12 Dewey's philosophy of education: a critique from the perspective of care theory

Care theorists owe much to John Dewey and his prescriptions for progressive education. Although there are problems for feminists in pragmatism, they may be remedied. As Virginia Held has said, "[w]e would ... have to transform pragmatism."[1] We would have to enlarge (or at least elaborate further) the pragmatist conception of experience; in particular, we would have to include women's experience in a careful and deliberate way.

As we examine Dewey's ideas on education, we find much to appreciate. But there seems to be a pervasive lack of attention to *relations* as they are described in care theory. Dewey has much to say about the individual and the community, but he rarely digs beneath the two to locate what care theorists take to be ontologically basic – the dyadic relation – and his discussion of thinking may be too narrowly confined to scientific thinking.

In this brief and appreciative critique, I look at five important topics in his philosophy of education: the child, the curriculum, learning and inquiry, democracy, and moral education.

THE CHILD

Possibly the most often misinterpreted of Dewey's lines appear in *The School and Society*: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy."[2] He did not mean by this that all children should have exactly the same curriculum – one devised by the "best and wisest parent." Taken as a whole, Dewey's writings on education make it clear that the best and wisest parents would want for each

child the education best suited to that individual child. Such parents will insist on adequate resources for every child and an organization of schooling that will introduce all children to life in a democratic community. The education recommended by Dewey recognizes, in general, the active nature of children, but it also identifies important differences in individual children.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey agreed with Rousseau on the matter of individual differences:

> The general aim translates into the aim of regard for individual differences among children. Nobody can take the principle of consideration of native powers into account without being struck by the fact that these powers differ in different individuals. The difference applies not merely to their intensity, but even more to their quality and arrangement.[3]

Dewey went on to emphasize the importance of working with "preferences and interests," noting that these wax and wane. He agreed with Rousseau that education should attend to natural capacities and interests, but he cautioned that not all natural tendencies are desirable, and he parted company with Rousseau exactly here. Dewey did not believe that children are born naturally good; nor did he believe that they are born tainted by sin from which they require salvation. Dewey's view of children is practical, supported empirically: children differ in their interests and capacities; they have inclinations toward both good and evil; they are active, social creatures whose worthy interests should be identified, encouraged, and guided.

In discussing child development, Dewey identified four great childhood interests:

> Keeping in mind these fourfold interests – the interest in conversation or communication; in inquiry, or finding out things; in making things, or construction; and artistic expression – we may say they are the natural resources, the uninvested capital, upon the exercise of which depends the active growth of the child.[4]

While children are engaged in these activities, they are at the same time having inner experiences:

> The real child ... lives in the world of imaginative values and ideas which find only imperfect outward embodiment. We hear much nowadays about the cultivation of the child's "imagination." Then we undo much of our own talk and work by a belief that the imagination is some special part of the child

that finds its satisfaction in some one particular direction – generally speaking, that of the unreal and make-believe, of the myth and made-up story.[5]

Dewey put the question directly to his audience:

Why are we so hard of heart and so slow to believe? The imagination is the medium in which the child lives … Shall we ignore this native setting and tendency, dealing not with the living child at all, but with the dead image we have erected, or shall we give it play and satisfaction?[6]

Given this powerful plea for recognition of the child's imaginative life, it is odd that he has been accused of recommending a social studies curriculum that is too mundane to interest anyone. Criticizing the "expanding horizons" curriculum credited to Dewey (but this could be debated [7]), Kieran Egan writes:

If one considers what most engages young children's minds, it is surely stories about monsters, witches, dragons, star-warriors, and princesses in distant times and places, rather than the subject matter, however actively engaged, of families, local environments, and communities … The young child's immediate surroundings, then, are too taken-for-granted to be meaningfully explored.[8]

This argument is by no means settled. Dewey would probably answer Egan by saying that children's immediate surroundings are loaded with interest and opportunities to exercise imagination. It is our choice of pedagogy – of interaction with chosen content – that makes the subject-matter boring and lifeless. Indeed, he did address this criticism in *How We Think*:

To the child the homely activities going on about him are not utilitarian devices for accomplishing physical ends; they exemplify a wonderful world, the depths of which he has not sounded, a world full of the mystery and promise that attend all the doings of the grown-ups whom he admires.[9]

For Dewey, imagination is "not a flight into the purely fanciful and ideal, but a method of expanding and filling in what is real."[10] Perhaps, however, he gave too little attention to the fanciful and the mysterious. Martin Gardner said of Dewey that he lacked a sense of the numinous: "Nothing seems to have mystified Dewey. Never, so far as I can recall, did he see anything tragic or comic or absurd about the human condition. We are all organisms interacting with our environment, and that's that."[11]

However, it may be that it is just Dewey's *language* that is devoid of the color we associate with the numinous. In many places, he encourages us to blur the lines between labor and leisure, work and play, culture and utility, seeing imagination at work everywhere. He urged educators to see imagination and pleasure in scientific work and utility in the arts. But we must admit that he said little about the role of stories, poetry, and make-believe in the lives of children.

Another of Dewey's concepts, *growth*, is central to his view of childhood and immaturity. For Dewey, immaturity is to be valued for its potential. However, it is a mistake, he wrote in *Democracy and Education*, to suppose that growth or development is "a movement toward a fixed goal. Growth is regarded as *having* an end, instead of *being* an end."[12] Dewey wanted education to proceed in such a way that students would remain eager for further education. Today (as in Dewey's day) we often hold as an ideal "lifelong learning" but, as Dewey warned, we teach in ways that are likely to make people glad to be finished with schooling.

We cannot press Dewey with the question, "Growth toward what?" because he has warned us that growth is an end in itself. But how do we evaluate growth? In *Experience and Education*, Dewey gave some help on this with an example of a man who becomes more proficient as a burglar. This proficiency cannot be regarded as growth because it may well close down future possibilities for growth. Dewey proposed this test: "Does this form of growth create conditions for further growth, or does it set up conditions that shut off the person who has grown in this particular direction from the occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in new directions?"[13] But the answer to this question is not as easy as the burglar example makes it seem. Parents and teachers are often concerned when a child becomes immersed in one interest or activity over a prolonged period of time. A boy may be gaining computer skills, for example, but is he developing as a social being? A girl may be a talented dancer, but is she reading enough?

On questions such as these, care theorists find Dewey too vague. Sara Ruddick points out how difficult the problems may be: "The mind of a mother fostering growth is marked by a sense of children's complexity and of the difficulties of responding confidently to them."[14] She gives examples of questions that trouble mothers:

Should a child be allowed to stay indoors all weekend when all the other children are out playing? Should children be forced for their own good where they fear to go – into classrooms or to birthday parties, for example? ... When is allowing a child to grow "naturally" a cover for impotence in the face of her will?[15]

Ruddick devotes a full chapter to the complexities of fostering growth – how protecting the child may conflict with encouraging growth, how attempts to shape a child may impede or foster growth. And care theorists are willing to identify the directions in which growth should move. Even if we agree with Dewey that the aims thereby sought are not ends completed, accomplished, finished for good, but always ideals that provide continuous progress – still we are willing to name and discuss them.[16] We will return to the place of growth in a discussion of Dewey's theory of inquiry.

Care theory puts great emphasis on relationships and, although Dewey wrote much about community and democracy, he said little about dyadic relations. In contrast, care theorists believe that the teacher–student relation is central in education.[17] We may prefer Deweyan inquiry methods and the full, active participation of students in their own learning, but we acknowledge that caring teachers may produce fine results with rather old-fashioned methods – if they establish and maintain caring relations with their students.

THE CURRICULUM

Dewey's view of curriculum is often called "child-centered," but this is inaccurate.[18] In a work as early as 1902, *The Child and the Curriculum*, Dewey criticized both the "new," permissive form of education that people have persisted in attributing to him and the "old" education that subordinated the child to the curriculum. He insisted that "the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process."[19] The child and the curriculum must interact.

Later, in *Experience and Education*, he again argued against an either/or approach to the child and the curriculum. He described the principles of the new (progressive) education appreciatively:

To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and

teachers, learning from experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world.[20]

But, Dewey warned, everything depends on how these principles are filled out in practice:

> The general philosophy of the new education may be sound, and yet the difference in abstract principles will not decide the way in which the moral and intellectual preference involved shall be worked out in practice. There is always the danger in a new movement that in rejecting the aims and methods of that which it would supplant, it may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and constructively.[21]

Dewey's curriculum linked child and subject-matter. Geography was of special interest: "The unity of all the sciences is found in geography. The significance of geography is that it presents the earth as the enduring home of the occupations of man."[22] This view of geography led Dewey to an emphasis on occupations – on doing things, making things, thinking about what is involved in securing resources, inventing and using tools. Dewey deplored the kind of geography usually taught in schools: names and locations of cities, rivers, mountains, etc. – filling children up with inert facts. But it is not clear how much time should be spent on "occupations" and how teachers can be sure that the basic content and structure emerge from these activities. Years later, Jerome Bruner offered a similar critique of traditional methods but suggested a solution based directly on the major concepts and structures of the disciplines.[23] Despite an occasional burst of creative ideas on curriculum, the schools persist to this day mainly with text, lecture, and test methods.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey made two important, specific suggestions for the history curriculum – increased emphasis on industrial history and on intellectual history. The first fits well with the corresponding emphasis on doing, making things, and finding out how things work. The second, if put into practice, should help to integrate the curriculum. Intellectual history should find a place in every subject, thus making it more likely that students find meaning in their studies. Both recommendations are made by care theory as well, but care theorists and many other feminists suggest an even

greater change in the curriculum.[24] They charge that important topics associated with female work and family life are given little or no attention in the school curriculum. Matters crucial to human flourishing rarely appear in school studies: making a home, parenting, religion, caring for plants and animals. Curriculum thinking inspired by care theory is more radical than that advanced by Dewey.

Perhaps the most damaging criticism leveled at Dewey's curriculum philosophy is that it is "anti-intellectual." As Sidney Hook has commented, the criticism is bizarre. Indeed, Dewey's philosophy lays such emphasis on thinking, planning, reflecting, interpreting, and evaluating – the methods of intelligence – that a more just complaint would be that it puts too great a demand on teachers' intellectual capacities.

The underlying cause of this misinterpretation seems to be the longstanding belief that school subjects can be ranked by the inherent strength of their intellectual content. Dewey tried throughout his career to counter this faulty belief. In *How We Think*, he wrote:

> It is desirable to expel ... the notion that some subjects are inherently "intellectual" and hence possessed of an almost magical power to train the faculty of thought ... Thinking is ... a power of following up and linking together the specific suggestions that specific things arouse. Accordingly, any subject, from Greek to cooking, and from drawing to mathematics, is intellectual, if intellectual at all, not in its fixed inner structure, but in its function – in its power to start and direct significant inquiry and reflection. What geometry does for one, the manipulation of laboratory apparatus, the mastery of a musical composition, or the conduct of a business affair, may do for another.[25]

Dewey made this point repeatedly; it is central to his philosophy. The intellectual quality of educational experience lies not in the curriculum content itself but in the vital interaction between student and subject-matter.

Because of his insistence that any subject can be intellectual and because he so often used the words *occupation* and *vocation*, it is often supposed that Dewey was an advocate of vocational education. His position is somewhat confusing. He did want the schools to help in preparing students to find an appropriate occupation or "calling." In *Democracy and Education*, he wrote: "To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness. Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one's true

business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstances into an uncongenial calling."[26] But he opposed vocational education as it then appeared in schools: "There is a danger that vocational education will be interpreted in theory and practice as trade education: as a means of securing technical efficiency in specified future pursuits."[27] He advocated education *through* occupations and education for vocations but drew back from education construed as preparation for a trade or narrowly defined occupation. His fear was that such education would perpetuate the status quo with respect to occupational and economic hierarchies.

Instead of rejecting vocational education as preparation for a specific occupation, Dewey could have discussed how to augment such courses of study with cultural activities that might enrich whole lives, if not occupational endeavors. Care theory is more sensitive to the plight of those who must do unpleasant, boring, or physically difficult but necessary work – perhaps because, in general, women have for centuries been caught up in work "forced by circumstances." Since our society will likely always need such work done, an important aim of schooling should be to prepare all students for a fulfilling life beyond their occupation. A second, fundamentally important, aim is to instill in all students a deep appreciation and respect for all those who do the essential work of our society.[28] In this area – preparing students fully for occupational life – care theory finds significant lacks in Dewey's recommendations.

LEARNING AND INQUIRY

There has been much debate over Dewey's concept of inquiry. Did he reduce all inquiry to scientific method? Did he misconstrue scientific method? Was he tainted by idealism? Was he actually a realist? These questions and similar ones directed at Dewey's basic philosophical ideas are addressed in other chapters in this volume. Here we are interested in the role envisioned by Dewey for inquiry in schooling.

To make sense of Dewey's philosophy of education, we have to consider how his basic concepts fit together. *Inquiry* for Dewey is the means by which *growth* is maintained. I noted earlier that the idea of growth is vague from the standpoint of practical pedagogy, and that claim stands. But it holds a central place in Dewey's biological/naturalistic framework. It provides "one exemplification of the principle

of continuity."[29] The principle of continuity tells us simply that a person's experiences are linked together, but this linking may be a haphazard chronological set of happenings or it may be continuity as exemplified by growth; that is, the latter type of continuity in educational experience increases the student's power to engage in further activities that will count as *experience*.

Again, it is not possible to discuss Dewey's theory of experience fully here. For educators, the important point is that an *experience* has an external aspect – some activity in the world – and an internal aspect – an affective impact or meaning for the individual. Some daily happenings – mindless doings and under-goings – do not qualify as experience at all, and not all experiences are educationally worthwhile. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey said:

> Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other ... Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted.[30]

We might wish Dewey had said more here. It seems likely that callousness may reduce the quality of interaction with other human beings; social experience may well be restricted. But it is conceivable that other avenues of growth will remain open, even grow. Dewey continues: "Again, a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience."[31]

Dewey did not claim that an increase in automatic skill is necessarily bad, although many educators have taken him to mean this and that they should banish all drill and memorization from the classroom. Wise teachers will generate questions of the sort: When is drill facilitative? How much is too much? And they will ask the question implied in Dewey's warning: Where will this acquisition of skill lead?

Dewey's comments so far can be taken as criticism of the rigid, mindless, and sometimes harsh methods associated with traditional education, but he also expressed concerns that might be directed at the new education:

> An experience may be immediately enjoyable and yet promote the formation of a slack and careless attitude; this attitude then operates to modify the quality of subsequent experiences so as to prevent a person from getting out

of them what they have to give. Again, experiences may be so disconnected from one another that, while each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they are not linked cumulatively to one another. Energy is dissipated and a person becomes scatter-brained.[32]

Dewey wanted educators to be guided by the principle of continuity as exemplified in growth. But this increases the complexity of teaching. A teacher may, for example, provide for her class an "experience" that follows logically on past activities. However, what the teacher provides is not an *experience* as Dewey defined it. That is something had by the one experiencing it. The teacher provides opportunities for students to interact with subject-matter and thereby have an experience. *Interaction* is Dewey's "second chief principle for interpreting an experience in its educational function and force."[33] The idea is to give balanced attention to both internal and external aspects of experience. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to interact with subject-matter that itself exhibits some logical continuity, but they must watch their students and listen to them to determine whether a continuity of experience – growth – is occurring.

What Dewey hoped to achieve through education is not a community of adults saturated with information or fixed knowledge but, rather, people who exhibit habits of mind facilitative of further intellectual and moral growth. The word *habit* figures prominently in Dewey's philosophy. In his use of the word, Dewey did not refer to mere repetition or mindless activity. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, he explained that his use was somewhat different from our everyday meaning:

> But we need a word to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systemization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity ... The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response, not to particular acts.[34]

We develop habits of mind primarily through inquiry. *Inquiry*, Dewey said, is the controlled transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is whole and determinate.[35] The material used to conduct inquiry Dewey called *knowledge*. Now, again, his use of this word differs somewhat from common usage. For Dewey,

knowledge is bigger than *truth*, and material used in inquiry qualifies as knowledge so long as it continues to guide inquiry successfully. We can describe many situations in which students use faulty rules or routines in their attempts to solve mathematical problems. When these rules bring them to incorrect results, students are led to reflect on their procedures and, eventually, to discard the rules. Faulty rules and information no longer appear in the catalog of knowledge.[36] A word of caution here: Dewey was not consistent in his use of the word *knowledge*. Sometimes he used it in the conventional sense to point to things accepted as known; sometimes his use seems to be synonymous with *truth*. In his discussion of inquiry, however, he separated the data taken initially as knowledge from that arrived at as the conclusion of careful hypothesis testing.

The process of inquiry involves formulating a problem, hypothesizing, testing, analyzing, and evaluating. Its purpose is "finding out things," gaining greater control over our environment, and bringing order to indeterminate situations. Dewey's five-step model has become famous as a description of inquiry. (I leave aside for the moment whether Dewey used it too exclusively in his attempt to describe thinking and learning.) Thinking characteristic of inquiry involves: "(i) a felt difficulty; (ii) its location and definition; (iii) suggestion of possible solution; (iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion; (v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief."[37] Dewey pointed out that imagination is involved at several of these steps – in defining the problem, in formulating a hypothesis, and sometimes in testing our conjectures. In his discussion of ethical decision-making, testing in the imagination is especially important.[38] There are possibilities for action that we see immediately to be wrong when we test their consequences in imagination. Indeed, we cannot ethically test them in the actual world. As we will see in the discussion of moral education, this feature of moral thinking may set it apart from scientific thinking, and Dewey may have been mistaken in supposing that all thinking can be reduced to the form he specified for inquiry.

Consider poetic or literary thinking. It is more likely to start from awe, pleasure, comic juxtaposition, grief, or the sort of exemplification that triggers metaphor. Writing about knowledge, Robert Frost contrasted scholars and artists: "Scholars get theirs with

conscientious thoroughness along projected lines of logic; poets theirs cavalierly and as it happens in and out of books. They stick to nothing deliberately, but let what will stick to them like burrs where they walk in the fields."[39] But it is not only poets and fiction writers whose thinking begins with something other than "a felt difficulty." The thinking of naturalists often begins with almost casual observation: there is something wonderful, something colorful, something odd. When a problem arises, naturalists may fall into the pattern described by Dewey, but the pattern may be disrupted often by an unexpected observation.

This is important for teachers. It is one reason that so many of us value *exposure* in education. When we share an experience with students without demanding that it culminate in specific learning, some students may pick up on a feature of our presentation. They may experience the surprise, delight, or wonder mentioned by the poet. They may go on to learn much. From the teacher's perspective, however, the outcome of such episodes should be awareness, not necessarily learning.

Dewey was certainly aware of indirect, informal, or incidental learning. In *Democracy and Education*, he wrote:

> Under normal conditions, learning is a product and reward of occupation with subject matter ... [The child] learns in consequence of his direct activities. The better methods of teaching a child, say, to read, follow the same road. They do not fix his attention upon the fact that he has to learn something ... They engage his activities, and in the process of engagement he learns.[40]

Learning, for Dewey, means the acquisition of useable knowledge, growth in the development of intellectual habits, and more frequent and competent use of the tools of inquiry. One might wish, however, that he had said more about musing, daydreaming, the mental equivalent of walking in fields. Instead of cultivating these activities and steering them toward productive thinking, we do our best to discourage them in schools.

One could also argue that Dewey gave too little attention to the opposite end of the learning spectrum – that of learning routine skills. In the paragraph quoted above on learning to read, Dewey added, "the same is true of the more successful methods of dealing with number or whatever."[41] We might want to modify his claim. Children are unlikely to learn many important skills and principles in

mathematics without some direct instruction and routine practice. But teachers can be careful to explain where this practice is heading, and we can agree with Dewey that teachers should not let it dominate classroom activity.

From the perspective of care theory, there is another concern about overemphasis on the problem-solving mode of inquiry. Working with human relational situations, we may become so immersed in the problem that we forget to look at the human beings who have the problem. Caring requires relation and receptivity. We must listen to the cared-for. When we have decided to respond, we must figure out what to do; problem-solving is clearly involved. However, there must be turning points:

> As we convert what we have received from the other into a problem ... we move away from the other. We clean up his reality, strip it of complex and bothersome qualities, in order to think it. The other's reality becomes data, stuff to be analyzed, studied, interpreted. All this is to be expected and is entirely appropriate, provided that we see the essential turning points and move back to the concrete and the personal. Thus we keep our objective thinking tied to a relational stake at the heart of caring.[42]

Concern for basic relations renews a difficulty noted earlier by Virginia Held. The pragmatist context of experience is perhaps too limited. If it is expanded to include the traditional experience of women, new problems arise and, further, we are encouraged to look for problems, not simply react when we stumble on them. Writing of care ethics, Held notes: "It addresses questions about whether and how we ought to engage in activities of care, questions about how such activities should be conducted and structured, and questions about the meanings of care and caring."[43]

In addition to the analysis of expanded experience, there is a comparable need to extend Dewey's model of problem-solving. Not only should we incorporate the "turning points" mentioned earlier but we also need a more relational perspective on consequences. The original problem may be solved by and for the individual inquirer. But what are the possible effects of his/her solution on others in the social context? Have new problems been introduced? Indeed, whatever the original context of the problem, when moral factors are considered, it may be that "the adequacy of moral understanding decreases as its form approaches generality through abstraction."[44]

Care ethics requires sensitivity to the needs of others both in its search for problems and its examination of consequences. It also includes a basic role for emotion in inquiry and problem-solving. Emotion provides motivation. Reflection on and evaluation of the emotions of all involved in a problem context contribute to the anticipation of further problems and consequences, and attention to these emotions may help to avoid undesirable consequences. Dewey provides some advice here by suggesting that we try out various possibilities and examine the consequences of our prospective acts in our imagination. But he seems to concentrate on the intellectual imagination, whereas care theory emphasizes the empathic imagination.

DEMOCRACY

Dewey's view of democracy is not, strictly speaking, a political view; that is, his view of democracy goes well beyond what most people think of as political. Certainly Dewey would be unwilling to label a nation or society "democratic" simply because it had conducted ostensibly free elections. For Dewey: "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."[45]

To get a sense of Dewey's view, we might start with his long-standing debate with Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler[46] over educational matters. Both Hutchins and Adler believed that a democratic form of government depends on the grounding of its citizens in common knowledge, and this common knowledge is fundamentally fixed. Hutchins wrote:

> Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth is everywhere the same. Hence education should be everywhere the same ... I suggest that the heart of any course of study designed for the whole people will be, if education is rightly understood, the same at any time, in any place, under any political, social, or economic conditions.[47]

One could hardly find a greater contrast to Dewey's position. As we saw earlier, Dewey regarded knowledge as bigger – more encompassing – than truth. Knowledge is that information or understanding which is useful in guiding inquiry, not that bit of eternal truth we have managed to secure. For those knowledge statements that have

resisted vigorous attempts at falsification, Dewey did sometimes use the term *truth*, but he preferred to call such statements *warranted assertions*. He rejected claims to eternal, absolute, or fixed truths.

Dewey's conception of democracy is dynamic, constantly growing, and its health depends on the corresponding growth of its citizens. The first concept treated in *Democracy and Education* is *transmission*:

> Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger. Without this communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it, social life could not survive.[48]

Notice that Dewey did not mention the transmission of knowledge, truth, or facts. These are to be sought *in* communication. Dewey began his discussion of communication with the desire to communicate, not with the products of past communication: "There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common."[49] Next, he did mention knowledge, but it is clear that he wanted to convey a sense of knowledge as dynamic, as ways of knowing:

> What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – like-mindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks ... The communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions – like ways of responding to expectations and requirements.[50]

This paragraph is a powerful introduction to Dewey's philosophy of education and democracy. Desirable intellectual and moral habits are to be transmitted through reciprocal forms of communication and participation. Teachers in democratic societies should not try to pass knowledge – like bricks – to their students; they must engage them in patterns of communication that will help them to develop democratic habits of association as well as the requisite habits of mind.

The difference between Hutchins/Adler and Dewey should be clear. In the Hutchins/Adler view, educated people possess a fund of common, cultural knowledge. In Dewey's view, educated people possess common habits of mind, dispositions, and modes of communication. In Dewey's view, a democracy is always a work in progress; it is not a fixed entity that can be preserved by transmitting fixed values. Democratic societies, in Dewey's framework, develop a history of rational deliberation, a form of communication that addresses problems purposefully and incorporates non-violent ways of handling differences.

The capacity for rational deliberation is not, however, the product of individual, natural intelligence. In *The Public and its Problems*, Dewey made clear that the habits leading to rational deliberation develop through "the give-and-take" of communication, and it is one important function of education to direct this development.[51] Indeed, the *individual* is also a product of social relations. Dewey rejected the notion of pre-social individuals who band together in a social contract. Because he rejected that definition of individuals, he said perhaps too little about rights.[52] It is not true, however, that he rejected the idea of rights; his objection was to the notions of natural rights and of the pre-social individual. Rights are *granted* after rational deliberation among members of a community.

Dewey proposed a two-part criterion for evaluating the worth of various forms of social life. In a democratic form, "there are many interests consciously communicated and shared; and there are varied and free points of contact with other modes of association."[53] Dewey applied this criterion to several groups to show how they fail as worthy forms of social life. Under totalitarian forms, for example, there is a lack of shared communication:

> Stimulation and response are exceedingly one-sided. In order to have a large number of values in common, all the members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others. There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves.[54]

It is a concern for lack of shared experience – a lack that tends to support classed societies – that led Dewey to object to vocational education as trade education. But this issue needs far more discussion. It is one that is still vital – and still neglected – in current debates

on schooling. No matter what the school does, the society will always need work done that is not associated with academic education. Some of these jobs are unpleasant, boring, or physically demanding. The trades actually offer some of the better jobs in the non-academic category. Dewey could have capitalized on his often repeated claim that any subject can be taught and learned in ways that are intellectually rich and worthwhile. He could also have explored ways to enrich vocational education with topics that treat personal and family life.

He could have suggested that students be allowed, with appropriate guidance, to choose their own course of study. The great moral fault in tracking (or "streaming") is not tracking itself, but the arbitrary assignment of youngsters to "lower" tracks and the provision of poor courses within those tracks.[55] It seems odd for a philosopher so immersed in ideas integrating mind and body and so appreciative of the practical to be unwilling or unable to construct a democratic conception of vocational (trade) education. Given his admiration for Walt Whitman – "the seer of democracy" – one might have expected greater emphasis on respect for all types of honest work.

There is another odd omission in Dewey's discussion of democracy and education. The comprehensive high school made it possible for students from various programs – vocational, academic, business – to come together in extra-curricular activities. These activities provide opportunities for the give-and-take Dewey recommended. In doing so, they increase the "varied and free points of contact with other modes of association." Additionally, school activities such as band concerts, art exhibits, dramatic performances, and sports all provide both school–community contacts and educational experiences beyond the classroom. Dewey himself, in *Freedom and Culture*, recognized the importance of the arts to democracy:

> It has not been customary to include the arts, the fine arts, as an important part of the social conditions that bear upon democratic institutions and personal freedom. Even after the influence of the state of industry and of natural science has been admitted, we still tend to draw the line at the idea that literature, music, painting, the drama, architecture, have any intimate connection with the cultural bases of democracy.[56]

Yet there is little mention in Dewey's educational philosophy of clubs, arts, or other extra-curricular activities. But this neglect of

the arts in political/social life was not as widespread as Dewey suggested. At the same point in time, Virginia Woolf gave the issue careful attention in *Three Guineas*.[57]

MORAL EDUCATION

Dewey consistently drew our attention to two meanings of moral education. In the first, *moral education* refers to a form of education that is morally justified. In the second – one much in the public eye today – it refers to an education (or curriculum) designed to produce moral people. Most of Dewey's writings on education concentrate on the first meaning but, of course, the two are not unrelated.

In handling these two aspects of moral education, Dewey walked a line between liberalism and communitarianism. It is not surprising that he is referred to by some as a "pragmatic liberal" and by others as a "democratic communitarian." He believed that a democratic community could do much to shape social individuals who would embrace common goals, associate cooperatively, and work together for the common good. In "Ethical Principles Underlying Education," he said: "It is not the mere individual who makes the final demand for moral action, who establishes the final end, or furnishes the final standards of worth. It is the constitution and development of the larger life into which he enters which settles these things."[58]

If he had left his thinking there, he would have been subject to a charge often leveled at communitarians – that they are too tightly bound to the values and customs of their particular community. Is the collective always right? How can we criticize the "larger life" of which we are a part if that group "settles these things"?

But Dewey did not leave the matter there; he did not embrace an Aristotelian communitarianism. He put great emphasis on the capacity of individuals to engage in critical thinking. Clearly, he expected the methods of intelligence to work toward the improvement of society. Critical thinkers will improve society, and a democratic society will support and nurture critical thinkers.[59] However, many of Dewey's critics believe there is still a problem here. Upon what do critical thinkers draw if they cannot rely entirely on the principles, values, and customs of their society? Is method sufficient to accomplish what Dewey set out to do? The problem identified by critics may be only theoretical. In a closed society – one with a fixed

and universally accepted ethos – the problem would surely be real. But in today's pluralistic societies with multiple means of widespread and instantaneous communication, many competing ideas and values may trigger critical thinking and supply alternative criteria for evaluation.

As a society becomes more democratic, it educates to guide the critical thinking that will support its own survival and growth. The school plays a significant role in this task: "[It exercises] a certain specific function in maintaining the life and advancing the welfare of society ... [And] the educational system which does not recognize this fact as entailing upon it an ethical responsibility is derelict and a defaulter."[60]

The school should, then, be organized as a miniature society, one that incorporates the best features of the developing, democratic, larger society: "The school cannot be a preparation for social life excepting as it reproduces, within itself, the typical conditions of social life."[61] But what are these conditions? How should educators choose the elements of the larger society that best reflect its democratic ideals? This is not a trivial problem, and the pluralism that furnishes competing ideas to stimulate critical thinking now contributes to continual debate within the philosophy of education. Should educators use the view of democracy advanced by Hutchins and Adler or the one put forth by Dewey? On what grounds?

The possible flaw in Dewey's thinking is perhaps best illustrated through a careful examination of his own words:

> I sum up ... by asking your attention to the moral trinity of the school. The demand is for social intelligence, social power, and social interests. Our resources are (1) the life of the school as a social institution in itself; (2) methods of learning and of doing work; and (3) the school studies or curriculum. In so far as the school represents, in its own spirit, a genuine community life; in so far as what are called school discipline, government, order, etc., are the expressions of this inherent social spirit; in so far as the methods used are those which appeal to the active and constructive powers, permitting the child to give out, and thus to serve; in so far as the curriculum is so selected and organized as to provide the material for affording the child a consciousness of the world in which he has to play a part, and the relations he has to meet; in so far as these ends are met, the school is organized on an ethical basis.[62]

Now, arguably, the conditions laid out by Dewey could be met by many kinds of society. Fascist philosophers of education could agree

with most, perhaps all, of Dewey's points.[63] Thus everything depends on how Dewey construes and defends each of the three resources mentioned above. This "moral trinity" cannot stand on its own. We have to dig through the vast body of Dewey's work to find justification for his pronouncements on moral education and, even then, we may feel that something vital is missing.[64]

Uneasy over the missing (vital and basic) elements in Dewey's ideas on moral education, we may nevertheless agree with his criticism of what is today called "character education":

> What the normal child continuously needs is not so much isolated moral lessons instilling in him the importance of truthfulness and honesty, or the beneficial results that follow from some particular act of patriotism, etc. It is the formation of habits of social imagination and conception.[65]

Care theory tends to agree with this, but it suggests a more explicit, a firmer, foundation on which to build the formation of such habits. It insists upon receptivity, vulnerability to the suffering of others, acceptance of the obligation to respond as carer to the expressed needs of the cared-for (which may involve meeting those needs, diverting them, or sensitively rejecting them), and at least one absolute injunction: never inflict unnecessary pain.

It is not that Dewey entirely neglected issues of sensitivity and emotional qualities. Good character, he wrote: "[requires] a delicate responsiveness – there must be emotional reaction ... [It] is difficult to put this quality into words ... [This sensitivity is characterized] by tact, by instinctive recognition of the claims of others, by skill in adjusting.[66]

Even here, we may rightly be bothered by Dewey's seeming lack of commitment and his provision of a way to escape the obligation to care through "skill in adjusting." Again and again, we have to look well beyond his specific words on moral theory and moral education to locate the elements needed to fill them out. Perhaps the difficulty lies in his refusal to see morality as a distinctive domain of human life – one irreducible to the domain of scientific method.

With a firmer foundation, or what Dewey himself referred to as a "pou sto," which sympathy provides, his method of moral decision-making can be powerful. In *Ethics*, he described it as "democratic rehearsal":

Deliberation is actually an imaginative rehearsal of various courses of conduct. We give way, *in our mind*, to some impulse; we try, *in our mind*, some plan. Following its career through various steps, we find ourselves in imagination in the presence of the consequences that would follow; and as we then like and approve, or dislike and disapprove, these consequences, we find the original impulse or plan good or bad.[67]

Notice that Dewey has here once again made use of imagination. The method described is indeed powerful, provided we have adequate criteria by which to judge when we *should* approve or disapprove certain consequences. Care theory lays out such criteria; Dewey did not.

CONCLUSION

Care theory is largely compatible with Dewey's philosophy of education. Both agree on the active nature of the child, the interactive nature of curriculum, the centrality of inquiry and critical thinking, and the need for continuous development of democratic ideas. However, care theorists include far more on the experience of women;[68] accordingly, they say more about an expanded curriculum, and they find a worrisome gap in Dewey's discussion of moral education. These flaws can be remedied. Dewey himself recognized that philosophy would change as women began to engage in it.

NOTES

1. V. Held, *Feminist Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
2. J. Dewey, *The School and Society* (1899), *MW* 1:5.
3. J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), *MW* 9:122.
4. Dewey, *School and Society*, p. 30.
5. Dewey, *School and Society*, pp. 37–38.
6. Dewey, *School and Society*, p. 38.
7. S. Thornton, "Social Studies Misunderstood: A Reply to Kieran Egan," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 12 (1984), 42–47.
8. See K. Egan, *Children's Minds, Talking Rabbits, and Clockwork Oranges* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).
9. J. Dewey, *How We Think* (1909), *MW* 6:311.
10. Dewey, *How We Think*, p. 311.
11. M. Gardner, *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener* (New York: Quill, 1983), p. 335.

12. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 55.
13. J. Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938), *LW* 13:19.
14. S. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 83.
15. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, pp. 85–86.
16. See N. Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), and N. Noddings, *Happiness and Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
17. See A. M. Sidorkin, *Learning Relations* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).
18. See P. Jackson, "John Dewey's *School and Society* Revisited," *Elementary School Journal* 98 (1998), 415–426; also D. C. Phillips, "John Dewey's *Child and the Curriculum*: A Century Later," *Elementary School Journal* 98 (1998), 403–414.
19. J. Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), *MW* 2:279.
20. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 7.
21. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 7.
22. Dewey, *School and Society*, p. 13.
23. J. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).
24. See, for example, N. Noddings, *Critical Lessons: What our Schools Should Teach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
25. Dewey, *How We Think*, pp. 211–212.
26. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 318.
27. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 326.
28. See, for example, Held, *Feminist Morality*; V. Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Noddings, *Happiness and Education*; Noddings, *Critical Lessons*; Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*; and Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
29. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 19.
30. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 11.
31. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 11.
32. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, pp. 11–12.
33. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 24.
34. J. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *MW* 14:32.
35. For more on this concept, see J. Garrison, *Dewey and Eros* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), and J. S. Johnston, *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).
36. For further discussion of this process, see N. Noddings, *Philosophy of Education*, 2nd edn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007).
37. Dewey, *How We Think*, pp. 236–237.

38. J. Dewey, *Ethics* (1908), *MW* 5.
39. R. Frost, *Complete Poems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1949), p. viii.
40. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 176.
41. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 176.
42. N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 36.
43. Held, *Ethics of Care*, p. 46.
44. M. U. Walker, "Moral Understandings: Alternative 'Epistemology' for a Feminist Ethics," *Hypatia* 4 (1989), 15–28.
45. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 93.
46. See R. M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1936); M. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal* (New York: Macmillan, 1982).
47. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, p. 66.
48. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 6.
49. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 7.
50. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 7.
51. J. Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (1927), *LW* 2.
52. See E. Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
53. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 89.
54. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 90.
55. See N. Noddings, *When School Reform Goes Wrong* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007).
56. J. Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (1939), *LW* 13:69.
57. V. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1938).
58. J. Dewey, "Ethical Principles Underlying Education" (1897), *EW* 5:58.
59. See S. M. Fishman and L. McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998).
60. Dewey, "Ethical Principles Underlying Education," p. 58.
61. Dewey, "Ethical Principles Underlying Education," pp. 61–62.
62. Dewey, "Ethical Principles Underlying Education," pp. 75–76.
63. See G. Gentile, *Genesis and Structure of Society*, trans. H. S. Harris (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960).
64. See N. Noddings, "Thoughts on Dewey's 'Ethical Principles Underlying Education,'" *Elementary School Journal*, 98 (1998), 479–488.
65. Dewey, "Ethical Principles Underlying Education," p. 72.
66. Dewey, "Ethical Principles Underlying Education," p. 80.
67. Dewey, *Ethics* (1908), p. 293; emphasis in the original.
68. See C. Seigfried, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).