

DEWEY IN HIS SKIVVIES: THE TROUBLE WITH RECONSTRUCTION

Robbie McClintock

Teachers College
Columbia University

ABSTRACT. In this essay, Robbie McClintock argues that educational theorists have inflated John Dewey's deserved reputation beyond what the quality of his work can sustain. He briefly recounts how Dewey developed a program for reconstruction in philosophy, education, and social life with the aim of overcoming chronic dislocations in social life. McClintock sees two parts to Dewey's reconstruction: a negative program, in which Dewey rejects the metaphysical heritage that had induced these social dislocations; and a positive program, in which he advances scientifically grounded instrumentalities for a more humane conduct of life. McClintock hypothesizes that Dewey's negative reconstruction, based on facile historical reasoning, dismissed historical resources that could have strengthened his positive program to develop a naturalistic humanism, one more instrumental in the art of living. To explain his hypothesis, McClintock selectively shows how, in numerous works, Dewey rejected prior thinking unnecessarily as a means to advance his ideas, focusing in particular on Dewey's dismissive assessment of Immanuel Kant's and G. W. F. Hegel's work. McClintock criticizes Dewey's historical views to encourage present-day educational thinkers to avoid emulating them and to make full, creative use of the philosophical tradition instead. He closes the essay by suggesting how historical reason can anticipate future possibilities and thus inform present action, and by calling on all to use it in humanizing the lifeworld we share.

I don't suggest the emperor had no clothes. We all admire John Dewey's work; it formed and inspired us. He thought extensively, worked hard, and composed an unparalleled corpus, exemplary in scope and influence. Yet his thought looms large, especially among theorists of education. Do we overvalue it, narrowing our horizon to his concerns?

Dewey lived a human life, like ourselves, like the woman in the next office, the man down the hall, or those in the pantheon — Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, or Nietzsche. All of us, the raw student and the hallowed name, are simply human. As we meet — in and across both time and space — we do so as peers, toe to toe, at once equals yet each unique.

And in our interactions, comprising human, all-too-human lives, we try to judge ourselves and others rightly even though the just estimation is never given, clearly marked as true. Judging worth in the face of uncertainty, we approximate sound evaluation, an estimate that fluctuates around positives and negatives, we modulate our estimates, never able to claim certainty, fully attained.

Further complicating the positives and negatives, a double uncertainty arises from the interactive flux of life. What strengths and weaknesses do we perceive in those whom we assess? And how do our affinities and aversions, our own dispositions — enthused, credulous, worldly, cautious, skeptical — bias our perceptions of others?

We all learn that we might err in perceiving. In Hans Christian Andersen's beloved tale, the swindling weavers played on this caution to get the emperor and his people, the high and the low, to misjudge what plainly met their eyes. While weaving the emperor's finery, the pair repeatedly warned everyone that their handiwork would appear invisible to the "unusually stupid" or someone "unfit for his office." Together, this combination can induce big errors in the shared estimate of reputations.

On one side, mystified by something of high repute, but feeling devoid of pretension about it, we are all inclined to hold ourselves unusually stupid — of course, not globally, but with the specific at hand. "I just don't get it. But who am I? If *they* say it's so, it must be right" — be *it* classical music, abstract art, macroeconomics, or whatever. But by itself, the ordinary person's self-effacement wouldn't have made the weavers' swindle work, for prudent expertise would dependably have spoken up. But it didn't. Those, like us, who fancy we enjoy some repute, relative to a matter in repute, avoid seeming unfit for our status, seriously biasing our judgment. If I can't see a virtue that other experts see, or if another discovers a virtue that I fail to perceive, I lose face and maybe even more.

Hence, as a public reputation grows, good or bad, ordinary complaisance and expert conformity both strengthen. With this combination at work, a misperception builds and persists, as in Andersen's tale. The swindle worked until a child blurted out, "he hasn't got anything on!" Being too naïve to doubt what she saw, and too young to have her motive questioned, she made the misjudgment obvious to all and even the shivering emperor suspected she was right.

Having reached an age and status often described as a second childhood, I will say what seems plain to me. Through a combination of general complaisance and expert conformism, we educational theorists have inflated Dewey's deserved reputation far beyond what the quality of his work can sustain. Less naïve than Andersen's child, I state my view as a reasoned hypothesis, indicating why I think it merits consideration.

First, in "Reconstructing Reconstruction," I recount briefly how Dewey initially formed *an aspiration to act*, putting forth a program for reconstruction in philosophy, education, and social life. Through reconstruction he sought to overcome chronic dislocations in social life by rejecting the faulty intellectual heritage that had induced and sustained them, replacing it with generative ideas, soundly grounded instrumentalities for a more humane conduct of life. Second, in "Reconstruction, *Just So*," I indicate the nub of my hypothesis, namely that Dewey pursued the negative part of his program for reconstruction — his rejection of past thinkers and their thinking — through a vacuous form of historical reason, weakening his positive program for a naturalistic humanism, one more instrumental in the art of living. Here I explain my hypothesis by sampling a spectrum of evidence selectively. Then in the third and fourth sections, "Dewey's Persistent

Kantian Misconstruction" and "Woozling in Reverse," I criticize Dewey on Kant and Hegel, showing how a misplaced animus weakened how he mobilized historical resources for his work. In the fifth section, "Envoi," I suggest how historical reason can anticipate future possibilities and thus inform present action, and I call on all to use it in humanizing the lifeworld we share.

RECONSTRUCTING RECONSTRUCTION¹

Scholars have documented Dewey's life and work thoroughly. My thesis does not rest on newly discovered materials. Let's ground it instead by looking at available materials in a more critical spirit than has been the norm. But first, we need to note some high points in Dewey's education and early career as he formed an active program for reconstruction in philosophy, education, and society, which he then steadily pursued through his mature work.

Thinking precedes thought; acting before action. Youthful wondering preceded Dewey's formed ideas about reconstruction. Looking back at 71, Dewey narrated how active goals of reconstruction engaged him long before he linked them with that term. As an undergraduate, religious conflicts roiled him and "social interests and problems" moved him. Exploring those in the college library, Dewey encountered Harriet Martineau's presentation of Auguste Comte's positive philosophy. Much in it did not catch his interest, "but [Comte's] idea of the disorganized character of Western modern culture, due to a disintegrative 'individualism,' and his idea of a synthesis of science that should be a regulative method of an organized social life, impressed me deeply" (*LW* 5, 153–154).² Here Dewey succinctly identified the start of his lifelong commitment to reconstruction, an effort to cut the disintegrative individualism endemic in Western culture from its roots, replacing it with an instrumental synthesis of science regulating the organization of social life.

Graduating in 1879, still a raw youth of only 20, Dewey took fifteen years to form his Comtean aspiration fully into his program for reconstruction in philosophy, education, and society. He marked time for three years, earned his PhD in two, and then started teaching at the University of Michigan in 1884, when he was 25 years old. In 1886, he married Alice Chipman, and soon he had a growing family,

1. The Hathi Trust Digital Library (<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Search/Advanced>) gives full-view access to virtually all the resources useful for contextualizing Dewey's work published prior to 1923. I have used diverse biographical resources for Dewey, particularly George Dykhuizen, *The Life of John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973); and Barbara Levine, *Chronology of John Dewey's Life and Work* (Carbondale, Illinois: Center for Dewey Studies, 2016). The Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan provided access to Eliza Jane Read Sunderland's notebooks on courses Dewey taught between 1889 and 1902 (on microfilm MF622C) via Interlibrary Loan. For the sake of readability and economy of space, I omit much analysis and documentation. Interested readers can download the full monty, "Dewey in His Skivvies, Annotated," at <http://www.educationalthought.org/files/dewey.pdf>. It gives full citations to over 100 sources, in addition to Dewey's collected works, correspondence, and lectures.

2. All references to Dewey's works, unless otherwise specified, will be to *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953, Electronic Edition*, eds. Jo Ann Boydston and Larry Hickman (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2003). These will be cited in the text as *EW*, *MW*, and *LW*, respectively. For instance, the citation (*LW* 5, 153–154) refers to *Later Works*, volume 5, pages 153–154.

a straitened budget, and a full calendar of activity. Success was less an achievement, more an imperative. A research scholar, he produced articles in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, *Andover Review*, *Science*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, and a bunch in the prestigious journal *Mind*. In 1887, his substantial textbook, *Psychology*, won good reviews and wide course adoptions. A year later, his careful critique, *Leibniz's New Essays Concerning the Human Understanding*, followed. At 28, his career was off and running and would continue unabated for another sixty-five years.

Catapulting as a student and novice professor through the 1880s, Dewey rapidly absorbed knowledge and a professional role, that of an emerging authority in the history of philosophy with an interest in philosophical psychology, the rising protégé of Professor George Morris. Dewey's first two books and his essays prior to 1889 fit this role, advancing views quite different from the program for reconstruction in philosophy that he would soon start enunciating. Late in the decade, however, Dewey began to break from Morris. In 1888, Dewey jumped to the University of Minnesota, in search of better pay and a clearer path up the academic ranks. Early in 1889, an event erased any potential ambivalence about going it alone. Morris died unexpectedly. That fall, at 30, Dewey returned, newly promoted, to head Michigan's philosophy department. Dewey grasped his main chance, blossoming as he defined his distinctive life work.

Reconstruction had already entered Dewey's vocabulary in two distinct senses. The first came from the faculty psychology of Dewey's youth, indicating what the imagination does in reconstructing stored-away data into active memories. Dewey spoke of reconstruction in this established sense in his first book, *Psychology*: "Our past experiences are gone. ... They have no existence until the mind reconstructs them" (*EW* 2, 155). Examples of this usage are scattered throughout Dewey's work, generalized to apply to various mental activities; for instance, most famously in Dewey's definitions of education: "We thus reach a technical definition of education: It is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (*MW* 9, 82). As here, this usage frequently appeared reinforced with synonyms, and Dewey used this ordinary sense, sometimes strategically, again as here, but not distinctively, in common with all who speak of the process of reconstructing one thing or another.

In his book on Leibniz, Dewey had introduced a second sense of *reconstruction*, indicating not what minds generally do, but what philosophers specifically do. He extracted the root meaning from Descartes: "the method of philosophy consists in the analysis of any complex group of ideas down to simple ideas which shall be perfectly clear and distinct; that all such clear and distinct ideas are true, and may then be used for the synthetic reconstruction of any body of truth" (*EW* 2, 272). Later in the work, Dewey began to give it a more systemic sense: if altering a key idea transformed controlling, foundational concepts, working the reconstruction fully through would fully transform a system of thought. Dewey described how Leibniz, *pace* Locke, found no grounds for necessity in experience. Hence, "both form and content, accordingly, need to be reconstructed [by Leibniz] if they are to be

worthy of the name of science or of knowledge" (*EW* 2, 326, see also 416). More than a method for doing philosophy, Dewey made it the basis for a life agenda of work.

Reconstructing, in its first sense, as a mental activity, occurs throughout Dewey's work. We may encounter it, but not as a primary concern. Reconstruction, in its second sense, as a philosophic transformation carried out by specific thinkers, also occurs throughout Dewey's work. In this sense, reconstruction indicated the outcome of philosophic inquiry and argumentation more than the unfolding of a general intellectual process. This reconstruction made past sources of error and discord inoperative and replaced them with instrumental resources for guiding current and future activity. We will concentrate on it in criticizing the program Dewey developed and pursued as his life work, reconstruction in philosophy, education, and social life.

Following Morris's death, Dewey rapidly developed his program of reconstruction. By 1890–1891, in essays on the self in relation to Kant and Hegel (*EW* 3, 56–74), on moral theory and practice (*EW* 3, 93–109), and on logical theory (*EW* 3, 125–141), Dewey repeatedly used the concept of reconstruction in explaining the fundamental contradiction in contemporary life between the promise of scientific rationality and the senescence of accompanying metaphysical ideas about human action and morality. He structured the last essay on the present position of logical theory to explain the task the reconstructive agenda would take up. "Science has got far enough along to make its negative attitude towards previous codes of life evident, while its own positive principle of reconstruction is not yet evident." These reflections climaxed in questioning where logical theory stood in the present: "when we speak of the rationality, of the intrinsic meaning of fact, can these terms be understood in their direct and obvious sense, and not in any remote, or merely metaphysical sense?" (*EW* 3, 125–129). This and similar questions rhetorically implied a reconstruction in logic and thought, one that required our "acting on it, only *ambulando*," on our feet: to allow scientific rationality to guide practical life by putting a stop to remote, metaphysical thought (*EW* 3, 140–141).

Two years later, James Tufts recommended his friend and colleague Dewey to head the philosophy department at the University of Chicago. Up to this time, Dewey had integrated his philosophic career into a context of Christian observance, conventional through the nineteenth century in American higher education. A small community, Ann Arbor clustered some 10,000 people around an academic institution that fulfilled familiar collegiate roles with intimations of becoming a large research and teaching institution. Already, Dewey had been taking the train west from Ann Arbor to Chicago, five hours or so, to participate in the social reform activities of Hull House. And Chicago's philosophy department included pedagogy, a path to apply reconstruction directly in life. With the move, he could better put his reconstructive program into practice.

In mid-May 1894, Michigan students, sad and proud, hung Dewey's portrait in Newberry Hall and gathered to hear him address the Students' Christian Association one last time. "No one can afford to miss the privilege of hearing him" (*CJD*

1, #00125).³ Dewey was not merely moving from one university to another; he was marking a significant change in his work and the context he set it in. He bid farewell to an academic institution and to its students, but the institution and his students were an ethos of activity, a community, a way of living with which he had identified. Dewey simply called his farewell, "Reconstruction" (*EW* 4, 96–105). His words explained his own reconstruction, why he was leaving the practice of philosophy within the ethos of a Christian community to embrace an effort to reconstruct the secular world with a philosophy of life grounded on scientific principles.

For an unassuming man, Dewey depicted a remarkable challenge. As a historical advent, pursued for centuries, Christianity had advanced three great ideals: first, "the value, the inalienable worth, of the individual soul"; second, personal participation in a Kingdom of God in which people bound themselves together "in one harmonious whole of sympathy and action"; and third, the revelation of a truth to man that sufficed supreme, without ambiguities, for the guidance of life. Dewey averred that historically Christians had achieved each sufficiently to make them habitual, matters of lip service, and consequently that these great ideals had ceased to work as aspirations. Their redemptive power had thereby disappeared.

Like many others in his time, Dewey was moving into a secular world. Christianity had become an ineffectual shell, lacking moral force. The material power of science incessantly destabilized a moral order shakily secured by outworn, ineffectual habits. Piecemeal solutions to specific dislocations would not suffice. Science must become a method of truth, not only for the control of the material world, but as "the actual incarnation of truth in human experience and the necessity of giving heed to it." Remote, merely metaphysical thinking impeded the sound use of scientific method in conducting human affairs. Breaking the ghostly grip of historical life and infusing experience with methods of conduct based on sound science became the mission guiding his work. Reconstruction had to decouple the engine of science from traditional philosophy to enable it to guide practical life with tested, instrumental knowledge, or, as Dewey put it years later, knowledge that "is instrumental to the enrichment of immediate experience through the control over action that it exercises" (*LW* 10, 294).

On moving to Chicago, Dewey's life became more thoroughly secular and his commitment to reconstruction filled out conceptually as well as practically, more actively, on his feet. Dewey worked reflectively and energetically to reconstruct the practice of education. In "My Pedagogic Creed" Dewey closely connected education to reconstructing in both its senses: (1) as a cognitive process, "I believe ... that education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing"; and (2) as a sociocultural program, "I believe that education is a regulation of the process of

3. All references to Dewey's correspondence will be to *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, ed. Larry Hickman (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2008). His correspondence will be cited in the text as *CJD*, followed by the volume and letter number. For instance, the citation (*CJD* 1, #00125) refers to *Correspondence*, volume 1, letter number 00125.

coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction" (*EW* 5, 91 and 93).

Reconstruction rested on education, the existential starting point for all persons, and, as Dewey's summative concern, reconstruction encompassed all of life. An all-encompassing reach distinctively characterized Dewey's life work, and it derived from his program of reconstruction. Donald F. Koch, editor of Dewey's class lectures on political philosophy, logic, and ethics, for 1892 through 1903, treats them all as a massive effort in collaboration with his students to work out the theoretical and practical implications of reconstruction as an intellectual enterprise for the twentieth century (*CLJD* 1).⁴ The concept of reconstruction in name and in substance made possible the extraordinary scope of Dewey's collected writings, an outsized assemblage of books, articles, and other texts subjecting all walks of life to his reconstructive program.

Beginning with his reading of Comte, ending with his very late writings, reconstruction as a program had a negative and a positive agenda. The negative consisted in Dewey's efforts to break thought about human conduct free from its roots in the remote, metaphysical systems of prior philosophy. Through Dewey's negative agenda of reconstruction, he argued strenuously that philosophers should "turn their backs completely" on metaphysical dualisms in the emerging scientific era.⁵ And the positive agenda encompassed Dewey's efforts to ground principles for the rectification of practice in education, public affairs, social life, and aesthetic life, which we can loosely sum up as his instrumentalism or experimentalism.

In what follows, I hypothesize that the trouble with reconstruction arose primarily from Dewey's pursuit of his negative agenda, an ill-conceived polemic against the historical tradition in philosophy and its implications for education and other humane concerns. To carry out his negative work, Dewey needed to show that prominent thinkers of the past had formulated and propagated unsound ideas that present-day people should discard or ignore. He tried to do that without engaging the erring ideas at close quarters. His negative agenda became a blanket rejection, leading him to discard much of potential value to his positive agenda. I believe constructive reconstruction — adapting instrumental rationality for the guidance of practical life — also had significant weaknesses, but I will leave the positive agenda and its weaknesses for brief consideration in later sections.

4. All references to Dewey's class lectures refer to *The Class Lectures of John Dewey*, ed. Donald F. Koch (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2010). His lectures will be cited in the text as *CLJD*, followed by the volume and page number. For instance, the citation (*CLJD* 1, 2247) refers to *Class Lectures*, volume 1, page 2247. (Yes, *CLJD* 1 has 2,650 pages; I have seen in recent work on Dewey references to *CLJD* 2, but it does not seem to be available through InteLex and I have been unable to use it.)

5. John Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Phillip Deen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012).

In the next section, I criticize Dewey's negative reconstruction by examining some texts that exemplify significant limitations in his historical powers of interpretation. These led to specious judgments and to his throwing out much that held potential to advance his positive development of instrumental thinking. Then, in sections on Kant and Hegel, I suggest that Dewey's pursuit of his negative agenda in reconstruction weakened his capacity to develop his positive program of reconstruction. If Dewey had worked more assiduously with the intellectual traditions that he declared outmoded and irrelevant, he could have strengthened his own positive vision concerning the value of scientific thinking for the guidance of life. We should learn from the mistakes of the master: I conclude by calling for the more robust use of past philosophical and educational thinking, prompting us as contemporary educational theorists to renew our interest in literatures that carry the stigma of Dewey's declarations of irrelevance.

RECONSTRUCTION, *Just So*

Can we liken Dewey and Rudyard Kipling? They were contemporaries who led different lives, but both could tell stories, *just so*. Kipling gained renown for it — the fanciful tales for his daughter explaining how the leopard got its spots, the camel its hump, the first letter written, and many more. Let's see about Dewey and the historical judgments on which he based his reconstructive efforts in philosophy, education, and society.

We've seen how Auguste Comte impressed Dewey. Undue individualism destabilized Western society and culture, and thinkers needed to stabilize things by synthesizing science into a positive philosophy of life — a social physics, as Comte called it. Dewey soon found other inspiration, but the intent to rectify historical dislocation by using the potential social significance of science remained the foundation of what Dewey wanted to accomplish. My critique does not primarily contest Dewey's positive vision. It was what it was. I concentrate on Dewey's negative agenda, his arguments that past philosophic thought had no value or relevance in guiding present-day life. In many pages of many works, Dewey contended that the thinking of past philosophers imparted concepts, principles, and values inimical to the sound conduct of life in a fully scientific age. Was Dewey's historical argumentation sound?

While at Chicago, Dewey's ideas about reconstruction matured, primarily through his courses and through his practical efforts as an educational reformer. His negative and positive agenda appeared from time to time in essays, but the whole program was developing in a pupal stage. His thought was ripening; his reputation building. To pursue his reconstructive ideas effectively, he needed to write with authority for a readership of significant stature and scope. For a public intellectual, New York provided the best base. Arriving at Columbia in 1905, Dewey began to empower his program. The success, financial and reputational, of *Ethics*, which Dewey and Tufts published in 1908, added to Dewey's stature. Then in 1910, he won a lasting readership with *How We Think*.

We can take its chapter 11 as an initial paradigmatic example of negative and positive reconstruction in operation. In it, Dewey contrasted the negative,

long-established practices of empirically learning from experience with the positive practice of scientific method, yet to be applied to ordinary life. He described empirical thinking briefly with no attention to the many different contexts of its use. Then he surveyed three of its characteristic disadvantages and closed reciting the many ways in which empirical thinking “[actually stifles] subsequent inquiry and reflection” (MW 6, 296). Dewey immediately turned to a section on “the scientific method,” beginning, of course, “in contrast.” With the ills of mere empiricism left behind, scientific method could ground a sound program for training all in the practice of thinking (MW 6, Part 3 *passim*).

Dewey had made it as a public intellectual. A string of books followed through the next four decades, all featuring variations on Dewey’s program of reconstruction. The specifics of the problematic varied in the way Dewey stated them, but they all had a negative and positive side: obsolete antecedents that blocked the full emergence of a sound sense of nature and of life within it. Throughout these works, Dewey wrote *ex cathedra* extensively about his program of reconstruction in philosophy, education, and cultural life. He characterized traditional thinking negatively in order to delegitimize and suppress metaphysical ideas that he thought were obstructing the emerging efforts to apply to the conduct of life his positive agenda for reconstruction, variously called instrumentalism, empirical naturalism, naturalistic empiricism, and experimentalism.

Reminiscing, Dewey observed that “schematic and formally logical” writing came easily to him, while he found “the concrete, empirical, and ‘practical’” difficult (LW 5, 150). In evaluating historical materials, Dewey relied heavily on his facility for schemas — a risky way to write history, for it can lead away from the sources, shrouding both the complexity and the substance of past achievements. Dewey had a wealth of synoptic knowledge — general views of the whole, catch phrases about someone’s work, associations between the names of persons and movements linked with diverse labels, keywords, leading ideas, and memes — all packaged for easy apprehension. With a capsule for this, that, and everything, Dewey had a knack for crafting truthy explanations.

Early on, G. Stanley Hall, a prominent psychologist a generation ahead of Dewey, remarked on a variant prominent in *Psychology*, where “definitions make the very fiber of the book.” Exploiting his ability to craft general explanations clearly, Dewey wrote an astonishing amount for encyclopedias — *Johnson’s Universal Cyclopeda* (1894), *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (1902), the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1904), *Monroe’s Cyclopeda of Education* (1911–1913), the *Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Education* (1921), the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1933), and the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (1939). He filled his courses and his books with historical synopses on diverse topics, applying his schemas to them, often highly abstracted from the sources.

Let’s consider some instances, concentrating on *Experience and Nature* (1925), for in this book he gave a full, typical statement of both his negative and positive agenda of reconstruction and he worried over it to an unusual degree, revising it in 1929 in reaction to its initial reception. To begin, take two sentences from

chapter 3 on "Nature, Ends and Histories." They exemplify Dewey's historical exposition of past thought at the level of the descriptive sentence: "The doctrine of natural ends was displaced by a doctrine of designs, ends-in-view, conscious aims constructed and entertained in individual minds independent of nature. Descartes, Spinoza and Kant are upon this matter at least in agreement with Bacon, Hume and Helvétius" (LW 1, 81). The six names vaguely concretize "a doctrine of designs, ends-in-view, conscious aims constructed and entertained in individual minds independent of nature," an abstract construct confected from ungrounded references. The displacing of natural ends by a grab-bag doctrine joins numerous unspecified texts in evidencing agreement among major thinkers from different times and places about a large, ill-defined transformation of thought. Did the six personages agree? *Not impossible, it seems.*

As in other works, here Dewey rarely pointed to specific texts; he gave little context; and he cited almost nothing in explaining his negative and positive agenda for reconstruction. He concatenated capsule descriptions to explain the need for each reconstructive move he had in mind. In this example, the sentences asserting agreement among the six thinkers come from a paragraph of nine such ungrounded assertions about the intellectual effects "in the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century." *A lot happened* according to those nine sentences, but other than the six thinkers agreeing on the fate of natural ends, *no one did anything*. The sentences simply described a lot of abstract transformation having taken place, all in Dewey's own words without reference to agents, events, contexts, or sources. The chapter included fifty-two such ungrounded paragraphs. The upshot?

Thus the conception that thought is the final and complete end of nature became a "rationalization" of an existing division of classes in society. The division of men into the thoughtless and the inquiring was taken to be the intrinsic work of nature; in effect it was identical with the division between workers and those enjoying leisure. (LW 1, 68)

Not impossible, it seems. But, how do we know what the chapter concluded? We know it only because Dewey chose to describe it, *just so.*

Alas, Dewey's schemas, his dropping names, his historical abstractions glibly described, do not empower us as readers to say how we know what we might think we know from what he asserted to have been the case. In interpreting the life experience and the thinking of persons in other times and other places, the historian's art must give some grounding in actual texts set sufficiently in their context to make an interpretation credible, and to link it and its context to available sources so that others can interpret the matter themselves. One cannot contest points, elaborate them, and thoughtfully agree or disagree with closed, encapsulated abstractions, unanchored to particular events that comprised specific actions and actual contexts. The descriptions of traditional thinking and its transformations elicit a shrug, *not impossible, it seems*, but after a long series of *not impossible, it seems*, one wonders how the story always turns out, *just so.*

In *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), Dewey similarly dealt with other major thinkers, presenting them through his own unanchored descriptions, without

much interpretive context, often as if the ideas deserved no provenance at all. He provided little *explication de texte*, depicting *The Quest* at a remarkably high level of generalization. Plato and Aristotle received scattered and conventional mention, as did Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Mill, and Spencer. Dewey wrote about Newton with a little fullness in "Ideas at Work," and in the "Conflict of Authorities" he discussed Spinoza some, Kant more, and Hegel a bit. But a well-seasoned professor could have written it all consulting no sources. And given such a parsimonious interpretive context, only an equally well-seasoned reader could deal with Dewey's story on anything other than a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

Impersonal abstractions often labeled Dewey's schemas, not names. Throughout his writing, he often directed his negative reconstruction at "tradition," and in *The Quest* he took it to the extreme. Tradition quested "for certainty," for "a peace which is assured," for a stability "fulfilled in pure knowing alone." Tradition had power: it found "its way into all themes and subjects, and determines the form of current problems and conclusions regarding mind and knowledge" (LW 4, 7). Sometimes Dewey let a particular thinker define tradition, which, as "formulated by Aristotle, ranked social arts lower than pure intellectual inquiry, than knowledge as something not to be put to any use, even a social and moral one" (LW 4, 61). *Not impossible, it seems*. But did Aristotle really think what Dewey said he thought? And did what Dewey said Aristotle thought really formulate what tradition stood for? *Not impossible, it seems*. Dewey referred to tradition 145 times in the book: when put together it said that tradition was the recursive sum of what Dewey said it was. *Not impossible, it seems*...

Just so. "The whole classic tradition down to our day has continued to hold a slighting view of experience as such, and to hold up as the proper goal and ideal of true knowledge realities which even if they are located in empirical things cannot be known by experimental methods" (LW 4, 22). *Not impossible, it seems*. Happily, that sclerotic, yet powerful tradition embodied precisely what would enable it to perform the get-lost role assigned to it in Dewey's program for reconstruction in philosophy. In his view, tradition required the separation of knowing and doing; science could merge them; therefore, contemporary thought could and should jettison tradition. In his turgid prose: "If, accordingly, it can be shown that the actual procedures by which the most authentic and dependable knowledge is attained have completely surrendered the separation of knowing and doing; if it can be shown that overtly executed operations of interaction are requisite to obtain the knowledge called scientific, the chief fortress of the classic philosophical tradition crumbles into dust" (LW 4, 64). *Not impossible, it seems, but, oh! Just so!*

Might tradition as a historical concept always encompass complex, multiple ideas and aspirations so different, many-sided, both complementary and discordant, ever in turmoil, so that they keep renewing their potency because no person, group, or era, not even Dewey, could encompass them to declare them null and void? *That's not impossible, I say. Exactly so!*

Dewey's negative agenda for reconstruction set an impossible task, one beyond the limits of historical reason. He devoted great energy to pursuing it unnecessarily.

Tradition has no actuality, no power to act. People thinking historically, as Dewey attempted, can only postulate tradition as a noumenal fiction outside the limits of historical experience — exactly the sort of regulative idea that Dewey so railed against in Kant's ethical thinking. Dewey's *Just So* stories, empty negations, could not set the problematic for reconstruction. In pursuing his negative reconstruction, Dewey refrained from considering particular texts by particular thinkers written in particular contexts. Without such grounded interpretation, his criticisms had no import other than his ungrounded declarations of opinion. Insofar as he believed those empty opinions, he might have written off potential sources of useful concepts. That's the rub. Might he have done it differently?

In 1948 Dewey reintroduced *Reconstruction in Philosophy* to a mid-century audience. He defended "what one of the milder of my critics has called 'a sour attitude' toward the great systems of the past." Not at all, Dewey chirped. He admired the power and significance of those systems highly "with respect to their connection with intellectual and moral issues of their own time and place." His doubts concerned only "their relevancy in a much changed human situation," that is, to the situation of Dewey and friends, to the time and place of contemporary critics. In a new age, antiquarians could amuse themselves with the great systems of yore, but for the conduct of contemporary life, those systems sowed dysfunctional confusion, requiring a reconstructive prophylactic ensuring that contact with the source would bear no fruit (*MW* 12, 257–259).

Let's ask, do much-changed human situations *ipso facto* make prior thinking irrelevant? In limiting relevancy, what does Dewey's phrase "of their own time and place" really mean? Weary old Kant had never left Königsberg. Did his lifespan in that city define his "own time and place"? If the phrase meant the time and place in which a thinker had lived, strictly speaking, say for Plato, it would mean from roughly 400 to 350 BC, primarily Athens and secondarily a few other points of reference in the Peloponnese and the Greek Mediterranean. But would anyone, even Dewey, confine Plato's time and place so stringently? Well then, how could those later times and other places, each "much changed," come to hold Plato's work to be "their own"? Historically powerful ideas exert that power, not only in the time and place of their origin, but in different times and distant places. How does that happen?

Maybe intellectual habit so extended Plato's time and place, but not probably, for history tells how the great currency of many thinkers during life evaporated upon their deaths. How does the time of a few persist? Perhaps synoptic history of the sort that Dewey practiced helped other times and other places to make Plato their own. But that would not suffice, for when a time and place have relied on synoptic histories to make foreign thinkers their own, they took over, not vital thought, but the sterile dogmas of an alien occupation.

Doubtless, Plato's own time and place extended so far beyond its original Athens because newborn interpreters studied a distant, foreign Plato with care and demonstrated to their time and place why Plato was indeed "their own." Without renewal by fresh readers, deep readers, the null hypothesis of history holds: the

dead have died and life moves on. But where intellectual life is sound, fresh readers continually knead their intellectual resources to draw from them concepts that illuminate the realities of their much-changed circumstances. Was Dewey a fresh reader? Or did his strategy of reconstruction prejudge the irrelevance of prior systems? Did Dewey's practice of reconstruction in philosophy and education include significant effort to renew works of the past by looking for their potential relevance as a positive resource for addressing the circumstances of his time? Let's explore this question, looking at what Dewey did, and failed to do, with Kant and Hegel, starting with Kant.

DEWEY'S PERSISTENT KANTIAN MISCONSTRUCTION⁶

Throughout, Immanuel Kant served as the bullseye for Dewey's negative work of reconstruction. In 1924, the *New Republic* published "Kant after Two Hundred Years," a prime opportunity for Dewey to rethink his view of Kant. Instead, he wrote a grudging appreciation, reiterating why Kant made reconstruction so necessary. "This was his great achievement: demarcation of two realms, one of mechanical science, the other of moral freedom and faith, connected yet independent, one beginning at the boundaries of the other." Kant's net influence surrendered "the concrete world of affairs to the domain of mechanism fatalistically understood." It shed "over a life built out of mechanical subordinations the aureole of a super-worldly ideal, sentimental at best, fanatical and deadly at worst" (MW 15, 310 and 312).

We could here worry over Dewey's 1915 lectures on *German Philosophy and Politics*, which his 1924 assessment of Kant reprised in brief. But we would distract ourselves from the most interesting question by trying to unravel how passions of war skewed Dewey's assessments as he tried to anathematize Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and others for disposing Germans to aggressive self-assertion. So too, Dewey's extensive engagement with Kant's ethical thought should not detain us. The two editions of *Ethics* with James H. Tufts, the several iterations of extensive syllabuses for his ethics courses, and summative articles on ethics and moral thought constituted a major accomplishment, but a specialized history conventionally told, largely independent of Dewey's reconstructive program.

Let's also pass quickly by what Dewey had to say about Kant in his 1888 book on *Leibniz's New Essays*, noting only that it reinforced his idea that Kant stood as the great defender of the rationalist dualism that so needed reconstruction. Let's take as our starting point that Kant served as the prime target for Dewey in his negative program for reconstruction and ask, why? Why did Dewey assign Kant that role? Dewey's reading of Kant presents an interesting, but problematic paradox.

6. Throughout the essay, citations of Immanuel Kant's work refer to the Cambridge University Press translations, particularly *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1781]); *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1788]); and *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1790]). The Hathi Trust Digital Library provides access to the secondary literature on Kant that was available to Dewey.

Kant's critical philosophizing, initiated by his three *Critiques*, made human experience in its different forms central to his philosophic inquiry. Kant has exerted substantial historical influence because numerous subsequent thinkers have widely extended this initiative by centering concern on experience in different lifeworlds. Kant's question — How is experience possible? — has become the great heuristic for post-Kantian inquiry. Given the centrality of experience in Dewey's thought, he appears to participate significantly in this movement of post-Kantian inquiry. Yet in writing about Kant, Dewey did not recognize the centrality of experience in Kant's *Critiques*, nor did he profit from the way Kant inquired into the possibility of experience to the degree that other thinkers of his time were doing.

Of course, Dewey knew that "possible experience" had a role in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, less so with the other two critiques. But Dewey said little about how Kant examined the possibility of experience, an important strategy of inquiry for Kant. In "Kant and Philosophic Method" (1884), an essay from his student days, Dewey noted that Kant added to rationalism and empiricism a further method in philosophy, examining the possibility of experience. Dewey quickly declared it "doubly false" and in the closing third turned to the promise of Hegel's logic, use of negation, and dialectic as a more promising path to sound method (*EW* 1, 34–47). Inquiry about the possibility of experience thereupon dropped out of Dewey's understanding of Kant's philosophic effort.

Through his docility, his penchant for absorbing the conventional ethos surrounding him, during his early years at Johns Hopkins and Michigan Dewey absorbed an understanding of Kant's critical philosophy that he never outgrew. He did not become infatuated with Kant, as he did with Hegel, but he internalized a particular understanding of the strategic role Kant had in the history of philosophy, which he maintained through his whole career. Dewey formed his estimate of Kant's critical philosophy through his earliest mentor, H. A. P. Torrey, and then through George Morris, especially Morris's study of Kant's first *Critique* and Edward Caird's impressive *Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant*. Then in 1890, that estimate became fixed as Dewey prepared his enthusiastic review of Caird's more recent two-volume analysis of Kant's critical philosophy. That basically completed Dewey's grounding in Kant as the initiator of critical philosophy.⁷

Let's grasp the philosophical context and Kant's place in it as it would have appeared to Dewey's mentors in the 1880s and 1890s. To do so, I will first set the scene, reminding ourselves that the emerging academic world of secular scholarship and instruction was not yet the prevailing ethos. Dewey, formed in the old world, participated in the emergence of the new, carrying with him vestiges of the old, among them his understanding of Kant. That had consequences for the

7. George Sylvester Morris, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: A Critical Exposition* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1882); Edward Caird, *A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant, with an Historical Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1877); and Edward Caird, *The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1889).

character of Dewey's mature work. To make those clear, I will tell my own *Just So* story, not to explicate Kant, but to illuminate some problematic aspects of Dewey's thought.

In the United States, and Britain too, both the old-time colleges and even the emerging universities still invested philosophy with strong religious expectations. Torrey, Morris, and Caird wrote thoughtfully as concerned Christians, nervously drawn to Kant as a thinker who, from within their religious ethos, took on the intellectual challenges to it, perhaps risking too much in seeking to achieve too much. Until Dewey went to Chicago, he worked within the Christian academic climate. We think of Johns Hopkins as the first modern graduate university in America, but Dewey's Hopkins fully participated in the old-time ethos. It had deep roots.

Kant succeeded as the first philosopher of front rank to live and work as a university professor. Up to that time, as Kant himself noted in *Der Streit der Facultäten*, the philosophy faculty was decidedly a junior faculty to those for medicine, law, and theology.⁸ Kant turned from a clerical career only at the end of his studies; Friedrich von Schelling and G. W. F. Hegel with their friend, the poet Friedrich Hölderlin, studied theology together at the University of Tübingen; Karl Marx studied law; and even Friedrich Nietzsche slid into classical studies, with some philosophy mixed in, having started preparing for the clergy. Through most of the nineteenth century, a person acquired an academic grounding in philosophy in preparing for the law or the clergy.

Most systematic philosophy, whether rationalist or empiricist, came from outside the university, and academic philosophers were responsible for defending and disseminating a religiously sound philosophic grounding. When David Hume raised Kant from his dogmatic slumber, the alarm was not simply an interesting argument about causality, but one widely perceived as shaking the foundation of religiously sound philosophic syntheses. If causality merely signified a habitual expectation between something that seems frequently to follow another, that raised troubling questions about the relation between humans and divinity. Thus, expectations then associated with his academic role constrained Kant, yet at the same time he was a man deeply moved by Enlightenment aspirations.

However staid in his ways Kant may have been, he had an active spirit and curiosity, an openness to advanced ideas. He might well have felt in sympathy with Hume, but he could not have expressed that directly from his position. He took more than a decade to work out a finely tuned response to Hume. It did not directly contest Hume's arguments on their own ground, but significantly shifted how thinkers could discuss matters like causality, the questions that might destabilize the philosophic grounding for religious thought. Kant initiated what people quickly started calling *critical philosophy*, newly distinct from the prior mode, which aimed at a *positive metaphysics*. Kant did something both simple

8. Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties/Der Streit der Fakultäten*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979).

and radical: he changed the basic question generating philosophic thinking. His strategy evoked considerable angst among strongly religious thinkers, however, for he ceded a lot of ground to thinkers such as Hume.

Let us try to feel the angst, *just so*. Up through Kant's pre-critical period, what he and others wondered about as they reflected in wonder, were variations on the question, "*I wonder what X is!*" What *is* being? What *is* God? What *is* truth? What *is* knowledge? What *is* real? What *is* matter? What *is* duty? What *is* beauty? What *is* causality? Yet, it seemed that for every claim about what X is, a critic would pop up showing the claim was unsound, an erudite whack-a-mole routine. Kant said in effect, "OK. If we keep deceiving ourselves in asking what X is, let's try asking, *How is X possible?*" Critical philosophy would stop trying to account for the existence of things and would instead attend to their possibility, taking their existence as an evident given. Kant did not ask, What is experience? He asked, How is experience possible? He worked the *Critique of Pure Reason* out by asking how experience of the external world was possible. He generated the *Critique of Practical Reason* by inquiring how our acting on the ground of principle alone was possible. He thought through the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by exploring how judgments of taste and purposeful actions were possible.

How did the what-is-X question — and our world is still full of them — differ from the how-is-X-possible question? Kant changed the standpoint from which he posed the question. The old-time philosopher asked the what-is-X question from the standpoint of the X: What is X in itself, what is it really, truly, essentially, actually, independent of us? The Kantian philosopher asked the how-is-X-possible question for himself, from his own standpoint: How is the X, which happens in my world all the time, possible for me? How come it can happen? Instead of inquiring into existence or being, the Kantian philosopher inquired as an agent how a given matter or concern was a possibility for him.

We are seeking to understand why Dewey may have failed to appreciate critical philosophy as a means of investigating experience. To do so we need to grasp how historical change can include a shift in the prevailing ethos, which can deeply alter historical experience, rather like the famous "duck or rabbit" image associated with Gestalt psychology. With a complex work such as the *Critique of Pure Reason*, subtle shifts in the prevailing historical ethos can lead to significant shifts in how people interpret the work.

Until Dewey moved to Chicago at the age of 35, he had lived and worked in a Christian academic ethos in which the metaphysical concerns of the *Critique* were dominant. Interpreters paid less attention to the basic question of critical philosophy and worried instead whether Kant had soundly deduced the logical necessity of the categories with which people constructed possible experience. They further attached considerable significance to his distinction between *phenomena*, the world of ordinary experience, and *noumena*, regulative ideas referring to a fictitious thing-in-itself, outside the limits of possible experience. The Kant that Dewey internalized between 1880 and 1894 was this Kant, especially as

interpreted by Morris and Caird. It was not the Kant of critical philosophy, but Kant, the last great defender of metaphysical thought.

As the twentieth century loomed, academic thinking rapidly became more secular, and significant changes altered the perception of works such as Kant's *Critiques*. Rigorously deducing the necessity of the categories lost importance. Their existential ineluctability sufficed: "assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin, and entrails at once," thrust into this life, each "feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion," as William James observed. The construction of possible experience followed. The secular academic ethos has been inherently existential and antimetaphysical. In that ethos, Kant's introductory sections on asking how experience was possible received more attention. So too did a short *aesthetic*, in which the experiencer acquires through space and time the inchoate contents that will become constructed through categories into substantive experience. And then a longer section on *principles*, about how active agents use concepts to construct and control, as best they can, their experience in the world, finally gained primacy. The new *Critique* became much simplified, a strategic asset for many innovative strands of twentieth-century inquiry — within philosophy and in other subjects like psychology, ethology, physics, sociology, and so on.

As Dewey went off to Chicago, he consciously left a Christian academic ethos for a more secular one, and he could easily have become a twentieth-century post-Kantian. He might have reread Kant's first *Critique*. He would have passed over the deduction of the categories, thinking it didn't matter so much, recognizing the existential necessity of living with and through the categories to be *ambulando*, as he would put it. He would feel comfortable within the limits of experience as the long last half, the dialectic, laid them out, and he would have shrugged at the *noumenon*, saying that he could have regulative principles just as well without it. He might even have mined parts, like the third analogy of experience, on the principle of community or reciprocity, which would have helped him develop his ideas about the organic circuit more fully. But Dewey could not read Kant in this way. By that time, committed to the negative side of reconstruction, he stubbornly maintained the nineteenth-century idea of Kant as the man who upheld the authority of an otherworldly metaphysics. As such, Dewey's Kant ceased to be a great defender, becoming instead the man who had peddled rigorous deductions and a mysterious thing-in-itself to his teachers. Not seeing the new Kant ironically left Dewey unable to respond to many developments taking place that would have strengthened his ideas.

Let's briefly sum up discussing Kant as a potential resource that Dewey ignored by noting two major consequences of Dewey's inability to engage in a fresh reading of Kant. The two were distinct, but converged, and had much to do with aspects of Dewey's thinking that have attracted criticism during and after his mature career. One concerned his instrumentalism, but I will postpone the instrumental until after discussing Hegel in relation to Dewey's critique of the great systems. The other consequence concerned Dewey's central concept of

experience and related concepts such as education, nature, art — the big ideas he sought to reconstruct. Dewey habitually hypostatized such abstract concepts, still bent on asking the what-is-X question. More attention to Kant's critical philosophy could have helped him control this habit.

Dewey generally wrote about vital processes as if he knew what they were: "Experience is. . . ." "Education is. . . ." "Art is. . . ." Dewey argued against metaphysical thinking, but he characteristically wrote with a metaphysical diction. Definitions of abstract processes and conceptual things fill his work. In reviewing *Experience and Nature*, George Santayana criticized Dewey for forgetting that *experience* as such required an experiencing agent to give it a form — to determine its beginning, middle, and end, which Santayana called the foreground of experience. Dewey ignored the foreground, the agent for whom experience becomes possible. For Santayana, the experiencer preceded experience, immersed in circumstances, the phenomenal sources of the experience. We might say that we should use the concept of "experience," and other concepts for active processes, as verbs, not nouns; as actions, not substantives. An agent, involved in action, constructs experience in time, with a beginning, middle, and end, which are not intrinsic to the experience, but are characteristics of the agent's construction of it. Santayana observed,

Its name is Experience; but lest we should misunderstand this ambiguous word, it is necessary to keep in mind that in [Dewey's] system experience is impersonal. It is not, as a literary psychologist might suppose, a man's feelings and ideas forming a life-long soliloquy, his impressions of travel in this world. Nor is it, as a biologist might expect, such contact of sensitive animals with their environment as adapts them to it and teaches them to remember it. No: experience is here taken in a transcendental, or rather in a moral, sense, as something romantically absolute and practically coercive.⁹

Dewey replied in "Half-Hearted Naturalism" (*LW* 3, 73–81), talking around Santayana's point. We might make criticisms like Santayana's about *Art as Experience*, for *experience* comes across in the same way. "Experience," almost always used as a noun, would denote an abstract process with a blurred locus of control. A contemporary reading of Kant would have greatly helped keep track of the agents working the processes about which Dewey wrote.

At this point, let us turn away from Kant in considering the negative side of Dewey's effort at reconstruction in philosophy and education. Kant will return, but first we should recognize that he presents too easy a foil for suggesting that Dewey's negativity toward past thinkers deprived him of important intellectual resources. Dewey engaged Kant in an atmosphere of enthusiasm for Hegel, making it unlikely he would deal positively with Kant's work. From early on, he distrusted Kant's thought and seems to have read it from duty, not choice. Hegel was a different matter. Many who are deeply versed in Dewey's thought suggest that in spite of his rejection of past systems, Dewey made Hegel's thinking a positive resource, *malgré lui*. Let's test that out.

9. George Santayana, "Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics," *Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 25 (1925): 680.

WOZZLING IN REVERSE¹⁰

Remember in A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* how Pooh and Piglet pursue the Woozle in the snow, round and round the larch trees, ever surer they would catch one, for they kept seeing the tracks of more and more Woozles? Only problem: the tracks in the snow were really their own. Publication of a text from Dewey's 1897 course on "Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit" (*CLJD* 1, 333–405) has set off a Woozle hunt for Dewey's "permanent Hegelian deposit," possibly even for a fresh reading of Hegel by the master himself. A growing group of scholars are finding similarities between Dewey's later work and things they attribute to that early course, namely an *au courant* humanist/historicist Hegel, the human spirit forming itself through the personal experience of each and the historical experience of all. Only problem: the scholars, not Dewey, make the connections between the 1897 course and Dewey's later work. The hunters demonstrate the enduring influence of his early engagement with Hegel by reading their interpretation of Hegel into the content and expression of Dewey's later work, and into the mysterious text of 1897, too. By doing so, they open new lines of interpretation and further inflate Dewey's prestige as a man of vision, who anticipated the most recent interpretations of an obscure yet seminal thinker.

And they sight some big tracks, indeed: "in Hegel's terms, when Dewey reflects on the psychology of individual humans, in works such as *Human Nature and Conduct*, he articulates a philosophy of subjective spirit; when he reflects on the history of Western civilization, in works such as *Reconstruction in Philosophy* and *The Quest for Certainty*, he develops a philosophy of objective spirit."¹¹ The hunters, surely by inadvertence, even suggest an astonishing reverse causation: "Hegel's reflections on language are remarkably similar to Dewey's."¹²

But let's not be too hard on the Woozle hunters. Their hunt pursues a hypothesis: Dewey's early reading in and about German idealism — first Kant, then neo-Hegelians of his time, and finally Hegel himself — left an imprint that helped him to shape, and us to understand, his intellectual development and his more mature work on logic, psychology, social thought, pedagogy, and even theology. John Shook started things off with his *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*, and James Good followed with an even fuller effort in *A Search for Unity*

10. Throughout this discussion, citations of Hegel's work generally refer to G. W. F. Hegel, *The Oxford University Press Translations. Electronic Edition* (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 2000), and G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke II. Electronic Edition* (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 2003). I have found the Hathi Trust Digital Library invaluable in assessing Dewey's engagement with the work of Hegel in the early 1890s. This resource provides access to original sources in German and English translations, and works on Hegel by William Torrey Harris, G. Stanley Hall, Josiah Royce, and others.

11. James A. Good, "Rereading Dewey's 'Permanent Hegelian Deposit,'" in *John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit, with the 1897 Lecture on Hegel*, ed. John R. Shook and James A. Good (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 60.

12. James A. Good and Jim Garrison, "Traces of Hegelian *Bildung* in Dewey's Philosophy," in *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Paul Fairfield (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 61.

in *Diversity*.¹³ He surveyed recent Hegel scholarship in English and described Anglo-American Hegelianism until about 1900. He then devoted three chapters to Dewey's education and professional formation prior to moving to Columbia in 1904. Numerous other scholars have joined the hunt, finding further Hegelian ideas in Dewey's later work. Most recently, James Scott Johnston has convincingly reinterpreted Dewey's intellectual development in *John Dewey's Earlier Logical Theory*, shifting the question somewhat away from Hegel's influence toward the immanent development of Dewey's early ideas about logic, which derived significantly from Hegel.¹⁴

All this work exemplifies the reputational inflation that clouds our judgment of Dewey. To grasp what's happened, let's think of Andersen's weavers, not as actual swindlers — nothing like that is going on — but as personifications of our proclivity to magnify reality. Nice phrases stick in the mind, like Dewey's "permanent Hegelian deposit."¹⁵ But when assayed in Dewey's *Collected Works*, the lode offers little worth mining. Almost all of it dates between 1890 and 1892 and throws little light on Dewey's work as a whole. Late in the twentieth century, as scholars got access through publication of his class lectures to "Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit," it seemed to augment the resources for understanding Dewey's appropriation of Hegel's thought greatly. Then and now scholars have concentrated on Hegel's ideas about spirit, *Geist*, and an eighty-five-page text by Dewey on Hegel's philosophy of spirit made the permanent deposit vastly more attractive to Dewey's interpreters. We should hypothesize that, in the excitement of the discovery, the 1897 text did not receive sufficiently rigorous critical examination.

Too long for the text of a lecture, the document has none of the breaks expected in a compilation of student class notes. The initial thirty-five paragraphs provide some biographical framework and some exploration of Hegel's thinking. It gives some detail on his early religious writings from when he worked in isolation as a *Hauslehrer*. A survey of Hegel's thinking as it stood, circa 1800, follows, including a standard survey of Hegel's antecedents, outlining the succession of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. The next three paragraphs rush Hegel from 1800 to 1817, when he published his *Philosophie des Geistes*, the third volume of his *Enzyklopädie*

13. See John R. Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000); James A. Good, *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The "Permanent Hegelian Deposit" in the Philosophy of John Dewey* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006); and Shook and Good, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit*.

14. James Scott Johnston, *John Dewey's Earlier Logical Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014). In the online version of this essay, I discuss and cite additional contributions to this line of analysis from the voluminous journal literature on this topic (<http://www.educationalthought.org/files/dewey.pdf>).

15. See, for example, Good, *A Search for Unity in Diversity*, and "Rereading Dewey's 'Permanent Hegelian Deposit.'"

der philosophischen Wissenschaften.¹⁶ In all, the introductory paragraphs relied on thoroughly conventional resources, Edward Caird's *Hegel* (1883) and Karl Rosenkranz's *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben* (1844), the one a 220-page introduction to Hegel's thought, and the other the favorable biography (as distinct from the hostile one) of the two biographies then available.¹⁷

Textual criticism needs to concentrate on the remaining four-fifths of the document. To the textual critic, these paragraphs pose an alternative: either they document Dewey's considered reflection and commentary with Hegel's *Philosophie des Geistes* as foil, or they primarily condense Hegel's book, converting the 386-page *Philosophie des Geistes* into a sixty-page English précis with a few interpolations, usually clarifying what a reader at the end of the nineteenth century might find especially obscure in the original. The Wozzlers have taken up the first option with alacrity. I believe the second stands upon a close comparison of the 119 paragraphs from 1897 with the full text of Hegel's *Philosophie des Geistes*. An expanded version of this essay available for download has the nitty-gritty. Here let's ourselves jump to conclusions.

When all is said and done, we should conclude that the German 1845 edition of *Philosophie des Geistes* served as the source for most of what the concluding 119 paragraphs contain. Further, Dewey prepared the précis, and the material introductory to it, for the 1891 course on "Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit" at Michigan. In substance the précis does not give grounds for attributing to Dewey a present-day humanist/historicist reading of Hegel. In light of the original, substantive weaknesses in the précis become apparent. They draw attention to the second concern I mentioned in introducing "Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit," namely an effort to estimate what Dewey *did not get* from Hegel's *Philosophie des Geistes* that would have been of use in developing his own ideas. Rather than build a tenuous case that Dewey had a present-day interpretation of Hegel tucked away as his permanent deposit, let's use "Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit" to see what Dewey did not get that might have been of value to him.

Recent interpretations of Hegel pay close attention to how he developed his thinking from 1800 through 1807, working with Schelling and then alone, creating the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* as the great *Bildungsroman* of the human spirit. Introductory sections of "Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit" merely mentioned the Jena years and the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* in passing, concentrating instead on Hegel's prior religious writings. This weighting in the introductory part does not suggest a Deweyan breakthrough in interpreting Hegel. The *Philosophie des Geistes* did include, however, a substantial section on "phenomenology."

16. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, Part III of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace and Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

17. Edward Caird, *Hegel* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1883); and Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben* (Berlin: Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, 1844).

In it, Hegel reprised the much larger *Phänomenologie*, describing the experience of *Geist* in ways particularly rich with concepts important in present-day readings of his work. This mini-phenomenology explained the self-transformation of *Geist* from naïve consciousness to self-consciousness to reason, not talking about it from the outside, but trying to communicate how *Geist* internally experienced those changes as it carried them out as their active agent. Paragraphs 75 through 85 in the précis condense this section in Hegel's original, paragraphs 413 through 439.¹⁸ Let's look closely at how the précis condensed these thirty pages into seven in order to see what Dewey missed that might have served his later work.

Hegel came of age and developed as a philosopher mulling Kant's great question, how is experience possible? Kant had answered abstractly. He used logical categories to show how reason could construct experience by forming the inchoate data we sense into the phenomenal world we experience. Could reason really do that? We have seen that Kant tried to give a deductive answer to demonstrate that indeed reason could use abstract categories in this way. But peers, prominently Hegel (with the young Dewey in his train), thought this deductive demonstration might be sound in principle, but an answer itself rather empty of experience. Hegel wanted to see the construction of experience taking place in substantive human experience. If experience became possible by constructing it from data and the conceptual categories, a philosopher should be able to see the whole process happening in the course of life: the life of persons, and the historical life of humanity as a whole. Hegel's great project became *phenomenology*, the study of phenomena in the making, of the self-construction of all the various kinds of experiencing in human life as it happened.

Hegel is difficult to read, here and throughout, because he took on a difficult task, wanting to grasp clearly the experience of constructing experience, to do it as it happened. Kant's excessive abstraction arose because he had simply reverse-engineered "pure reason" — reason *rein*, clean and simple reason; reason thinking that X is Y, that A causes B, that C and D are interacting together. Examining "pure reason," Kant arrived at a solution implicit in his starting point. Instead, Hegel wanted to start with an indeterminate constructor, one that could start from nothing and make experience possible from there.

Hegel began with *Geist*, sometimes wrongly translated as "mind," more properly as "spirit." It helps to remember that the German *Geist* and the English *ghost* are the same word, which originally meant "the soul or spirit, as the principle of life; also [the] ghost of life [as in the phrase,] 'to give up the ghost': to breathe one's last, expire, die."¹⁹ For Hegel, *Geist* indicated a human agency potentially

18. However, paragraphs 80 and 81 in the précis interpolate a comparison between Hegel's transition from consciousness to self-consciousness to Kant's deduction of the categories. This was probably Dewey, again drawing the line between Kant and Hegel that he drew during that same period in his essay "The Present Position of Logic" (*EW* 3, 137–141).

19. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "ghost, n.," accessed March 7, 2018, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/78064?rskey=Ty8jwc&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

capable of forming itself. Hegelian phenomenology would study *Geist* forming its capacities for experience in concrete personal life and in collective historical life. Hegel differentiated phenomenology from philosophy, using *phenomenology* to depict how *Geist* experientially formed and brought itself to life while confining *philosophy* to surveying the formed results as *Geist* had up to then realized them in the philosopher's present and the culture of his or her time.

Phenomenology followed how *Geist*, the human spirit incarnate in each of us and in all of us, existentially created our capacities for experience, understanding *Geist* as a protean, active agent coming in life to take care for itself in every way that humans do. He looked at *Geist* through the course of its self-formation, sometimes as *Geist* looking subjectively on the world and sometimes objectively, appearing for us to be in the world. In this effort, Hegel would use simple terms for this *Geist* like *das Ich*, the I, instead of abstract ones like the *Ego*, and direction signals like *an sich*, in oneself, and *für sich*, for itself, to indicate switches between internal and external perspectives. Hegel also paid much attention in his thinking, and in the existential self-formation of *Geist*, to the formation (*Bildung*) of important concepts (*Begriffe*), that is, to *Begriffsbildung*, concept formation, putting the two terms together as often happens in German. And *Begriffe*, concepts, were not for Hegel inert thoughts or empty logical operations, but intellectual tools with which we can say, "I grasped what happened" ("Ich griff was passiert").

Hegel worked as a critical philosopher in the spirit of Kant, asking not what X is, but how is X possible. Hence, for Hegel, observing what *Geist* did had less importance than grasping how *Geist* did it. How is self-formation possible? To respond, Hegel used a concept of great importance for his thinking. Throughout his writing, he extensively used the noun *Aufhebung*, and the verb *aufheben*, a very old word with an active, hard-working meaning. It has a nutty translation — "sublation, to sublimate," as if any English speaker would intuit what that means. Discontented with obscure, Latinate terms, translators often talked around *Geist* experiencing *Aufhebungen*, and their doing so made the actual working of Hegel's dialectic seem complicated or formalistic. We should not *translate* the noun *Aufhebung* and the verb *aufheben*. We should use their English cognates, "upheaval" and "to heave up." For Hegel, *Geist* heaves itself up from one of its possibilities to another. *Geist* follows one line of self-formation until evident tensions and stirrings for it make another line of self-formation discernable, and grasping it, *Geist* wrenches itself from the established path and heaves itself onto the new one, taking with it all the capacities for experience it had previously formed.

In the labors of life from time immemorial, people have heaved things up, out, on, aside — say, fallen forest limbs up onto a pile of firewood for winter warmth, or stones from a field being plowed to build a wall or a home. In birth itself, through excruciating labor, the newborn is heaved into the world, drawing a first breath of life, a novel *Geist* forming-itself thereafter, heaving itself up from possibility to possibility. The heaving up cancels the prior state but substantially preserves the wood, the stone, the parental genes and genius, as something new takes on

new form and new uses. *Geist* forms itself through such upheavals, which in the fullness of history take infinitely varied forms. Hegel used variants of *aufheben*, and of the closely related *erheben*, to denote the *Begriff* that was the workhorse of his thinking. Through the section on phenomenology in the *Philosophie des Geistes*, Hegel described how *Geist* moved itself through a series of *Aufhebungen*, heaving itself up from naïve awareness into controlling its sense perceptions and initiating systematic understanding and then heaving itself through yet another *Aufhebung* into self-consciousness.

Hegel's first five paragraphs of this section survey what *Geist* must to do to heave itself up into a state of reason, the formative agenda of the whole section. Then Hegel went back to its beginning and explained how *Geist* moved itself through key states of consciousness in order to throw itself into a state of self-consciousness. After it has made each move, *Geist* sees that each heave has made sense, but making the heave was contingent and difficult, sometimes dangerous and painful. The Deweyan précis covered what *Geist* did but diffused the agency of *Geist*, dropping out the difficulty and risk, describing it as something that simply happened. For instance, the précis summarized the *Aufhebungen* through which consciousness readies itself for self-consciousness by reporting the results in four packets, each beginning "It is discovered that ..." (§79 summarizing §§418–423). Thus readers get a series of outcomes to actions by a vague agent they cannot grasp.

For Hegel, the difficulty and risk that *Geist* faced in moving itself from desire to reason involved *Anerkennen*, the *Begriff* denoting the process that takes place when a self-aware, desiring agent encounters another self-aware, desiring agent. Hegel had prepared the way with several paragraphs on how self-conscious desire initially leads *Geist* to consume into itself what is not itself, the object of its self-aware desire, to eat, to drink, to nourish the self. This desire, felt as a drive to take possession, motivates the life and death struggle that erupts when two self-aware agents encounter each other. When an I, knowing only desire, encounters a different I also driven by desire, each sees the other as an object to be possessed, consumed as one's own. Both enter compulsively into a struggle to death, until one, on the brink, desists, choosing in defeat life over death, recognizing — acknowledging, honoring, respecting — the other as a self-aware I, driven by a desire like its own. Unlike the contract theorists, who superficially conceived an originating conflict and a facile, prudential contract resulting from it, Hegel deeply probed the struggle culminating in a recognition, affirming life in the face of death. It issued eventually, not in a contract, but in each reciprocally recognizing the other and oneself as autonomous, self-aware beings. *Geist* could base many different bonds upon that recognition.

Hegel took ten pages to show this struggle unfolding fully and to probe its consequences and implications. The précis compressed Hegel's full thought into a bit more than one page, dropping out a great deal. The précis summed up what happened with an abbreviated discussion of two selves recognizing each other by stating that "full freedom is developed when the particular selves recognize

that there is a true unity of will to which all equally owe obedience" (§85). The quotation formally states the result of the recognizing process, but the human experiencing of the process would be of greater interest to the humanist/historicist Hegel, and Hegel explored it in some detail in the original. In the précis, the reciprocal dynamic requisite in two persons recognizing one another became converted immediately into a condition of unity, putting philosophy before phenomenology.

The précis confused the Hegelian struggle that erupts when two primordially self-conscious persons encounter one another with the Hobbesian war of each against all. It held further that through the struggle that stops just short of death, the victor, the evident master, achieved recognition, for he "learns that he must not destroy others but that he must care for them in order to be cared for himself. He recognizes, that is, that his free existence is dependent upon the existence of others and is not in hostility to other existences" (§85). Edifying pabulum! For Hegel, the struggle left the victor in his Trumpian ignorance, supposedly superior but bereft of recognition by the loser, whom the victor could neither fathom nor trust. The slave had ironically become the free man, able to both see himself as himself and as the master saw him. The master, alone with his mastery, could only do that by renouncing his mastery, recognizing the other, not as the slave, but as the free man, a peer, who now stood before him.

Early and late, Dewey passed over a lot in Hegel's thought that might have helped him develop his positive goals. The précis compressed a text in which *Geist* repeatedly heaved itself up into new frameworks, unleashing new forms of activation for itself while preserving what in substance it previously had made of itself. Dewey's *Collected Writings* show no sign that he tarried with the concept of *aufheben* and incorporated it into his mode of understanding human action. Variants of the term, either as *sublation* or *aufheben*, do not occur in its many volumes. Using plain English, Dewey once noted how readers might *heave* a sigh of relief, and he referred on occasion to historic events, such as the Russian Revolution, as upheavals. Although Hegel's ghost might refer to those as *Aufhebungen*, Dewey's usage did not signal his adoption of Hegelian concepts here. Had he done so, Dewey might have practiced his program of reconstruction more effectively, but he did not do so.

To approach a close, we can only think suggestively about what Dewey did not get from Hegel, or from Kant and many others, that might have empowered his aspirations. Importantly, had Dewey taken more from Hegel, he might not have developed that sour attitude toward past thought that one of his critics remarked upon. In his writing, Dewey concentrated quite hard on both personal development and historical change, but what he says about them frankly does not excite much interest because Dewey omitted what Santayana called the foreground of all experience, its contingency in time and space for the agent constructing it. In contrast, Hegel crafted his concepts to grasp that contingency: protean change through experience, historical and personal.

Had he given more attention to Hegel's account of how spirit opens new paths from the internal tensions in past achievements, Dewey might have found a different way to deal with all those dualisms against which he warred. *Aufhebungen* also might have provided a better way to think about the formative experience that the young unfold for themselves than Dewey's description of it as a process of continuous growth, which glossed over its inner working with a softly padded outer cover. Dewey could also have done more with the problem of recognition, *Anerkennen*, to resist the impersonalizing forces so powerful in his world and ours. Modern schooling, even schooling pervaded by Deweyan principles, all too often fails to support the efforts of those who toil within it to achieve meaningful recognition, *Anerkennen* of self and other. And finally, Dewey showed few signs that he considered *Begriffsbildung*, concept formation, as a potential alternative to his obsession with method in thinking about how scientists proceed in advancing their work and understanding.

Suffice it for now to wrap Hegel up. The 1897 course really was an 1891 course. The vast bulk of substantive documentation for Dewey on Hegel comes from that earlier date. Early in 1891, in an expression of his reconstructive program, Dewey clearly drew a line between Kant and Hegel, judging Hegel's thought to be in substance on the side of the reconstructors: "I conceive Hegel — entirely apart from the value of any special results — to represent the quintessence of the scientific spirit." But he foresaw a problem, too, continuing to note that the state of science had been such that "Hegel's standpoint was, therefore of necessity obscure" (*EW* 3, 138 and 140). Initially, Dewey hoped that he might overcome that obscurity, but an increasingly mute record after 1891 suggests subsequent experience was disabusing him of that hope.

That Dewey continued for a time to teach his course on Hegel's Logic and on the Philosophy of Spirit tells us little — we all have taught topics after our excitement for them has waned. In *Democracy and Education* (*EW* 9, 62–65), in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (*MW* 12, 90, 140, and 157), and in *The Quest for Certainty* (*LW* 4, 50–52), Dewey clearly put Hegel among the bad guys in need of reconstruction. During the First and Second World Wars, Dewey showed little reconjunction in including Hegel among those to blame for German transgressions (*MW* 8, 184–200 and 421–442; and *MW* 10, 221–226). Did Dewey need to target Hegel in his work aimed at reconstruction? Did he need to uncouple from earlier thinkers to make the case for his present views? By doing so, did he diminish his own intellectual resources for putting forward his positive philosophy?

I think Dewey's negative agenda of reconstruction had neither substance nor purpose. He could have advanced his positive agenda just as well without it, and by pursuing his negative agenda, he channeled his energy into a sinkhole and impoverished the background from which he could draw in developing his actual achievements.

ENVOI

Let's back away a bit from both Hegel and Kant, and think in conclusion about Dewey's view of history. Dewey treated historical life in a deeply reductionist

way. To begin, he schematized it, reducing the record to a few names, keywords, associations, memes, and conventional capsules. Then he configured all that into a single great problem, both enduring and pernicious, the split between intellectual life and material life, and he took the reconciliation of that split as the grail of his quest. Dewey's reductionist history diluted what it preserved and consigned to oblivion what his schemas did not catch. Does historical life really involve a split between matter and mind? Not if historical life involves living agents acting in a world thinking about what they do.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Let's think briefly as critical philosophers about Santayana's famous dictum, asking, how is historical life possible? For someone living in a human world, it is not only the categories of Kantian logic that make experience possible. All sorts of acquired concepts, tools, principles, routines, regulations, laws, ideas, compacts, practices, tastes, skills, desires, works of art and literature, and so much more, serve in making experience possible in its full human complexity. The wondrously rich past — all the available culture, both high and popular — stands prior to present experience and it always will. Relative to possible experience, history stands as an array of a priori synthetic resources for the construction of experience in the living present. Why rail against it? Why desiccate it in empty schemas?

Let us entertain the possibility that positively bad ideas are very rare and that historical change does not convert sound thinking achieved in former times into a set of erroneous propositions. Error puts thought out of context. Context binds thought and historical change alters contexts. Without care about who is doing what and why, thought easily stagnates and people apply ideas out of context. That is why I have been harping on the importance of remaining clear about agency, suspicious that Dewey did not maintain clarity about who was acting with various ideas for what purposes.

To see what I mean, reflect on the list of dualisms that Dewey worried over in *Democracy and Education*. The list in his original index was long, more than thirty pairs: activity and knowledge, activity versus mind, authority versus freedom, and so on.²⁰ Each component of these dualisms stands on its own as a legitimate topic in education. Take out the conjunctions, the versuses! Dewey linked them together as apparent dualisms that he could dispense with. Separately, even paired, these concepts posed no problem in their proper contexts. Changed conditions posed the problem. Changed conditions altered the contexts in which people used powerful concepts, altering who tried to do what with them for what reasons, inviting the inappropriate use of the ideas. Let's see how new conditions altered agency, shifting who would use the concepts in what ways.

Once upon a time, the agent of education was the infant, the child, the youth, the man and woman, and if we stop and reflect, that is still sort of true, perhaps

20. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 442.

even more than sort of. But Dewey was writing in a time when “education” was rapidly becoming institutionalized, writing explicitly for prospective normal school teachers. With these historical changes, the agent of education ceased to be the person engaged in an effort at lifelong self-formation. It shifted to the institutions that the public powers were everywhere creating for the purpose of educating the young and even the mature. Hence, education has become what schools do.

Dewey participated in this displacement that was occurring through the institutionalization of education — perhaps reluctantly, perhaps by inadvertence. We respond to his pedagogy because he seems to have wanted to preserve the agency of the child and the person in their educational experience. But he muddled it. He liked to blur his prose, and “education” became a metaphysical blob, a subtype of Dewey’s “experience,” with both being actions without agents. A new context — institutional programs, programs in which normal school teachers would be functionaries — would alter who would use the concepts for what purpose. Concepts formerly of use to students, the agents pursuing their own education, would become guiding principles that others would adopt and use to control the activities supporting their pedagogic wards, an open invitation for the concepts to regulate activities inappropriately.

We can avoid such displacement by asking the Kantian question — How is educational experience possible, especially for whom? — and doing so in the Hegelian style: by grasping the possibility of education as its agent experiences it. Here the non-Hegelian character of Dewey’s program of reconstruction becomes apparent. The changed conditions supported a pedagogical *Aufhebung* in which the child heaves herself up into a new, more abstract educational situation. Still, having heaved herself up into the school, the child remains the child, and the full set of conceptual resources meaningful outside the institutional context carry over into the new context, significant and important to the child. She continues to construct her possible educational experience with all those powerful concepts that Dewey deprecated as parts of pernicious dualisms.

Think of education-as-preparation, which in *Democracy and Education* Dewey wonderfully debunked as the pedagogical poohbahs then and now propound it. But he let the displacement stand by debunking the misuse without really affirming its proper use. As a pedagogical concept, education-as-preparation has immense importance and value to the person pursuing self-formation. Even for the poohbahs, education-as-preparation might seem to involve some serious meditation on Max Weber’s two great essays on the vocations of science and politics,²¹ but in our brave new world of public life, serious preparation by the poohbahs seems to pass as entirely unneeded. But the child, the real agent of education, engages the question of education-as-preparation continuously, seriously, in work and in make-believe.

21. Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” and “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (1946; repr. New York: Routledge, 2009).

Children, all of us, engage in shaping ourselves through our unfolding sequence of life choices by preparing, quite authentically (whether imaginatively or actively), for all sorts of futures, even when the prospective future is absurd. The vital context for the concepts involved in the various dualisms to which Dewey objected is this: persons engaged together in an effort of mutual self-formation, recognizing one another, working to shape themselves intentionally, against the behavioral conditioning of the forces in the world playing upon them. We do not need to censor or reduce this conceptual repertoire from the past; we need to keep the concepts aligned with their authentic agents as the environment of action changes.

Something else also: the agents of possible experience act not through their generic roles, but as particular living persons. The person who became the normal school teacher had not only to perform the requirements of her office, but to engage *as a person* with the child *as child* in a process of *Anerkennen*, or reciprocal recognition, not as pupil and teacher, but as two autonomous persons, each able to recognize that the other, like herself, has recognized her full humanity. If we think about the concepts on the list of dangerous dualisms from the point of view of the child or youth or person who might use them to construct their experience, we see them all having substantial value when used in the correct context. The lives of real persons, of children and youths and everyone else, are complex, many-sided, continuous, social and interpersonal — each and every person has a real stake in each and every concept listed in Dewey's index.

Dewey reacted to critical philosophy, particularly Kant's contribution to it, as a body of doctrine that he did not like because to him it seemed to impede the sound application of intelligence to the conduct of life. Others saw critical philosophy as a *Begriff*, as itself a concept, a resource for inquiry and construction, enabling a living person to start from a this or that, from a given, and to proceed carefully in exploring how that given was possible. Such exploration has been an extremely fruitful stance since the 1890s. Tom Rockmore's excellent survey of twentieth-century philosophy, *In Kant's Wake*, and the essays in *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy* gathered by Paul Fairfield, investigate the possibilities. Had Dewey been less hostile to Kant, Rockmore's short section on Dewey's interaction with Kant might have had more meat to survey and something like Fairfield's collection would probably have been published long before 2010.²²

What Dewey missed, we're missing too, and that's our problem. His instrumentalism epitomized the virtues of the progressive movement. His instrumentalist commitments — organizing the AAUP, work with leading educational associations, the League for Independent Political Action, American Children's Theatre,

22. Tom Rockmore, *In Kant's Wake: Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006); and Paul Fairfield, ed., *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010). James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) provides an excellent general view and a sense of Dewey's place within the Progressive movement prior to World War I.

the *Social Frontier*, the Committee for Cultural Freedom, to name a few — were diverse, high-minded initiatives for the betterment of all. But instrumentalism may have slowly decayed. Are we awakening to find it out of control? High-minded instrumentalism might have been fine, “a faith in intelligence, as the one and indispensable belief necessary to moral and social life” (*LW 2*, 21). But how does an abstract property like intelligence function as a belief in moral and social life? Who does what with it? What in instrumentalism has worked to keep it high-minded? Suddenly we find ourselves awash in lots of low-minded instrumentalism, in tweets and talking points, bubbles and echo chambers, a ship of state that’s become a ship of fools. Do we clearly know what agents and verbs can jump into action under the banner of instrumentalism? Does *Trump: The Art of the Deal*²³ illustrate instrumentalism at work, or does it exemplify anti-instrumentalism and why?

Dewey’s positive goals served good purposes. He generally backed constructive policies, goals, and programs that would pass Rawlsian tests of justice as fairness, and he advanced them with dedication within his time. But was that result determined by his philosophy or his sensibility? Instrumentalism fails to clarify and leaves obscure what actions, by whom, it should address. “Instrumentalism maintains ... that action should be intelligent and reflective, and that thought should occupy a central position in life” (*LW 2*, 19). That’s nice, but it glosses over far too much. Who will spontaneously defer, saying “I’m dumb and unreflective, and mindless reflex occupies a central position in my life”? Thinking that forgets, obscures, conceals, or disguises the agent who thinks instrumentally about who-knows-what becomes deeply irresponsible by omission or commission.

We must not rest on Dewey’s laurels. The public still has its problems. We grossly fail to achieve reciprocal recognition of each and all. And both democracy and education, as we know them, have become as much hindrances as helps to humane learning and to a humane public life. Let’s do what Dewey didn’t finish, or even try. Let’s work with all the historical resources he might have drawn on. Let’s pay prolonged attention to the intractable problems and to the formative principles in order to educate ourselves, beneath the surface, to build a common life on real foundations. Kant stated the three fundamental questions that all share across time and space: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A805/B833). Living our lives, constructing our experience, we seek to answer these questions. Let us bear down on them. Among other things ...

What can I know? Let’s undertake a sustained, serious *Critique of Education*, not another smug complaint about all the wrong that others are doing and not another arrogant pontification about needs and imperatives by a secure commission of distracted souls. How is formative experience possible? What are the limits of its possibility? What things do people do that transgress the limits of possible formative experience? What can they do for themselves and others within those limits of possibility? Be prepared — howls of denial will greet a critique of education carried out with fullness, rigor, and clarity of mind.

23. Donald J. Trump and Tony Schwartz, *The Art of the Deal* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987).

What should I do? Let's work to discover, develop, and practice, within the limits of possible education, how to cultivate the capacities of each for human agency in a world of constraints. If we are not educating ourselves for agency in the midst of real circumstances, we are submitting ourselves to propaganda and manipulation. To get on that path of discovery, development, and practice, we need to stand patiently under the few great efforts — like Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, like Vico, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Herder, Schleiermacher, Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Weber, Arendt, and Dewey too, and all that have come in their train — working to understand their most difficult texts, absorbing their spirit while seeking to exceed their grasp.

What may I hope? Let's aspire, with humility and hope, to achieve a state of universal recognition in which each person feels fulfilled at once in and for herself, a state in which the subjective sense of self that each feels and thinks fully harmonizes with the objective realities each experiences, and a state in which all know with confidence that all are living in that state of complete fulfillment. No one can enjoy such fulfillment in this world as it is, but each and all do expect, need, and merit heaving ourselves up meaningfully toward that state, despite the realities of our unhappy consciousness. Without that feeling of meaningful movement, we disengage in resentful alienation from personal and collective life. In this world as it is, we may hope to join in shared effort, inclusive of all, to better approximate the human fulfillment of all.

Let's think back to Newberry Hall as Dewey spoke to the students he would soon leave behind. He called to mind the great ideals of a great religion, and he must have felt that at Chicago and beyond he would pursue his version of those ideals in his more secular way. Now for us, our quest — rigorously critiquing how education is possible, discovering how to form and educate our human agency in a world of constraint, and working to recognize reciprocally our mutual humanity — more meaningfully expresses the trinity of shared questions, yet in different language. Whatever the language, the ideals, the self-expectations, move us with meaning. We all form and pursue them as ordinary humans, and in forming and pursuing his, Dewey made mistakes while still accomplishing a lot. His mistakes become cautions for us; his accomplishments become our standard. As humans, no different from Dewey, we have our opportunity to heed his cautions and to improve upon the standards that he and so many others have set through what they were able to know, by what they did, and for which they hoped.

You! The young, grasp your turn!

I AM GRATEFUL to Steve Cohen, Ellen Lagemann, Maxine McClintock, Avi Mintz, and Grace Roosevelt for helpful comments on drafts, and to Anne Reinish, a doctoral candidate at the University of Michigan, for help in securing valuable documents. Special thanks to Chris Higgins, a master of the editor's art of not letting an author finish prematurely, and to Joyce Atkinson and the staff of *Educational Theory*. They do not bear responsibility for the views here voiced.

Copyright of Educational Theory is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.