetic with the overall motives and aims of this project, Dewey's discussion reveals no lived *need* for us to view such values in religious terms (Eldridge 1998, 129, 167–169). Such critical remarks concerning the intellectual reworking of the religious, and its practical implications, not only dismiss Dewey's general religious proposal, but they would seem to further challenge its contemporary relevance. It is then important to recognize why they do not undermine my use of Dewey's view as a vehicle for isolating shared needs and ideals that go beyond religious commitment.

As a first preliminary remark, we should note that the most prominent, public advocates of secular humanism fail to explicitly discuss the sort of community ideals that Dewey emphasizes as central to religious life. Moreover, they fail to show any great sensitivity as to why the social functions of religious commitment may remain important. Consequently, such positions do not appreciate the way religious commitment can be intimately connected to the value of social participation and interaction, and that this connection is precisely what many find important within the religious life. Not surprisingly, there is hence no further attempt to understand the importance of such community ideals, or to recognize their more general role in providing meaning and significance to human life. But without such understanding, secular viewpoints continue to contribute to the type of social divisions that Dewey was most concerned to overcome. Even when secular humanists promote the sort of community ideals that Dewey presents as religious, there remains a danger in being insensitive to the social import of religious experience.

The key point is this: when secularists advocate the abandonment of all

things religious, even while at the same time promoting ideals of mutual participation and cooperation, then the ideals and values central to an inclusive democratic society are portrayed as exclusively humanist and secularist. Whether cooperative ideals are highlighted or not, the outcome remains the same in both cases. Those who remain committed to religion because of its social import are not offered an alternative that they can take seriously. Either the group participation that gives meaning to their daily lives is ignored, or it is portrayed in terms that sever it from its connection to the practices of religious communities. Once again, social divisions between the religious and secular are reinforced with no genuine possibility of communication across this divide.

The failure to recognize how community participation informs the value of human life is also seen with the claim that Dewey's naturalization of the religious supports its militant rejection. This reading of Dewey's proposal downplays or ignores the social environment that supports all human life, whether involving secular or religious communities. Here, as Dewey himself explains, humanity is viewed as "living in an indifferent and hostile world and issuing blasts of defiance" (*LW* 9: 36). No attempt is made to understand how social interaction and communication generates the values and ideals that contribute to the significance of human life. Similar remarks can be made in reply to Eldridge's practical point concerning the lack of present need to view these ideas in a religious way. It is true, of course, that many people would share the view that they have no need for viewing the type of democratic cooperative value promoted by Dewey in religious terms. Such ideals can inform their conduct and action without being tied to any form of religious commitment or devotion. The key point here, however, is that such a response is, at bottom, a personal one that is responsive to an individual need. It does not fully recognize how others may think differently on this issue, precisely because they have different needs. Once again, there is a failure to appreciate the *social* import of the values Dewey emphasizes whether these are given a secular or religious formulation. This critical response then implies the sort of cultural and social divisions that Dewey sought to overcome with his conception of religious value. It is important to note that my point is not that the poor unenlightened still need religion, so we must preserve it for their sake. Rather, without an attempt to clarify the terms in which this value is shared, that is, without a deepened understanding of the way community ideals give meaning to individual's lives regardless of their religious commitment, we are left with a secular response than can only further encourage cultural divisions and social conflict.[9]

Dewey's account can help to move beyond that stalemate. His re-conceptualization of the 'religious' is based on the conviction that philosophy can help to change how we think about various features of human life by describing how we might go about instituting such changes. This proposal is offered in the attempt to help break down the divisions that continue to disrupt our ongoing struggle to improve society and human life. Religion has been and continues to be important for many individuals, but its basic doctrines conflict

with other dimensions of modern life. In addressing this problem Dewey asks us to acknowledge the reality of the value found within religious commitment, especially as it encourages democratic ideals, and to wonder how it might reestablish contact with other social institutions without the debilitating affects of its outdated theological doctrines. This task is the philosophical one of reconsidering the place of such ideal purposes and values within the complex social dynamic within which we all live. Dewey hopes that by engaging in this task we will encourage a deeper recognition of their prevalence beyond the confines of religious doctrine. The result is a strategy for coping with the religious issues that continue to divide us, by broadening our sense of the religious so that it becomes continuous with our social ends and goals.

However, as I have suggested, we do not need to accept Dewey's particular implementation of this strategy in order to see the importance of the role of community in helping to promote value and meaning within human life. By locating this as an ideal within the religious life, one that is not tied to any specific religious or secular commitment, Dewey has highlighted a shared core ideal of community and its importance for human life that can serve as a platform for dialogue across social divisions. The meaning and significance attached to life through a commitment to democratic ideals of community and mutual cooperation, is something that both sides of a secular-religious divide can view as significant and worth promoting. Neither group has an exclusive right to such ideals, and their ongoing promotion is in the interest of all members of the larger community we share.

Through his discussion of the social functions of religious communities, Dewey highlights deep human impulses that a secular perspective needs to address. However, this can be accomplished not though a broadening of religious attitude, but by promoting these impulses and the community life that responds to them as shared human needs and ideals that go beyond religious commitment. It has been suggested that a secularist viewpoint may eventually replace religious commitment in its various forms (Gottlieb 2007). No doubt, it is something like this perceived secular future that fuels much of the enthusiasm behind the militant stance of the New Atheism. Nevertheless, it remains important to identify and foster the potential positive functions of religion as a genuine vehicle of human solidarity, rather than ignore the impulses that drive religious commitment.

For some, like Eldridge, Dewey's reconstruction of the religious life will remain unnecessary, but it can still provide secularists with resources for recognizing the important role community ideals play in sustaining life. For others, it may highlight those features of religious commitment that they value, while also demonstrating in ways they too can recognize, that these values are not exclusively tied to such commitments. If so, these values are depicted as available for everyone, and are not seen as the exclusive domain of secularism or religion. This might serve to further highlight how no intellectual engagement with religion, either through its acceptance or rejection, will threaten to divert us

from recognizing the shared values and ideals that remain a crucial part of the communities in which we live. With its specific recognition of the way religion at its best promotes ideals that we all can share, Dewey's religious proposal offers a perspective that can help to overcome the conflicts generated by our inability to see beyond an unbridgeable secular-religious divide.

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NOTES

1. A useful overview is found in Gottlieb 2007. The principal works of the New Atheism are Dawkins 2006, Dennett 2006, Harris 2004, and Hitchens 2007. They all question the intellectual foundation of religious beliefs, but differ somewhat in their further motivations and projects. Dawkins primarily wants to raise consciousness concerning the respectability of atheist commitment. Dennett argues for the importance of a scientific treatment of the origins of religion. Harris forcefully focuses on the irrationality of all forms of religious belief. Finally, Hitchens's discrediting of religion centers on its human-made character. My interest here is in some of the general contours of their militant stance rather than their detailed criticisms of religious commitment. This is in part because their arguments repeat well-known points that I more or less accept. More significantly, I am concerned with what follows from these arguments, specifically, whether the inference from an intellectual dismissal of religious belief to a militant rejection of any value within religious life is a good one.

2. My discussion is most clearly directed at the current status and use of religion within America. Nevertheless, it is hoped that it has some broader applications for our understanding of the place of religion in modern culture and society. For discussion of the way religion offers serious obstacles to the effective workings of American democracy, see Kitcher 2008 and Hollinger 2008.

3. The issue here is a subtle one, since from the perspective of the religious, the secular view refuses to see religious commitment as having any special ability to inform human life in a meaningful way (Kitcher 2007, 154–162; Dawkins 2006, 345–374). The alleged neutrality of the scientific investigation of religion suggested by Dennett is ultimately 'corrosive' (Sterelny 2006). For further discussion of this problem and its challenges see Kitcher (2007, 149–166).

4. Kitcher thinks that Dewey correctly recognizes the need for an intermediate position between the extremes of militant atheism and the acceptance of supernatural religion (2007, 160–162). My own way of interpreting Dewey's position agrees that by discussing the social functions of religious communities it highlights deep human impulses that a secular perspective needs to come to grips with. However, as I further suggest below, this can be accomplished, not through a broadening of religious attitude, but by promoting these impulses and the community life that responds to them as shared

human needs and ideals that are not tied to religious commitment. Citations to the *Middle* or *Later Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–1990) are given by *MW* or *LW* followed by volume and page numbers.

5. For further discussion of the motives behind Dewey's religious proposal see Eldridge (1998, 147–149).

6. The aim remains Deweyan in spirit if not in detail, as it takes seriously Dewey's remark that "the most pervasive fallacy of philosophic thinking goes back to neglect of context" (*LW* 6: 5).

7. For a more detailed treatment of Dewey's reinterpretation of the terms 'religious' and 'faith', see Eldridge (1998, 149–167). Dewey also notoriously thought that the concept of 'God' still retained a use after it had been stripped of supernatural connotations. Much critical discussion of *A Common Faith* centered on this issue. My reasons for omitting it here rely on Dewey's later dropping its use, suggesting that it is less central to his overall proposal. For more details and discussion see Rockefeller (1998, 141–146) and Eldridge (1998, 154–160).

8. This objection is adapted from Kitcher's criticism of spiritual religion (2007, 154). We will see that it finds explicit expression in (Eldridge 1998, 129). My use of 'humanism' expresses a general concern for human ideals and values from within a philosophically informed conception of human nature (Olafson 2001, 59).

9. Dawkins, in particular, shows a marked inability to understand this point (2006, 20–22, 394–5). He tends to view the kind of position developed here as a confused failure to distinguish the consolation value of religious belief from its truth. But the key issue as I present it here does not concern the truth of religious belief, but the added value many find through their participation in religious communities. Any secular response that fails to address this fact cannot understand the impulses that influence religious commitment nor can it fully recognize any shared ideal of community that is not tied to a religious or secular commitment.

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Richard Rorty's Disenchanted Liberalism

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This paper identifies cultural disenchantment as a crucial concept in Rorty's understanding of liberalism, and considers how Rorty's use of this term draws on but also differs from similar ideas in Nietzsche and Weber. It argues that Rorty's notion of disenchantment complements his Darwinian view of human nature and his conception of the self as a centerless web of beliefs and desires. These three principal ideas form the basis of Rorty's novel theoretical approach to liberal democracy and of his belief in its ability to sustain itself without its traditional rationalist justifications.

From its inception, liberal democracy has been founded on the belief in natural rights, or in universal principles of morality and government that are susceptible of rational justification. In the past century, however, this belief has come under vigorous and sustained assault, and confidence about the goodness and even the viability of modern liberal societies has accordingly waned. The most serious theoretical source of these developments has been the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, who launched a blistering attack on modern rationalism and on the societies informed by it. His writings have continued to shape the ideas of many twentieth-century critics of liberalism, chief among them Heidegger, Foucault, and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School. Yet even writers more friendly to the project of liberal modernity have concluded that liberal democracy cannot respond to its present crisis solely on the basis of its own diminished resources, and must instead seek to ground itself in some broader and deeper vision of humanity and our place in the world. These writers reject the characteristically modern orientation towards the future, common to such previous opponents of liberalism as Rousseau, Marx, and Nietzsche, and instead look to the past for guidance or support (e.g., MacIntyre 1984; Taylor 1989, 516–521; see also Kolakowski 1997).

This theoretical quandary has become a pressing practical problem with the emergence of illiberal groups in traditionally liberal societies (see Tebble 2006), as well as the erosion of civil liberties and the apparent large-scale acceptance of state-sanctioned torture. The question now seems more urgent than at any time in the last twenty years: what theoretical self-image is available to liberal democracy once it has severed itself from the universalist rationalism

of Locke or Kant? And what reason is there to think that such a post-rationalist liberalism can survive – on what basis can it affirm its most basic principles?

In this increasingly pessimistic atmosphere, Richard Rorty has gained widespread acclaim and notoriety for his insistence that the post-Nietzschean dismantling of modern rationalism need not spell doom for liberalism.[1] While accepting Nietzsche's critique of the ahistoric rationality championed by the Enlightenment, Rorty maintains his allegiance to liberal democracy, indeed going so far as to argue that this critique is in fact beneficial for liberalism. In this article I argue that Rorty answers these questions about the self-image and viability of liberalism with three major theoretical cornerstones that mutually illuminate and support one another. In doing so I challenge the common view of Rorty as "anti-foundationalist," both in the sense that I claim Rorty has theoretical foundations and in the sense that I reject the common view of Rorty as advocating simple intellectual and artistic play, or limitless self-creation. My argument is rather that Rorty's form of liberalism has both theoretical and practical foundations, and that the two overlap or have a common source in cultural disenchantment.

In practical terms, both critics and admirers of Rorty have stressed the importance of self-creation and ironic redescription in Rorty's political thought, and it is this aspect of his liberalism for which Rorty has become famous. But most commentators have ignored or understated the extent to which the poetic redescriptions of Rorty's liberal ironists would be underpinned, and so restricted or delimited, by the traditional liberal distinction between the public and the private, and in particular by a relation between the two that answers almost exactly to Max Weber's description of disenchantment in modern capitalist societies.

In theoretical terms, Rorty remains largely unique among Anglo-American liberals in the extent to which he has thought through the philosophical challenges to liberalism mentioned above and attempted to respond to them with a conception of liberalism informed by the major intellectual developments of the past hundred and fifty years, especially the thought of Darwin and Nietzsche. More specifically, Rorty has sought to incorporate those developments into a naturalist self-understanding and support for liberalism. I argue that there are three major points or cornerstones of Rorty's liberalism, his emphasis on disenchantment, his Darwinian view of the human mind, and his conception of the self as a centerless web of beliefs and desires.

Throughout this essay I follow Rorty and use the term "liberalism" in its broadest sense, to mean a theory of government grounded in individual rights and the consent of the governed, and opposed to any collectivist or traditionalist forms of political practice or theory. This is the expansive sense in which Rorty is concerned with liberalism, and in particular with the question of whether liberalism has or needs transcultural or metaphysical foundations. I believe that Richard Bernstein is right that Rorty is primarily and indeed almost exclusively

concerned with this general definition of liberalism and the question of its theoretical foundations (R. Bernstein 2003), and I therefore eschew extended comparisons of Rorty with other thinkers on specific points of liberal theory.

This preoccupation with foundational questions is, as Bernstein notes, in some respects a significant weakness, or at least a limitation. "[I]f we apply to Rorty the same tough pragmatic standards that he applies to others, there is very little concrete payoff ... How are we to descend from Rorty's lofty rhetoric to the effective liberal reforms? I don't see that Rorty has much that is useful to contribute to this type of pragmatic activity" (R. Bernstein 2003, 135).[2] If we grant, however, that this is a limitation of Rorty's writings or thought (and, using Rorty's own criteria, an important one), we are still left to consider Rorty's chief concern, his attempt to show that universally valid justifications of liberalism are both impossible and undesirable. It is, of course, this aspect of Rorty's thought, his disavowal of philosophic groundings for liberalism, that has elicited the most criticism and the most admiration. Many commentators have attacked Rorty for being too blithe about the effects of abandoning philosophical foundations for moral and political beliefs. Representative of these critics are Bernard Williams (1990) and J. Judd Owen, who has argued that Rorty's anti-foundationalism leaves him unable to respond to the challenges posed to liberalism by the claims of revealed religion (J. Owen 2001, 30–96).[3]

There are, then, two chief criticisms of Rorty's work, which may at first seem contradictory. On the one hand, Rorty is too sanguine about the consequences of sloughing off rationalism. On the other hand, and despite Rorty's disdain for the universal and the metaphysical, and his praise of the local and contingent, his own thought concerns itself with only the broadest and loftiest themes. He is unable to provide the tools, to use one of Rorty's favorite metaphors, for deliberation about liberalism and its most urgent practical problems.

The virtues and vices of Rorty's usual approach are illustrated very well in an exchange with Simon Critchley. Critchley suggests that Rorty is trying "to ground the moral legitimacy of the political order in a claim about the pre-political state of nature," a claim which, like Rousseau's appeal to pity in the *Second Discourse*, is a claim about "a pre-social, pre-rational sentient disposition that provokes compassion in the face of the other's suffering" (Critchley 1996, 26). Rorty replies that "[m]aybe there is such a sentient disposition, but it is so malleable – so capable of being combined with indifference to the suffering of people of the wrong sorts – that it gives us precious little to rely on." Rorty is surely right about this, but he then goes on to write, "We should just thank our lucky stars that there are quite a lot of people nowadays who are pretty consistently appalled by human beings suffering unnecessarily" (Rorty 1996c, 42). This statement seems almost like a parody of the tendency towards apolitical abstraction for which Bernstein criticizes Rorty, which in this case prevents Rorty even from explaining what would support or animate a post-foundational liberalism. Apparently there is nothing for us to do,

theoretically or practically, except to "thank our lucky stars" for the current of history in which we presently happen to be drifting along.

The same pattern emerges in Rorty's exchange with Jean Bethke Elshtain. Elshtain offers a convincing criticism of Rorty's reading of Freud, arguing that it prescinds entirely from Freud's account of social and moral development, and thus gives us no way of understanding where the human aversion to cruelty comes from, or which familial and social practices are likely to encourage it and which retard it (Elshtain 1992, 207–211). Freud would insist, according to Elshtain, on the existence of a human nature which cannot simply be overwritten or reprogrammed. This human nature also has a particular end or natural harmony, in Elshtain's reading of Freud (albeit one which can only be achieved by a proper upbringing). Human beings should therefore not be cruel because it warps their souls.

Rorty objects, persuasively, that "I suspect that the souls of the Aztec priests painstakingly gouging out their prisoners' hearts and, for that matter, those of the Catholic bureaucrats whose *mission civilizatrice* made the Congo so profitable to King Leopold, and of the Unitarian captains of the slave ships, were as harmonious as most" (Rorty 1992, 220). Yet even if one agrees that Freud's account of moral development is not some kind of ersatz theodicy, Elshtain's criticism retains considerable force. The fact that Aztec priests and Belgian bureaucrats were not plagued by discordant souls does not answer the heart of Elshtain's critique, that Freud offers a very specific and detailed account of how amoral and asocial human infants, through a certain kind of upbringing or affective education, are molded into ethically autonomous adults, and that Rorty discards this account without offering anything in its place.[4]

In the next section, I try to show that Rorty does indeed accept that there are forces shaping and constraining the development, character, and progress of liberal societies, and of our options as individuals within them. He does not simply combine a rejection of metaphysics with a feckless assumption that this rejection both makes all things possible and ensures the success of liberal values and societies. Ultimately, however, Rorty's picture of the character and possibilities of liberal democracy owes more to Max Weber, and to his accounts of instrumental rationality and especially of the disenchantment of the world, than to anyone else.

1. Rorty's Disenchanted Liberalism

For Rorty, "anti-foundationalism" means that philosophic or metaphysical groundings for our beliefs are both intellectually untenable and politically unnecessary, not to say detrimental. Yet Rorty's eagerness to dispense with traditional notions of philosophical rationalism, and even more with liberalism's reliance on those notions, does not mean that he favors a greater role for religion in the public life of liberal democracies. On the contrary, Rorty sees the demise of rationalism as following directly from the death of God. Rorty is thus a

disciple of Nietzsche insofar as he believes both that God is dead and that at the heart of both Western rationalism and Christianity is the "*metaphysical faith* ... that God is the truth, that truth is divine" (Nietzsche 1974, 283).[5] The death of God, and so of the notion of one, eternal truth, thus submerges human affairs completely in the temporal and contingent.

Rorty therefore views the death of God as salutary, largely because it has prepared the citizens of Western liberal democracies to regard the notion of metaphysical or transhistorical truth as obsolete. Rorty's liberal utopia, as he describes it in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, will carry this process to its logical conclusion. Rorty's liberalism, at least in its ideal form, does not simply remain secular; it achieves the purest form of secularism possible, precisely because it has been penetrated so deeply by Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God and his consequent critique of rationalism.

> [I]n its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinized world or a divinized self. Such a culture would have no room for the notion that there are nonhuman forces to which human beings should be responsible. It would drop, or drastically reinterpret, not only the idea of holiness but those of "devotion to truth" and of "fulfillment of the deepest needs of the spirit." The process of de-divinization ... would, ideally, culminate in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meaning of their lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings. In such a culture, warnings of "relativism," queries whether social institutions had become increasingly "rational" in modern times and doubts about whether the aims of liberal society were "objective moral values" would seem merely quaint (CIS 45).[6]

As certain elements of this description indicate, Rorty seems to agree with Nietzsche's characterization of the citizen of liberal democracy as "the last man" (Nietzsche 1978, 16–18).[7] As these same elements also therefore indicate, Rorty's project is largely a faithful continuation of the project of modernity, the aim of which has always, or at least often, been to recast human self-understanding so as to convince humanity that it need not expect or long for meaning in anything higher than itself.[8] Rorty's response to critics like Nietzsche, who reject with disgust the kind of society this project has produced, is to suggest that "even if the typical character types of liberal democracies *are* bland, calculating, petty, and unheroic, the prevalence of such people may be a reasonable price to pay for political freedom" (ORT 190). Rorty offers a slightly different version of that argument at the end of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, where he suggests that liberals ask malcontents like Nietzsche and Heidegger "to *privatize* their projects, their attempts at sublimity ... [t]his request

for privatization amounts to the request that they resolve an impending dilemma by subordinating sublimity to the desire to avoid cruelty and pain" (197).

Rorty's distinction lies not so much in his response to Nietzsche's rebuke of liberalism – which begs all the questions at issue, as Rorty himself would be the first to acknowledge, and indeed to insist that it must (CIS 5–9) – but in his argument that the death of God is a boon to liberal democracy, that "the preservation and progress of democratic societies" (CIS 44) will be more certain or secure in a world that has abandoned the traditional concerns of philosophy and especially of the rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment. Rorty gives perhaps his deepest reason for holding this opinion in his essay "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy." There Rorty proposes that most of the distinctions of traditional philosophy (e.g., nature-convention, in itself-to us, subjective-objective) "were steps on a ladder that we can now safely throw away;" Rorty dismisses the objection that such a proposal requires arguments made in the realm of traditional philosophy as "pointless and sterile." Anticipating charges of thoughtlessness or superficiality, Rorty defends himself by explaining that there is "a moral purpose" behind the "air of light-minded aestheticism I am adopting toward traditional philosophical questions." Rorty explains this moral purpose in a passage that reads almost like an *aperçu* of Montesquieu's political project.

> The encouragement of light-mindedness about traditional philosophical topics serves the same purposes as does the encouragement of light-mindedness about traditional theological topics. Like the rise of large market economies, the increase in literacy, the proliferation of artistic genres, and the insouciant pluralism of contemporary culture, such philosophical superficiality and light-mindedness helps along the disenchantment of the world. It helps make the world's inhabitants more pragmatic, more tolerant, more liberal, more receptive to the appeal of instrumental rationality (ORT 193).[9]

Rorty's reason for advocating certain Nietzschean themes as integral parts of liberalism's self-understanding is thus very much in line with certain strains of classical liberal thought, and indeed seems to rely on them. He regards the abandonment of established notions of "truth" and "philosophy" as the necessary, or at least highly desirable, next phase in the pursuit of the classic goal of liberalism, a rational or disenchanted society. As for the actual institutions and practices of liberal societies, Rorty's philosophical radicalism leaves them almost entirely untouched.[10]

So far I have used a number of charged and evocative terms more or less interchangeably: "disenchantment," "the death of God," "the last man." I have drawn these terms from Rorty's works, as he drew them from the works of Nietzsche and Max Weber. It is worthwhile and indeed essential to pause and clarify these terms or concepts, especially the notion of disenchantment, which I

have maintained is central to Rorty's thought on politics. From there we can further specify Rorty's position by distinguishing disenchantment from similar Nietzschean terms or concepts.

The best concise statement of Weber's understanding of "the disenchantment of the world" comes in his famous essay, "Science as a Vocation."

> Let us first of all clarify what this intellectual rationalization through science and scientific technology actually means in practice.... [It means] that there are in principle no *mysterious, incalculable powers at work*, but rather that one could in principle master everything through *calculation*. But that means the disenchantment of the world. One need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control or implore the spirits, as did the savage for whom such powers existed. Technology and calculation achieve that, and this more than anything else means intellectualization as such (Weber 1989, 13–14).

Disenchantment thus means the displacement of a magical or religious interpretation of the world by a rationalist worldview concerned with calculation and technical control; the world itself changes from a source of spiritual meaning to an inert object to be mastered by means of technological prediction and control and managed rationally to provide for the material needs of human beings.

Weber's broader historical argument can be (too briefly) summarized as follows: Protestantism, and specifically Calvinism, originally devised and promoted the rational analysis and control of the world, whether of the individual through rational asceticism, the political or social world through rational organization, or the natural world through the accumulation of scientific knowledge.[11] Eventually, these procedures of rational management, first promoted under the aegis of Protestantism for religious purposes, are stripped of any significance or grounding outside of themselves, and specifically of the religious or spiritual significance once assigned to them. The ultimate consequence of this Protestant promotion of rationality is the process of secularization, driven by the expansion and ascendance of capitalism, modern science, and the impersonal or "objective" organization of the social and political world. All that is left at the end of this process of disenchantment and secularization is a series of rationalizing activities or practices that have no justification or indeed meaning outside of themselves, and a disenchanted public world; the social world created by Protestantism is thus ultimately governed solely by instrumental rationality, and any form of public philosophic or spiritual reflection upon human ends is completely alien to it. Thus "[t]he fate of our age, with its characteristic rationalization and intellectualization and above all the disenchantment of the world, is that the ultimate, most sublime values have withdrawn from public life, either into the transcendental realm of mystical life or into the brotherhood of immediate personal relationships between

individuals" (Weber 1989, 30). This description is nearly identical to Rorty's conception of the ideal relation between the public and the private in liberal democracies (e.g., ORT 194–196, 209–210, CIS 197–198), although the tone and implied evaluation are almost exactly opposite.[12]

This Weberian notion of disenchantment is similar to but still distinct from the Nietzschean concepts of nihilism and the death of God; none of these excludes either of the others, but nor does any one of them quite entail or coincide with any of the others.

For Nietzsche the death of God means not only that Christianity no longer occupies the central or authoritative place it once did in Western civilization, but that all transcendent ideals and values have lost their ability to inspire belief. Claims to universal validity or authority seem not only illegitimate but incredible, even absurd. Thus no human belief or practice can ground itself in anything greater or more meaningful than the empty flux of human history, which now appears as a senseless and purely accidental or contingent process, and the (historically conditioned) choice of the individual.

So far both Rorty and Weber are in agreement with Nietzsche (part of Weber's concern in "Science as a Vocation" is to analyze the meaning of science as something chosen by an act of decision, rather than as something that can justify itself or demonstrate its own necessity or choiceworthiness).[13] Nietzsche's analysis of nihilism, however, which for him follows from the death of God, remains largely particular to him. For Nietzsche, the death of God spawns nihilism, which, very simply, means that life becomes "meaningless," that one can find no reason or purpose for anything. Nietzsche is greatly concerned that the collapse of transcendent ideals, and specifically of the religious ideals promulgated by Christianity, will leave humanity bereft of any goals, and thus will vitiate the will itself, which has a uniquely important place in Nietzsche's thought. The word "nihilism" means many different things in Nietzsche's writings (especially in his posthumously published notes), but it almost always means that the death of God and the disintegration of transcendent values is understood as a crisis of the greatest magnitude, whether that crisis is experienced as terrifying, depressing, or exhilarating. The human will does not require transcendental or otherworldly goals (indeed, these are to be avoided), but it does require more remote and more demanding goals than those on offer in liberal societies.

Finally, there is the figure of the last man. The last man is characterized by an almost sub-human sense of complacency; he is despicable because he can no longer despise himself, and this inability to despise himself, to feel any great dissatisfaction or longing, marks the end of humanity. In the context of Nietzsche's concern with nihilism, the last man is almost defined by his ignorance of or indifference to nihilism, by his inability to experience the death of God at all, much less to be gripped by the full depth and force of its meaning. The last man's life is not pointless or meaningless, but what meaning or purpose it does have is thoroughly petty, ignoble, and mediocre.

When Rorty accepts Nietzsche's description of liberals as last men, therefore, he is accepting Nietzsche's polemical portrayal of the products of modern democracy, but not Nietzsche's presentation of nihilism as a terrible crisis of meaning for the modern West. Specifically, Rorty denies the claim that the collapse of transcendental ideals or meaning constitutes a crisis of meaning as such, or that human beings are lost without majestic and distant goals to will (it is perhaps significant that Rorty speaks frequently of the death of God but rarely of nihilism).

I have gone into some detail explaining these points not only because they recur in Rorty and in my treatment of him, but because a clear understanding of their meaning is crucial for grasping the concept of disenchantment and the role it plays in Rorty's political thought. Disenchantment, as Weber and Rorty use the word, is not the same thing as Nietzschean nihilism (although Weber's attitude towards disenchantment shares much with Nietzsche's attitude towards nihilism). One can encourage or take a positive view of cultural disenchantment, as Rorty does, without espousing Nietzsche's views on nihilism (and specifically his normative attitude toward it). And Rorty's admission that citizens of modern liberal democracies are more or less what Nietzsche means by "the last man" gibes well with Rorty's encouragement of disenchantment; the last man is very much at home in a disenchanted world.

It should be noted, however, that for both Rorty and Weber disenchantment is not permanent, inevitable or complete, and in particular that it does not necessarily entail the death of God, or even of Christianity. As Weber writes in a famous passage at the end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, "No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance" (Weber 2005, 124). Likewise, in "Science as a Vocation" Weber speaks of the old gods rising from their graves in the new, disenchanted forms of impersonal forces (Weber 1989, 23). Rorty's concern is less with a resurgence of religious passions in new, disenchanted guises than it is with the rise of religious fundamentalism (see note 3 above), which would represent a rollback or undoing of cultural disenchantment. Hence both Rorty and Weber allow for the possibility of a resurgence of traditional religion in the future; conceptually, Weber seems to think this could happen in a disenchanted world (at least if the old gods adopt novel, impersonal forms), while Rorty seems to think that by definition thoroughgoing disenchantment precludes a significant role for religion in public life.[14]

Thus despite Rorty's use of Weber's terminology, it is clear that there are important differences in how the two thinkers understand the concept of disenchantment. In particular, it is clear that Weber does not share Rorty's belief that a thoroughly disenchanted world would necessarily be "enlightened, secular, through and through" (CIS 45), a tolerant, pragmatic and liberal world

(ORT 193). It is on the basis of this belief that Rorty promotes an attitude toward philosophy that is conducive to continual disenchantment, and it is on the basis of this belief that he makes disenchantment the central foundation for his vision of liberalism. Before exploring this last point in detail, however, we must turn to the question of what it means to say that Rorty's thought employs bases or foundations at all.

2. Rorty and Theoretical Foundations

Let us return to the passage in which Rorty claims to advocate light-mindedness or insouciance towards traditional philosophical problems in order to help along the disenchantment of the world (ORT 193). As Richard Bernstein notes, this statement flatly contradicts Rorty's oft-avowed "skepticism about the influence of *any* philosophical reflection on the dynamics of society" (R. Bernstein 1987, 542). Rorty's "moral purpose" for his "light-minded aestheticism" appears to depend on a philosophy or metaphysics of history, or, if those terms are too grand, it seems to presuppose some kind of theoretical account of the social and political development of the past three hundred years, an account which Rorty takes to be foundational for his project. In other words, Rorty is employing a fairly concrete and developed model of the causes and consequences of disenchantment, as well as of the effect of philosophical thought on society.

The claim that Rorty is appealing to theoretical foundations in his work will seem strange, for Rorty has come to be associated with the term "anti-foundationalism." This seems to me misleading, however, for what Rorty objects to is not the idea that beliefs or theories must have foundations, but that they must represent or correspond to a reality which exists and has a determinate form independently of those beliefs, a determinate form which makes beliefs "true" or "false."[15] In this case many beliefs will necessarily have foundations in other beliefs. Moreover, it is also the case that these beliefs will be directly in touch with the world (ORT 159–160), but they will be means of coping with the world that are caused by this contact with reality, rather than being representations given definite or specific form by that reality (ORT 8–12). Thus it is accurate to speak of grounding or foundational beliefs or theories for Rorty's political thought.

These points, and especially this last distinction, are elaborated and clarified in Rorty's essay "Relativism – Finding and Making" (Rorty 1996b). There Rorty describes "how human inquiry looks from a pragmatist point of view – how it looks once one stops describing it as an attempt to correspond to the intrinsic nature of reality and starts describing it as an attempt to serve transitory purposes and solve transitory problems." Pragmatists like Rorty want to break with "the Cartesian-Lockean notion of a mind seeking to get in touch with a reality outside it," the notion of a mind "whose relations with the rest of the universe are representational rather than causal" – in other words, the notion of a mind that represents the rest of the universe in words and concepts rather

than being acted upon by it, and is thus somehow untouched by the mechanisms of causation to which everything else in the universe is subject. In order, therefore, to "rid our thinking of the vestiges of Cartesianism," pragmatists adopt "a Darwinian account of human beings as animals doing their best to cope with the environment – doing their best to develop tools which will enable them to enjoy more pleasure and less pain. Words are among the tools which these clever animals have developed ... to become fully Darwinian in our thinking, we need to stop thinking of words as representations and to start thinking of them as nodes in the causal network which binds the organism together with its environment" (37–38).

In the course of explicating the meaning of this Darwinian picture, Rorty advances a specific conception of human nature, especially at the end of the essay, where he contrasts himself with those who accuse him of relativism. "We pragmatists see the charge of relativism as simply the charge that we see luck where our critics insist on seeing destiny." If humanity destroys itself with nuclear weapons or regresses to a Hobbesian state of nature, Rorty contends, "our species will have been unlucky, but it will not have been irrational. It will not have failed to live up to its moral obligations. It will simply have missed a chance to be happy" (47). Here, as in so many passages, we see Rorty foregoing what Nietzsche called "the old mendacious pomp, junk, and gold dust of unconscious human vanity" (Nietzsche 1966, 161), and this is surely one of the most attractive features of his writings. Yet even as Rorty renounces exalted concepts like "destiny," he slips in what almost amounts to a teleology. Granted, the point of the entire passage is to disclaim any notion of teleology, but this does not stop Rorty from saying that the human species, if deprived of democracy, will have "missed a chance to be happy." This makes no sense if human beings are really completely historical; if there is no essence of humanity except that determined by a particular historical dispensation, there is no reason why human beings living in a violent, post-apocalyptic world would be any less happy than we today are. The remark makes perfect sense, however, if human beings are "clever animals," "doing their best to develop tools which will enable them to enjoy more pleasure and less pain" (Rorty 1996b, 38).

Although I am arguing that Rorty bases his defense of liberalism on a conception of human nature, there is a crucial distinction that must be made regarding this conception and its relation to politics. It seems to me that the key to Rorty's position is not that he rejects any notion of a stable human nature (though his view of what is stable in human nature is obviously relatively minimalist), or even of a human nature that could serve as a foundation for theoretical and practical reflection. It is rather that he emphatically rejects any view of human nature as ultimately given meaning or dignity through its connection to a non-human entity which is of greater worth than the merely human, be it God, nature, history, rationality or any other such thing. He rejects any notion of a human nature that points beyond itself, that needs to be completed by something outside of and superior to it.[16] He thus also

unambiguously rejects any notion of a human nature comprising innate intellectual or spiritual capacities, capacities defined by their orientation towards one of these greater, more august super-human entities, that are best realized in a liberal democracy (a view given classic expression in Kant's essays "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" and "What is Enlightenment?"). Renouncing the idea of such capacities means renouncing them both as justifications for liberalism and as safeguards or supports for liberalism once it has been established.[17] Rorty's disenchanted liberalism integrates itself into this Darwinian picture of human nature and of human inquiry as concerned primarily with satisfying transient desires; it is thus able to promote a public space devoted purely to the rational satisfaction of material needs, and to consign concerns for sublimity or perfection to the private sphere (I will discuss this point further in the following section).

There is then, according to Rorty, a common human essence, but that essence is simply the ability to feel pain, and in particular the distinctively human pain of humiliation (cf., e.g., CIS 91, 192).[18] This is by no means a conception of human nature with which a Christian or a Kantian would be satisfied, but it is enough to determine how much harm a particular type of society is likely to do to this essence or core, and to rank different types of societies accordingly.

In short, Rorty rejects the term "human nature" as it would be used by a metaphysician, but not as it would be used by a Darwinian. This latter sense of human nature would include the ability to be humiliated or to use an opposable thumb, but not to discern the moral law or to ascend Plato's divided line. It should be noted that Rorty's Darwinism consists entirely of this anti-Platonist, anti-Kantian conception of human nature and particularly human thought; Rorty is in no way trying to base liberal morality on an imperative to adapt and survive. Rorty is a "Darwinian" in the same way that he is a "Nietzschean" or a "Freudian" – it is not a matter of discovering some new philosophic foundation or lodestar (natural selection, the will to power, the unconscious) and orienting his thought by its authority, but rather of taking some part of each thinker's revolutionary criticism of previous thought and using it for his own purposes. What is unique about Darwin for Rorty is that he enables us to conceive of the human mind and of language in the way described above, and more generally to conceive of human beings as "animals ... doing their best to develop tools which will enable them to enjoy more pleasure and less pain" (Rorty 1996b, 38). Once human beings come to see themselves in this way, they have no reason to rebel against a disenchanted world devoted to security, comfort and averting cruelty, rather than to creating political hierarchies that accurately reflect natural or metaphysical hierarchies. Darwin's refashioning of our understanding of nature is especially crucial here: "After Darwin ... it became possible to believe that nature is not leading up to anything – that nature had nothing in mind" (PSH 266).

But if Rorty thinks that Darwin, and the picture of humanity that emerges from his writings, is right, why doesn't he argue more forthrightly for this picture? Perhaps because "I do not know how to argue the question of whether it is better to see human beings in this biologistic way or to see them in a way more like Plato's or Kant's" (Rorty 1996b, 47; cf., again, CIS 5–9). Just as Rorty doubts that "we'll get anywhere arguing theism vs. atheism" (PSH 171), so he doubts we'll get anywhere arguing Plato or Aquinas vs. Darwin. Philosophers are, "now as in Cicero's day, still arguing inconclusively, tramping round and round the same dialectical circles, never convincing each other but still able to attract students" (Rorty 1996b, 36). Since neither truth nor justice is served in this manner, it would be better to discard the vocabulary of previous Western philosophy altogether.

At the same time, however, it is important to note that Rorty is not suggesting that reason should be disregarded altogether or even eschewed or particularly depreciated (see also note 15 below). As Rorty explains in response to those who accuse pragmatists like him of irrationalism: "We pragmatists reply that if that were what rationality is [adherence to the vocabulary and conceptual structure of traditional Western philosophy], then no doubt we are, indeed, irrationalists. But of course we go on to add that being an irrationalist in that sense is not to be incapable of argument. We irrationalists do not foam at the mouth and behave like animals. We simply refuse to talk in a certain way, the Platonic way" (Rorty 1996b, 34). It is not reason in general to which Rorty objects but rather certain assumptions or concepts of Western philosophy, and even more the way in which the questions and assumptions of Western philosophy have been placed at the center of justifications for liberal democracy, and thus to a certain extent at the center of the public life of liberal societies. Rorty holds rather that these questions and concerns should be treated as a purely private taste or interest, as we will see in the following section.

3. The Theoretical Foundations of Rorty's Disenchanted Liberalism

The most encompassing foundation for Rorty's political thought is the set of claims he makes about the causes and consequences of disenchantment. Rorty identifies several causes of the disenchantment of the world (ORT 193), but the most significant for his purposes is "light-mindedness" about traditional theological and philosophical topics. The most important consequence of disenchantment, for Rorty, is that it "helps make the world's inhabitants more pragmatic, more tolerant, more liberal, more receptive to the appeal of instrumental rationality" – in short, it helps to make liberalism stronger and more secure. Both parts of this claim seem necessarily to entail a theoretical account, even if a relatively uncomplicated or modest one, of the relation between philosophy and society, as well as of the antecedents and effects of disenchantment. None of this need necessarily involve claims about the inner essence of reality, but Rorty does seem confident that he knows enough to

describe at least the workings of our social and political world, and so to urge us to move in a particular direction if we want to attain a particular end.

The second theoretical cornerstone of Rorty's political thought is the notion of the self as a contingent and centerless web of beliefs and desires, a notion which stems from the situation Rorty describes at the beginning of his essay "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy." There Rorty maintains that in the past century, the "rationalist justification" of the Enlightenment has been "discredited," not on the grounds of utility but on those of truth. The sense of the passage as a whole is clearly that the philosophical thought of the Enlightenment has been shown to be false or untenable (see also ORT 33). The result of the major intellectual developments of the twentieth century has been "to erase the picture of the self common to Greek metaphysics, Christian theology, and Enlightenment rationalism: the picture of an ahistorical natural center, the locus of human dignity, surrounded by an adventitious and inessential periphery" (ORT 176).[19]

In place of this picture of an ahistoric natural center of the self, Rorty proposes a view of human beings as "centerless networks of beliefs and desires" (ORT 191). This move not only makes universalist argument impossible or implausible (since there is no universal structure common to all such networks); it also means that one's most intense experiences of sublimity, and the beliefs and desires associated with those experiences, can ultimately be regarded as idiosyncratic personal experiences, rather than as expressions or intimations of a human essence and therefore of universal or public significance. Since these experiences of sublimity do not emanate from or constitute the "center" of one's self, they can safely be relegated to the private sphere, both by the individual and by society as a whole. In other words, one's experiences of or desires for sublimity are no more central to one's self than are one's experiences of and desires for physical comfort and security, and a centerless self thus not only precludes the distinction between the universal and the particular but also that between the high and the low or between the noble and the base. In short, the centerless self harmonizes perfectly with the disenchanted world described by Weber: "the ultimate, most sublime values have withdrawn from public life, either into the transcendental realm of mystical life or into the brotherhood of immediate personal relationships between individuals" (Weber 1989, 30).

The third cornerstone on which Rorty's thought rests is the Darwinian view of human beings. According to this view, the human mind is acted upon by the same natural pressures, or is fully embedded in the same network of natural causation, as the rest of the world. The human mind therefore does not represent or describe an objective reality from which it is somehow distinct, or which it somehow observes without being affected by it, but rather attempts to contrive tools that will be useful for gratifying our animal desires and aversions. The purpose of human life is thus not to pursue the truth about the intrinsic nature of things, nor to live according to the precepts of an ahistoric rationality. It is rather to devise new and better tools to help us enjoy pleasure and avoid pain, where

these two experiences, however complex and sophisticated the forms they might take, are always understood as fundamentally rooted in our natures as biological creatures.[20]

How do these three points relate to one another? On the one hand, one can regard them as comporting or cohering with one another, rather than any one of them being logically or causally prior to the others. At the same time, however, the view of the self as centerless and contingent looks like an instance of the light-minded aestheticism towards traditional philosophy that Rorty advocates; adopting this view of the self is, after all, hardly the only possible response to the collapse of Enlightenment rationalism. The Darwinian view of human nature seems to be both more serious and more substantial, and Rorty indeed uses it to give a theoretical account of human inquiry and the human mind. The Darwinian view also suggests that physical security and perhaps even comfort should be the primary human concerns, or in any case that they should take precedence over concerns with sublimity or nobility; the notion of a centerless self thus seems in some sense to proceed from or presuppose this Darwinian picture, or at least to receive considerable reinforcement from it. Hence Rorty's Darwinism, like the picture of the self as centerless, clearly and very forcefully supports and aligns with the division between a disenchanted public sphere, dominated by bureaucratic management and the rational satisfaction of material needs, and a private sphere in which alone the sublime or transcendent has its place.

The Darwinian or biologistic picture of human nature is thus in a sense the more fundamental or comprehensive aspect or foundation of Rorty's thought; Rorty, like most political thinkers before him, bases his vision of a good society on his understanding of human nature, in this case arguing that the Darwinian picture of human nature supports and legitimates a disenchanted society.[21] Rorty's specifically political thought, however, centers on disenchantment, as its firmest foundation or center of gravity. The self-sustaining character of a disenchanted liberalism is Rorty's strongest or most certain answer to the question of how a post-philosophic liberalism can survive. More specifically, it seems to answer the question of why those who feel some dissatisfaction with liberal society, who hear the siren song of a Nietzsche or a Loyola, will remain liberals. Rorty repeatedly raises the possibility that people who despise the social world or the typical human product of liberalism may nonetheless remain loyal liberals (e.g., ORT 192ff.).[22] What is his reason for this hope? If we are all "vector sums of contingent pressures" (PSH 196), what are the contingent pressures that will act on Rorty's citizens and ensure that they remain liberals? The best answer, it seems to me, is the one provided by Mark Lutz: "ironists will not be liberal simply because liberalism secures their private projects of self creation. More fundamentally, they will be liberals because the spiritual flatness of liberal culture will keep them sufficiently fearful of degradation, compassionate, and calculating to prevent their creative projects from straying beyond the bounds of bourgeois sensibility" (Lutz 1998, 34). This

particular formulation is harsh, but, in my view, fundamentally accurate. The great radical challengers of liberalism will remain visible in the sky like brilliant but distant stars, while the gravitational pull of disenchantment keeps Rortian liberals firmly on the ground of liberal democracy.

A more positive way to describe Rorty's work would be to say that he carries forward the project of removing religious and metaphysical elements from both prescriptive and descriptive accounts of the world, and indeed that he tries to bring together the most compelling instances of this attempt into a coherent whole. In this unmetaphysical sense, Rorty's position can be described as thoroughly naturalist or naturalizing (or, if one prefers, as "secular, through and through"). Rorty advances a series of fully and consistently naturalist positions – on the self, on human nature and intellectual inquiry, and on liberal democracy and disenchantment – and relates or integrates them in such a way that they not only mutually illuminate, support and reinforce one another, but also provide liberalism with a largely novel self-understanding and justification for these fundamental components of its conceptual constitution. Rorty's naturalism is unsentimental but not reductionist or debunking (see also ORT 113 ff.); thus he argues for an unsentimental, naturalist understanding of the origins and mechanics of both our cognitive and moral capacities (drawing primarily in the former case on Darwin and in the latter on Freud), without in any way thinking these capacities thereby diminished. In the same way, Rorty embraces a sober, Weberian account of the origins and mechanics of modern democratic societies, without thinking that this account diminishes the personal freedoms and reduction of suffering that these societies undoubtedly do provide. This naturalist refiguring or redescription of the character and legitimacy of liberal society, in the midst of continuing practical and theoretical challenges to its basic organizing principles and intellectual foundations, may be Rorty's most important and enduring achievement.

NOTES

1. In this essay I focus almost entirely on Rorty's political writings, touching on his epistemological views only when it is necessary to elucidate his work on politics. Some of the major recent examples of reactions to Rorty's views on truth and objectivity are in Brandom 2000. For a fuller discussion of responses to Rorty's work, see Rumana 2002. There is also a sizeable bibliography in Guignon and Hiley 2003, 184–200.

2. Similarly, Bernstein argued in an earlier essay that Rorty, by concerning himself only with the "metaphilosophical" question of whether liberalism needs a transhistorical justification, is of no use in adjudicating the various questions about the character of the self, of justice, of liberty, and so on, that are at the heart of disputes about what liberal democracy should be. See especially the fourth part of R. Bernstein 1987. This essay, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward," is the best critique of Rorty I have read; it makes several cogent criticisms of Rorty's work and calls attention to some crucial contradictions in his writings.

3. Although a discussion of Rorty's concerns regarding religious fundamentalism is beyond the scope of this paper, one can get a sense of their magnitude from Rorty 1996a, 29. At the same time, however, it is only fair to note that for Rorty the most important factors threatening American democracy, and liberalism generally, are diminishing economic expectations and class regimentation, not the intrinsically dark nature of man and still less the withering of the belief in ahistorical rationality and morality.

4. See also Caputo 1993, especially the critique of Rorty on autonomy, 161–166.

5. See the first chapter of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, especially 20–22.

6. I refer to Rorty's chief works through parenthetical citations in the text using the following abbreviations: CIS – *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*; ORT – *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1*; PSH – *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Although Rorty has more recently published several treatments of his political views (especially Rorty 1998 and Rorty 2001), it seems to me that they are only extensions of the work cited here. In particular, the *theoretical* foundations or core of his political ideas are expressed in these earlier works.

7. Rorty himself freely admits this elsewhere: "[People object to conceding] to Nietzsche that democratic societies have no higher aim than what he called 'the last men' – the people who have 'their little pleasures for the day and their little pleasures for the night.' But maybe we should make just that concession, and also concede that democratic societies do not embody anything, and cannot be reassured by anything, larger than themselves (e.g., by 'rationality'). Such societies should not aim ... at anything less banal than evening out people's chances of getting a little pleasure out of their lives." Rorty 1987, 12.

8. Although Rorty, of course, wants to jettison the metaphysical notion of "humanity."

9. The best criticism of Rorty's endorsement of instrumental reason I have read is J. Bernstein 1992, especially 684. In a nutshell, instrumental rationality, with its necessary orientation towards calculation and control of contingencies, blocks the way to the gratitude for contingent things which Rorty wants to promote.

10. See also R. Bernstein 1987, 563, note 27, on Rorty's "virtually unqualified endorsement" of "'really existing democracy' in Western capitalist societies," and West 1985, 267.

11. In this context the word "rational" does not have any exalted meaning and in particular is not opposed to the irrational. Rationalism in this context simply means the orderly and efficient pursuit of a particular end, an end which will necessarily appear irrational from other perspectives. In other words, Weber is discussing instrumental rationality, not rational or philosophical reflection on human ends. Thus the end or goal of capitalism, the accumulation of ever more capital, is irrational from the point of view of any form of hedonism, but the personal and social practices fostered by capitalism (industry, frugality, etc.) are an extremely rational way to pursue this end (Weber, 2005: 18, 140, note 9).

12. Although Rorty adopts the notion of disenchantment from Weber more or less without criticism or development, he mostly ignores Weber's concerns with the negative aspects of disenchantment (e.g., the dominance of bureaucracy in modern politics). This is obviously a weakness or blind spot in Rorty's thought, but one which he shares with much of contemporary liberal theory.

13. On Nietzsche and Weber see D. Owen 1994, 84–139, Lassman and Velody 1989, and R. Bernstein 1992, 35–41.

14. Both Rorty and Weber can be contrasted on this point with Peter Berger, who has argued that the relationship between religion and modernity (or between secularism and modernity) is more complicated than the disenchantment thesis holds (Berger 1999). It is worth noting that Rorty's view of the persistence of religion in modernity is considerably different from that of Berger, who attributes the rise of counter-secular religious movements to "the quest for meaning that transcends the restricted space of empirical existence in this world," a quest or need which in Berger's view is unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future, if ever (Berger 1999, 13). For Rorty, there emphatically is not any such inherent or ineradicable need for the transcendent, and his practical or political goal is to promote the sort of contingent historical development that will create a situation in which such needs are felt to be purely private matters (if they are felt at all).

15. Rorty develops this view in many of the essays in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, especially "Inquiry as Recontextualization: An Anti-Dualist Account of Interpretation" (93–110; see especially 97–98) and "Non-Reductive Physicalism" (113–125; see especially 120–121). This means that the same thing can be described with different vocabularies for different purposes, and that no one vocabulary is privileged or primary (e.g., that of theoretical physics), because no one purpose is more essentially human than any other (see the discussion of the meaning of the death of God above); thus a table is both a solid table as it appears to human eyes and a collection of atoms that are mostly empty space, but it is not "really" either. This latter point is made in "Non-Reductive Physicalism" and the first chapter of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (see esp. 11ff.).

16. Rorty therefore rebuffs the attempt "to use the weapons of metaphysics against metaphysics" instantiated in "British empiricism, positivism, contemporary Australian philosophical physicalism, and the like.... All they accomplished was to replace one non-human source of justification (the Will of God, the Idea of the Good) with another (the Intrinsic Nature of Physical Reality)" (Rorty, 2001b: 90). On this point, see also the crucial passage from *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* cited above (CIS 45).

17. For further discussion of these questions, with particular reference to Rorty's relationship to traditional humanism, see Soper 2001 and Rorty 2001c.

18. For further treatment of this point, see D. Owen 2001, 93–103.

19. It seems to me that this line of argument must be foundational in the traditional philosophic sense for Rorty. Otherwise, I think Alasdair MacIntyre's criticism is devastating: "Rorty's ambivalence about philosophical argument renders quite unclear the point of his appeals to Wittgenstein, Davidson, and others. He cannot, it seems, be offering us grounds drawn from their theories; but if he is offering us their conclusions detached from any rational grounds, why should we be interested?" MacIntyre 1990, 710.

20. Although Rorty's "non-reductive physicalism" implies that these experiences can be understood equally well or validly as either mental or physical, I think Judd Owen is right to argue that even Rorty's "non-reductive" physicalism is ultimately materialist (J. Owen 2001, 61–64). See more generally J. Owen 2001, 57–64, on the difficulties that Rorty's use of the notion of a purposeless physical world creates for him. Rorty cannot bring himself to assert that he has a true picture of the world, but even so, "Rorty's 'ontological neutrality' ... in fact applies only after substantial ontological possibilities have been discounted, or, in other words, after a positive and important ontological claim has been staked" (63).

21. Yet one could, I think, argue that the Darwinian view of humanity required a certain level of cultural disenchantment before it could be publicly promulgated and gain

traction; in other words, one could argue that the disenchantment of the world is chronologically and in some sense causally prior to the Darwinian view of humanity. One could even push this further in an historicist direction and argue that disenchantment is entirely causally prior to the Darwinian picture of human nature, or that the latter is essentially a product of a disenchanted world. Although this is not my interpretation of Rorty, it is a possible relation of these two points (and, I think, a possible reading of Rorty).

22. Some have argued that Rorty's disenchanted society would produce only rationalized atoms incapable of ethical autonomy or ironic narcissists unconcerned with social justice, and that these shortcomings, rather than any attraction to illiberal modes of thought and life, would constitute the real threat to his form of liberalism. See J. Bernstein 1992, especially 674–680, and R. Bernstein 1992, 286–287. For a further critique of Rorty's conception of the liberal ironist as a public egalitarian and a private Nietzschean, see Critchley 1996, 25, and Rorty's (partial) response, Rorty 1996c, 42–43.

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American Pragmatism and Feminism: Fresh Opportunities for Sociological Inquiry

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Despite its impact on public administration, policy development, education, philosophy and politics, American pragmatism has made a relatively small impression on the social sciences. In particular, American pragmatism has seldom influenced feminism, which is remarkable given the potentially striking affinities between these two disciplines. Drawing upon the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey and the work of feminists who support a pragmatist approach to the study of gender, this article discusses the chequered history of relations between the two disciplines. It also focuses on the methodological possibilities of establishing a pragmatist-feminist position. Taking ethnography as a means to illustrate our ideas, we suggest that a pragmatist-feminist ethnography can help social scientists to rethink theory in terms of its practical application, articulate the value of an anti-foundational view of knowledge and promote investigating people's concrete experiences for understanding gender inequalities.

1. Introduction

Recently there has been a revival of interest in American pragmatism from a feminist perspective. Saying as much is to recognise that American pragmatism has not had a sustained impact on feminist theorising. This is both perplexing and intriguing for a number of reasons. At the height of its influence during the first three decades of the twentieth century, American pragmatism shaped many intellectual currents within politics, public administration, policy development, education and philosophy. This is not altogether remarkable given American pragmatism's conceptualisation of theory in terms of its practical consequences. Indeed, American pragmatism distanced itself from modes of intellectualising that proffered empty abstractions, preferring instead to link together theory and action so that one shapes the other continuously. Despite its emphasis on understanding theory to help improve the human condition, it struggled to maintain its influence at a time when logical positivism was rapidly colonising American philosophy (Baert 2003). Marginalised during the middle part of the twentieth century, its fortune was reversed when Richard Rorty, Richard

Bernstein and other neo-pragmatists sought to resurrect scholarly interest in pragmatist philosophy. The current revival of American pragmatism within disciplines such as public administration (Shields 2005) and communication studies (Perry 2001) reflects a growing acknowledgement among commentators of the relevance of American pragmatism in the contemporary intellectual environment. This notwithstanding, American pragmatism's comeback has yet to exert much bearing on sociological and methodological inquiry (Morgan 2007; Joas 1993).

As we see it, American pragmatism is as compelling in today's intellectual climate as it was when it first emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. We are attracted to American pragmatist philosophy not just because it posits a concept of science as a social practice accountable to those whose lives it aims to improve, but also because it rejects absolutisms and opposes dualisms such as mind/body and object/subject. Until recently, feminist theorists were one of many social scientists who had overlooked these characteristics of American pragmatist thought. Thus one aim of this article is to highlight areas of shared concern between feminism and American pragmatism such as the rejection of dualisms, defending perspectives on the provisional nature of knowledge and truth, and seeking to foster social reform based on emancipation from prejudice.

In line with feminist theorist Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1996, 2001), we note the missed opportunity for developing cross-disciplinary links between feminism and American pragmatism. Furthermore, we also recognise the limited impact American pragmatism has made on our understanding of research methodologies, particularly those employed by feminists and other social scientists. Feminist researchers are often said to be innovative and skilled at using different research methodologies and methods to study gender (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002; Reinharz 1992). Indeed, ethnography is a well-established methodological approach used by feminist researchers for studying gender relations in the lives of women, and more recently men's lives (Warren and Hackney 2000; Skeggs 2001). While ethnographies on gender display much variation in how they draw from the canon of feminist theories, especially post-modern forms of feminism, they have rarely derived theoretical insight from American pragmatism. Acknowledging this, another aim of this paper is to outline the possibilities for and characteristics of pragmatist-feminist ethnography, as a way of illustrating potentially fresh avenues for sociological inquiry associated with a multi-paradigm approach of this kind.

This paper is structured in the following way. To begin, we briefly outline the early American pragmatist tradition, highlighting some of its key proponents and their contributions. Next, we focus on the work of John Dewey, which informs this article's main argument. The next section examines the relationship between American pragmatism and feminism, explaining why feminists and pragmatists have rarely stirred each other's imagination. Inspired by scholars who have reconnected feminism with American pragmatism (Seigfried 1996, 2001), we outline a pragmatist-feminist perspective before exploring how this

can shape the path of an ethnographic approach to the study of gender. Here we map out an agenda for the pragmatist-feminist ethnographer, organised around three key themes: (1) determining the focus of analysis within ethnographic research on gender; (2) re-defining theory; (3) and pursuing a focus on the future.

2. Early American Pragmatism

Our starting point is the early American pragmatist tradition as it can be found in the work of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), and John Dewey (1859–1952). This is not to say that the American pragmatist movement is defined only by the writings of these commentators. Other figures associated with early American pragmatism include George Herbert Mead and Josiah Royce. A number of neo-pragmatists have also had a hand in its development, perhaps one of the most notable being Richard Rorty. As such, American pragmatism can be defined as a complex and assorted collection of competing ideas, theories and perspectives. Indeed, this plurality is a striking feature which has generated numerous scholarly accounts that attempt to distinguish and clarify different strands of pragmatist thought.

It is not our intention to detail different versions of American pragmatist philosophy. We restrict ourselves to providing selective insights into the work of John Dewey, whose ideas are particularly useful for articulating a pragmatist-feminist perspective. However, it is worth briefly mentioning Peirce and James who, alongside Dewey, are often regarded as being highly influential in shaping the American pragmatist movement. Charles Sanders Peirce is credited with developing a semiotic pragmatism in which knowledge is viewed as a social undertaking rather than residing strictly in the cognitive field. While James and Dewey both differ in their versions of pragmatist philosophy, they stayed close to Charles Peirce's original pragmatist principle that beliefs could only be distinguished by the different kinds of action they give rise to (Peirce 1878/1992). Thus pragmatism has become well known for understanding the meaning of beliefs or statements in their practical consequences.

William James, a trained physician, was particularly troubled by the precarious place of humans in the new scientific world. James applied Peirce's pragmatist principle to the notion of truth, thereby turning pragmatism into an epistemological undertaking, heavily influenced by his psychological and moral outlook on traditional philosophical issues. But James did not regard American pragmatism as a fanciful adventure in abstract theorising. Indeed, the concern with improving the human condition is considered another common denominator between Peirce, James and Dewey. Evident across his major works such as *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907) and *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism* (1909), James consistently emphasised the importance of concrete facts and the application of theory to improve human action.

John Dewey endorsed Peirce's inquiring critical spirit and logical methods but like James his interests were moral, aesthetic and educational, and his notion of truth was pluralistic. As with James, Dewey also had an interest in analysing the consequences of human knowledge on people's lives, setting much store by the idea that human action can enhance the human condition. His pragmatist philosophy was developed over a number of critically acclaimed texts including *Essays in Experimental Logic* (1916), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938). Significantly, Dewey developed a perspective called *instrumentalism* in which the value of concepts and theories is assessed not on the basis of abstract epistemological principles but in terms of their ability to respond to particular problems. For our purposes here, it is this dialectic between knowledge and experience that makes Dewey's work most helpful in outlining a pragmatist-feminist approach to the study of gender. From a Deweyan perspective, which potentially strikes a chord with much feminist theory, knowledge and experience cannot be separated in a dichotomous fashion. Knowledge is part of experience and contributes to the enhancement of that experience, while reflection is necessary to comprehend and manage experience successfully. We start to unpack some of Dewey's ideas in the next section.

3. John Dewey's Contribution to American Pragmatism

John Dewey was born in 1859 in Vermont. A graduate of the University of Vermont, he obtained a doctorate in philosophy from Johns Hopkins University. Widely regarded as one of the most controversial philosophy professors of his generation, he taught at a number of places such as University of Minnesota, University of Chicago, and Columbia University. His views on democracy and social reform were seen as revolutionary: he considered American democracy the best form of government but saw it challenged by the effects of the industrial revolution which had led to too much wealth in the hands of a few men.

A prolific writer, he published over 300 articles and books spanning a variety of fields including philosophy, education, religion, ethics, logic and social reform. Given such breadth and diversity of topics, we will focus mainly on Dewey's contribution to philosophy and his model of scientific inquiry (i.e., *the community of inquiry*) for they provide useful inroads for a better understanding of the connections between pragmatism and feminism. Despite the risk of essentialising a Deweyan position through over-simplification, we regard Dewey's contribution to this article's argument as three fold.

First, Dewey conceives of knowledge not as an ensemble of absolute truths and certainties but as a series of practical acts judged by their consequences. All judgments are practical in as much as they originate from an incomplete or uncertain practical situation which is to be resolved. Thus the aim of knowledge is not to correspond to the world but to anticipate future experience, taking as its material experiences the present and the past.

Furthermore, the truthfulness of knowledge is ultimately assessed by its usefulness.

Second, his take on morality is not as obedience to universal principles but as a contingent, social and deeply human affair that has far reaching implications for what counts as useful knowledge, and therefore as 'truth'. The consequences of theory cannot be appraised according to an *a priori* schema but only with respect to the values and norms of the community of practice from which theory emerges and is applied to.

Third, Dewey sees reality as indeterminate and processual rather than static and formed by ready-made elements. As such, the world exhibits: 'an impressive and irresistible mixtures of sufficiencies, tight completeness, order, recurrences which make possible prediction and control, and singularities, ambiguities, uncertain possibilities, processes going on to consequences yet indeterminate' (Dewey 1958, 47). It is this day-to-day uncertainty that triggers the need for scientific inquiry. Therefore, problems of science are the practical problems of life, being always situated within a particular social formation, which Dewey calls *the community of inquiry*. People belonging to *communities of inquiry* are connected by three elements. First, the problematic/practical situation, the scientific methods needed to resolve that problem and the democratic values to be upheld in coming up with a practical solution. According to Dewey, the focus on a problematic situation is essential for it helps a community to form around the issue requiring resolution. Second, members of a community of inquiry must bring a scientific attitude to the problematic situation, and view both theory and method as tools to develop practical solutions. Third, communities of inquiries must be democratic: they must take into account values/ideals such as freedom, equality, as well as efficiency in pursuing their goals and objectives (Evans 2000).

The members of a community of inquiry proceed with a sense of critical optimism and a belief that there are practical solutions to practical problems. Dewey was a strong believer in the capacity of humanity to progress while accepting that there is uncertainty and doubt in the world:

> The scientific attitude may almost be defined as that which is capable of enjoying the doubtful; scientific method is, in one aspect, a technique for making a productive use of doubt by converting it into operations of infinite inquiry (Dewey 1929, 228).

Although Dewey applauded science for offering rigorous methods for solving problems and acquiring information about how the world works, science was not regarded as the ultimate or the only way to know the world. Dewey maintained that the process of inquiry began with and ended in experience. Inquiry, as a contingent, open-ended process relied on the positive (or otherwise negative) feedback from the community of inquiry. For Dewey, 'all scientific inquiries, regardless of their field of focus, are natural, situational, grounded in problems,

integrations of theory and practice, and evaluative' (Campbell 1995, 199). The conclusions of the process of inquiry are not truth, but the best available solution at the time, and are always subject to revision. Thus, scientific inquiry is not a means or method to find the truth: it is merely the means/method to reduce doubt and restore balance to a problematic situation. Moreover, knowing the world through experience is instrumental to rearranging it, and giving it a form that is more useful to one's purposes.

Dewey's conception of community is closely connected to his understanding of democracy as a kind of co-operative experiment (Seigfried 1996). Democracy is not necessarily political democracy but a social phenomenon that goes deeper. It is a way of life that emphasises working with others, sharing with others and contributing something positive to the humanity. Thus, co-operation amongst individuals takes place not only in order to achieve certain goals but is itself a priceless addition to life (Dewey 1938, 342).

For our purpose, Dewey's contribution to the canon of pragmatist writing furnishes us with a number of opportunities for establishing connections with feminist theory. We explore some of these possibilities in the next section.

4. Pragmatism and Feminism

The intellectual currents produced by American pragmatism around the end of the nineteenth century began to nourish the minds of a number of trailblazing feminists such as Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. For example, as Seigfried (1996) notes of Addams who, unlike many of her male pragmatist contemporaries, explicitly acknowledged the value of women's insights and experiences. Addams was also a notable humanitarian and established Hull House in 1889, a pragmatist experiment in neighbourhood activism, designed to address vexing social and industrial problems such as poverty and poor education that were rife within impoverished urban communities in Chicago.

Efforts to utilise pragmatism for advancing a feminist programme of political action were short-lived. Offering a history of pragmatism's chequered reception among feminists, Seigfried (1996) pinpoints two crucial factors. First, the exclusion of women from key academic institutions of higher education such as universities and colleges meant few women occupied influential positions to pursue a pragmatist-feminist philosophy. While the activities of women writing and campaigning from a pragmatist perspective were vigorous, they were largely confined to sites outside higher education settings. As Seigfried laments, one result of this exclusion was that women's authority and sphere of influence in furthering a feminist-pragmatist philosophy was limited.

Second, the appraisal of the early feminism tradition as 'shrill and dogmatic' (1996, 107) by later pragmatists, who also believed that their forms of pluralist thinking were immune to the influence of feminist criticism, meant that many turned away from feminist theory. More than this, however, is the observation that many pragmatists seemed ambivalent to the overwhelming

evidence of sexism and women's oppression that would ignite a second wave of feminist politics in later decades. Not surprisingly, feminism and pragmatism experienced a lengthy hiatus before the recent resurgence of interest among feminists in American pragmatist philosophy (Duran 1993; Livingston 2001; Seigfried 1993, 1996, 2001; Shields 2005; Thayer-Bacon 2003; Whipps 2004).

At this point it is worth briefly stating that connecting American pragmatism with feminism is a complex endeavour. Not all of the pragmatist literature is appealing to feminists, as Seigfried (1996) herself observes, citing the sexism pervasive in much of William James's work. In a similar vein, tracts of Dewey's work have been subject to feminist accusations of under theorising gender and power relations, and idealising the domestic situation of women (Upin 1993). Although Dewey stands out from many of his male pragmatists counterparts in his supportive stance towards addressing gender issues, his references to gender are intermittent, revealing tentativeness (perhaps reluctance) in engaging fully with issues affecting women. Yet, rather in the manner of how feminists have cautiously approached other philosophers found lacking in providing adequate accounts of gender such as Michel Foucault, Seigfried and others have engaged carefully with material from the pragmatist catalogue.

Striking, then, is that Seigfried relies heavily on Dewey's work to signal the compatibility between pragmatist and feminist positions. For our purpose, Seigfried provides a rich theoretical backcloth that helps us to consider further the possibilities for yoking together pragmatism and feminism.

5. Connecting Dewey's Pragmatism to Feminism

Seigfried (2001) expands upon the key areas where Deweyan pragmatism and feminism share common ground. One area of overlap is the emphasis Dewey and feminist theorists place on social reform based on emancipation from prejudice. In broad and simple terms, feminism and pragmatism share a commitment to eradicate oppression from society. From a Deweyan perspective, oppression is a barrier to individual development as well as learning and experiencing full participation in all areas of life. Correspondingly, much feminist activism aims to breakdown oppression for similar reasons, although the focus is on women's experiences and improving women's lives. While pragmatism has a wider remit in terms of addressing the impediments to achieving social democracy and inclusion, there is much for feminists to work with in terms of developing pragmatic methods of inquiry and practice that can help to rebuild a society free from forms of oppression based on gender.

Recognising this, Seigfried draws attention to the way Dewey conceptualises experience. As Seigfried understands Dewey, the purpose of inquiring into experience is to interrogate problematic situations. Crucially this is not an activity that is limited to the vaporous realms of philosophical theorising. Dewey and other pragmatists were highly critical of the empty abstractions proffered by many philosophers as 'solutions' to major social

problems. They are deemed to be no substitute for analyses of human life grounded in concrete, existential experience. Put differently, concrete experience refers to the activities, interactions and events that people 'do' in their daily lives. This is not to suggest that abstraction has no role within inquiry but, for Dewey, abstraction is not considered to be superior to concrete experience. Rather the concrete and abstract co-equally exist together within the process of inquiry, allowing scientific facts and objects to be explored alongside individual values, meanings, and emotions. Framed as such, theory emerges from experience. Here, then, Dewey undermines a Cartesian mind-body dualism that feminists might find attractive. It has been feminists who have vociferously criticised Cartesian philosophy for sustaining harmful dichotomies, not the least of them being linking reason with masculinity, and emotion with femininity (Lloyd 1984).

For Seigfried (2001), this pragmatic conceptualisation of the abstract and the concrete provides an opportunity for women to take their experiences as a baseline for inquiry. Feminist commentators have been particularly vigorous in reclaiming women's flesh-and-blood experiences in order to derive insights into gender inequalities. Indeed, the emphasis on developing theoretical concepts and frames for helping women to articulate their experiences is particularly apparent in feminist standpoint epistemology (Hartsock 1983, 1998; Collins 1990; Jaggar 2004). According to Harding (1987), standpoint feminism takes women's experiences as a platform from which to construct knowledge about women's lives. Such feminist research aims to benefit women and refutes the positivistic claim that the researcher is a detached, neutral observer. For standpoint feminists, women's concrete experience of life, as they understand and interpret it, is regarded as the best criteria against which the authenticity of knowledge claims about women's lives can be judged (Collins 1990). From this position, women have begun to redress the knowledge gap about women's experiences of life. More than this, however, is that knowledge of women's lives has informed feminist political activism that aims to remedy material gender inequalities in women's lives.

Using women's perspectives as a starting point for activism strikes a chord with a pragmatist principle of perspectivism. According to this principle, men's and women's experiences and outlooks differ. Male and female viewpoints may display strengths and weaknesses, which a pragmatist mode of inquiry would seek to address. Of course, the turn towards pressing women's experience in the service of feminist inquiry is not without its problems. Standpoint theory has been attacked for constructing a fixed reality from which to know the world in gendered terms (Grosz 1996). This type of epistemic superiority, as its post-modern critics read it, rests upon feet of clay for assertions of the concreteness of women's experiences assume generalisability about women's lives where there is none (Flax 1990). Yet it is crucial to acknowledge that feminist standpoint epistemology has advanced considerably. Criticism that standpoint feminists subsume all women under one category of

'woman' is arguably outdated given that contemporary feminist standpoint epistemology explicitly acknowledges that women occupy multiple positions within society, which shapes the diversity of their experiences (Harding 2004).

Indeed, Seigfried (1996) argues that Harding's (1987) characterisation of feminist analysis is compatible with pragmatist philosophy, since it also calls for the inclusion of diverse and marginalised communities of interest. A contemporary pragmatist response to the challenge of theorising women's concrete experiences might be to recognise the variation in how women experience such things as oppression, childrearing, marriage, work, and so on. In so doing, pragmatists would regard eliciting competing women's points of view as an integral part of the process of inquiry. As Thayer-Bacon (2003, 434) suggests, the more voices that can be included and heard, the greater hope there is for using inquiry to arrive at a 'sound judgement' of a problematic situation.

6. Outlining a Pragmatist-Feminist Position

How appealing Dewey's pragmatist philosophy might be to feminist scholars partly depends on the strand(s) of feminist theorising scholars subscribe to. Feminism, like pragmatism, is not a homogeneous body of perspectives. But what emerges from the foregoing discussion is a Deweyan pragmatist-feminist perspective that, for our purposes here, can be usefully characterised in at least three ways. First, it aims to go beyond ivory tower intellectualising about the position of women and men within society. Women's oppression is an important concern that warrants attention to how it might be theorised, but it also invites action that aims to expunge it from society. As Seigfried (2001) points out, the pragmatist concern with judging the usefulness of ideas and knowledge in terms of its practicality and workability is attractive to feminists who seek to link knowledge with action.

Second, a pragmatist-feminist perspective on knowledge is non-foundational in the Deweyan sense, that there is no knowledge unmediated by inquiry. Knowledge is a constructed outcome of particular inquiries as they arise within specific contexts at certain moments in time. As such, knowledge is regarded as temporal, indeterminate and contingent. It is also linked to power through an understanding of the process of inquiry as an event in effecting material change.

Third, a pragmatist feminist point of view holds that concrete experience is key to interrogating social problems such as gender inequalities. This is not to adopt a form of standpoint theory that might produce a calcified version of, say, 'women's experiences', but rather a dynamic and fluid understanding of the concreteness of people's experiences. Framed in this way, a pragmatist-feminism perspective might aim to create and maintain an open communicative field in which multiple points of view are crucial to forming and exploring lines of inquiry. Importantly, a pragmatist-feminist perspective does not take-for-granted a fixed reality from which to know the world, but instead seeks to elicit

a diverse range of perspectives in order to arrive at workable and practical solutions to problems. Equally and relatedly, because a pragmatist-feminist approach focuses on the individual's point of view, there are exciting opportunities for exploring how this might operate at the level of methodology. To illustrate, in the following section we outline our ideas for a pragmatist-feminist approach to the ethnographic study of gender.

7. Toward a Manifesto for the Pragmatist-Feminist Ethnographer

We choose ethnography to illustrate how American pragmatism and feminism may be connected methodologically because it is already receptive to the both the influence of pragmatist and feminist philosophies. For example, the interactionist tradition within ethnography, often associated with the work of George Herbert Mead, builds, in part, on American pragmatist principles. From this position, ethnographers accept that humans and human action can only be understood in relation to the community contexts in which they are embedded (Atkinson et al. 2001). Significantly, we are not alone in suggesting that ethnography should continue to be inspired by pragmatist principles. In line with Watson (forthcoming), we also argue that ethnographic research should follow a pragmatist agenda of understanding truth and reality through their relevance to practice. But we are also attracted to ethnography because one of its virtues is that it can derive theoretical insight from a number of conceptual resources (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

On that point and in regard to ethnographic research described as 'feminist', there is plenty of evidence to illustrate the myriad ways in which feminists have approached ethnography as a method and at the level of epistemology (Skeggs 2001). Ethnographic research conducted by feminists has helped to document the richness of women's lives, understand women's experiences from their own points of view and explore gender as a social construction that is historically conditioned (Abu-Lughod 1993; Ellis 1986; Kondo 1990; Salzinger 2003; Skeggs 1997).

At this juncture, it is worth pointing out that it is not our intention to enter into debate about whether there is such a thing as 'feminist ethnography'. Discussions of this sort ignited by, among others, Stacey (1988) and Abu-Lughod (1990) are a vital part of the history of feminist ethnography. Whatever the value of distinguishing between 'feminist' and 'non-feminist' ethnography might be, we understand a pragmatist-feminist approach as one possible way of providing the theoretical scaffolding for ethnographic research. Notably, while there is an abundance of commentaries on the relationship between feminism and ethnography and plenty of ethnographic research on gender, there is little ethnographic material that draws on American pragmatism and feminism. Arguably, this is not surprising; as discussed above, pragmatism is a largely untapped resource for feminists, while pragmatists have not always been receptive to feminist theories (Seigfried 1996, 2001).

Addressing this shortfall, we map out an agenda for a pragmatist-feminist ethnographer. Our agenda is not to be taken as a definitive version of the principles that may guide the pragmatist-feminist ethnographer. We assemble our ideas as a base for others to build on. With that in mind, we outline three key themes: (1) determining the focus of analysis within ethnographic research on gender; (2) re-defining theory; (3) and pursuing a focus on the future.

7.1. The Focus of Analysis

As we see it, a pragmatist-feminist ethnographer would concentrate on actions. By studying actions, s/he can better tap into tacit knowledge and the informal culture that makes a particular group tick. The researcher will blur the Habermasian distinction between material/instrumental and social/discursive actions. The sayings and the doings of an individual are both regarded as actions, and therefore worth studying. Understanding actions to be gendered, they must be placed in their practical context in order to avoid atomistic descriptions of individual actions (Schatzki 2001). Such contexts are not coherent and stable but display, in the words of Dewey:

> ... an impressive and irresistible mixture of sufficiencies, tight completeness, order, recurrences which make possible prediction and control, and singularities, ambiguities, uncertain possibilities, processes going on to consequences yet indeterminate (1958, 47).

The processual dynamism of gendered social life and its inherent uncertainties could only be understood by actively participating in the situation at hand, and applying terms supplied by the community of practice interested in finding solutions to problems. It is not just the actions of the subjects that form the focus of analysis: ethnography is itself an embodied practice and the doings and sayings of the researcher are of crucial importance to the process and outcome of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In focusing on gendered actions (of the people studied and of her/himself), the ethnographer must consider also the material artefacts, language conventions and other material and discursive props that constitute the gendered social context of the research setting.

The pragmatist-feminist ethnographer also needs to pay close attention to the actions of both dominant and marginalized actors, and ensure s/he does not collapse into a position of relativism. The importance of context is crucial. It is not desirable to extrapolate insights from how gender is reproduced through everyday practices, social structures and cultural meanings in one context, only to assume they hold relevance across all other contexts. For example, a pragmatist-feminist ethnographer might investigate what marginalised women and men need in specific social contexts order to participate fully in social life. But, as Nancy Fraser (2001, 31) argues within a pragmatist vein, there is no

reason to assume that all of them need the same thing in every context'. For example, it cannot be supposed that gender will always be the primary epistemic category of analysis. It might be, as black feminist researchers have demonstrated, that race and ethnicity have more bearing on how some women feel disenfranchised from certain social contexts (Collins 1990). The same is true of other factors that intersect with gender such as class and sexuality, as explored in ethnographies by Skeggs (1997) and Talburt (2000) respectively.

Crucially, a pragmatist-feminist ethnographer could provide insights into the different values, assumptions and intricate histories of women and men, investigating how individuals construct themselves as subjects marked by gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, age and so on. As Seigfried (1996) points out, pragmatist perspectives provide intellectual headroom for a conception of gender as a historically conditioned social construction, and as something an individual assumes through creative responses to the contexts in which they are enmeshed. Looked at in this way, a pragmatist-feminist ethnographer would not accept that there is no way of judging between competing stories of gendered lives. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2006, 137) aver, 'abandoning reasoned grounds for judgement seems politically defeatist, conceals the criteria validity that are being used, and actively reproduces the status quo'. This sentiment is apparent in the pragmatist impulse to examine the material conditions of people's lives with a view to improving them, thus exhibiting compatibility with feminist goals that aim to expose and address the material inequalities in women's lives (Seigfried 1996). This endeavour can be couched within an ethnographic method, which enables us to develop a close understanding of what different people need at different times and in specific contexts, in order to overcome the barriers to participating in social life.

7.2. Re-Defining Theory

To recap, from a Deweyan perspective the superiority of some theories over others is to do with their ability to capture and describe more appropriately what is going on in practice, and in becoming better tools for solving specific problems. It is the usefulness of knowledge that helps establish the difference between meaningful and non-meaningful knowledge. Thus Dewey argues that theorising means to experience the world in one way or another, and not accounting for this experience means escaping into useless theory. This assertion is explored at length in *Experience and Nature* (1929), in which Dewey writes that experience is about what *men* (sic!) do, what they strive for, believe and endure and also how men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe and imagine. As Dewey remarked in an early text, theory is inextricably linked to this 'universe of non-reflectional experience of our doings, sufferings, enjoyments of the world and of one another' (1916, 9). What people know about the world is influenced by what they do, can do and want to do in the world as individuals and as collectivities.

As such, theory cannot be a mere individual achievement, but a social one, for the validity of a theory is assured when the theory makes sense to a certain community of practice. Ethnography, through its closeness to the field, is an ideal methodology (and possibly the only one) that allows the researcher to tap into the internal logic of a community of practice.

Van Maanen (2006, 13) describes ethnography as the most scientific of the humanities and the most humanistic of the sciences. As social science, ethnographic theories provide systematic generalisations about 'how the world works'. Such generalisations are not empirical and cannot be extrapolated to larger populations: they are theoretical and concern the process being studied. As a humanistic science, ethnography relies on creative writing techniques but the final product (the ethnographic theory) is different from the product of literary creations. The latter is about enjoyment, diversion, shock and achieving a state of pleasure. The former may achieve all these but, more importantly, ethnographic theories must reflect upon, inform and change practice. This is not to say that they merely reflect and enhance the agendas of the powerful. Nor are they subordinated to practice in the sense of making practice more important than reflection. The relationship between theory and practice is a dialectical one.

Pragmatist theorising, like some strands of feminist theorising, is very much concerned to highlight the dialectics between knowledge and action. Even feminists such as Judith Butler, considered by her feminist critics as promulgating a form of postmodern feminism that uses theory as a tool merely to expose the gendered process of knowledge, argues that theory alone is insufficient for social and political transformation.

> Something besides theory must take place, such as interventions at social and political levels that involve actions, sustained labor, and institutionalised practice, which are not quite the same as the exercise of theory (2004, 204).

Butler goes on to say that theory and practice are mutually influencing, although feminist scholars still come at the nature of this dialectic from different and sometimes opposing angles (Zalewski 2004). As we see it, knowledge of how women and men differ between and among themselves can have positive practical consequences for coalition building. But, as Seigfried (1996) points out, pragmatist-feminist philosophy does not overlook the potential conflict and pain that arises from engendering pluralist dialogue. For Seigfried, who finds inspiration in the black feminist research of bell hooks, achieving a sense of solidarity or even consensus need not entail an outright denial of human differences. This process is hard and likely to be slow and incremental but as sociologist Steven Seidman reasons:

> At least in the pragmatist strategy, the interpretive and therefore the interested character of our moral claims is evident. Such claims will be

> contested more readily if they are viewed as interpretive accomplishments than if one envelopes them in an aura of transcendent reason (1997, 210).

We believe that developing insights into this process of social negotiation should be at the heart of pragmatist-feminist ethnographic theorising.

As such, this begs the question of whether truth can be attained, which from a pragmatist perspective is not a wholly theoretical question but a practical one too. The meaning of an idea is the practical consequences of the idea, for knowledge is intrinsically intertwined with human action. Pragmatists recognise that there are many ways of interpreting the world, and some are 'better' than others. However, one can recognise the superiority of one way over another thanks to practical experience and dialogue. Thus the pragmatist-feminist ethnographer's interest in what works, and how and why it works (or doesn't) in terms of combating gender inequalities, translates into a notion of knowledge that is anti-foundational: one that is potentially appealing to a pragmatist-feminist ethnographer because it directs attention towards problem solving using the data and the understandings available at the time. Generating and presenting knowledge that has consequences for future applications is a moral responsibility. A pragmatist-feminist ethnographer may choose to describe and explain gender practices in a certain way but this will ultimately serve to suggest alternative ways in the light of more democratic principles of organisation. As well as developing new theoretical perspectives and conceptualisations of gendered practices, the ethnographer will make central the individual struggle for human dignity and meaning in people's lives.

7.3. A Focus on the Future

The pragmatist-feminist ethnographer must show a genuine interest in the future, in the alternatives that may just happen, and in perspectives that are not yet realised. Emerging theory is oriented to the future taking the past and the present as its immediate material. Acting in the present is about anticipation and projection rather than about evaluating the past. Feminist theorists who see the value in lifting and considering multiple voices of those who are marginalised share a similar approach to that adopted by Dewey. The critical consideration of alternative and competing perspectives is something that inquirers strive for, even if consensus cannot be arrived in terms of judgements about the future. As Seigfried explains:

> [Consensus] ... is one of the fundamental values of pragmatist feminist philosophy because social problems require concerted action to be solved equitably and efficaciously. Such consensus is temporary, revisable, strategic, and directed toward specific ends-in-view (1996, 275).

Consensus is an ideal, one that is seldom achieved as Seigfried (1996) acknowledges, but it is worth striving for. We agree. Consensus through engaging with difference offers opportunities for people to re-evaluate their own views and to imagine alternatives. Pragmatist-feminist ethnography on gender can be concerned with exploring the conditions that make possible consensual decision-making among gendered communities of inquiry. It can also explore the possibilities for women and men to imagine a future (e.g. gender utopias) that is shaped by the eclectic voices of the liminal, although such envisioning will vary according to different perspectives on the merits of 'defining' men's and women's interests and positions. Here, then, is an aperture for interrogating harmful gender dualisms that hierarchically order gender relations according to male/female and masculine/feminine. Crucially, pragmatist-feminist ethnographic data on how these dualisms are invoked or challenged by women and men could potentially complement, for example, discursive analyses of how discourses on gender generate subjectivities at an individual level. The pragmatist impulse to investigate the social, moral and political consequences of certain gender constructions might offer fresh practice-centred perspectives on some of the identity politics debates within feminist circles that are at risk of becoming breathless (Fraser 2003).

8. Concluding Remarks

The current interest in American pragmatism among feminist theorists is telling of a growing acknowledgement among scholars of the potential pragmatist philosophy holds for (re)thinking the dialectic between theory and practice. For some feminist scholars this has opened up new lines of inquiry for exploring the social, political and material effects of gender inequalities in women's and men's lives. Indeed, we can investigate how women and men construct themselves as gendered subjects within particular environments, providing insights into what resources people need in order to participate fully in social life. Our contribution to the renewed interest in American pragmatism is to strengthen the presence of a pragmatist-feminist perspective within the social sciences, an arena that has generally been unreceptive and/or indifferent towards American pragmatism (Baert 2003).

In this article we have introduced American pragmatist philosophy, pointing out the merit of deriving theoretical insight from the writings of John Dewey for developing a pragmatist-feminist perspective. Drawing also on the feminist work of Charlene Haddock Seigfried, we have outlined some of the potentialities of linking feminist theories with American pragmatist philosophy. One important lesson we can draw from this is that a pragmatist-feminist approach provides a robust philosophy for supporting a notion of social science as a form of social practice that is accountable to those whose lives it seeks to better. This approach holds potential currency within a current intellectual, economic and social climate that is troubled by vexing questions of how to

address persistent inequalities that relate not just to gender but also to race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and so on.

Another lesson we can draw is that pragmatist-feminism can provide a basis for developing the field of social science methodology. We have shed light on this assertion by using ethnography as an illustrative case in point. Pragmatist-feminist ethnography can be characterised thematically in a number of ways. In broad terms, it can be seen as a contextually sensitive scientific method which can help us to understand more closely the social processes by which forms of consensus might be achievable, in order to tackle social problems. Thus pragmatist-feminist ethnography forces us to address, among other things, concerns regarding epistemological issues of how to understand and negotiate different points of view and shifting intersectionalities of gender, sexuality, class, age, etc. As well as the technical issues associated with ethnography as a method that generates knowledge as a tool for action.

The challenge for social scientists is to adopt a pragmatist-feminist perspective for studying women's and men's lives. As we see it, such an approach may inform not just ethnographic accounts of gender, but also action learning methodologies, qualitative interviewing methods and studies on gender using mixed methods. This warrants further analysis, in order to supplement existing analyses of the methodological implications of adopting a general pragmatic approach within the social sciences (Morgan 2007). We also see a number of potentialities that relate to how a pragmatist-feminist perspective might be applied across different research settings. For example, work organisations, regarded by feminist theorists as important gendered arenas marked by gender inequalities (Salzinger 2003; Gherardi 1995), might benefit from a pragmatist-feminist approach. Studies on the work situations of men and women could focus on how people (re)construct the social meanings attached to gender, but also with an eye to how this knowledge might have practical application. As such, a feminist-pragmatist approach in organisation studies and elsewhere could help us to heighten our imaginations as to how gender inequalities can be addressed, and what gendered future worlds might look and feel like. It is precisely for this reason that we see pragmatist-feminism theory as a relevant and worthwhile resource for informing research activities within the social sciences.

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Non-Passivity of Perceptual Experience

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The main problems faced by a conception of perception as passive will be introduced through a critical examination of John McDowell's account of 'empirical thinking'. Overcoming these difficulties will lead to a conception of perception as involving an active cognitive participation of the perceiver, and an account of how observational judgment is warranted that is focused on the conditions of experience. In both cases, analogies to inquiry in scientific experimental practice will be explored.

"Seeing is in some respect an art, which must be learnt"
William Herschel, 1782.

Seeing is believing, at least in the sense that perceiving something is a warrant and justification for belief that it is so. For perception to play this role, it appears that it must have content, suitably related to the content of the belief, and that what content it has must be a matter of receptivity rather than within our control. This basic intuitive understanding of the matter is prevalent; its articulation has proved exceedingly difficult. To arrive at a more precise understanding we shall explore analogies to inquiry in scientific practice. Taking the detailed account of 'empirical thinking' in the work of John McDowell as a starting point, we will strive for a conception of perception as inherently active, practical, and participatory.

The conception of perception as having conceptual content, defended by McDowell in *Mind and World,* has been the focus of innumerable discussions (see e.g. Gunther 2003). Also central to McDowell's view is that perception is passive, in a sense to be specified. This alleged passivity, critical to the account because it purportedly warrants perceptual objectivity, has hardly been discussed in the literature, let alone called into question.

I will discuss two major difficulties which obstruct this account of perception as passive and argue for a double qualification of the passivity of perception. The first problem has to do with cognitive responsibility. Typically, the passivity of perception excludes from the domain of perception any experience with a content for which the subject has some cognitive responsibility. Much of what we ordinarily regard as perceptual experience

presupposes, however, some cognitive activity and implies some cognitive responsibility for its content. The first qualification will then be to complement the domain of passive perceptual experience by a domain of *participatory* perceptual experience. The relation between the two forms of experience will provide a model for how 'seeing' is related to 'looking' in general. Drawing on an analogy with measuring activity, the relation between the two forms will be characterized as a diachronic relation.

The second problem is related to the justificatory function ascribed to perception with respect to empirical thinking. For perception to play this role, and this is the second qualification, the concept of passivity must be freed from the idea of non-endorsement of the content of experience which locates the latter outside the domain of our beliefs. The challenge is to do so without threatening the objectivity of empirical thinking. Looking once again to practice, and to reasoning involved in experimental inquiry, it will be argued that perceptual beliefs are ultimately justified not by pointing to supposedly non-endorsed contents of experience but by appealing to the *conditions* of experience.

1. Starting With McDowell's Account Of Perception

For perceptual experience to serve as a rational ground for empirical thinking, it must satisfy, according to John McDowell (1996), two conditions: it must be passive and its content must be conceptual.[1] In McDowell's inquiry into the conditions for the possibility of empirical thinking, the passivity of experience plays a fundamental role.

If our thinking is to be *empirical*, to be directed at the world, then the world, McDowell says, must exert a normative constraint on our thinking, and that constraint must be through the content of experience (1995, 231). For this constraint to be normative, McDowell argues, it has to be possible for the content of experience to entertain a rational relation with empirical judgments, and for that, this content must be conceptual (1996, 11; 1995, 237). But if the constraint exerted by the content of experience on our thinking is to be empirical, it must come from outside this thinking, it must take the form of being "saddled with conceptual content." As a (conceptual) given,[2] impressed on our sensibility from outside the domain of our judgments and beliefs, the content of perceptual experience can exert a constraint on empirical thinking warranted to be, not only rational, but external to this domain. And the existence of such an external constraint is viewed as nothing less than a condition of possibility of the objectivity of our thinking directed at the world, a condition of our being in touch with the world. I will come back later to the problem of having the content of perception at the same time external to the domain of our beliefs and rationally constraining. First, we need to clarify the notion of passivity and what it means that one is 'saddled with conceptual content'.

For McDowell, conceptual capacities belong to the 'faculty of spontaneity', they are "capacities whose exercise is in the domain of responsible

freedom" (1996, 12). And McDowell insists that the capacities drawn on in receptivity could not be regarded as conceptual were they not the same as the capacities that are involved in active thinking. How, then, is it possible to have perceptual experience, at the same time, being passive and involving conceptual capacities, with the ideas of spontaneity and responsible freedom attached to them? To answer this, McDowell introduces a crucial distinction: perceptual experience involves the same capacities as are exercised in active thinking, but in receptivity these conceptual capacities are merely *actualized* (1996, 9; 1998, 410).

To assert the conceptual character of the content of experience is to reject a two-level conception of empirical thinking of the sort defended for instance by Evans (1982), in which one level does not involve conceptual capacities. But there are still two levels; it is rather that the demarcation is now in terms of *how* conceptual capacities are involved. The first level is the one of impressions, experiential intakes, in which conceptual capacities are (merely) actualized. The second is the level of judgment, of the exercise of conceptual capacities, where acts of thinking are realized and contents are endorsed or rejected.

This contrast between actualization and exercise of conceptual capacities is all the more important since McDowell does not dwell much on characterizing passivity, besides saying that experience is "a kind of occurrence or state" (1996, 9) and using such metaphors as 'being saddled with content' or 'passive reception'. But it is indirectly characterized through a systematic contrast with the (active) exercise of conceptual capacities. Conceptual capacities are "defined as the kind of capacities they are by their role in active self-critical thinking" but "experience itself is not a case of that." Conceptual capacities are fully exercised in judgment, "which is the end... of the controlled and self-critical activity of making up one's mind.... But the very same capacities can be actualized, outside the control of the subject, in the receptivity of sensibility." (1998, 410) Even in judgments closest to experience one has a choice about endorsement of the content of one's judgment whereas in experience "one's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available, before one has any choice in the matter." (1996, 10)

The distinction between the passivity of experience and the activity of thinking hinges thus on the strict opposition between the subject of experience having or not having some control on the operation of conceptual capacities. That experience is passive is tantamount to saying that the subject of experience has no cognitive control on what the content of his or her experience is: to experience is to undergo a certain occurrence, finding oneself in a certain state, characterized by a certain content. Can this conception of perception as passive account, accurately and comprehensively, for our perceptual life?

2. Toward A Concept Of Participatory Perception

Imagine you are looking hastily for a particular book on the bookshelf and are able, without identifying the titles, suddenly to discriminate this book from the others. Throughout, no doubt that you are completely engaged with the world; but this is a highly controlled and sophisticated form of perceptual engagement. You have shaped your perceptual faculty into a specific instrument of search and whether to adopt, as well as to sustain, this specific 'radar-search' perceptual attitude is under your control. This is not an experience one can simply find oneself having, but it is, nevertheless, a very common sort of experience and an experience that it seems difficult not to identify as part of our perceptual life. If this sort of experience involves some cognitive control, however, according to a passive conception of perception, it cannot count as perceptual experience. Could a passive conception of perception offer a satisfactory alternative account of it?

There is indeed an alternative account that a passive conception of perception may try to put forward by somehow dismissing the 'call to account'. I will examine that option in a moment. But there is also a positive account that may seem available to a view on perception as passive. I will call it the 'active preparation' account, and begin by considering it first.

There are well-known cases of perceptual experience apparently involving some activity and however accountable in terms passive reception. Take the phenomenon of 'color constancy' (Thompson 1995). A sheet of paper that looks black when seen in the shade will still look dark if the perceiver goes out in the light; and this phenomenon is commonly interpreted as a demonstration of the non-passivity of the perceptual system. However, Thomas Johansen (2002, 183) argues, it can be made compatible with perception as passive by understanding the relevant activity as merely an adaptive preparation of the perceptual system, rather than part of the perception itself: "vision has an *active* ability to adjust its mean in relation to the circumstances.... The eyes have to reset themselves emerging from a dark room so as to register relatively stronger movements, which are at first blinding." On this view, the senses adjust themselves to the new environmental conditions so that perception can take place, passively, in an optimal way. The passivity of perception can be maintained by deflecting the activity involved from the perception itself towards the *preparation* for perception.

However judicious, this account cannot be an immediate answer to the problem we are concerned with. The form of perceptual activity that Johansen considers is one in which it is 'vision' that adjusts itself, 'the eyes' that reset themselves. The case we are considering is one where the subject himself is actively involved. But this distinction between preparation of the perception and the perception itself is nevertheless relevant. It appears to be precisely what McDowell seems to recommend when he admits that to attribute passivity to experience is not "to deny that experiencing the world involves activity.

Searching is an activity; so are observing, watching, and so forth. But one's control over what happens in experience has limits: one can decide where to place oneself, at what pitch to tune one's attention, and so forth, but it is not up to one what, having done all that, one will experience" (1996, 10, note 8).

McDowell does not develop any further his account of such activities as searching, observing or watching, and it is not clear how the difference between mere seeing and observing or watching would be accounted for. But this scarcity may itself be informative: it suggests that there is no important difference between the perceptual experience one has when one is merely seeing and the perceptual experience one has when one is searching, observing or watching. Searching, observing or watching are regarded as activities in that one actively contributes to the realization of certain conditions, for instance, by looking in a certain direction, by being more attentive. But perception itself takes place after that, without being different from a mere seeing in significant ways. So, what may seem to be cases of non-passive perception would have to be understood as cases of actively prepared passive perception.

The problem is that, whatever one does with one's body, as long as one is not perceiving, that may be acting but it is not searching, observing, or watching. Searching, observing and watching presuppose, not that one is *going to have* a perceptual experience, but that one *is* having a perceptual experience. Admittedly, to place oneself somewhere and to turn one's eyes in a certain direction may not qualify, in themselves, as *cognitive* activities. But as activities, rather than mere movements, they presuppose some intentionality and some cognitive control.

To answer that objection, one may try to analyze the searching, observing or watching in a series of passive seeings separated by brief periods of activity in which the perceiver resets her orientation, turns her body, tunes her attention, and so on. The new problem would be to account for these seeings and activities being elements of a unified experience without appealing to some form of cognitive activity permeating the whole series.

But perhaps the most fundamental difficulty is to square any such separation, between preparation for perception and perception itself, with the character of the experience itself. Think of watching the sunset, or scrutinizing a painting and discerning progressively subtler details. These experiences could not count less as perceptual than scanning the shelf in search of a book. They are necessarily not instantaneous events, but there is nothing they could be said to be a preparation for but themselves. Some other cases seem to admit the distinction more readily, like someone trying to recognize from the window the person standing at the gate. Let's imagine there is a moment where the person in question, Ulysses, is recognized. It is tempting to think of this moment of recognition as, perceptually speaking, different from what happened before. But the difference is not one between being a perceptual experience and not being a perceptual experience. Rather, the difference in play here is analogous to the difference between running a race without having crossed the arrival line (which

is compatible with maybe never getting to this point) and crossing the arrival line. Trying to see who is there is already, at each instant, as much of a seeing as aiming to run to the arrival line is already, at each instant, running. What makes crossing the arrival line particular is 'only' that it makes the whole run a success. Similarly, what makes the experience of recognition different from the whole process of 'trying to recognize' is 'only' that it makes the latter praiseworthy.

As mentioned above, there is, however, a second account of cases like the 'radar-search' that is apparently available to a passive conception of perception. The ability to discriminate a book on a shelf, without precise identification of the others, seems to involve some cognitive control on the experience. But the proponent of passivity may simply dismiss the request to account for this experience. It may be true, one would argue, that the observer actively contributes to the content of his or her perception and that this contribution has a cognitive dimension. But the result is that she doesn't see the books clearly, she only sees blurred objects. It is not a case of perceiving how things are, not a case of *objective* content. And this is not the sort of experience that the conception of perceptual experience as passive reception needs to account for since passivity is meant to ensure objectivity.

This proposal requires a particular conception of the norms of evaluation of the content of perception, to rule it as defective, that is, non-objective. That the content of my experience is objective means, to use McDowell's formulation, that 'when I am not misled', I am perceiving what is there, in the world, or certain aspects of it. But we have to keep in mind that objectivity, in the context of McDowell's own enterprise, is not to be accounted for from a 'sideways' perspective (a perspective that is not the perceiver's own). McDowell's project is to answer the *perceiver*'s worry as to the objectivity of her perceptual experience, not the worry of someone who could compare the perceiver's content of experience to something else.

But there is a more fundamental problem with an account of perception that precludes the involvement of cognitive activity. It is that, most often, not only does cognitive activity appear to be compatible with our perceptual grasp of the world but it appears as an instrument of enhancement of our perception of the world, and sometimes even as the condition of possibility of faithful perception, rather than passivity.

Simply consider a specialist examining a wall for signs of fragility. Little by little, she begins to see, here and there, black traces, cracks, stains etc. It is a process which requires some cognitive activity: one has to sustain an intent and oriented focus, one has to keep in mind what one is looking for, and to entertain the global image that develops in the course of the observation. The content of perception becomes if anything richer, more realistic.

Active thinking doesn't take the observer away from the world; if anything, it takes her closer. An illustrated argument of this point is offered by Iris Murdoch in "The Idea of Perfection" (2001, 1–45) where she introduces a

character M, a mother, who thinks of her daughter in law, D, that she is "lacking in dignity and refinement," "sometimes positively rude," "always tiresomely juvenile." Time passes and M settles down with this fixed picture of D. But at some point, thinking that she herself may be prejudiced, snobbish, M decides "to look again." Her vision, the content of her perception, little by little, is transformed: D is finally seen as "not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on."

What made the change possible, Murdoch argues, is that M has worked at seeing D differently, and this activity directed at looking attentively, and changing the way one sees things is, for her, a case of "moral activity." No doubt that active, responsible thinking is part of this activity, it is a condition of possibility of it as moral activity. But her responsibility doesn't introduce a gap between the way things appear to M and the way things are. She is describing one's working at seeing the world one is living in (Dunphy 2003, 145–163). It is in the progressive attempt to see a particular object clearly that she thinks we exercise our responsible freedom, a process that is infinitely perfectible and carries with it a necessary fallibility.

One may rightly wonder whether we are still speaking about the same thing here. Even granted that striving to see a person correctly is relevant to moral evaluation, what does it have to do with the objectivity of the content of experience in seeing *things*, in 'getting in touch with world'? The responsibility pointed out by Murdoch need not pertain solely to a moral dimension. Think of someone looking at the sky after she read a book about constellations, and trying to discern a certain constellation. "Many a night have I been practicing to see," Herschel relates, "and it would be strange if one did not acquire a certain dexterity by such constant practice."[3] But one certainly does not find oneself saddled with perception of the constellation. Granted, it is passively that the observer sees the stars. But as she is working at seeing something else, she will recall what she saw in the book, focuses on a certain part of the sky, trying to recognize and select the right stars, so as to relate them into a new object.

Working at seeing the particular arrangement of the stars that constitutes the constellation, involves active thinking in remembering, selecting, relating: "To pay attention is not merely further to elucidate pre-existing data, it is to bring about a new articulation of them by taking them as figures...." (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 29) Eventually, looking up at the heavens she will simply see this constellation, being then, one may say, saddled with content. But that should not obliterate her responsibility for that content. Were she a student, she could certainly be praised or blamed for her success or failure.

The domain of application of the passive conception of perception is too limited to encompass the whole scope of our perceptual life. It has to be complemented by a domain where the perceiver is cognitively involved in perceiving and thereby cognitively responsible for the content of her experience. In this domain, perception needs to be conceived of as participatory in that the

perceiver participates in it through the cognitive control she exerts. But what is the relation between these two domains? Discerning progressively a constellation cannot be accomplished without first perceiving the stars, so these two domains cannot be understood as separate. The example even suggests a form of dependence of participatory perceptual experience on passive experience with passive perceptual experience being more fundamental, with a somehow simpler content. On the other hand, if passive perception of the constellation is eventually possible, participatory experience is a condition of this possibility. Drawing on an analogy between measuring and experiencing, I will propose a diachronic rather than hierarchical understanding of the relation between passive and participatory forms of perception.

Some experimental set-ups can be seen as making passive measurements, measurements of objects existing in nature (Harré 2003, 32). But measuring is a matter of passive reception only at a certain advanced stage of inquiry: "Where experiments are interpreted as conveying unarguable lessons about the contents of Nature, this indicates that a controversy has already reached a stage of provisional closure.... This closure makes instruments into what are seen as uncontestable transmitters of messages from nature, that is, it makes them transparent." (Schaffer 1989, 68) The moment where one can read the outcome of an instrument as resulting from a passive reception is the provisional achievement of a difficult and controversial process. It is a process which requires cognitive involvement on the part of the 'measurers' with respect to what the relevant data are, how to tune the instruments, how to treat the data they provide and, yet, counts already as measurement activity.

Take a thermometer: nothing, it seems, is more passive than a thermometer, nothing more accessible than a thermal state. But the historical description Ernst Mach, or more recently Hasok Chang (2004), give of the achievement of a thermometer quickly belies this impression. The practice of thermometry only achieved coherence and stabilization through a laborious process trying to articulate theoretical, instrumental, empirical constraints and involving conventional decisions. The passivity of the measurement of temperature was not a given. The whole history of thermometry can be read as a dynamical, interactive process *aiming at* the achievement of a passive measurement. An instrument appears to extract information from nature only when we have been able to encapsulate, into the material form of the instrument, two kinds of 'knowledge': a working knowledge, which is a matter of control over material agency, and a 'model knowledge' which involves the selection and transformation of a signal into a measurement (see Baird 2003, 50). Passivity is not a more fundamental form of measuring activity, it is an achievement. But it is not less fundamental either, for the process directed towards the stabilization of a measurement built on other measurements (e.g. of length or volume) which qualify as passive. What emerges then, rather than a hierarchical picture, is a diachronic understanding of the relation between two forms of measuring activity.

Regarding experience now, the analogy with measurement suggests understanding passive experience, where we are saddled with content, as an achievement, possibly provisional, of a participatory perceptual process, rather than a mere starting point. This process is like a ladder that is finally left behind in the same way that, once we have an instrument making what we consider, currently, as (passive) measurements, we are oblivious to the instrumental process which led to this instrument. And as passive forms of measurement are invested and relied on in processes of stabilization of new measurements, passive forms of perceptual experience are invested and relied on in processes of participatory perceptual experience.

3. Addressing Objectivity: Externality and Rational Constraint

A more comprehensive account of our perceptual activity will not reject the conception of perceptual experience as passive, but locate it in a larger scheme that incorporates a dynamical, reciprocal relation between passive experience and participatory experience. This modification cannot, however, be the only qualification to the conception of perception as passive.

For the lack of control over the operation of conceptual capacities that characterizes passivity, in McDowell's conception of experience, is not exhausted by the idea of a mere reception. It involves also a condition of *non-endorsement* of the content one is saddled with. The problem with this condition arises from the tension in the double requirement that the content of experience be external to the domain of our beliefs, in that it is not endorsed, and also rationally constraining with respect to empirical thinking. The second qualification to the conception of perception as passive will be to release this condition.

The 'external constraint constraint' appears in McDowell's transcendental inquiry as a condition of possibility of empirical thinking. To simply make sense of the idea of empirical thinking as thinking answerable to the world, we must make sense of the idea of a "world's verdict" to which our empirical thinking is answerable, this 'world's verdict', in the perspective of the 'minimal empiricism' advocated by McDowell, can only be delivered by the 'tribunal of experience'(McDowell 1995, 231). If our thinking is to be directed at the world, it must be possible to appeal to experience for its justification. What is required for the answerability to experience to be possibly an answerability to the world? What we appeal to as a justification must stand, according to McDowell, outside the sphere of active, spontaneous, responsible, thinking: "there must be a rational constraint on thought from outside it, so as to ensure a proper acknowledgement of the independence of reality." (1996, 28)

In experience "one takes in, for instance, sees that things are thus and so" and that is "the sort of thing one can also, for instance judge" (1996, 9), that is, endorse, or reject. This judging is additional to being saddled with content. The content of experience is a mere impression of the world on our 'receptive

capacities' in the sense that this content of experience is pre-judgmental. In this picture, justification by experience is justification by the content of experience, and the content of experience is not the content of a judgment, or a belief.

I will argue that, while the appeal to experience does play a justificatory function with respect to empirical judgment, what fulfills this function is not a non-endorsed content of experience. The argument will go as follows: (1) if the justification of empirical beliefs by experience is a justification by the content of experience, this content must be the content of belief, at least in the minimal sense that it is endorsed; ultimately it will be an observational belief; (2) when it comes to the justification of observational belief, the justification by experience is a justification, not by the content, but by the *conditions* of experience and their reliability.

How does experience justify a judgment? McDowell makes it clear that the relation of justification is a rational relation, a relation within the space of concepts. He doesn't dwell much, in *Mind and World*, on making explicit the idea of 'rational relation', but the examples he mentions, "relations such as *implication* or *probabilification*" (1996, 7, italics mine) may suggest an inferential structure.[4] But, as noted by Kathrin Glüer (2004, 246), an inferential relation between two propositions is, by itself, not enough for the former to be a reason for the latter, unless the proposition in question is held true, endorsed. That is precisely what McDowell's passive conception of perception precludes when it says that the content of perception is external to the domain of our beliefs (see Stroud 2002). So how can the content of perception have a justificatory function?

McDowell, perhaps surprisingly, admits that if the justification of a proposition takes the form of an inferential relation, the justifier must belong within the domain of our beliefs:

> No doubt it does not make sense to suppose one might avail oneself of such an entitlement, in moving inferentially to beliefs whose contents are consequences of the claim that things are as one perceives them to be, unless one believes that one's experience is indeed a case of perceiving things to be a certain way.... (McDowell 2004, 215)

But he denies that this can be an objection to his conception. For the judgments that are inferentially justified are judgments that are not *immediately* perceptual. In the case of immediate perceptual judgments, i.e. observational judgments, if the rational relation between the content of experience and the judgment were inferential it could only be of the "stuttering form, 'P; so P'" (*ibid*., 405). For, on the one hand, the content of experience would have to be endorsed to be justificatory, and on the other hand, the content of the justified observational judgment would have to be the content of this same experience. The mistake made by his critics was, according to McDowell, to be oblivious to the

particularity of observational judgments and to identify 'rational' with inferential:

> The concept of inference ... is not central for me.... In the conceptual activity I am mainly concerned with, that of making observational judgments, what matters is the rationality exemplified in judging whether things are thus and so in the light of whether things are (observably) thus and so. (McDowell 1998, 405)

There must then be another form of rational relation of justification that observational judgments bear to the perceptual content meant to justify them. What can that be?

If McDowell wants to conceive of justification as a relation between contentful items, that is, as requiring a 'content-sensitive justifier', and if this relation cannot be inferential, it must be, according to Crispin Wright (1998, 400), that McDowell endorses a 'quasi-inferential' conception of justification. This quasi-inferential relation of justification would have the same structure as an inferential one, that is, a relation between two contentful, and in effect conceptual, items, except that the justifier of the belief would not itself be a belief. McDowell rejects Wright's diagnosis and traces it, aptly or not, to what he takes to be Wright's mistaken understanding of the content of experience as "a quasi-inferential intermediary between facts and judgments" (McDowell 1998, 430). McDowell finds "obvious that the idea of observational judgment, in particular, involves a specific, content-sensitive justifier" and contends that this justifier is the fact observed itself. Unfortunately, he doesn't elaborate on that point; it simply strikes him "as obvious enough that observational judgments have specific, content-sensitive justifiers – apart, as I say, from philosophically generated distortions – for the thought to stand on its own feet" (1998, 430).

Admittedly the notion of quasi-inference, in that case, was not particularly illuminating. It put a name on the claim that there would be something like a content of experience that would, without being endorsed, be the justifier of a judgment having the same content. It doesn't help us to see how that could be. So neither inference nor quasi-inference connects the content of perception to the content of the observational judgment.

But to say that the former is simply a fact in the world doesn't make it less puzzling. For a fact to play the role of a justifier, doesn't it have to be recognized, if only implicitly, *as a fact*? Not if one adopts a 'sideways' perspective on the justification of perceptual beliefs – there may well be a justifier accessible from a standpoint that the perceiver is not aware of. But again, that is not the perspective McDowell purports to be exploring. From the standpoint of the perceiver, how could a fact that is not recognized as such be rationally constraining?

Suppose I make the observational claim that the temperature indicated by the thermometer is 70 degrees and, realizing how surprising it is given how I

feel, I asked myself whether I am really entitled to this belief. Of course, *if* it is a fact ... but this is precisely what I am wondering. Let's admit with McDowell that there is no need of an intermediary between facts and judgments and that observational judgments can be justified by appealing to experience. This appeal, however, cannot be an appeal to the fact stated by the judgment since what is in question is precisely the factual status of the judgment (see Chen 2006, 252). Again the analogy between perceiving and experimentation may be helpful.[5] Think about what Pascal (1648) did to justify the observational assertion to the effect that atmospheric pressure varies with altitude. Presumably what any scientist would still do in order to justify an observational assertion: describe, precisely, *how* it has been possible to observe it, which instruments were used and how the conditions to use them were prepared. They do not point to *something*; they point to a procedure.

Just as McDowell needed to avert falling back into the myth of the given, so in the philosophy of science there is an eminent danger to avoid: it is all too easy to be bewitched by an image of the world as an external constraint on scientific thinking. Especially outside the pragmatist traditions, such an external constraint may seem necessary to guarantee the objectivity of scientific knowledge and to understand the difficulty of scientific practice. There is something to this, but just as for McDowell "outside our thinking" does not mean "outside what is thinkable" (1996, 28), so "external to scientific activity" does not necessarily mean external to 'the cultural space' in which the scientists are working (Galison 1987).

If that distinction is ignored, the external constraint is still regarded as a sort of Given, at least in the sense of being prior to and independent of what happens during experimental activity. On that view, the various difficulties to stabilize experimental outcomes have a common source fixed and defined right from the beginning. But this is a *retrospective* point of view, which projects into the past the current acknowledgment of what counts as an external constraint. This point of view debars one from apprehending the situation from which scientific knowledge emerges, which is the analog, in philosophy of perception, to the situation of the perceiver. To adopt a situated standpoint requires us to consider the difficulties as they arise, in a context of practice shaped by what the scientists know, what they did and do, what they aim at, and how (see e.g. Pickering 1995a; Rouse 1996, 2002). To see the difficulty in acquiring empirical knowledge in this light is not to deny objectivity, nor to deny that scientists have to struggle to overcome these difficulties, and to do so in the 'right' way. It is precisely to be faithful to this endeavor, to the skills and the choices that are involved in scientific *activity* that encounter with the world should better be thought of in terms of resistances which are "situated with respect to particular projects, models, and extensions of models" (Pickering 1995b, 52). Resistances, in contrast to constraints, are not pre-defined, they emerge along the way to knowledge – which means that they are not external to what the scientists do or think, to their practice and the models they develop.

A similar alternative is possible for understanding experience.[6] Firstly, to have a definite content of perceptual experience is the result of an experiential enterprise, which, like experimental activity, may encounter resistances, resistances always embedded in a context, of aims and resources, and emerging in the dynamics of experience. This is where the externality of the world resides: not in the givenness of the content of experience, but in the difficulty of achieving a definite and reliable content of experience. Secondly, the appeal to experience in order to justify an observational assertion consists in an answer to a 'how-question', "How do you know?" or "How did you come to this belief?" An answer to a '*how*-question' appeals to a means. When a person's 'I see that *p*' entitles her to assert that *p,* it is not by pointing to '*p*' as a not-endorsed contentful item; it is by pointing to 'see' as a reliable way to know that *p*. Most of the time, we have no reason to doubt that what we see, when we look, is how things are. If we doubt, what we do is to start examining the conditions in which this seeing occurred. This is where the normative constraint on perception lies: in the conformity of the conditions of experience to norms of reliability. "That experience is passive," McDowell (1996, 10) writes, "satisfies the craving for a limit to freedom that underlies the Myth of the Given." He is right to attempt to provide an alternative to naïve myth, but in practice this craving is to be satisfied by normative constraints of reliability for the conditions of experience.

4. Conclusion

A large domain of our perceptual life cannot be understood in terms of passivity of experience, as being saddled with content. The conception of perceptual experience as passive reception has to be qualified by introducing the notion of 'participatory experience'. Participatory experience is a form of perceptual experience where, by contrast with passive experience, the cognitive activity of the subject participates in the constitution of perceptual content. The relation between these two forms of experience should be understood as diachronic.

In addition to being saddled with content, McDowell characterizes passivity by a non-endorsement of the content that is received. But this non-endorsement cannot be reconciled with the function assigned to this content as a rational constraint on empirical thinking. To serve as a justification for empirical thinking, the content of experience must be the content of perceptual beliefs. When it comes to justifying these perceptual beliefs we must turn to the conditions of perceptual experience, that is, the conditions in which the perceptual belief is formed, and appeal to their reliability. The justification of any observational judgment on the basis of experience follows the pattern of accounting for the warrant of an experimental finding on the basis of the experimental procedures followed.

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NOTES

1. McDowell's philosophy is neo-pragmatist, but his account of 'empirical thinking' is not oriented to practice to the extent we see in classic pragmatism; compare Peirce's "Anything is, for the purposes of logic, to be classed under the species of perception wherein a positive qualitative content is forced upon one's acknowledgement without any reason or pretension to reason. There will be a wider genus of things partaking of the character of perception, if there be any matter of cognition which exerts force upon us" – quoted and discussed by Cheryl Misak in Shook and Margolis (2006, 404–405).

2. Conceiving of experience as a passive exercise of concepts "amounts not to a rejection of the Given as such, but a recasting of it.... In rejecting the Myth of the Given, McDowell intends to reject a mythology about *what* is given, and how, but not the very idea that anything is." (Wright 1998, 397)

3. Letter to Sir William Watson (1782), in Lubbock (1933, 101).

4. This is undoubtedly how Robert Brandom (1995, 246) thinks of it: "The contents of concepts are articulated by the inferential relations among them in virtue of which one judgment can serve as a reason for or against another" (see also Brandom 1998, 370).

5. For how cognitive activity is involved in experimentation and modeling see further Peschard 2007.

6. Compare Pickering's terminology and his conception of constraints with Peirce's discussion (1932, 1, 324) of action and perception with its emphasis on the *resistances* encountered in experience.

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Epistemological Behaviorism, Nonconceptual Content, and the Given

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Debates about nonconceptual content impact many philosophical disciplines, including philosophy of mind, epistemology, and philosophy of language. However, arguments made by many philosophers from within the pragmatist tradition, including Quine, Sellars, Davidson, Rorty, and Putnam, undercut the very role such content purportedly plays. I explore how specifically Sellarsian arguments against the Given and Rortian defenses of "epistemological behaviorism" undermine standard conceptions of nonconceptual content. Subsequently, I show that the standard objections to epistemological behaviorism inadequately attend to the essentially social and practical nature of justification.

Debates about the nature of justification – in particular, those concerning whether knowledge has a foundation – have influenced our thinking about such disparate fields as ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy of mind. Traditionally, foundationalist epistemologies have sought to find some "ultimate" ground for belief. Empiricist-minded foundationalists, in particular, have argued that this ground must in some sense be perceptual. A recent turn for such foundationalists has been the attempt to argue that the best way to account for epistemic foundations is to appeal to "nonconceptual content" in perception. Foundationalists of the sort I'm interested in provide an account of

> foundations [that] commits one only to *non*inferentially justified propositions, i.e., propositions justified independently of evidential relations to other propositions. On this modest foundationalism, the subjective nonconceptual contents of experience (e.g., what one seems to perceive) play a central role in the noninferential justification of foundational propositions. (Moser 1989, 2)

At its core, the move made by foundationalists defending nonconceptual content is motivated, at least in substantial part, by the epistemic regress argument. The slide from the regress argument to the endorsement of nonconceptual content is motivated by the view that what is needed to stem the regress is an appeal to

some aspect of perceptual experience that is nonconceptual but that supplies positive epistemic value to experience. This appeal to nonconceptual content should ensure that what is foundational itself does not require, and perhaps does not even admit of, justification; that is, that such things can be properly foundational.

However, the pragmatist tradition – at least a contemporary strain of it – has not adopted this approach. This antifoundationalist tradition in pragmatism draws upon the triune critiques of Quine in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Sellars in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," and Davidson in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction (and, with it, the "dogma of radical reductionism"), Sellars's critique of the Given, and Davidson's challenging of the scheme/content dualism all aim at undermining the notion that there are are, paraphrasing Sellars, "self-authenticating" parts of reality—be they analytic meanings (Quine), sensory experiences (Sellars), or "theory-neutral reality" (Davidson).

Sustaining this triune critique of the Given is an epistemological behaviorism: the view of knowledge as a public, normative ascription of justification to agents rather than naturalistic descriptions of their mental states. While Sellars lays the foundations (if you'll pardon the metaphor) for such a view in "Empricism and the Philosophy of Mind," epistemological behaviorism itself receives a fuller exposition and defense in Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. In this paper, I wish to show that the antifoundationalist, epistemologcally behaviorist elements of the pragmatist tradition have been correct in rejecting the Siren song of nonconceptual content. The Sellarsian arguments against the Given and the Rortian development of epistemological behaviorism provide adequate accounts of the role of experience and perception in knowledge. I intend to show how one such standard set of criticisms, here raised by Paul Moser, fail to adequately grasp the nature and role of epistemological behaviorism in the critique of the Given. In the next section, I will motivate the Sellarsian critique and show how it is tied to epistemological behaviorism. Subsequently, I will raise Moser's objections to the Sellarsian critique and epistemological behaviorism. In the final section, I will show how Moser's objections fail to adequately address the insights of epistemological behaviorism.

1. The Myth of the Given

What is the Sellarsian critique in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (EPM) a critique of, exactly? Sellars claims that the attack in EPM is aimed at providing a "general critique" of a "framework" of the Given (see §1, 128, in Sellars 1963), though he only explicitly targets the notion of an empirical Given. What does it mean to deny that there is a Given (i.e., an element of experience that is Given)? We should not be goaded by the locution "denying an empirical Given" into thinking that Sellars wishes either to deny that observation plays a

role in the generation of knowledge or to assert that the entirety of experience is (merely) a product of the human volitional mind. Indeed, he suggests at the opening of §1 of EPM that, if

> the term 'given' referred merely to what is observed as being observed, or, perhaps, to a proper subset of the things we are said to determine by observation, the existence of "data" would be as non-controversial as the existence of philosophical perplexities. But, of course, this just isn't so. The phrase 'the given' as a piece of professional – epistemological – shoptalk carries a substantial theoretical commitment, and one can deny that there are "data" or that anything is, in this sense, "given" without flying in the face of reason.

Thus, the target of the critique is the ascription of epistemic import to the causal deliverances of the world *as such*. The claim Sellars makes is that one can admit the 'givenness' of experience – that it is a 'deliverance' from the external world – without requiring that this sort of experience be Given (i.e. have positive epistemic import, in and of itself).[1] The important difference between givenness (the deliverance of the senses as such) and the Given is that the former is *non*-epistemic whereas the latter is explicitly epistemic. That is, givenness merely marks out the kinds of perceptual experiences we are subject to as beings that have perceptual experiences. This isn't yet to say anything further about whether these deliverances have any special epistemic import or that they have content that is "conceptual" or "nonconceptual" – just that they are, as it were, perceptual happenings. To say that givenness, in this sense, is something that has an epistemic import is to make an *additional* claim about the place of such things *within* an account of knowledge, within an epistemology. It is precisely the slide from the givenness of an experience to its being epistemically Given that Sellars wants to deny.

Thus, to deny the Given is not to deny non-inferential knowings or to deny the importance of observation to knowledge. Instead, it is to undercut the

> idea that observation "strictly and properly so-called" is constituted by certain self-authenticating nonverbal episodes, the authority of which is transmitted to verbal and quasi-verbal performances when these performances are made "in conformity with the semantical rules of the language" (§38)

The core of the problem with traditional, foundationalist views about observation is that they require the equation of normative statuses ("epistemic authority") with merely causal states in an agent.[2] To put the point another way, the views here attempt to show how the move to give an account of epistemology in which "epistemic facts can be analyzed without remainder – even 'in principle' – into non-epistemic facts ... [is] a mistake of a piece with the

so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics" (Sellars 1997, 19).[3] The fallacy, in the moral context, is the inference from a natural 'is' to moral 'ought': from, say, the fact that people act selfishly to the fact that they ought to so act. The equivalent fallacy, in the epistemological context, is from non-epistemic facts to epistemic facts. This is the move that I describe above as shifting from givenness to the Given.[4]

With the success of the critique of the Given, Sellars needs to provide a new explanation of the nature of mind. Since previous models of mindedness started with the assumption that the mind was a private, individualistically construed entity, Sellars owes us an explanation of how a mind and our knowledge of it could be the sort of thing that can be had without appealing to a Given. This requires the development of the second part of Sellars's account: methodological behaviorism. Whereas a *philosophical* behaviorism is the doctrine that all psychological vocabulary be reducible to (or analyzable in terms of) behavioral vocabulary, methodological behaviorism requires only that the genesis of psychological vocabulary be given in behavioral terms; once we have psychological vocabulary, we need not deny the reality of the entities postulated by it. That is, our method in investigating the mind ought to be behaviorist: it ought to treat psychological explanations of observable behavior as posits. However, once our psychological explanations are well confirmed and we're skilled in making observations of the "posited" entities of psychology, the reality of these entities need not (perhaps ought not) be denied. Within a methodological behaviorism, our coming to appreciate appearances *as* mental entities (rather than straightforwardly relating to the objects in the external world) is a function of becoming sufficiently linguistically, and so conceptually, sophisticated about the mind so as to have a vocabulary about mental phenomena.

Those who would deny this behaviorist approach to the philosophy of mind quickly point out that such a view has peculiar consequences; in particular, its lack of a theory of impressions makes it difficult to explain perceptual experiences. A theory of impressions would give the requisite explanation for what these three very different propositions have in common:

(a) Jane sees that the object over there is red and triangular.

(b) The object over there looks to Jane to be red and triangular.

(c) There looks to Jane to be a red and triangular physical object.

What is supposed to explain the commonalities of (a)–(c), under a theory of impressions, is that Jane has the same impression.

Methodological behaviorism has the resource for explaining just this fact; what (a)–(c) have in common in the context of non-inferential observation is their appearance to Jane – they all look the same (as it were) to her, even though

in (a) her vision is veridical (or, at least, her judgment is fully endorsed); in (b) there is a withholding of the endorsement of judgment about the shape and color of the object; and in (c) there is withholding of endorsement of even the presence of the object itself. We may postulate here a *theoretical* entity which explains what these reports have in common – impressions. Impressions are states of perceivers that are, roughly, "replicas" of the objects of the world.[5] They are "the end results of the impingement of physical objects and processes on various parts of the body" (§60). These entities begin as mere theoretical posits – they play a role in expanding the (methodologically) behaviorist field of explanation, but they are not discovered, at first, by being observed; rather, their existence is suggested by the explanatory role that is required of them (i.e. what (a)–(c) have in common). While impressions, thus construed, might play an epistemic role (once introduced), their epistemic role is essentially tied to their role in the broader theory that introduces them.

The Sellarsian picture, then, is a social approach to individual epistemology and mind; an individual's ability to have knowledge about the world *including* her mind depends on the combination of her individual skills and the social practices which generate knowledge. This is not just to say that "knowledge is a social affair" while pointing to social knowledge makers/ conveyors like newspapers or scientific journals. Surely that much is correct. Rather, this picture highlights the role of social training in the having of any knowledge, including the development of epistemic skills in light of the praise and blame of the community; it is the roots of an epistemological behaviorism. The critique of the Given rules out the possibility of construing epistemology in terms of "self-authenticating" mental states, and the development of methodological behaviorism shows that one can deny the Given while countenancing a notion of impressions (i.e. as introduced as theoretical posits). Taken together, these ideas give rise to the epistemological behaviorist view that construes justificatory status as a social, normative status that denies that perceptual bare presences (for example) have epistemic import outside the bounds of properly functioning epistemic practices.

2. Moser's Defense of the Given

Of course, the idea that a "perceptual bare presence" *can* bear such epistemic import is a fairly standard view; it is a view that, at least in part, is made palatable by foundationalist approaches to epistemology. Moreover, it can seem as though it is ineliminable if we are to remain broadly empiricist epistemologically. If there were an adequate defense of such a foundationalism, the defects of the Sellars-style behaviorist project would be made manifest: we might have an explanation of perceptual knowledge that does not require the additional theoretical apparatus posited by epistemological behaviorists. In this section, I will take up one such defense put forward by Paul Moser.

Moser takes his "commitment to nonconceptual perceptual contents [to

be] a commitment to a *given* element in experience, i.e., an element that is not essentially something *taken* to be of a certain sort" (186). For Moser, like many other foundationalists, nonconceptual content is supposed to play two roles in epistemic theory: first, it is supposed to stem the epistemic regress argument, and second, it is designed to bridge the justificatory gap between the merely causal inputs we receive from the world and the propositional knowledge we end up with as a result of perceptual processes.[6] Moser defines the Given as follows (ibid.):

> *X* is given to a person, S = *df.* S is immediately aware of *X*, and *X* can play a prominent evidential role in the noninferential, immediate justification of a foundational belief.

Notice, here, that what is Given is not what epistemologists generally consider the foundation of knowledge. Rather, the Given conveys justification on foundational beliefs; it is the epistemological sub-basement (to continue the architectural metaphor a bit too far). He then goes on to specify the following key definitions:[7]

> Immediate Awareness. One is immediately aware of an object, *X*, only if one is aware of *X* in such a way that one need have no propositional or conceptual relations to *X*, or any other intermediaries in one's awareness of X.
>
> Propositional Relation. One's having a propositional relation to *X* is ... just one's predicating something, such as a property or a relation, of *X*.
>
> Conceptual Relation. One's having a conceptual relation to *X* is ... just one's classifying or categorizing *X* in accord with some classificatory scheme consisting of certain terms (which might be the members only of a language of thought).

The subsequent argument that Moser makes using this definition is, in the absence of a Sellarsian alternative, quite compelling. Given his definitions of propositional and conceptual relations, it seems to follow that having a propositional relation to *X* entails having a conceptual relation to *X* (on the rather plausible assumption that predicating something of *X* just is classifying or categorizing *X* in a particular way). From here, he argues that since

> one's conceptualizing *X* in one way rather than in a contrary way (e.g. as *F* rather than as ~*F*) requires justification, one's immediate awareness of the given cannot essentially involve conceptualization. On the supposition that the immediate awareness of the given essentially involves conceptualization, such awareness will itself require justification. In that

> case, such awareness will be unable to provide immediate justification for a foundational belief in such a way that a regress of justification-requiring items terminates. One's immediate awareness of the given will then be just another member in a chain of conceptual events requiring justification; it will not then be a terminus of such a chain. So if immediate awareness of the given essentially involves conceptualization, such awareness will be incapable of serving the main foundationalist purpose.

Given the terms in which Moser is talking and his understanding of the Sellarsian critique, this would appear to be a straightforward consequence. However, there are some serious problems with the view Moser's account turns on. One of these is the very notion of 'immediacy' that he mobilizes in this context. His account of Immediate Awareness holds that, in such awareness, there is no mediation by concepts or propositions. It isn't clear that there is any harm in denying immediate access to the world in *this* sense, as there still is room for an account of *noninferential* knowledge (for example, to stem the regress problem) from within the domain of fully conceptualized perception. Why are we compelled to seek out this sort of awareness to explain empirical knowledge?

The obvious motivation for Moser's account here is the concern with the regress of reasons. Indeed, he goes so far as to call stopping it "the main foundationalist purpose" (187). However, for us to feel compelled to endorse a view incorporating nonconceptual content in order to stem the regress, it would be necessary that no other conceptualist alternative would prove adequate. Let us suppose for a moment that the Sellarsian account rules out the possibility of Immediate Awareness; this alone does not preclude the possibility of noninferential knowledge (and *a fortiori* an end to the epistemic regress). Even if my awareness of the world is thoroughgoingly conceptual, that does not require my making an inference every time I perceive something or attempt to justify a claim that I saw such a thing. I don't infer from the statue's appearing brown that it is brown when I look at it; rather, I see, straight off, that it is brown. Granting this doesn't entail or require that this particular knowing is located outside a conceptual scheme; rather, it means that my coming to occupy a space within such a scheme can come either by the kind of license conveyed by inference *or* by the kind of license that comes from astutely and skillfully observing the world. So, when I perceive the statue, I perceive that it is brown or cold directly, even if this perceiving requires my being situated within a conceptual scheme (among other enabling conditions). If the regress is formulated in terms of inferential justification – as it often is – then this kind of direct knowledge is sufficient to stop the regress because we need not appeal to further premises in order to justify my perceiving the brown statue; we might, for example, appeal to my perceptual acumen.

One of the central reasons why this option is overlooked is the failure to take on one of the key insights of Sellars's "Empiricism and the Philosophy of

Mind": namely, that not all epistemic dependence is inferential. I don't *infer* the brownness of the statue from, for example, beliefs about my perceptual acumen (let alone from the skills themselves); nevertheless, such a judgment of color is dependent upon my perceptual skills (e.g. my ability to discern color), and such judgments may well depend on my knowing that I'm an adept perceiver. Moreover, my skill might come into question in certain contexts (for example, when I judge in ways that differ from my peers), and I might have to demonstrate my ability to judge color. Even if we can define good observational skills in terms of propositional knowledge (i.e. of brown objects), this alone does not require that we infer from such articulations when we make the observation. So long as epistemic dependence outstrips inference, we can get a terminus for the regress in non-inferential observation without having to endorse the Given. This understanding of the skillful component of perception gives us a means for stemming the epistemic regress without having to appeal to foundations.

This skillful component, however, is not itself Given, as one's skillful redemption of a claim might, itself, fail – for the obvious fact that sometimes fail to do the right thing or fail to do it well enough.[8] Of course, the suggestion that nonconceptual content is unnecessary to stem the regress is not entirely unique; there are other views that suggest this – though not necessarily in the way that I do here. The philosophically interesting claim that I wish to defend in this context is that the appeal to nonconceptual content is neither necessary nor *sufficient* for stemming the epistemic regress. It isn't necessary because there are ways of stemming the regress that don't rely on such an entity; it isn't sufficient because nonconceptual content is not capable of providing the sort of justification required to stem the regress. I've already highlighted the ways in which one can see that appeals to nonconceptual content are, strictly speaking, unnecessary with regard to stemming the regress of reasons (because concerns about conceptualism are orthogonal to the issues raised by the regress), so now it is time to take up the insufficiency claim. If nonconceptual content turns out to be neither necessary nor sufficient for stemming the regress, not only is it optional (in the way I highlight above), but relying on it seems to be unmotivated altogether; it isn't up to the task it has been assigned.

Some further details of the role Moser ascribes to nonconceptual content will help us see the issue in better relief. Moser takes a nonconceptual perceptual experience to be

> an event or state of awareness that essentially has as an object a sensory item or feature.... [It] is a psychological event or state of attention attraction essentially related only to a nonconceptual sensory item or feature, such as shape, color, sound, odor, taste, or some analogue thereof. It is thus, in essence, judgment-free and concept-free (84).[9]

Moser calls such awareness "direct attention attraction" (81), as this kind of

attention attraction is "different from mere sensory stimulation, since it essentially involves direct awareness, albeit nonconceptual awareness, of what is presented in experience" (ibid.). However, direct

> attention attraction is also different from one's *focusing* attention on something, where one at least implicitly predicates the feature of individuality or of isolatability of what is presented in experience. Attention focusing, as various psychologists have stressed, essentially involves psychological *selection* of some sort. Such selection essentially involves a form of conceptualization, since it essentially involves a form of objectual categorization. Attention attraction is *not* thus selective; so in ordinary English we use the passive voice to characterize it, whereas we use the active voice to characterize attention-focusing. In essence, direct attention attraction is one's being directly psychologically "affected" by certain contents in such a way that one is psychologically *presented* with those contents. (81–82)

The idea here is that there is some state of an agent which lies between attention focusing (which is a form of conceptual awareness) and mere sensory stimulation. While Moser concurs that *reports* about judgment-and content-free entities will not stop the regress of arguments because such reports are conceptual and propositional, he does think that nonconceptual entities can provide foundational justification (or, at least, positive epistemic status).

This approach will not work, though. The very structure that Moser constructs to defend nonconceptual content seems to render such content *irrelevant*. Moser's basic approach imports a notion of 'nonepistemic explanation' that will, as it were, bind the nonconceptual content to our judgments and thereby provide a foundation for knowledge. The proposed view is that

> one's subjective nonconceptual contents can make a proposition, *P*, evidentially probable to some extent for one in virtue of those contents' *being explained for one* by *P* in the sense that *P* is an essential part of an explanation for one of why those contents exist, or equivalently, why those contents occur as they do. (91–92)

Thus, nonconceptual contents can come to play an epistemic role in virtue of their explanatory relationship to a proposition. The explanation here must be *non*epistemic explanation – otherwise, Moser's view would be smuggling in the conclusion he wants to show. The notion of nonepistemic explanation that Moser uses states that

> one thing explains another when and only when the former makes it, to some extent, *understandable why* the latter thing is as it is. Applying this

> notion to [his] preliminary story about evidential probability, we can say roughly that a proposition *explains* certain subjective nonconceptual contents if and only if it makes it, to some extent, understandable why those contents are as they are, or, equivalently, why those contents occur as they do. (93)

On its face, this view seems to be an *epistemic* explanation; it references intelligibility ("understandable why") in its very explication of the concept. Perhaps, more importantly, the nonconceptual entities no longer seem to be playing a justificatory role at all; the proposition itself is the thing which conveys justification. Nonconceptual entities only come to have epistemic upshot if there is a proposition which explains (or would explain) them, but this explanation can only come from propositions and not nonconceptual contents. If there is no explanation of the nonconceptual content, then they do not justify foundational beliefs; however, if there *is* such a explanation, then it would seem that the explained content cannot be Given in Moser's sense. Explanations require the mobilization of concepts, and so these explanations preclude a nonconceptual role for such episodes. Hence, even if we were to admit the possibility of nonconceptual content, it cannot play the epistemic role Moser enlists it for.

Perhaps Moser has some other, rather more causalist or externalist, view of explanation in mind. The idea would be, then, that nonconceptual content – Moser's Given – conveys noninferential, immediate (viz. without propositional or conceptual) justification to foundational beliefs which would require something like a causal explanation of perceptual content. The mode of explanation is something like: nonconceptual content itself can be explained by, for example, neurophysiology; however, this *explanation* does not confer conceptual or inferential justification to foundational beliefs. Instead, what conveys the justification is the nonconceptual content itself (i.e., as an episode with such content) – which, when we have an adequate neurophysiology, can provide a set of propositions that explain the epistemic efficacy of such content.

This turn of argumentation itself yields two significant problems: first, that this sort of explanation won't help us in our epistemological tasks, and, second, that such explanations render the "contentfulness" of nonconceptual content unnecessary. Turning to the first problem: a fairly standard concern with this sort of explanatory structure is that there may be many, mutually contradicting, evidentially probable propositions for explaining any phenomenon. So, we could have explanations P and $\sim P$, both of which are equally evidentially probable propositions explaining nonconceptual content x, underwriting the justification of a foundational belief (though, *ex hypothesi* not in an inferential way). This would have some peculiar consequences. One consequence is that, following classical logic, all logically possible foundational beliefs are so justified, because $P \ \& \ \sim P$ entails any proposition. This might give aid and comfort to infallibilist foundationalists, I imagine, because they hold that our

basic beliefs cannot fail to be true; but this is a bit peculiar for the rest of us. Very few would assert that the mere fact that my perceptual apparatus is having some causal contact with the world entails that I'm having a genuinely foundational experience; to do so is to slide back into phenomenalist or sense-data theories. This also violates what I imagine is the spirit of Moser's suggestion; namely, that a single, good explanation allows nonconceptual content to convey its justification to foundational beliefs. Yet, this seems to be a straightforward consequence of the view.

An even worse problem (at least in the context of the current discussion) is the second problem: that the externalist move seems to gut the role of "contentfulness" in nonconceptual content. Since the discussion at hand does not consider anything like what the agent has access to in its explanation of justification with regard to the mental states that she does have access to, we might wonder about the role of the contentfulness that is purported to be in nonconceptual content. These nonconceptual impacts convey their justification to foundational beliefs via an evidentally probable explanation. But such explanations need not reference *content*; they need only reference the causal chains that, for example, stimulated various parts of the central nervous system. When these causal chains terminate in beliefs (rather than, e.g., an involuntary kick of the leg), then the agent has a fully conceptual, foundational belief (supposing that this sort of foundationalism is correct). The role of 'content' seems to drop out from the picture altogether. So, the call for nonconceptual content, rather than a more straightforward call for an agent's causal relation to the world, seems a bit unmotivated given Moser's argumentative structure.

The foregoing suggests that, in both the case of the regress argument and the analysis of the role for nonconceptual content, the entity Moser relies on to do much philosophical work is simply incapable of doing the work required of it. I suspect that the real concern motivating this part of Moser's argument is not the epistemic regress problem; the motivation is, rather, a concern about having *unmediated* access to the world *as it really is*. The concern here really seems to be the felt need to explain how the mind comes into contact with the world. It is this concern that appears to push against epistemological behaviorism; as I suggested earlier, the "natural" way of explaining our experiences and knowledge of the world references mental entities (e.g. impressions, sense-data, and the like), and epistemological behaviorism, as a behaviorism, provides an analysis of knowledge that is not reducible to such entities.

Notice, though, that Moser's work evinces a deeper anxiety. Moser seems to be concerned that our conceptual apparatus stands between "us" and the world, and that the only way to come into contact with the world as it is requires our coming to have contact with the world from some position outside of the conceptual. If such contact could only be had from within the exercise of conceptual judgments, then, the story goes, we run the risk of sliding into idealism. The concern that seems to *really* concern Moser is that we cannot understand how our knowledge can be of the world if it is conceptual through-

and-through; since we add the conceptual elements to experience, epistemologies that fail to countenance a check on such acts of will concomitantly fail to tie our knowledge of the world to the world (rather than to our ways of taking it).

What Moser is proposing in his analysis of the Given is *not* an explanation of how one can silence the call for justification in good conscience (as it were), but rather an explanation of how we come to have the world in view at all. This sort of explanation is designed to help epistemology overcome the problems faced in explaining how it is that a mind, ensconced behind a conceptual scheme, can be said to know about the things in the external world. These are two very different questions, and the latter is a way of being caught in the grips of the view criticized (in different fashions) by Quine, Sellars, and Davidson.

One can wonder about stemming the epistemic regress without additionally using the solution to that problem to solve the question of whether minds really contact the world. That Moser thinks of foundationalism as requiring beliefs that terminate in nonconceptual content is unsurprising, since his epistemology construes the regress and "external world" problems to require roughly the same answer. However, the epistemological behaviorist position is one that is compatible with the notion of (a regress-halting) observation that rejects the idea that "a fixed stock of meanings, [or] a theory-neutral reality, can provide ... a ground for comparison of conceptual schemes" (Davidson 1973, 14).

This should come no surprise, seeing as the "idea of the Given is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, [as extending] more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought" (McDowell 1996, 7). An epistemology that holds out hope for a Given is one that hopes to find something that

> allows us to acknowledge an external constraint on our freedom to deploy empirical concepts. Empirical justifications depend on rational relations, relations within the space of reasons. The putatively reassuring idea is that empirical justifications have an ultimate foundation in impingements on the conceptual realm from outside (McDowell 1996, 6).

It is here we find overlap between classical pragmatist doctrines and (their motivation) and the contemporary "Quine/Sellars/Davidson" tradition. The "anti-intellectualism" of early pragmatist doctrines regarding meaning and truth express a skepticism about the "mind/world" gap. The pragmatist account of meaning's inexorably tying concepts to their practical effects and the account of truth's analogous move with regard to propositions (attempt to) short-circuit the mode of thinking that posits a gap between mind and world that needs to be bridged. Looked at from this perspective, the philosophical enterprise is not

"bridging mind and world" but rather (to echo generations of pragmatists) "making our ideas clear." Moreover, this attitude informs the "internal realism" of Putnam and Rorty's dismissal of skeptical challenges as well – though this should be unsurprising, given the role that pragmatist and Sellarsian thought plays in their work. Taken together, these views – classical pragmatist and epistemological behaviorism – emphasize that the constraint on thought is the world, but not the world beyond thought.

This diagnosis allows us to see why Moser seems compelled to lean so heavily on issues of passivity vis-á-vis sensory experience – this passivity is supposed to be the bridge between the world outside of thought and the mind. The primary place we can see this is the passage that I've cited from (81ff.), above. In that passage, Moser distinguishes between "direct attention attraction" and "attention focusing"; the latter is supposed to be be an act of "psychological *selection*" wherein "one at least implicitly predicates the feature of individuality or of isolatability of what is presented in experience " (emphasis in original), whereas the former is a non-selective experience in which "one's being directly psychologically 'affected' by certain components in such a way ... [makes her] psychologically *presented* with those contents." In some ways, this distinction seems rather intuitive: there is, after all, an obvious difference between one's directing her attention and her attention being attracted by something (esp. something other than her). As Moser rightly points out, the active/passive voice grammatical structure encodes a difference between a circumstance in which one is actively doing something and one in which she is subject to what is happening.

Unfortunately, the concern about activity and passivity doesn't quite align with the question of conceptuality. There doesn't seem to be any motivation to deny we can have our attention drawn to conceptual things; for example, when a car backfires nearby, the noise attracts my attention. I react to this sort of presentation as a noise and as something having spatio-temporal source even if I don't react to it as being a car backfiring (e.g., if I hit the deck thinking that it is gunshots); these are both conceptual reactions in Moser's sense. More importantly, from an epistemological perspective, is the worry that the *mere* psychological presentation of something (in the sense Moser intends with attention attraction) doesn't seem to help with explaining the relationship between such inputs and our takings of the world. If active, conceptual judgments are unconstrained to the extent that we can only understand experience by reference to passive, non-judgmental contents, then Moser's view will not mark much of an advance over idealism. While such a view might explain the causal connection between judgments and the world (e.g., the world forces its way in causally via our perceptual appartus), it doesn't explain why any judgments we make are constrained by the world. That is, if there aren't already constraints on the exercise of judgment prior to the consideration of the possibility of nonconceptual content, then how is adding nonconceptual content to the psychology of agents going to add this sort of constraint? The takings that

drove Moser to a notion of nonconceptual content seem to be equally unbound within the mind as they were with regard to the external world.

3. Two Critiques of Epistemological Behaviorism

While Sellarsian arguments against the Given undercut the sort of foundationalism that Moser advocates, the "epistemological behaviorism" that accompanies them are subject to some common criticisms. Indeed, Moser himself raises two such objections to Rorty's development of epistemological behaviorism in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*: Moser attempts to show first, that the epistemological behaviorist's conceptualism (i.e. the claim that all perception is conceptualized) is impossible, and, second, that epistemological behaviorism's account of epistemic authority is inadequate. I will take these up in turn.

If Moser can give us a reason to deny conceptualism, he would be in a position to resist some of the arguments I've made above. A successful critique of conceptualism would, at a minimum, help show that the style of argument I use to stem the regress fails; it could show that the epistemic regress cannot be stemmed in a satisfactory way from within the domain of the conceptual. An appeal to nonconceptual content as a solution to the epistemic regress problem would thus get serious motivation. And, indeed, Moser does attempt to undermine conceptualism for this very reason by mobilizing a regress argument. The infinite regress argument in this context has as its conclusion that conceptualism "faces the threat of an imminent endless regress of required conceptual events" (189). Moser argues that conceptualism requires that

> if a person, *S*, is to have a visual perceptual experience of an object, *X*, *S* must discriminate *X* as something, and thus categorize *X* under some term, *F*. But it seems that if *S* is to categorize *X* under *F*, *S* must have some logically prior event of awareness of *X*; otherwise, *S* may have in his psychological possession nothing whatsoever to categorize under *F*. Thus it seems that the categorization of *X* presupposes an awareness of *X*. Given radical conceptualism, this means that *S* must have a logically prior event of *conceptual awareness* of *X* if *S* is to categorize *X* under *F*. But since this prior awareness of *X* is itself conceptual, it also involves categorization of *X*, and thus presupposes some logically prior awareness of *X*. (189–190)

This continues on infinitely, for, Moser argues, this kind of presupposition obtains for "each member of the resulting endless regress of required events of conceptual awareness" (190). The problem, Moser claims, is that

> it is implausible to suppose that every event of perceptual awareness requires an infinity of conceptual events. Since each of our episodic

> conceptual events occupies a distinct and finite amount of time, and since our events of perceptual awareness occur in a finite amount of time, we should deny that perceptual awareness entails an infinity of conceptual events. (ibid.)

This argument leaves the conceptualist in a position where, in order to reply, she must "propose some sort of logical integration of awareness and conceptualization" (ibid.). If this regress goes unsolved, then the Sellarsian solution I proposed to the epistemic regress problem (i.e. fully within the bounds of the conceptual) fails; at best, the proposed solution would put off the regress one step – precisely where Moser claims the conceptualist has it.

There are at least two potential grounds for response to Moser's objection. The first response is to suggest that such a reply has been proposed and worked out in detail (*pace* Moser), most famously but not uniquely, by Kant. This undermines Moser's dismissal of conceptualism as needing an explanation of such a logical integration (yet not providing one) – especially given that one of Moser's explicit targets is Rorty. After all, Rorty's position is connected up, at least genealogically, to Kant's through both his Sellarsian *and* his pragmatist sensibilities. More importantly, the solution to the challenge in this conceptual regress does not require the sort of reply he supposes. The conceptualist ought to disagree with the opening supposition that one "must have some logically prior event of awareness of *X*" in order to conceptualize *X*. This presupposition reinstates the problem with Moser's deployment of the active/passive distinction that highlighted before: it assumes that there is some neutral empirical content (e.g. "nonconceptual") which becomes conceptualized as the result of an exercise of judgment. The claim that an agent "may have in his psychological possession nothing whatsoever to categorize under *F*" might well be false. The picture Moser seems to be painting is one of an essentially passive mind, one that exclusively "plays defense." All the mind does is actuate its conceptual capacities in direct response to stimulation. Perception, on this account, is like returning a volley in tennis or returning a punt in football; until there's a ball to hit back or run toward your endzone with, there's no volley- or punt-returning to be done.

However, it seems clear that our conceptual capacities "play offense" as well. Our perceptual responses to our environment frequently involve expectation as much as stimulation. Consider a simple case: in a darkened bar, I reach for my beer. Unfortunately, I'm not attending to my general environment as much as I am the conversation, and so I grab a teetotaling friend's glass of milk. When I take a sip, I taste neither beer (as I expected) nor exactly the milk; the expectation of beer-related sensations structures the perceptual input received by the interior of my mouth – the flavor as well as the mouth feel of beer are rather different from those of milk, to say the least. Of course, once I realize that the glass holds milk, I may "reset" my expectations and have a more milkly experience. The point, though, is that conceptualization of experiences

need not follow stimulation; expectations put in motion certain conceptual apparatuses *prior to* their being exercized in response to stimulation.

So, it doesn't strictly follow from the fact that my experience of *X* requires a conceptual discrimination of the sort that would entail the conceptual regress; my experience of things other than *X* can suffice to prime my expectations in any particular case. If I expect to discriminate *X* based on my perceptions of other parts of my environment, then stimulation matching *X*-ly expectations allow my experience to move along smoothly; those that fail to fit cause the sort of jarring experience I describe above. If expectations play the role I suggest here, then the regress doesn't get off the ground. Expectations allow for conceptualization to begin even before the receipt of the particular, expected stimulus. The story that remains to be told describes how it is one comes to have such expectations; this, however, is a tale to be told by the empirical and cognitive psychologists. For the purposes of this discussion, all that matters is that the conceptual regress is stemmed; given the flow of experience and the role of expectation in it, the regress never seems to get off the ground.

Let me now turn to the objections against against epistemological behaviorism. Moser raises two such objections: the first is that runs "afoul of the important distinction between one's *having* justification and one's *showing*, or presenting, justification" (183); the second is that it inadequately handles epistemic authority because it neglects "the central importance of the individual's 'epistemic authority' in the justificatory process" (184). Both of these objections are commonly raised against epistemological behaviorist views, and so they merit some reply to make room for the Sellarsian epistemological behaviorism I wish to defend. The first objection that Moser raises—eliding the having/showing distinction – comes in the form of attributing to Rorty the following epistemic principle (Moser, 183):

> EB. One is justified in believing that *P* if and only if one has engaged in the social practice of showing that one's belief that *P* sustains appropriate relations to the other beliefs supported by the "epistemic authority" of one's social community (see [Rorty] pp. 186, 187, 188).

This sort of objection is fairly common, and the motivation for it seems appealing. The epistemological behaviorist orientation toward the behavioral aspects of justification – toward demonstrating entitlement to one's claims – does seem to give this objection some legs; however, I will show that the objection itself turns on a mistake. The passages he cites in Rorty don't actually justify attributing this view to Rorty (even if, in other forums, Rorty may have suggested such things); moreover, it needn't follow at all from an epistemological behaviorism. I'll take these up, in turn. Turning to *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, we find Rorty's central claim about being justified (on the relevant pages) appears on page:

> Once again, Sellars falls back on saying that justification is a matter of social practice, and that everything which is not a matter of social practice is no help in understanding the *justification* of human knowledge, no matter how helpful it may be in its *acquisition*. (186)

Rorty continues on the next page,

> To sum up, Sellars's psychological nominalism is not a theory of how the mind works, nor of how knowledge is born in the infant breast, nor of the "nature of concepts," nor of any other matter of fact. It is a remark about the difference between facts and rules, a remark to the effect that we can only come under epistemic rules when we have entered the community where the game governed by these rules is played. (187)

Clearly, Moser's EB is not an apt distillation of these passages; Rorty has neither endorsed himself nor attributed to Sellars the view that justification always requires the "showing or presenting" of justification. All that Rorty is committed to is that ongoing justificatory practices are required for the possibility of justification – for us to be knowers at all. This claim is closely tied to the view of the epistemological as irreducibly normative – that "the idea that epistemic facts can be analysed without remainder – even 'in principle' – into non-epistemic facts, whether phenomenal or behavioural, public or private, with no matter how lavish a sprinkling of subjunctives or hypotheticals is, I believe a radical mistake – a mistake of a piece with the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics" (Sellars, §5).

Perhaps one might deny the Sellarsian or Rortian non-naturalism (at least in the sense of denying the reducibility of the normative to the descriptive) about the epistemic, and perhaps one might deny the connection between this non-naturalism and Wittgensteinian views about the social nature of rules; however, Moser attacks neither. Instead, he attributes to Rorty the view that a person "is justified in believing that *P* if and only if *one has engaged* in the social practice of showing that one's belief" (emphasis mine). The conflation of status and action (with regard to justification) here is Moser's, rather than Rorty's. The Sellarsian picture that Rorty attempts to spell out in the relevant passages is one in which

> characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says. (EPM, §36)

Clearly the Sellarsian view is more subtle than EB. Here, "being able to justify what one says" is compatible with never actually *justifying* one's belief to anyone in any way. It is, instead, to be in possession of the relevant skills (for

example) such that, should one's belief face a challenge, the agent can show that she does, in fact, believe justifiably.

Thus, for the kind of view Sellars and Rorty here defend, "knowing" and "justifiably believing" are normative statuses irreducible to empirical descriptions of episodes (even if, of course, some "knowings" and "justifiable believings" are episodes). Indeed, there are many ways to understand the status of "being justified" from within an epistemological behaviorist account that does not run together the status and the action of justification. There are three different approaches to the issue at hand that are worth considering, all of which are broadly compatible with epistemological behaviorism. In the first of these, an epistemological behaviorist account can achieve the distinction between the status and the action so long as there is someone who takes the agent in question to be justified (*sans* argument, as it were); that is, the justificatory status can be conveyed by attribution. So long as there is someone (perhaps someone with social authority) who can take an agent to be justified (i.e. can provide an argument or evidence in defense of another's attributed status), then she achieves the status without providing an argument in its defense. Hence, epistemological behaviorist views have at least some way of differentiating the status from the action – because the objection turns on overlooking the role of *attributed statuses* in justification. Of course, the "someone (perhaps someone with social authority) who can take an agent to be justified" can be the agent herself; we are, after all, capable of attributing justificatory statuses to ourselves by evaluating the strength of our evidence or arguments. I should hasten to add that one need not assert that the attribution of the status, in and of itself, settles whether the person, in fact, has the status. I will return to this point shortly.

A stronger way of allowing for the distinction between justificatory status and action is by situating discourse within a 'default/challenge' structure. The default/challenge structure of justification provides a different way of understanding how there might be a status/action distinction. The essential idea of such a structure is that often, when we attribute a belief to someone (self-attribution included),

> entitlement [to that belief] is attributed as well, by default. The prima facie status of the commitment as one the interlocutor is entitled to is not permanent or unshakeable; entitlement to assertional commitment can be challenged. When it is *appropriately* challenged (when the challenger is *entitled* to the challenge), the effect is to void the inferential and communicative authority of the corresponding assertions (their capacity to transmit entitlement) unless the asserter can vindicate the commitment by demonstrating entitlement to it (Brandom 1994, 177–78).

Justification comes to an end for an agent when the legitimacy of a challenge (i.e., the challenger's entitlement to make it) comes to an end; this legitimacy might (indeed, most likely does) vary from context to context. Here, one

receives the status for free, as it were – but only preliminarily. However, an agent is only permitted to retain this status if she is capable of defending it in light of challenges. Thus, one can have the status of "being justified" without actually "having justified" her beliefs.

What these options have in common is an essentially social view of individual epistemology; this social perspective allows for the understanding of (at least some) statuses as being a variety of ascription – whether it be self-ascription (e.g., "I am justified in believing that *P*") or otherwise ("You are/She is justified in believing that *P*"). The third suggestion is more radical, but it is the one that I find most promising. It begins by revisiting the idea that knowings are positions in a "logical space" of reasons. That is, knowings aren't mental states by nature (i.e. they aren't episodes); instead, they are normative statuses that apply to persons. Normative statuses can, of course, apply to things beyond persons. After all, to say that this dollar bill is legal tender but that dollar bill is not, does not attibute any naturalistic property to the bills; instead, it is to attribute the normative status of 'legitimate' to one and 'counterfeit' (or 'out of circulation') to the other.

Seeing that justificatory status is a social status allows us simultaneously avoid the compulsion to find an ascriber of status and maintain that the statuses are really had by persons – but they are real only because they are achievable within ongoing practices. One comes to have a status independent of any person's ascribing that status to her because one has "earned" (if only by participation in discourse, as would be the case in default/challenge structures) the status. Of course, some statuses do have the form of requiring a *de jure* ascriber of the status (e.g., someone whose say so is necessary and sufficient for the ascription of the status). Paradigmatic of such a case, I take it, is the kind of ascription made by someone who properly officiates at a wedding. In such a situation, the couple attains the status of "married" only when marriage is ascribed by the officiant; if the proper steps have been taken in preparation for the wedding, the ascription (viz., "I now pronounce you man and wife.") is sufficient for the conveying of the status. This sort of case, though, is distinctly unlike the status of having a justified belief. After all, justification is a much more decentralized, less-formal practice than matrimony: there are no justificatory officiants, and justificatory contexts are not as specialized as the matrimonial ceremony. Justificatory contexts are diffuse – they are quite literally everywhere that persons go – and no single person (or class of persons) has *de jure* authority to ascribe justificatory status to epistemic agents.[10]

Some statuses don't require *de facto* ascriptions in order for the statuses to be had by an agent, even if those statuses are parasitic on a picture of justification which essentially involves justify*ing* (rather than being justified). To make clearer the picture of status I have in mind, consider a fairly straightforward analogy: On an annual visit to an isolated cottage in the woods, I set up a small, wireless computer network between several computers. One one computer, I have a digital recording of a major league baseball game, and I use

this computer to broadcast the game to the other computers – *without the express, written consent of major league baseball*.[11]

Suppose, further, that I did not know that rebroadcasting of major league baseball games is a violation of the law. I have, in fact, violated the law – despite the fact that it is well nigh impossible that anyone would *de facto* ascribe the violation to me. I could not have that status without a whole slew of practices: major league baseball, broadcasting, assorted computing-related industries, and a legal system designed to protect what is broadly called "intellectual property." I also have the status despite the fact that nobody is around to ascribe the status to me – and will continue to have the status even if I will never get caught, criminal mastermind that I am. There might be no *de facto* practical upshot for my having the status in this case, but have it I do nonetheless.

Justificatory status works in much the same way. The essential point that the example highlights is that one can have a *social* status without the status being meted out or acknowledged by any person at all; what is required is that a practice that makes possible such statuses is ongoing. In the epistemic case, there is no being justified without ongoing practices of justification constituting a space of reasons – much like there is no pirating of Major League Baseball without professional sports, mass media, computing, and the like. Similarly, the justificatory *status* of the individual can be achieved in the absence of justificatory performances because the person is acting properly within an ongoing epistemic practice. Finally, much like a criminal status that is unrecognized by anyone has little practical import, a justificatory status that is unrecognized by anyone (because I'm having it all alone, in the woods, say) is of little practical consequence. What is of substantial practical consequence is precisely what can be said when the justificatory status of a belief is questioned or challenged – just like having one's criminal status discovered generates practical consequences. This practical difference between the status and the performance seems to lend itself to a broadly evidentialist approach to the issues at hand, as it accommodates a notion of the status as being derived from the explicitly practical and social dimensions of discourse.

With this in mind, let's return to Moser and Rorty. The requirement posited by Rorty is not that an agent's being justified in any particular instance is her *actually* showing herself to be justified; it is not the claim that one achieves entitlement to her beliefs only once she has made such a justificatory performance. Rather, it is a requirement that, for an agent to be elligible to know anything *at all*, she must be situated within an up-and-running social justificatory practice or set of practices. Consider, again, Rorty's summarization of Sellars's position (187): "[Sellars's psychological nominalism] is a remark about the difference between facts and rules, a remark to the effect that *we can only come under epistemic rules when we have entered the community where the game governed by these rules is played*" (emphasis, here, is mine).

So, on its face neither Rorty's nor Sellars's view is not committed EB, though they might be committed to something like a 'Space of Reasons Requirement':

> SORR. One's having the sort of justification essential to empirical propositional knowledge that *X* is *F* requires that one be situated within an epistemic social practice which allows for the demonstration of the proposition that *X* is *F*.

SORR does not entail EB. What it says is that, whatever justification is (whether it be only comparing propositions, or it includes other parts of our justificatory repertoire such as the skillful deployment of language and sharing evidence), it is the kind of thing that cannot occur absent ongoing justificatory practices. Under the SORR, I might be justified in holding a belief that *P* prior to my actually justifying it to others. What is ruled out is the possibility of being justified absent participation in any justificatory practice whatsoever.[12]

There is another element to Moser's critique of epistemological behaviorism: namely the problems related to community authority. While he raises a few concerns in this area, there is one objection that merits further consideration because its formulation highlights a problem with Moser's view. Moser's concern is that the social approach to epistemology makes a rudimentary error regarding authority and, worse, renders unintelligible the role of individual epistemic authority.

> Turning to the first point, we are faced with the challenge that epistemological behaviorism rests on a confusion between (i) one's social community's rarely being questioned, and so rarely shown to be mistaken, with regard to its common knowledge claims, and (ii) one's social community's having epistemic authority for one's self (184).

It would be a mistake to take it that (i) entails (ii) or that these are equivalent, as Moser rightly points out; however, it isn't clear that Rorty or any other epistemological behaviorist need be committed to such an entailment. Rather, the issue at hand is whether there is a place from outside the social practice from which one can make a criticism of the practice. To assess the epistemological behaviorist reply to this accusation, we need to consider the other half of the problem Moser raises for the epistemological behaviorist: the relationship between the epistemic authority of the individual and the social authority. Clearly, an epistemological behaviorist must deny that there is a place outside of all practices from which one can criticize a society's practice; to do otherwise would be to engage in the Myth of the Given. Moser's complaint here is that

> each individual must rely ultimately on his own "epistemic authority" to determine what it is that his social community agrees on as being true or

> reasonable. For each individual must rely on his own sensory and perceptual learning processes in finding out what is held in common by the various members of his particular community.... [O]ne will be relying ultimately on one's "epistemic authority," at least insofar as one relies on one's own learning processes based on one's own sensory and perceptual experiences (ibid).

This objection is curious, though. Nobody, I hope, would deny that one must use her judgment in order to assess what the corpus of community beliefs is, whether they are worthy of endorsement, and the like. But Moser's talk of individual *epistemic authority* seems to suggest that agents have epistemic authority that is prior to or independent of her social situatedness. But what does this authority look like? We have, I imagine, some potential candidates for those who are radically independent of a social space of reasons: non-rational animals (i.e. those incapable of joining such a community), young children (i.e. those who will join but have not yet), and the severely mentally ill (i.e. those whose behavior suggests that they are incapable of sustaining membership in the community). None of these groups, though, seem to be models of epistemic virtue – and their "objections" to our ordering of the social space of reasons are hardly the sort requiring serious inquiry.

Moreover, if epistemic authority is like other forms of authority, then it is a social relation; it is the license to make judgments. What cannot be at stake is whether I *can* make such judgments, because then what is at issue isn't authority at all. For example, I am certainly capable of behaving in ways that I have no authority to do: manufacture U.S. currency, write parking tickets, broadcast Major League Baseball, pronounce people "married", and the like. None of these things is beyond my ken or abilities (i.e., *qua* bodily movements), and even the most difficult of these tasks requires only a small investment in infrastructure. However, I cannot legitimately do any of these things, because I have no authority to. The way I get this authority is by being in a certain relation to others – by being endowed with this authority. My authority doesn't come from my naturalistically construed capacities, but rather as a result of social relations.

It is important to note that construing individual authority as a social phenomenon is not to require obedience to all social judgments; it does not preclude that one can reject – even fairly thoroughly – the epistemic norms of those around her. The picture that epistemological behaviorists have in mind inverts the traditional epistemologist's order of things: the individual's authority to make epistemic judgments comes from her being socially situated. Nonetheless, this authority conveyed to the individual can license her to be a "cognitive rebel" (to use Moser's phrase). The authority conveyed to the individual agent gives her liberty (though perhaps not license[13]) to use her own judgment and to criticize social structures. Even if, as the epistemological behaviorists suggests, it is only by participating in social practices that one can

come to exercise her own judgment, it doesn't follow from this that she is incapable of making a critique of the very structures which provide her with the authority to do so.

The foregoing suggests two conclusions: first, that the variety of common objections to epistemological behaviorism embodied in Moser's work fail; and, second, that the epistemological behaviorist approach is richer and more nuanced in its handling of some common intuitions about knowledge, minds, and authority than previously thought. The antifoundationalist strain of the pragmatist tradition that has its roots in the work of Quine, Sellars, and Davidson is more than a view about the architecture of knowledge. While it is antifoundationalist, it also offers a radical critique of the traditional, foundationalist view of the human condition. Epistemological behaviorism is social where foundationalist in individual and practical where foundationalism is intellectual.

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NOTES

1. I will use lower-case 'g' to mark off the uncontroversial sort of given, and capital 'G' to mark off the one Sellars critiques.

2. As we will see, an agent might be justified in holding her beliefs in virtue of being in a causal state; however, the sense in which the epistemological behaviorist means this is different from the foundationalist. See, especially, the discussion in §3, below.

3. The relationship between the naturalistic fallacy in ethics and the one, here, in epistemology is the move from something's being a natural property to its being a normative one. In the ethical version of the fallacy, the inference is from 'X maximizes aggregate pleasure' to 'X is the proper thing to do'. Similarly, the epistemological version moves from 'X is appeared to s-redly' to 'X knows that s is red'. In either case, while the non-normative antecedents may well be importantly (or even intrinsically) related to their consequents, much more is required to license such an inference.

4. I should hasten to add that this argument is not merely against *in*fallibilist foundationalism. The inconsistent triad argument may be reconstructed in terms of "justified belief" rather than "knowledge"; doing so would undercut the foundationalism of a fallibilist.

5. In this passage (§61), Sellars claims that "the model for an impression of a red triangle is a *red and triangular replica*, not a *seeing of a red and triangular replica*."

6. Perhaps there is a third possibility here as well. One might be concerned that if experience were 'taken' (e.g. an exercise of judgment) all the way through, we would be left with idealism. I will address this suspicion further on.

7. All definitions here are Moser, from pp. 186–187.

8. For further discussions of the epistemological dimensions of perceptual skill see both of my pieces from 2006.

9. Moser also thinks that "psychological states such as thinking, believing, remembering and intending," among other things, are representative of *non*conceptual nonperceptual experiences.

10. This claim may disappoint some epistemologists as well as members of various religious and judicial institutions. I will remain agnostic about whether, for example, the Pope is infallible with regard to judgments about Catholicism; what I say here is compatible with that claim, insofar as the Pope is only infallible with some small part of justification and is not a "justificatory officiant" *per se*. I also am agnostic about whether the decisions of the United States Supreme Court are "final because it (i.e. the Court) is right" or "right because it is final."

11. Major League Baseball controls the dissemination of its product via the following warning: "Any rebroadcast, retransmission, or other use of this game without the express, written consent of Major League Baseball is prohibited."

12. To head off one obvious objection: yes, a person shipwrecked on an island knows things, if she was shipwrecked after being inducted into the space of reasons. Her knowledge comes from having been a part of the community at one time, and thus brings with her the skills and practices developed there; after all, she can attribute to herself knowledge, and she can examine her grounds for belief. The only reason to think that she would no longer be a knower is if we were understanding the SORR along the lines of EB.

13. A long standing distinction in political theory is made between license and liberty. License is much like Nietzsche's 'will to power'; it is the ability to impose one's will or act as one wishes. In contrast, liberty is the freedom to act as one ought, not merely as one wills.

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Book Reviews

David G. Schultenover, ed. *The Reception of Pragmatism in France and the Rise of Roman Catholic Modernism, 1890-1914*. Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2009. Pp. xi + 248. Cloth ISBN: 0-8132-1572-3.

Philosophers ignorant of their history often err in their judgments as well as falter in moving forth the discipline. After all, respect for one's history is part of the self-reflection of a discipline concerned about its assumptions and foundations. In the words of Josiah Royce, "faithfulness of history is the beginning of creative wisdom." Royce argued that philosophy must respect its past because "no fresh beginning is worth making unless the ages have fertilized the forest soil where the new saplings are to grow."[1] In a time when philosophers in countries in Europe and Central Europe are becoming engaged in a discovery of the works of American philosophers including James, Dewey, Mead, and Royce, and are, in fact writing articles about the ideas of these classical American thinkers, it is appropriate that we become aware of the history of such interest and the implications it might have for the dialogue today. Thus, this book is timely and provides an overview of the reception of Pragmatist thought in France, but especially of the thought and work of William James.

The book will be of special interest to scholars of James' work and certainly also to those interested in American Pragmatism in general. However, the book particularly provides insights for those involved in dialogue with scholars in Europe and Central Europe where Catholic thought and life has been and still is prevalent. As this volume makes clear, aspects of James' thought paralleled those of French philosophers and theologians identified with Catholic Modernism and, it is this that set the stage for interest in France in this period about American Pragmatism and particularly the work of William James. Shook and Shultenover, in their Introduction, write: "The intense agitation over French Catholic Modernism provided the setting for the reception of James in France. Absent this movement, James would likely have had far less impact in France during his lifetime." (2) Given this setting, the book will also be valuable to those interested in Catholic thought and in theological issues in general. Of concern to those in the Catholic Modernism movement was a "method" that could overcome what they viewed as the "intellectualist extrinsicism" of the dominant Neo-Thomist view. They were seeking ways to make dogmas more

humanly meaningful and divine revelation more connected with ordinary human experience. The reception of James' work in France was also facilitated by the fact that he had an easy facility with the French culture and language and he did engage in correspondence with some of the central figures in the Modernism movement including Maurice Blondel, and Ẽdouard La Roy.

The first essay in this volume by Stephen Schlosser, S.J., labeled interestingly as a *propaedeutic* to the collection, seeks to set the issues surrounding Pragmatism and Catholic Modernism in a broader setting, in a larger intellectual and cultural drama: "a drama catalyzed by widespread anxieties about experience, realism, and determinism." (25) An excellent illustration of Schlosser's project is his discussion of Henri Bergson and the paradox that a Jew, in a time when French Catholic intellectual life was "strongly imbued with anti-Semitism," became an important figure in Catholic Revivalism. Schlosser writes: "This paradox is explained largely, however, by seeing that Bergson's central project offered great promise to the central anxiety of many others, especially Catholics – namely, the problem of freedom within a cultural hegemony of determinism." (52) Such an anxiety also provides insight into the appeal of James' philosophy since on of his major concerns in "Will to Believe" and other essays was with the question of freedom of belief. Other anxieties of the time were equally addressed by James, for example, the anxiety over the new priority given to experience leading to the question of knowing *reality* without experience's distorting lens. Finally, Schlosser argues, convincingly, I believe, that anxieties of this epoch in intellectual thought continue to be relevant today. He writes "A common task links both epochs: religiosity and modernity are locked in ongoing negotiations as they represent humanity's place in the world." (58)

The second essay in the volume by John Shook addresses early responses to American Pragmatism in France. Shook argues that there was selective attention to the ideas of pragmatism with particular focus on the importance of lived experience, connecting ideas with voluntary action, and regarding faith as playing a necessary role in achieving truth. There was also concern about pragmatism's notions about scientific knowledge and questions about the compatibility of pluralism with notions of an independent reality or absolute truth. There was also much debate over pragmatism and religion and strong arguments against applying this viewpoint to the religious arena. It was argued that the individual's own emotional needs should not decide theological matters, that reason and truth should not be abandoned and that "pragmatism leads to relativism, subjectivism, and skepticism." (69) Shook argues that James' more explicit and careful views on philosophy of science arrived in France late in the discussion and, unfortunately, just as James' final conclusions about truth and reality were becoming appreciated, war broke out. France's interest in pragmatism fell into steep decline not only due to the war but also to rival philosophies. Interest in pragmatism did not arise in France again until the 1950s.

Frédéric Worms, in his essay on James and Bergson, discusses various degrees of similarities and differences between these two thinkers, beginning first with an overview of their expositions of the work of the other. Then Worms focuses on what he believes are many striking parallels between their thought including "the theory of consciousness, 'durée' or 'stream of consciousness'; the theory of the unity of the subject and object in perception or pure experience, 'images' or 'radical empiricism'; finally the pragmatic theory of knowledge from a critical viewpoint (Bergson) or from a foundational one (James)." (77-78) Worms concludes with urging that careful study of both philosophers for their own sakes ought to be undertaken.

The essay by Donald Wayne Viney provides an excellent overview of the connections between William James and Charles Renouvier whose second "Essais" is cited by James as providing a stimulus to his own thoughts on free will and that inspired him to make his first act of free will "to believe in free will." James, like Renouvier, adopted the Kantian view that "free will is a postulate required by the moral life," and he accepted Renouvier's phenomenology of will" (99) This essay also brings to light the debt owed and acknowledged by Renouvier to Leyquyer, a somewhat eccentric, little published friend and colleague. Viney writes: "Without a doubt all the doctrines concerning freedom that Renouvier found valuable are central features of Lequyer's thought." (104) This claim, I believe, is well substantiated in the essay. The relationship between James and Lequyer is also nicely substantiated and subtle similarities and differences are nicely delineated. Viney concludes his essay as follows: "James was not a carbon copy of either Renouvier or Lequyer, even on the subject of free will and determinism, for which he most admired them. Nevertheless the extent of his debt to them was profound." (118)

The essay by Michael Kerlin is a sophisticated analysis of the complicated relationship between Maurice Blondel and William and particularly between their thought. Blondel's philosophy of action certainly interested James and especially the interplay between thought and action. Indeed, Blondel, at one point, considered using the name, "pragmatism," for his own thought. However, he became increasingly insistent in distancing his philosophy of action from this view. He believe James was engaged in a project much different from his own for he always "had in mind the opening of action to a transcendent reality beyond every human, worldly, or even finite realm." (139) Blondel's concern was to lead secular philosophers to take religion in general and Christianity in particular into account as philosophers. (142) In my view, it is unfortunate that the thought and work of Royce was not available to Blondel and the other French philosophers of this time.

The philosophy of Êduoard Le Roy is the subject of the essay by Harvey Hill. In a 1905 article, Le Roy proposes a "pragmatic theory of dogma." (143) Hill notes that "For Le Roy, pragmatism meant emphasizing the living experience of Christians without abandoning the quest for metaphysical truth." (144) For Le Roy, "dogmas were to be judged by the degree to which they

enlivened the modern intellect and gave direction to subsequent intellectual investigation." (147) Le Roy's understanding of dogma is an enlightening one and certainly relevant to both contemporary issues as well as to dialogue with the thought of Josiah Royce. Dogmas, for Le Roy, were to function as rules of practical conduct; "dogmatic formulas oriented Christians' lives before the face of God." Dogmas were seen as "theory-laden religious facts," and they needed to stand the "test of Christian life." Thus, for Le Roy, "to be pragmatic meant primarily to be grounded in the living experience of Christians."

The last two essays in the volume treat the connections of James, pragmatism, and the work of Marcel Hébert and George Tyrrell. The pragmatism of Marcel Hébert was concerned to bring together philosophy (particularly Kantianism), religion, and science (especially evolutionary science). Hébert analyzed religious symbolism, urging that religious imagery develop in an evolutionary way and claimed that the function of religious images was not "to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but to orient the believer to action." (174) He was able to subscribe to Catholic dogmas because he understood them not as literal descriptions of transcendent reality, "but as expressions of a basic metaphysical need in humanity." (182) The work of Tyrrell and Ginther's essay helps us understand that the reception of pragmatism in France must be seen in an ecclesial context, for one clear understanding of "pragmatism" was a philosophy and theology "perceived by some to contradict the teachings of the Catholic church." (186) Thus, for Tyrell, "pragmatism" had two meanings: (1) it referred to the philosophy of James, Schiller, and Peirce; and (2) it was a theological or philosophical concept that he used very generally as a "counterparadigm to the neo-Scholastic notion of the supremacy of reason." (188) For Tyrrell "pragmatism" concerned religious experience and especially that all faculties of the human person had to be taken into account. Further, Tyrrell was concerned to protect Catholicism from a utilitarian self-understanding that made "ethics the supreme and solely valid expression of religion" (203). He believed this might be a consequence of pragmatism. Tyrrell emphasized will as an equal aspect of the human being and he speaks of the "Pragmatism of Christ," which he says means that "Christ is not merely a truth to be believed, but a way to be trodden, a life to be lived." (211)

What these essays strongly demonstrate is that Pragmatism became a method and a view that could be used by those steeped in the Catholic tradition to counter a sterile intellectualism and to bring religion and religious truth back in touch with living, human experience. Thus, pragmatism's emphasis on freedom of will, on the close connection between thought and action, and on the test of ideas in action allowed these thinkers to challenge the dominant religious paradigm of their time. I believe this book offers new insights to those interested in dialogue between classical American thought, as well as contemporary Pragmatism, and the thought of philosophers and theologians from traditional Catholic countries. It should stimulate a new look at the work of James, but also Peirce, Dewey, and Royce as well as Schiller.

NOTES

1. Josiah Royce, "Is There a Philosophy of Evolution?" *Unitarian Review* 22 (July 1889), 1–12, 97–113.

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