Review
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Book Reviews

Dewey Reconfigured: Essays on Deweyan Pragmatism
Casey Haskins and David I. Seiple, editors
Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999
254 pp.

Collections of essays on pragmatic thought are appearing with increasing frequency. This reflects the growing number of scholars, and the modest number of journals, devoted to this field. We might desire more journals, but that would obstruct the aim of at least engaging the problems of philosophers instead of only the problems of pragmatists. Collections should reach a broader audience, but this book's title is not an engaging invitation. It is at least honest, since its contents have no defined topic or common theme. Casey Haskins admits as much in his Introduction, adding that roughly half of the essays explore Dewey's ideas as he understood them, while the others place his philosophical views in a critical light. Most major components of Dewey's philosophy receive attention: his social and political thought, his psychological and educational views, and his concepts of aesthetic, moral, and religious experience. The eleven essays are all deserving of close attention from those of other traditions as well as from pragmatists. Furthermore, their entwined themes invite the reader to ignore their actual ordering to find engaging continuities.

Several essays center on the nature and functions of the "self." Neither the actual doctrine nor the label of Turing machine functionalism appears to have been inspired by the Chicago school of psychological functionalism, led by Dewey and James Angell. "The Fortunes of 'Functionalism'" by J. E. Tiles does discern a common thread in their rejection of introspection. Introspectionism identified mind with consciousness, which for many early psychologists was just the phenomena presented to one's attentive awareness. The Chicago functionalists argued that attentive awareness is only one strand of a complex circuit. The stimulus-response model congenial to introspectionism cannot account for habitual behavior, in which subconscious mental circuits supply responses. Nor could the S-R schema account for behavior during problematic situations, during which attention is aroused to find the stimulus needed for response. Tiles traces the consequences of Dewey's functionalism towards the rise of behaviorism, which like strict Turing machine functionalism, wrongly ignores attentive awareness.

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Dewey's theory of the unit of behavior as the organism's purposive act in its environment, Tiles argues, would terminate current work on functionalism's approach to meaning. Linguistic meaning, like many important features of human behavior, rests on the whole self's abilities, including awareness, comprehended in their natural context.

Education in its broadest sense is the growth of the self's capacities. Institutionalized education, and its herding of students through majors towards careers, does not suggest "growth" but rather delimitation and conformity. So-called advisors usually suggest consulting one's current interests or likings. But no single part of one's temporary self should be encouraged to speak for the whole process of selfhood. Victor Kestenbaum advocates the hidden potentiality of "The Undeclared Self" over the surface contingency of one's declared self. Even the humanities, proclaiming concern for the intangibles of self-formation, timidly debate which curriculum adjustment will do the trick. Kestenbaum advises the encouragement of habits of mind essential for "the examined life" of genuine intelligence. Majors must still be chosen, but such decisions should be portrayed as the mysterious adventures that they really are. Education, like all life, is a precarious and sometimes tragic drama.

Moral decisions are a prominent feature of one's education. Against the tide of 20th Century ethical theory, Dewey portrayed morality as grounded in problem-solving instead of rule-following, and as dealing with social values and not justifications to personal interest. The most troublesome moral problems concern conflicting duties to others, each grounded in self-defining relationships telling me "who I am." Morality as problem-solving must hence be "ecological" as Steven Fesmire sagely explains in "The Art of Moral Imagination." This intelligent reconstruction of the whole self, in light of its possible consequences for others, must be an imaginative creation aimed at restoring both inner harmony and social harmony. The metaphor of the drama is again helpful. Pragmatic skills of "dramatic rehearsal" of possible future selves would nurture sensitivities to matters of widespread impact and long-range import. The ultimate ideal harmonization is the aim of democratic experience, explaining why moral deliberation is always social deliberation. Furthermore, Fesmire notices that the harmonization of social experience is Dewey's depiction of the purpose of art. His path-breaking essay explores how the "moral artist" would intelligently participate in the social drama of enriching everyone's social experience.

Vincent Colapietro's "Embodied, Enculturated Agents" also studies Dewey's advocacy of the growth of the whole active self. Like his work on Peirce,[1] this perceptive examination of Dewey credits much of the self's growth to linguistic cultural experience. Dewey's reliance on the term "organism" to emphasize growth actually sidesteps reductionist behaviorism in favor of a naturalistic functionalism. Critics leery of both behaviorism and naturalism, unimpressed by Dewey's treatment of the self, were likely seeking "an angel imprisoned in a body." But there is common ground, Colapietro argues, between Dewey's func-

tionalism and the Thomistic conception of the person. Dewey's philosophy offers a metaphorical understanding of the human organism as a spiritual substance capable of religious sensibilities. Because "it has been so radically transformed by its participation in semiotic processes...such a being is fully equipped to feel awe, wonder, reverence, piety, gratitude, and mystery." Consistent with Dewey's philosophy, the self-reflexivity of personal spirituality is bound up with the ongoing social processes that engender the religious sentiments. This implies, as Colapietro notes, that religious values in a democracy are subject to the experimental intelligence of the community.

Religious values, like all social ideals, are marked by fragmentation and conflict in any sufficiently pluralistic society. Dewey's antipathy towards religious institutions, only obliquely indicated by Colapietro, receives more explicit treatment in "Theology as Healing: A Meditation on *A Common Faith*" by Douglas Anderson. If the churches' conservation of religious values is an obstacle to democratic social experimentation, then each person's religious attitudes and experiences come under scrutiny. Anderson explores a reading of *A Common Faith* as a sermon on the possibilities of religious experience to heal community divisions and instabilities. It is Dewey's characteristic empirical demand that God is real only where the divine is experienced. The religious experience required is a transforming experience of the force of harmonizing ideals, working within us only because these ideals stand for our possible future selves. But these ideals must at the same time be the community's ideals, so that the restoration of personal harmony is precisely the restoration of community harmony.

Of course, not all citizens may be committed to social harmonization, especially in a religiously pluralistic society. Some religions pursue political evangelism, aiming at moral conformity through political means, and hence they desire legal control over education as a means necessary to their expansion. Dewey's political philosophy is likewise grounded on education, as James Campbell details in "Dewey and Democracy."[2] Education must foster the capacities of modern liberal democracy: the commitment to resolving social problems for the common good, the courage to consider radical social changes, and the condemnation of violent means to revolutionary ends.[3] But what of those religions that can cheerfully endorse these three principles even while they practice political evangelism? If citizens motivated by religious morality are victorious at the ballot box, has anything gone awry? Campbell does not address these specific questions, but he does supply an indication of the answer. A genuine democracy does not aim at any pre-set vision of the common good. Only each citizen may say whether his or her good is advanced by a social experiment, since it is each citizen's own experience affected by social change. Social problems are not real entities over and above the felt problems of people, and social progress does not exist over and above the benefits to each person's welfare. However, political evangelism would treat recalcitrant adults as children, incapable of knowing what is best for themselves. Religions do not typically encourage the humbly democratic sentiment

that any other citizen's estimate of the good and the right may be as potentially useful as one's own.

An even harder problem remains, since one of democracy's most contentious issues is whether to expand the community, such as expanding enfranchisement. Religions may be involved where they encourage the humble spirit of human equality. American revolutionaries, demanding the God-given rights of English citizenship, were not impressed by arguments pondering what was best for the inhabitants of England. Slavery abolitionists, inspired by a vision of the fundamental equality of all humanity, were not interested in debates over what would be in the best interests of the white citizenry. Many whites of that era came to a decision on slavery by imagining their future experience in full community with the prospective new members waiting to join. But this very kind of deliberation made a mockery of the basic rights of slaves, which cannot depend on their impact on the lifestyles of whites. Waiting for democracy to decide a question of basic right, as Thoreau complained, is often a foolish exercise in futility. Now Dewey did not, and would not have tried, to lay down in advance the perimeters of "community," since communities should themselves decide. Yet a strange paradox is generated: how can a community, looking only to what is best for itself, justly (and non-violently) decide whether to extend its concern to new members? Looking to "the common good" might not properly decide who shall count as "common."

We are confronted with this paradox today, in the question of whether citizenship should be extended to the unborn. As Eugenie Gatens-Robinson points out in "The Private and Its Problem: A Pragmatic View of Reproductive Choice," Deweyan liberal theory cannot support the anti-abortion movement's goal of an abrupt and forced legal adjustment to its own morality. But Roe v. Wade is similarly questionable, since it was also an abrupt, forced, and non-democratic decision. Gatens-Robinson persuasively shows how the pragmatic approach is local and gradualist, and grounded on the democratic (and feminist) call for "respectful attention to voices." The slow habits of social action must be allowed to work their own way towards resolutions, permitting the conflicting interested parties to find their common goals and to devise ways to achieve them together. Both sides to the abortion issue, for example, would prefer fewer abortions, and should accordingly work for adjusting social conditions of women. Pitting Dewey against fundamental rights independent of actual social and political contexts may cause discomfort. Yet Dewey's democratic forum has no place for voices proclaiming such transcendent rights for anyone, born or unborn. If interested parties would help decide the fate of the unborn, they must talk about what they know best: their own experience. Gatens-Robinson accordingly portrays the anti-abortion public as speaking about their interests in preserving an older social order characterized by the dominance of clergy and men. However, this is not an adequate portrayal of the entire anti-abortion movement, since many people opposed to abortion are not favorably disposed towards patriarchy either. What

might instead be the origin of their motivation? Dewey's social philosophy suggests that people *should* decide by imagining their future experience in full community with the prospective new members waiting to join. Still, some will continue to obstinately ask the unanswerable question of who shall speak for the speechless, without waiting on the pleasure of the current community. This country was born, and then was divided, in two civil wars over this question. With Thoreau, we might speculate how founding ideals of this country are ultimately responsible, and whether democracy can or should withstand them.

At this melancholy juncture we are confronted with Raymond Boisvert's accusation in "The Nemesis of Necessity: Tragedy's Challenge to Deweyan Pragmatism" that Dewey's philosophy is constitutionally unable to recognize the tragic fate in "our natural constraints." If the exercise of intelligence requires a tight focus on what we can control, and if fate is what instead sometimes controls us, then intelligence is naturally blind to fate. This formulation does not register the depth of Boisvert's complaint, since a Deweyan could respond that intelligence takes stabilities into account while manipulating the instabilities towards our advantage. Boisvert is not diverted by this reply, since he believes that some of the most dangerous fates lie in ourselves and not in the stars. Dewey's pragmatism would expand our scientific control of nature to encompass the control of ourselves through the social sciences. But this philosophy unquestionably values ever-expanding technological control, which may not only be quite impossible, but also our undoing. Harmony with the universe on our terms is a quite different goal from our harmony with the universe's terms.

Dewey's historical context might account for such *hubris*, since evolution forced many 19th Century intellectuals into a choice between faith in progress and pessimistic resignation. Casey Haskins traces Dewey's complex indebtedness to romantic themes for his conceptions of religious, moral, and aesthetic experience in "Dewey's Romanticism." With Fesmire, Haskins agrees that Dewey was inspired to find in aesthetic experience the model of self-fulfillment towards our ideals. Against Boisvert, Haskins argues that Dewey's faith in the possibilities of intelligence is not optimism, but rather the melioristic alternative to pessimism and romantic escapism. Pessimism denies all ideals, while escapism places ideals safely beyond the human struggle. Both extremes court fatalism by questioning the power of ideals to transform the world. Dewey's alternative, according to Haskins, is his cultivation of natural piety towards the genuine efficacy of ideals in human life. Ideals transform experience, as all sides agree, but the deeper issue is whether idealized experience is essential to intelligent practice. Romantic escapism isolates aesthetic experience must be isolated from practical concerns, but Dewey asserts their continuity.

As many of the essays before us emphasize, Dewey's fundamental theses inevitably involve his conception of experience. Richard Shusterman discerns two quite distinct conceptions in "Dewey on Experience: Foundation or Reconstruction," which will be labeled here as the "organicist" and "purposive" views. The

organicist view stresses the integrative quality that binds immediate experience into an individual whole, while the purposive view stresses the habitual behaviors that function to direct activity towards particular ends. Thought presumes a wider context of non-discursive situational experience, which both views provide, yet Shusterman argues that the organicist view is a pragmatic dead end. Shusterman thus revives a long-standing controversy going back to the reception of *Art as Experience*, that had lain quiescent since Thomas Alexander's defense of organicism.[4] Shusterman prefers to divorce what Alexander has labored to unify, namely, the fundamental role of the organically unifying quality for genuinely aesthetic experience and hence for knowledge. Both Deweyan pragmatists agree that problem-solving aims at the consummatory aesthetic experience of restored harmony. But an ineffable quality, despite its able enumerated advantages, may be a problematic foundational criterion for either knowledge or art in general. Shusterman would replace it with the "practical unity of purpose and the continuity and direct of habit." Such behavioral terms are consistent with Shusterman's efforts to establish "somaesthetics" as the continuity of body and mind which supplies the non-discursive background of experience.[5]

Richard Rorty's complaints against Dewey's foundationalist role for experience are thus justified in Shusterman's view. But Rorty's strictures against all non-discursive experience, such as the Deweyan-inspired "somaesthetics," displays more than just a lamentable bias of linguistic philosophy, but an attendant inability to read Dewey adequately. This is no news, but if a review of the history of this common complaint is needed, we may turn to Daniel Conway's "Of Depth and Loss: The Peritropaic Legacy of Dewey's Pragmatism." What is not reviewed is Rorty's own admission that he has neither the scholarship nor the desire to "become a student of the history of American philosophy."[6] Conway's defends Rorty's genuine pragmatism against the false followers of Dewey desiring Rorty's banishment, by this reasoning. Only anti-metaphysical thinking which abandons methodology can turn philosophy towards social problems, but Dewey has a metaphysical (by Rorty's lights) notion of experience,[7] so Rorty is right to read Dewey according to the overriding need to do social philosophy. Unfortunately for Conway, a refutation is supplied by this volume's other essays, for they successfully discern Dewey's focus on social experience and they ably use this concept for methodical inquiries into social problems.

This outstanding collection of timely essays makes good on the promise of Dewey's philosophy to illuminate perennial philosophical questions and current social issues. In one volume the reader is offered a variety of sophisticated and cutting-edge developments of pragmatic thought. Their remarkable variety and originality signals the continued flourishing of productive interest in Dewey that cannot be ignored by the wider academic community.

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NOTES

1. Vincent Colapietro, *Peirce's Approach to the Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

2. These themes are explored in Campbell's *Understanding John Dewey: Nature and Cooperative Intelligence* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995).

3. Dewey's liberalism, grounded on educating all citizens towards the capacity for self-rule, is a 20th century version of republican political theory, as Michael Sandel defines it in *Democracy's Discontent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

4. Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987).

5. Shusterman devotes many more pages to Dewey's merits, and to concerns about using an ineffable quality to characterize art in general, in *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

6. For example see Rorty, "Comments on Sleeper and Edel," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 21.1 (Winter 1985): 39.

7. See Rorty's "Response to Gouinlock" in *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), pp. 91-99. As one example, Rorty claims that Dewey failed to navigate between realism and idealism because no sense can be made of objects of knowledge changing during inquiry. Dewey couldn't make sense of that either; his theory of inquiry instead holds that objects of knowledge are created in experience during inquiry. For those who cannot detect, much less grasp, this empirical claim, Dewey's philosophy will remain stubbornly opaque.