From the *Ought* That *Is* To the *Is* That *Ought To Be*:
Ortega and Dewey on the Pedagogical Problem

[I presented this essay at a celebration of the Centennial of José Ortega y Gasset's birth at the CUNY Graduate Center, Spring 1983. As I recall (somewhat vaguely), it was to be included in the planned publication of the proceedings of the event, which suffered delays as the organizers sought a publication subvention. I believe, after several years, the intention to publish the proceedings was abandoned. At any rate, I have no record of the publication if it did appear. Shortly after 1983, I shifted my academic focus to work on integrating digital technologies into education, perceiving these as "an is that ought to be in my life," and did not seek to publish the essay in an alternative publication. I have here made minor editorial changes to the 1983 manuscript and updated material in a few footnotes.]

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Ortega and Dewey on the Pedagogical Problem

¶1:38 To my knowledge, Dewey said nothing about Ortega, and Ortega said nothing about Dewey. On various occasions, Ortega wrote about pragmatism dismissively; but students of Dewey will insist that he was not a pragmatist, his having described himself as an instrumentalist; and students of Ortega will have to admit that his dismissive passages seem based on a study of pragmatism that was neither deep nor broad.[1] The intellectual trajectories of the two thinkers, by their own accord, did not passively intersect, and to deal with them together we have to look at both, from the inside, to see how we might relate the life enterprise of each to that of the other.[2]

¶2:38 Life is a drama, thus the Ortegan phrase, and to bring the lives of Ortega and Dewey together, we need to grasp the dramatic tension that set the tone of life for each. Life is not a mere listing of events, of happenings, of entries on a nicely printed curriculum vita – life has both form and actuality, an epic adventure, a world and a center of action, a hope, a destiny, a denouement. We look, in the end, for the similarity or difference of form and actuality that life had in the experiential drama played out by Dewey and by Ortega.[3]

¶3:38 To begin, further, let us look not for the differences, for those are obvious and on the surface. They will not really be of interest until we establish, perceive, and bring to life substantial similarities, for not until then will the differences be interesting, differences within the common kind. Hence, my aim will be to put Dewey and Ortega into vital relation with each other, not to display their apparent opposition as it springs to the observer's attention. And to begin putting Dewey and Ortega into vital relation with one another, let us pose the question thus, can we perceive significant similarities in the dramatic tension generated in the life of each? Can we see a shared destiny between them, a conjoint task?

¶4:38 I think we will find Dewey and Ortega sharing a significant pedagogical destiny and I want here to explain my reasons for this conviction. I will proceed, however, by Ortega's method of contracting circles. "We will go moving toward it in concentric circles, their radius growing shorter and developing a greater

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[1] Ortega's first mention of pragmatism dates from an essay on Maetzu of 1908, "Sobre una apologia de la inexactitud," *Obras* I, p-119. He made a fuller statement in "Para dos revistas argentinas," published in *La Nación* in 1924, (*Obras* VIII, pp. 372-6), and a somewhat similar statement at the end of the second lecture in *What Is Philosophy?*, first delivered in Buenos Aires in 1928. Ortega published additional comments on pragmatism in *La Nación* in 1930 and 1931 (*Obras* VI, pp. 97, 357).

[2] My methodology here is, of course, patterned after Ortega's wonderful essay of 1932, "Pidiendo un Goethe desde dentro," *Obras* IV, pp. 395-420. The task here is to uncover the similarity in the vocations of Ortega and Dewey.

[3] I am intentionally using an Ortegan rhetoric rather than a Deweyian one: one of the obvious differences between the two thinkers lies in their use of language, Ortega the provocateur, Dewey the plowman. I examined the significance of "life in Ortega's work at length in the second part of *Man and His Circumstances: Ortega as Educator* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971).

degree of tension each time we swing around, slipping along from the outside of the spiral, cold, abstract, and indifferent, toward a center which is frighteningly intimate, even pathetic in itself, although not in our way of handling it."[4]

¶5:38 So, like a leaf gently accelerated, spun by an eddy, at the outer-most edge of a whirlpool, let us start our first looping concentric circle, seemingly oblivious to both Dewey and Ortega, with certain reflections on "the pedagogical problem" as we will learn to call it. "D*as pädagogische Problem*" is a phrase that I take from the little-known but highly significant book by Hermann Leser, called precisely that, *The Pedagogical Problem*. This phrase was the title of a book published in Germany between the wars, in the last half of the 1920s, to be more precise.[5] We will begin to loop around both Dewey and Ortega as we ask what content might have gone with this title. What would a book on the pedagogical problem have been about?

¶6:38 It would be interesting to conduct a poll, giving people the title and asking them to guess the contents. Such a poll, conducted with different national samples of well-educated respondents, would probably reveal significant differences in the meaning attached to the pedagogical. Chances are that Americans would expect the book to concern problems of teaching in one form or another, for when we include "pedagogy" in the American lexicon we usually take it to mean the study of theories of teaching.[6] Leser's book, however, was a work of cultural history, interpreting how major European thinkers transformed ideas of independence and autonomy from the emergence of modernity in the renaissance and reformation through the enlightenment and into early 19th-century German *Neuhamanismus*. Leser touched on the efforts of some great reformers of didactic practice, but his central concern was a different kind of pedagogical problem.

¶7:38 A certain type of educator will react as if a red flag had been waved before his down-stretched head as he stomps the hard-packed earth, tensing to charge. If it is about a different kind of pedagogical problem, it isn't really pedagogical at all, he will contend.[7] Leser's pedagogical problem is an excuse for esoteric cultural history that has no real bearing on education at all, he will protest. But to so protest would be to miss the entire point, and to leave, among other things, the shared destiny, the conjoint task of Dewey and Ortega, entirely opaque. Those who find it strange that for Leser the pedagogical problem should have been a problem of cultural history should be the very ones most curious about

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[4] *What Is Philosophy?* (Mildred Adams, trans., New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960), p. 17.

[5] Hermann Leser, *Das Pädagogische Problem in der Geistesgeschichte der Neuzeit* (Munich: Druck and Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1925 & 1928).

[6] According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New College Edition), *didactics* is "the art or science of teaching or instruction, pedagogy," while *pedagogy* is "the art or profession of teaching." The problem with English usage, of course, is that it renders “pedagogy” and “didactics” almost entirely synonymous, with the result that the opportunity for a useful distinction in the language is lost.

[7] Thus the history of Western educational thought written in English has remained narrowly oriented to the history of didactic reformers. I will imply in what follows, and argue explicitly in a book to be finished in due course, *Rousseau and American Educational Scholarship*, that this preoccupation with didactic reform leads not only to inadequate history writing but further to stunted educational practices.

why he drew such a connection, which from their perspective seems so strange. What was the connection in his mind?

¶8:38 I have begun to clear away certain acculturated preconceptions that students bring in good faith but unawares to their apprehension of important matters. Original thinkers are original precisely because they somehow have the force of mind to break through such culturally induced preconceptions, doing so unselfconsciously, as a matter of course, and then in retrospect, to place them correctly, we have to see that indeed they so broke through the preconceptions under which we still labor. Neither Ortega nor Dewey would have found anything unusual or misplaced in Leser's conception of the pedagogical problem and as we come to see better why Leser apprehended the pedagogical problem as he did, we approach closer to a clear perception of the shared destiny, the conjoint task, that links Dewey and Ortega in history despite the distance between them.

¶9:38 For Leser, the pedagogical problem drew one into an investigation of cultural history. There was nothing highly unusual about the cultural history he investigated and his work merits respect as a good, not great, example of German cultural history in the tradition of Burckhardt and Dilthey. The first volume covered the renaissance through the enlightenment. It began with a discussion of the transition from the medieval to the modern period, followed by a chapter on renaissance humanism, a couple on the reformation, especially Melancthon, one on the Jesuits and the counter-reformation. From there Leser turned to the modern spirit as made manifest by Montaigne and Bacon, to the German didacticians, Rathke and Comenius, and then to Locke, to pietism, to Shaftesbury and Adam Smith. Finally, the volume closed with Rousseau, who Leser treated at length as the *Uberwindung* of the enlightenment, its overcoming, really its overturning from within its own genius and inspiration.

¶10:38 What is unusual about the content of *The Pedagogical Problem* becomes apparent when one reflects on it as educational history. Certain figures receive short shrift, particularly Pestalozzi, who Leser dealt with briefly, along with Basedow, at the end of his first volume, as offshoots, as epigones, of the enlightenment that Rousseau had laid to rest.[8] In his second volume, Leser continued this unusual weighting. He opened it with a discussion of how Kant, through the whole burden of his critical philosophizing, set the post-enlightenment problem in which men had to make a world and form themselves as best they could living onwards, ever in history, no longer tutored by a transcendent reason guaranteed by the order of the world itself. And from Kant, the pedagogical problem passed, at least in the classical German tradition, to the great students of man in history, to the neo-humanists, Lessing, Herder, and F. A. Wolf, and then to the triumvirate, to Schiller, to Goethe, and to Wilhelm von Humboldt. There the work ends, not so much complete as it would seem exhausted.[9]

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[8] See, Hermann Leser, , *op. cit*., Vol. 1, *Renaissance und Aufklärung im Problem der Bildung*, *passim*.

[9] Hermann Leser, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, *Die Deutsche-Klassische Bildungsidee*, appeared in 1928. The *"Vorwort*," p. V, promised a third volume, "der zu einem grossen Teil schon fertig vorleigt," which would deal with educational theory from Fichte to Herbart and the problems of the present. I find no

¶11:38 What was at stake in this story that Leser told? Why was it the story of the pedagogical problem? We must again resist the temptation to dismiss its being called that as something gratuitous and irrelevant to education. For Leser the pedagogical problem was the basic problem of education and it was a problem that received its contours from the main lines of modern Western cultural history. In part, the linkage between the pedagogical problem and the great figures of cultural history, a linkage of which we are taking Leser's work to be representative, arose most clearly to German thinkers and educators because of historical accident. We can perceive better what may be at stake generally by dwelling for a time on why the connection would seem especially clear to German historical observers.

¶12:38 Here we might note another peculiarity of Leser's history. He presented the history of the pedagogical problem as the story of man's drive to independence, to autonomy. From Anglo-American or French points of view, the modern drive to independence was primarily a political drive. Such was not the case for Leser. What was at stake for him in the unfolding of the pedagogical problem was the aspiration to self-determination that so fundamentally marks the history of the modern era. Self-determination was not, for Leser, primarily a political problem, although he recognized that it also was that and as such had tremendous consequences associated with the great revolutionary movements of the West. For Leser, Self-determination was, first and foremost, a pedagogical problem, *the* pedagogical problem, although not, as we will see, the whole of the pedagogical problem. As has been oft noted, for better and for worse, Germans historically had a deficient political arena within which they could strive to realize their aspiration to self-fulfillment. Their polities fragmented into a multiplicity of principalities, bishoprics, and free cities, a congeries of countervailing powers that long delayed the emergence of a German nation-state. As a result, far more than elsewhere, Germans channeled their emancipators' energies into educational endeavor.[10] Leser reflected this experience when he depicted the

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sign that the third volume was ever published.

[10] An excellent, exemplary history of education making this point is *Die Enstehung des moderner Erziehungswesens in Deutschland* by Wilhelm Roessler (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961). Andreas Flitner, in *Die Politische Erziehung in Deutschland: Geschichte and Probleme, 1750-1880* (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1957), showed the intertwining of politics and education in German thought, but the frequency with which Germans responded to political challenges, in the manner of Fichte with pedagogical solutions, buttresses the view that in the German tradition many emancipatory energies that elsewhere would have been channeled into political activity there went into educational work. W. H. Bruford's series of essays, The *German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: 'Bildung' from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), indicates how most of the great German literary personalities denigrated political commitment in favor of cultivation of personal independence, and Bruford rightly points out that this tendency had serious political and social compromises inherent in it. Fritz K. Ringer, in *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), charts in great detail how the cultural elite, accustomed to seeing itself through its aspiration to high culture to be the vanguard of the struggle for enlightened independence, could not adequately face the imperatives of twentieth-century sociopolitical life, a tale that would be more edifying were it told in German than it is in American English where it is likely to buttress different tendencies that may be no less distorting without the conscious effort of critics to lead against the grain.

modern Western drive for independence primarily as an educational aspiration and achievement.

¶13:38 Such historical accident helps explain the keen attention paid to education in the German tradition, but it does not invalidate (or validate for that matter) the conclusions that may have been drawn about the pedagogical problem by a thinker like Leser, whose attention to it may have been so heightened. One may be unusually alert to all sorts of matters for all sorts of reasons, but determining whether ones perception of the matter in that state of heightened alertness is sound or not cannot be reduced to assessing the causes of the heightened alertness itself. In Leser's view, education was the main agency for the historic emancipation that characterized modern history. So be it -- what then was the pedagogical problem? Why should there be something problematic? Why could the history of education not simply be the history of man's self-liberation, of his quest and achievement of an ever-increasing measure of independence?

¶14:38 Look at the basic German term, at *Bildung*, for instance, at the subtitle of Leser's first volume, *Renaissance und Aufklärung im Problem der Bildung*, renaissance and enlightenment in the problem of..., of, shall we say, formative education, something akin to the related English word, "building," something the artist does in making a picture, *ein Bild*, namely making a composition, shaping the form of a work.[11] All the important terms were drawn together in a beautiful phrase by Wilhelm Dilthey, who opened his *Pädagogik: Geschichte and Grundlinien des Systems* reclaiming the subject for philosophy, seeing in it nothing less than the highest realization of philosophy -- "*Blute and Ziel alter wahren Philosophie ist Pädagogik im weitesten Verstande, Bildungslehre des Menschen*," "the blossom and goal of all real philosophy is pedagogy in its widest sense, the formative theory of man."[12] The way to independence, autonomy, was through a properly formative education -- this condition laid down the pedagogical problem the solution of which would be the highest achievement of philosophy, its blossom and goal.

¶15:38 These were not offered simply as vague, edifying sentiments, salubrious inspiration to the practical teacher. Pedagogy in its widest sense was a formative theory of man, a molding, a shaping, a making, a constructing of human material through a type of activity integral to the great modern struggle to achieve emancipation, to win independence, to acquire autonomy, and as all that, pedagogy was integral to the highest, the most difficult, the most important matter in all serious philosophy, integral because pedagogy was *the* problem, the pedagogical problem, that inevitable, intimate juncture at which a person had to intervene in the lives of others, to mould, to shape, and to form them, to intervene with respect to those very things that were intrinsic to their achieving

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[11] An excellent orientation to the concept of *Bildung* can be found in the article and bibliography by Clemens Menze, "*Bildung*," in the *Handbuch Pädagogische Grundbegriffe* (edited by Josef Speck and Gerhard Wehle, 2 vols., Munich: Kosel-Verlag, 1970, Vol. 1, pp. 134-184).

[12] Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 9, Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1933, 3rd ed., 1961, p. 7). For a very distinguished study of the fundamental theme of education throughout Dilthey's work, see *Die Pädagogik Wilhelm Diltheys: Ihr wissenschaftstheoretischer Ansatz* in *Diltheys Theories der Geisteswissenschaften* by Ulrich Herrmann (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971).

independence, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and thus pedagogy was *the* problem because it was a powerful form of authority exercised by many, affecting all, that had therefore to be demonstrated as a legitimate authority with respect to man's soaring strivings to an emancipated, independent, responsible condition. According to what pattern and by what means should the educator seek to mould the mind and character of others and what grounds might the educator adduce for holding this formative effort to be a legitimate exercise of authority and power over others, correct in its means, fit in its ends, properly observant of the dignity and autonomy inalienable in the human subject upon which the educator wreaks real effects?

¶16:38 *What legitimates pedagogical authority?* The educator exercises power. Educating entails forming human character and pedagogy, a formative theory of man, guides the direction and means of such formative effort. The pedagogical problem arises because educators must search for grounds legitimating and justifying their power, for a foundation that secures their pedagogical authority in a culture bent on independence, one aspiring to autonomy and self-determination for all its members. Now we can understand more surely why Leser attended to the mainstream of cultural history in his study of the pedagogical problem. When one sees that problem to be a fundamental one of legitimating a constitutive and ubiquitous form of authority in the culture, it becomes clear that this problem is the problem of the mainstream of the culture and to understand the culture entails understanding how its shapers deal with this problem. That is why the pedagogical problem is the big, deep, difficult problem that no culture should shirk.

¶17:38 How have thinkers in modern Western culture dealt with the pedagogical problem? That question will lead us further in our effort to encircle the shared destiny, the conjoint task, that, we hypothesize, united Dewey and Ortega in a common historic enterprise. Traditionally, the pedagogical problem, understood as the problem of legitimating educational authority, put pedagogy in close relation to political theory, on the one hand, and, as the grounds for both, to metaphysics and epistemology, on the other, those two branches of philosophy being difficult to separate because, as we shall see, the metaphysics of substances was both result of and foundation for a theory of knowledge that held reason to be able to attain certain knowledge about substantial reality. The traditional relation between pedagogy and political theory is evident from the classic thinkers: Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, and many more, are all artful intertwinings of political and pedagogical thought. Within this tradition, both ideas concerning the proper constitution of the polity and those concerning the fit formation of the citizen spanned a considerable spectrum, but up until reasonably recent times in seemed clear to most who addressed the political and the pedagogical problem that it was susceptible to a sound solution. In other words, thinkers disagreed about what political and educative authority was legitimate but they did not question that one or another such authority could, with conviction, be legitimated.

¶18:38 Reason was the reason for this conviction. Erring men might differ about the proper findings of reason, but they agreed that reason, were it unerring, would give them knowledge of reality, a reality that was what it was as sound reason knew

it, quite independent of the knowing reasoner, and thus it seemed evident that an authority that could demonstrate itself to be consistent with a reason, the truth of which was established by the nature of reality, must be legitimate by virtue of its being consistent with and guaranteed by a substantial reality, substantial on its own ground, independent of man, unmalleable in its nature, impervious in its essence to human wish or art. Take as an instance Sir Robert Filmer who summed up a long tradition of legitimating the divine right of kings by showing it to be an instance of the paternal pedagogical authority delegated by God the father to all kinds of subsidiary fathers, including preeminently the monarchic ruler, all of whom were imbued with that fit right to discipline and chastise their charges by reason of what reason showed to be the essence of the great chain of being.[13]

¶19:38 Critics of established authority, political and pedagogical, chipped at the chinks, and the chinks were epistemological. Philosophers could adduce only the concept of substance, not substance itself, only the idea of being, but not the being of being, not *res* itself. Metaphysics had the embarrassing quality of being a theory, a doctrine, a pathetically insubstantial idea of substance. It is the magnificent paradox of learning: the more one learns the more one knows that one does not know and that precisely has been the collective experience of modern science and philosophy. The more reason progressed, the more powerful it became in systematically investigating the worlds of man and nature, the more evident its fundamental fallibility became; the more progressive the achievement, the more inescapable became the record of cumulative error and the less self-evident became the presumption to know reality itself. From Locke through Kant the suspicion dawned and matured into a reasoned demonstration that reason could not reach reality, whatever that might be, and could at best deal efficaciously with the phenomena apparent in experience.

¶20:38 In short, metaphysics was shown to be an epistemology that erred; a theory of knowledge that held knowledge to be founded on being, when in fact it was a mode of knowing that was inherently constrained to have recourse to the *concept* of substance, the first of Kant's analogies of experience among the categories of pure reason, in order to stabilize appearances so that they might be apprehended in experience. This demonstration of the limits of reason stands as one of the great achievements of epistemological philosophy, but it leads to a significant problem in the legitimization of authority, political or pedagogical.[14]

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[13] On Filmer see Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political, Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1975) and James Daly, *Sir Robert Filmer and English Political Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

[14] *Legitimation Crisis* by Jürgen Habermas (Thomas McCarthy, trans., Boston: Beacon Press, 1975) is a valuable summation of these problems. It is difficult to cite a properly selective set of studies summarizing the history of this problem, for in a basic sense it is the history of modern Western thought which is so rich and complicated that it cannot be adequately encompassed and the whole is apparent only as an incoherent set of separate phenomena. Thus we have phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory, existentialism, structuralism, the sociology of knowledge, endless variants of psychoanalysis and neo-Marxism, each as if it were a separate movement, along with all their recent derivatives among the academic coteries of post-structuralists, post-moderns, deconstructionists, and takers of this turn or that. Fundamental to them all is the pedagogical problem and its political counterpart, but

The actual spectrum of potential claims to legitimate pedagogical authority perhaps narrowed, at least within liberal democracies, but that was not the problem.[15] It could narrow or contract as the case may be, for now the problem was not which authority was legitimate, but whether any authority could be legitimated. If my reason is an artifact of my experience, and your reason the artifact of your experience, how can I rationally legitimate the authority of my experience over your experience? How can you claim by right to be my teacher, someone who forms and moulds my human character, my experiential unfolding? That, putting it directly, becomes the pedagogical problem.[16]

¶21:38 Nineteenth and twentieth century thought, in political theory and in pedagogy, in epistemology and metaphysics, in the philosophy of history and of law, in sociology and esthetics, in social criticism and interpretation theory, is replete with numerous attempts to solve the problem of authority that arises with the doubt that reason can legitimate the claims of power. We might here venture a typology of such efforts, but it would take us too far afield for it would entail something approaching a full history of thought during the period, a recapitulation and extension of Leser's effort. We can note, however, that diverse efforts can be grouped as variations of the traditional proclivity to look to the world for the source of authority, as forms of ersatz natural law. The two most widespread types of this strategy held authority to be based on either the supposed laws of history or the supposed laws of nature, Hegel and Marx often being taken as exemplars of the effort to legitimize authority by diagnosing the destined course

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that is a guess and who can apprehend it all? There are so many linkages that run deep and cut across so many isms and apparent dissimilarities that it seems virtually impossible to work out an account of twentieth-century thought that does justice to its real driving questions and patterns of stimulus and inspiration.

[15] The possibility of such narrowing is, I think, an interesting hypothesis, although certainly one that would be difficult to establish. The direction such an effort would take is indicated by Eugen Weber's important study *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). Such an hypothesis, I think, is the whole burden of the history of material life, particularly as it has been cultivated by its great French practitioners, among them Emmanuel LeRoy Laudrie, Pierre Goubert, Pierre Chaunu, and pre-eminently Fernand Braudel, particularly in *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible* (Sian Reynolds, trans., New York: Harper & Row, 1981). All this demonstrates, in a somewhat different style, Max Weber's basic critique of the rationalizing drives of modern Western thought, and a prolonged encounter with the work of Weber (Max, not Eugen) has been integral in my formation of the views expressed in this essay. Weber's ideal-type of rational-legal authority, however, should not be equated with the traditional grounding of authority through a reason held capable of reaching substantial reality, for the ideality of the type renders it far more contingent.

[16] This is not, of course, merely an esoteric problem. To be fully effective, teachers must believe that they teach rightly, not merely correctly. They need to teach, not simply according to a rationally recommended model, but with full, legitimate authority to teach what they teach in the way they teach it, and the terrible impotence of contemporary instructional systems is largely due to the absence of such conviction. So too, students must believe that their enterprise of study is also right in the full sense of the word, not only correct, not only successful, but justified as a value worth effort and sacrifice. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* remains one of the great testaments to the pedagogical transformation that can occur when the resentment at illegitimate instructors is converted into the conviction that one's educative quest is fully justified. Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is, in contrast, a wrenching study of what can happen when a person's sense of pedagogical justification is not strong enough to withstand a lack of sustaining care that others, high and low, can manifest.

of history, and the social Darwinists, the demagogues of racial theory, and, I think, believers in the unseen-hand of the marketplace as a natural allocative force, for better and for worse, exemplify the attempt to legitimize power by appeal to various laws of nature.[17]

¶22:38 A second very widespread response to the pedagogical problem, the problem of legitimating educational authority, might be located in the interaction of what we will call cynical naivety and naive skepticism. Thus, one side denies that there is a problem of authority by insisting that the traditional metaphysical expectations would still be as good as ever if only the skeptics would stop willfully questioning what it is not meet for man to question, while the other side ignores the problem of authority by simply restating the critique of metaphysics in ever more refined variations, taking the persisting voices for traditional metaphysics as evidence that their own continuing discovery of the limits of reason does indeed push the frontiers of thinking into yet undiscovered territory. I fear a great proportion of academic philosophizing can be allocated to one or the other side of this strategy for begging the question, for evading the pedagogical problem.[18]

¶23:38 A third type of response to the problem, one that neither looks to the external world for a foundation for legitimate authority nor denies the problem by reiterating the ways of thinking that had already unfolded in history to disclose the problem, consists in efforts to ground human authority in human

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[17] *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964) and *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950) by Karl R. Popper are the best known and most influential critiques of these tendencies in the work of Hegel and Marx, but although Popper properly warns against the havoc that can be caused by believers in causes apparently legitimated by the destined course of history, he does not, I think, do justice to either Hegel or Marx, but that would take us afield. Jacques Barzun's *Race, A Study in Superstition* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965) remains an excellent critique of racism. The tendency to sublimate responsible political activity into the impersonal operation of formal organizations and impersonal processes is brilliantly stated with distinct but complementary emphases by Sheldon S. Wolin in *Politics and Vision: Continuity and, Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), especially chapters 9 and 10; by Theodore J. Lowi in *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States* (2nd ed., New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979); by J. G. A. Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); and by Bernard Crick *In Defense of Politics*, (revised ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964). I think that the archetype of this critique and its often unrecognized but subterranean inspiration was in the work of Max Weber, most apparently in his great essay "Politics as a Vocation," translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, pp. 77-128). Were this a different occasion, I would try to show that Weber's ideas of a value-free social science, combined with his conviction that politics had to be a domain of responsible, public, personal choice, amounted to precisely a fundamental critique of the expectation that responsibility for the creation of values could be shifted from the fallible human to infallible laws *of* either society, history, or *of* nature.

[18] Leo Strauss is the most distinguished of the traditionalists I have in mind here, for instance *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965). Stephen Toulmin, in his section on "Rationality and Conceptual Diversity" in volume one of *Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, pp. 35-130) gives a good critique of the inability academic philosophers have encountered in trying to go beyond the problems encountered by Kant in trying to ground reason.

life itself, the experiential immediacy of lived life.[19] Here at last we come to grips with the conjoint destiny of Ortega and Dewey, their shared task, which was, simply, in their different but powerful ways, to be major representatives of this effort to ground educational authority, to solve the pedagogical problem, by showing that experience, life, was the ineluctable foundation on which one encounters an ought that is.

¶24:38 Think back to the traditional metaphysics, to the metaphysics of substance. The problem with this metaphysics was that substance could be adduced only qua concept, not qua substance, and what was supposed to be founded on being ends confined to a phenomenalism in which all continuities and form could be demonstrated to be, not realities, but necessary conditions of the possibility of experience. With Kant, the critical standpoint of transcendental philosophy laid to rest claims to know transcendent reality. What at any time would pass for reality was constituted by the experiencing subject. The first variant of the post-Kantian effort to escape this phenomenalism, as we have briefly seen, turned to the world and held, with numerous variations of nuance, that a perfected reality would in due course be constituted in history or in nature by the developmental dynamics inherent in it and that those claims to wield power that worked in ways conducive toward the destined perfection of reality were in truth endowed with all the trappings of legitimate power. Such a mode of reasoning proved all-too-susceptible to rationalizing the dominance of arbitrary power, which, when historic prospect turned historic retrospect, seemed to be far from a destined perfection of reality.

¶25:38 Rather than turn outward, however, to the constituting of a perfected reality in the world, be it historical or natural, the Kantian critique left open a possible strategy of turning inward, to discovering the foundation of experience in experience, in life, in the phenomenon of phenomena. Here we must recognize that Dewey and Ortega were but two among a distinguished group of thinkers who pursued this solution to the pedagogical problem. It is impossible, within the confines of a paper such as this, to do justice to all contributions to this departure in modern thought. For our purposes here suffice it to concentrate on the basic similarities, as variations on this theme of our time, in the way that Dewey and Ortega grounded pedagogical authority on an ontology of experience and of life.

¶26:38 Let us not speak, here, any longer of "metaphysics" as the "beyond *phusis*", that which is really there behind the surface of things, because this way of speaking is too freighted with the concept of transcendent substance. Let us speak instead of the "ontic" -- not even, please note, of the ontological, which leads us into the trap of the mere discourse on being, but of the simply ontic, of that with the quality of being. Now the basic foundation upon which Ortega and Dewey built, along with others, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Husserl, among them, was that life, experience, call it what one would, was the ontic foundation of all appearances, the ground of all phenomena. Whether any substance lay there in reality behind the thing of appearance was moot. It was not moot, however, that the thing of

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[19] In recent American academic philosophy, Richard Rorty in *Philosophy, and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) and Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) have made significant turns in this direction.

appearance existed in my life, in my experience. Life, experience, was the ontic foundation and both Ortega and Dewey used it to legitimate definite visions of educational authority, to base solutions to the pedagogical problem.

¶27:38 To establish this similarity through a detailed *explication de texte* would turn this essay into a tome, for virtually the entire corpus of each man's work would merit being deployed in the exposition. Instead, I will give a summary statement of the ontic foundation on which each thinker built, offering the hypothesis that each summation, however un-nuanced from excessive compression, does justice to the generative conviction of each and that the generative conviction that each thinker worked from in addressing the pedagogical problem is closely, sympathetically related to that of the other. Such a method will not establish a conclusion, but it may stimulate further reflection, and that precisely is the purpose of an essay such as this. Hence. . . .

¶28:38 For Dewey, experience is the undifferentiated ontic ground of all possibilities. Because everything that exists phenomenally exists in experience, experience is that monistic whole in which all dualisms exist reconciled as tools for the reconstruction of experience in awareness, which reconstruction is the basic norm, the ought that is, for by that reconstruction the experiencing person can achieve growth in experience, the capacity for more experience. Because experience is an ontic ground, growth, the reconstruction of experience in awareness, the ground of experience, that is, the capacity for more experience, is an ought, an imperative, a necessary object of effort, for if it were not, the ground, however real at the moment, would likely as not self-destruct, proving transient, ceasing to be a ground. More experience must be the goal of experience qua ontic ground for when it ceases to be so the ontic ground ceases to be an ontic ground – death overcomes experience. Education is another, summational term for the growth and reconstruction of experience, and thus for Dewey education is an ought of experience and in this way he provides a solution to the pedagogical problem. Education is a legitimate imperative, encountered as such in the ontic ground, in experience. Precisely what forms of education are legitimate forms becomes apparent as the imperative of growth further unfolds as a norm existent in experience, qua ontic ground, disclosing a political norm of democratic participation. Growth in each person's capacity for more experience in a polity in which each person's growing capacity for more experience is reinforced and secured by a growing common capacity to initiate and manage shared experience: *ecce* democracy. A common, democratic education, efficacious for all, should constantly facilitate this democracy, of shared, common experience. These are specifications for legitimate pedagogical and political authority that Dewey found to be norms existent in experience, the ontic ground of everything.[20]

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[20] My gross compression of Dewey, here, is heavily dependent on recurrent readings of *Democracy and Education* (1916, New York: The Free Press, 1966). John J. McDermott, in his influential anthology, *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) indicates the basic point here when he observes that "Dewey's philosophy of experience was a pedagogy and his pedagogy was a philosophy of experience" (p. 421) and calls a key section "Experience Is Pedagogical" (pp. 421-523), using the substantive, *is*, and not, as in the section that follows, "Experience as Aesthetic," the mere preposition, *as*.

¶29:38 For Ortega, *life*, more particularly, *my* life, is the palpitating ontic ground of all possibilities. Everything that exists, exists in life, in my life, in your life. Without life, existence disappears and mute, moot stuff perhaps remains: without life, I neither care nor know. Life does not merely happen, a series of meaningless events that a passive subject undergoes; life is lived, life is active, creative, a tense drama of attempted achievements and suffered outcomes. Vital norms exist in life, not as secondary attributes of the living substance, but in the life lived qua ontic ground, in the vital existence that I and that you each lives. These norms are life projects, destinies, duties, tasks, a continuous succession of orientations toward the future, toward the possibilities of life, which we are continually choosing and the consequences of which we are continually suffering. What Dewey called the reconstruction of experience, Ortega called the choice of a life project, and for both the reconstructing and the choosing went on continually, and for both according to the quality of the reconstructing and the choosing so followed the quality of the existence experienced or lived. Thus for Ortega, destiny became a legitimate authority operating through oneself and others in the education of ones self and the working out of a common, public destiny or task became the legitimate authority structuring political life. Ortega, in contrast to Dewey, did not make a fetish of using democratic terminology, but like Dewey, Ortega insisted first that political norms existed in the ontic ground of life and second that these norms required the full participation of all in the determination and achievement of a common destiny and third that the greatest threat to such norms arose from the self-interested dominance by unworthy elites.[21] With respect to the problem, how to legitimate political and pedagogical authority, Ortega and Dewey were very close, finding norms for such authority to exist in the ontic ground, essentially the same ontic ground in the philosophy of each, life in the one terminology and experience in the other.

¶30:38 These flat statements, however essential they may be, leave the dramatic tension that constituted the lives of the two men still masked as they coped with their historic worlds, the worlds in their lives, not their lives in the world. This dramatic tension arose on one side from their personal aspirations to act as educators of their respective publics, aspirations that they could form because they recognized the pedagogical problem to be susceptible to solution. The tensions between selves and circumstances with the ontic ground of lived lives took form on the other side as their aspirations conflicted with the recalcitrant actualities of their historic worlds, actualities in lived experience that rendered their efforts to educate the public largely ineffectual. Both, in the process, became great thinkers, but great thinkers who wielded a power of dubious concrete effectiveness.

¶31:38 Ortega, as a man in the world, possessed a flair that Dewey seems to have lacked, a flair that informs Ortega's prose, a charisma that attracts attention to him in a group, a presence that made his comings and goings into events in the lives of others. Ortega, more than Dewey, marked himself as someone who consciously exercised public influence, who organized political initiatives, who

[21] My characterization here is based on the study of Ortega I have done over the years, reflected in *Man and his Circumstances* cited at the outset.

purposively innovated, seeking new, more effective ways to elevate public opinion. Ortega, more than Dewey, seemed aware with courageous perseverance that events were overtaking his aspirations, not invalidating them, but overwhelming them – "*¡No es esto, no es esto!*"[22] Thus Ortega, far more than Dewey, confronts us with a drama, a tragedy, at once intellectual and emotional.

¶32:38 Dewey, in contrast to Ortega, seems a bit flat, consistent, lacking the tension in his life that so profoundly characterized the life of Ortega. To see it this way is, I think, a failure of our perspective rather than to identify a real quality of Dewey's life. Dewey was, of course, chronologically considerably older than Ortega, but in vital time they were, I think, close to exact contemporaries: within the context of the life each lived, the work of each began to take on its characteristic shape and win some prominence in the very early 1900's, both had their periods of active influence from about 1914 to the mid 1930's, both then had a substantial period in which they could reflect upon their earlier work to qualify and extend it, and both have since their deaths in the early 1950's had considerable posthumous influence. All this, in part, is thus to raise the question: might historical generations be defined as much by when people die as by when they are born?

¶33:38 Be that as it may, for many, Dewey seems never to have lived in the sense of having had to struggle in anguish and in joy, but this flatness in his intellectual life is something projected onto it from the perspective of the retrospective observer. In reading Dewey, whether to praise him or to blame him, we blandly assume that he worked docilely as educator within the neo-Herbartian assumptions that have so vitiated educational discourse in America in the twentieth century. These assumptions render the observer oblivious to the pedagogical problem, to the recognition that all education entails the establishment and legitimization of authority. The neo-Herbartian assumptions make pedagogy a dependent implementation of psychology, a technical problem of devising artfully effective means. In seeing Dewey as an artificer, for good or ill, of progressive teaching methods, we thus perpetuate the terrible tragedy that was Dewey's destiny from the beginning. Dewey clearly wrote, like Ortega, in a tradition in which pedagogy worked in tandem with political philosophy and in which the two together were the channels through which persons came to participate in the culture and the polity as responsible agents pursuing life, liberty, and happiness in common with their peers.

¶34:38 Dewey worked as a student of *Wertrationalität*, as someone searching for the ground that made the activity of valuing possible. Dewey has been systematically perceived, however, as someone proffering a *Zweckrationalität*, as a proponent of rationally improved means for the pursuit of a happenstance end in view. To be sure, the term instrumentalism, invited this misperception, but for Dewey, within experience, an instrument was not a mere means to an extrinsic end; an instrument was a process by which we develop value in experience. Dewey has passed into history, having suffered the tragedy of enduring the fundamental misperception of his work. He has lost from it; we however remain as the continuing losers from it, and it is with respect to this condition,

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[22] *Rectificación de la República*, *Obras completas*, 11, p. 387.

our condition, not the condition of either Ortega or of Dewey, that I want to close with certain reflections on the possible future.

¶35:38 It was not without reason that Dewey and Ortega lived the intellectual tragedies that they lived. It is not without reason than the pedagogical problem is a permanent problem, that *Wertrationalität* drifts into desuetude, despite our high-minded protests against a tyrannical *Zweckrationalität*. To admit that there are reasons for these conditions is not to propound, to condone, to commend, or to collaborate with these; it is rather to attempt to think honestly about them with the intent, should fortune shine fair, of charting a way through them to a more favorable prospect. Let us, in this frame, turn back to our abbreviated typology of responses to the pedagogical problem that have characterized the post-Kantian era in Western thought. There were the deniers of the problem, who are thus destined to forever rediscover it, and then a group who turned outward to history or nature for a solution followed by our heroes who turned inward, to life, to experience, finding there the grounding where the ought is.

¶36:38 This, I think, is the right way, the only way, to encounter norms that exist: we encounter them there in the lives we live as ineluctably real values in our lived lives, which makes them, as such, the values of our lives; they are there, not as attributes, but as the ground, in life, in experience. When I encounter in experience, in life, an ought that is, I encounter grounds where authority is legitimate; where an ought is, I will be responsive to authoritative influence; where an ought is, I will feel it right to command. Norms existing, however, is not the same as norming existence; and the fulfillment of life and experience entails both norms existing and norming existence, and it is the latter half of the matter that brings us back to the turn outward, to the role of history in lived lives, and, as we insinuated it a moment ago, to that capricious mystery of experience, *fortuna*.

¶37:38 Clearly, adamantly, neither history nor nature, taken as transcendent objectivities, present us with existing norms, with an ought that is. Yet when we speak of the tragedy in Ortega's life, the drama in Dewey's experience, we are speaking of something that involves more than only the norms that existed in their lives, in their experience. We might put it this way: the grounds for valuing, for exercising authority, for recognizing right, are in life, in experience, and to put it even more actively, these grounds are in the living, in the experiencing, and such grounds are nowhere else. But, and here the inward turns outward, the occasions for actualizing the valuing either are or are not encountered there in the world, in the history given to us through the circumstances of our lives. For the fulfillment in life, in experience of the ought that is in my experiencing, in my living, I must encounter a correlative is that ought to be, upon which I can act to manifest the norm that exists in my life. The ought that is in my experience is such inalienably, whatever the world may be in the face of it, but for that inalienable ought that is to be fulfilled, brought to realization, the world as it is there in my experience must present the fit opportunity, the occasion, something that is, there in the world, upon which I can act affirmatively as a potentiality that I experience as something that ought to be. Real fulfillment results when an ought that is in experience meets in the world, in history, an is that ought to be and the normative agent can then act to realize its

worth. Fortune forced on Dewey and Ortega a world of action in which the historic opportunities were such that neither man could realize the values each found in his experience: that was the drama and tragedy, in its largest sense, of their respective lives.

¶38:38 Are we able to live our lives such that we ineluctably experience existent oughts? And will fortune, insofar as we experience existing norms, favor us with better opportunities for norming existence, for affirming actualities as ones that ought to be? As for Dewey and Ortega, so too for us, these are the questions the pedagogical problem puts to us out of which we constitute the drama and the destiny of our lives.