

JOHN DEWEY ON THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT: John Dewey once wrote: “Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful.” For him communication is the highest of the “arts of life,” for it is in communication that society is born and nurtured. It is by communication that we discover the possibilities of nature. And it is through communication that we make our shared experience meaningful. It is no wonder, then, that Dewey would conclude *The Public and Its Problems* with this provocative statement: Democracy “will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication.”

Dewey, however, does not adequately explain what he understands by “the art of full and moving communication” and never tells us how “communication” functions in the varied contexts of practical life. Despite, then, his obvious affection for communication, he leaves many questions about it unanswered. For instance, what makes communication possible? In what kind of situations is communication called for and why? How does an inchoate feeling or idea find concrete embodiment in language? What are the connections among language, communication, thought, feeling, and action? Most importantly, what is the process by which one employs the art of communication to influence the beliefs and behaviors of others?

This dissertation addresses these questions by approaching Dewey’s thinking on communication from a distinctly rhetorical perspective. Even though Dewey almost never mentions “rhetoric” in his entire corpus, I argue that it is precisely the absence of the term from his writings that makes

a rhetorical reading of his work all the more imperative. Such a reading permits us to understand the practical importance of the “art of communication” in the larger context of his social thought. If, then, the problem with Dewey’s writing on communication is that it often drifts into abstractions, one remedy is take those abstractions and place them into concrete situations, where communication is required to transform some part of the environment through transaction with human thought and action. Because this kind of activity has been the specific domain of rhetoric since the time of the sophists, it is only appropriate to read Dewey’s work through that tradition.

In effect, the goal of this dissertation is to explicate Dewey’s theory of communication in the terms of a rhetorical theory. But insofar as his thought went through three distinct “periods” in his lifetime, beginning with his Idealistic period in 1880, moving into his Experimental period in 1903, and culminating in his Naturalistic period in 1925, Dewey can be said to have had three implicit rhetorical theories. To articulate and explain each of these theories, I trace Dewey’s theoretical development through time and construct, through published works, private correspondence, and biographical material. I show that the first theory envisioned rhetoric as a form of *eros* that helps us grow towards Absolute self-consciousness. The second theory views rhetoric as a form of critical inquiry whose goal is the development of *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom. The third theory treats rhetoric as a productive *technē*, or a naturalistic form of art that has the power to transform experience, nature, and society through its transactional character.

By tracing Dewey’s theoretical development and explicating three implicit theories of rhetoric in his writings, this dissertation not only provides a unique perspective on Dewey’s changing views on language, ontology, and social practice, but also demonstrates how each theory can still be

effectively used to interpret and guide the art of rhetoric. This kind of work enables us to grasp different facets of this diverse and vibrant art. At the same time, it shows how Dewey's work remains an important resource for those who wish to promote and sustain a democratic way of life by educating citizens in the art of full and moving communication.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: JOHN DEWEY AND THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

The Sophists taught that man could largely control the fortunes of life by mastery of the arts...In short arts based on knowledge cooperate with nature and render it amenable to human happiness. The gods recede into twilight. Divination has a powerful competitor. Worship becomes moral. Medicine, war, and the crafts desert the temple and the altar of the patron-god of the guild, as inventions, tools, techniques of action and works multiply ...Through instrumental arts, arts of control based on study of nature, objects which are fulfilling and good, may be multiplied and rendered secure. This road after almost two millennia of obscurity and desertion was refound and retaken; its rediscovery marks what we call the modern era.<sup>1</sup>

When John Dewey praised the “modern” temperament of the Greek sophists in 1925, he was nearing the end of a long journey that had begun in the spirit of Plato and ended in the spirit of Protagoras. Although Dewey never placed himself in the lineage of the sophists, his description of their orientation to the world indicates that he felt a certain kinship with their democratic ethos. Referring to them as “the first body of professional educators in Europe,”<sup>2</sup> Dewey rejected the Platonic accusation that a sophist was a “hired hunter of rich young men”<sup>3</sup> and “an expert at

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1981; original work published 1925), 104. All Dewey citations from books and essays (with the exception of the 1886 edition of *Psychology, Philosophy and Education in their Social Relations*, and *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*) will use the original title of the work but the pagination from the *Collected Works*.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1980; original work published 1916), 339-340.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, trans. Nicholas P. White, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), 232d.



cheating and false-hood making,”<sup>4</sup> Instead, he classified the sophists as the first true educators of a democratic citizenry. Not only were they teachers who “instructed the youth in virtue, the political arts, and the management of city and household,” but they were social theorists who dealt “with the relation of the individual to the universal...of man and nature, of tradition and reflection, of knowledge and action.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the sophists were, as Dewey points out, the quintessential “humanists; aiming, by teaching literature and other social studies, to make the Greek states more conscious of their common language, literature and religion, and thereby to bring them into more friendly relations with each other.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, they justified their teachings without recourse to the will of the gods or the dictates of absolute truth. The human community now had to accept responsibility for its own destiny, and the sophists helped to provide the necessary skills that such self-determination required. Recognizing that the modern era was repeating this cycle, Dewey sought to recover the insights of the sophists and incorporate them into a revitalized theory of democratic life.

Dewey’s historical narrative is not without irony, as it contradicts the narrative of Dewey’s two most beloved authors, Hegel and Plato. In his 1930 autobiographical essay, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” Dewey explained that Hegel’s work had “operated as an immense release”<sup>7</sup> for him as a young man and that Plato “still provides my favorite philosophic reading.”<sup>8</sup> Plato, however, expends much energy in his dialogues denigrating the art of the sophist as a “shameful thing” akin to “pastry baking,”<sup>9</sup> and Hegel characterizes the sophists as somewhat immature “speculative philosophers” who were but a “phase of the inevitable process

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<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, 241b.

<sup>5</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 340.

<sup>6</sup> John Dewey, “History of Education,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 17, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990; original work published 1907), 183.

<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988; original work published 1930), 153.

<sup>8</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 154.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 463b.

of the unfolding of the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, for Dewey to praise the sophists for their modern and progressive spirit was effectively to invert Hegel’s historical account and praise a class of thinkers who had long been a target of Platonic ridicule. In taking this stand, Dewey not only rejected many of the core teachings of his mentors, but he simultaneously challenged the Western philosophical tradition to come to terms with the sophistic notion that the development and cultivation of the arts surpasses the traditional notions of philosophical or epistemic truth as the consummate achievement of the human species.

The question, however, is what Dewey meant by “art.” Considering his fascination with Greek civilization, it is no surprise that he took his inspiration from the Greeks. As Guthrie observes, the term “art” in contemporary use is uniquely situated between two poles. On the one hand, it “suffers from its aesthetic associations” in the form of “the opposition between ‘the arts’ and the natural sciences.”<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the Greek root of the word “art,” *technē*, has become associated with the connotations of its more instrumental English derivatives, “technical” and “technology.”<sup>12</sup> In the original Greek, however, *technē* referred to “every branch of human or divine skill, or applied intelligence, as opposed to the unaided work of nature.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it included both the “fine” and “technical” arts. The myth of the Greek god Prometheus embodies this broader notion of *technē*. In Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus tells the Chorus of his generous gifts to mortals: “Mindless was all they did until I showed / The dubious rise and setting of the stars. / That triumph next of scientific mind, / The count numerical for man I find / And history’s instrument, skill of the bard, / That great

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<sup>10</sup> John Poulakos, “Hegel’s Reception of the Sophists,” in *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 55 (Spring 1990): 162.

<sup>11</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1971), 115.

<sup>12</sup> Guthrie, *The Sophists* 115.

<sup>13</sup> Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 115.

composer, the written word.”<sup>14</sup> In this single passage, Prometheus attributes human survival to the arts of astronomy and other sciences, mathematics, poetry, and writing, all *technai* to be used in the service of improving the state of humanity.

We find a similar sense of *technē* in the “Myth of Protagoras,” the first theoretical defense of democracy in the classic world that was preserved (at least in part) in Plato’s *Protagoras*.<sup>15</sup> In brief, Protagoras’s myth accounts how even after human beings received Prometheus’s gifts of fire and the practical arts, they continued to be killed off by wild beasts because they could not form cities to defend themselves. For “when men did ‘come together’ the result was continued acts of injustice between them, all because they lacked the *technē* of living together in a city, the art of politics.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, as Dewey and Tufts describe the myth in their 1908 *Ethics*, “the gods gave men a sense of justice and of reverence, in order to enable them to unite for mutual preservation.”<sup>17</sup> As Dewey points out in an earlier work, however, justice and reverence are not the only *technai* humans were provided. In his 1894 *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, Dewey sketches the “three stages” of teaching ethics. Along with “practical encouragement and discouragement” and “reflective judgment,” Dewey includes, with a reference to Plato, “urging and restraint through speech (See Plato, *Protagoras*, 325-326)”<sup>18</sup> The section in Plato’s dialogue to which Dewey refers begins with the following passage spoken by Protagoras while defending his ability to teach virtue:

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<sup>14</sup> Translated by Eric Havelock as quoted in Eric Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957), 58.

<sup>15</sup> For a commentary on the debate over the reliability of Plato’s account, see George B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1981), 144.

<sup>16</sup> Kerferd, 142.

<sup>17</sup> John Dewey and James H. Tufts, *Ethics*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1978; original work published 1908), 8.

<sup>18</sup> John Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971; original work published 1894), 223.

Consider this: Does there or does there not exist one thing which all citizens must have for there to be a city? Here and nowhere else lies the solution to your problem... This one thing is not the art of the carpenter, the blacksmith, or the potter, but justice, and temperance, and piety—what I may collectively term the virtue of man ... [and] we have shown that they regard this thing as teachable both in private and public life.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to notice that “speech” is nowhere to be found in this passage. Dewey reads “speech” into Protagoras’s description based on the traditional connection between the sophists and rhetoric. In fact, within the fragments that remain of Protagoras, the explicit connection between rhetoric and civic virtue is never made. As Takis Poulakos observes, “it is respect and justice...not speech, that accounts for the origins of civilized life.”<sup>20</sup> It was actually Isocrates, Protagoras’s successor, who “put into practice Protagoras’ vision of rhetoric as an art [*technē*] that could be infused with the demands of political life and could make students of rhetoric good citizens of the polis.”<sup>21</sup> In his famous “Hymn to Logos” found in the *Antidosis*, Isocrates places the burden of civilized life squarely on the shoulders of rhetoric. Claiming that the power of persuasion has helped humankind escape the “life of wild beasts,” Isocrates credits speech with the creation of institutions, the writing of laws, the establishment of virtues, and the cultivation of intelligence.<sup>22</sup> He then concludes that “if there is need to speak in brief summary of this power, we shall find that none of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech, but that in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, in *Plato: Collected Works*, 325a.

<sup>20</sup> Takis Poulakos, *Speaking for the Polis: Isocrates’ Rhetorical Education* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Takis Poulakos, 105.

<sup>22</sup> Isocrates, *Antidosis*, trans. George Norlin, in *Isocrates*, vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1929), §253-256.

<sup>23</sup> Isocrates, *Antidosis*, §257.

Thus, Dewey's reading of Plato's *Protagoras* shows the connection he made between speech and social virtue long before he declared society to exist "in communication."<sup>24</sup> Not only does he read "speech" into a Platonic dialogue intended to denigrate it, but he places a great burden on speech to act as "the storehouse of the ideas and beliefs which form the culture of a people."<sup>25</sup> Dewey's position thus accords with the spirit of Protagoras, whose revolution was to invert the aristocratic ideal by insisting that demonstrable *arête* is not prior to *technē*, but derived from it. According to Havelock, "at root of this curious argument is Protagoras's invincible respect for the democratic virtues of justice, respect for other men's opinions and the processes of peaceful persuasion as the basis of communal life, and the necessity of communal life to the very survival of the human race."<sup>26</sup> The importance that Protagoras places upon *technē* leads Havelock to conclude that technology and social virtue are inextricably linked. For Havelock, "technology viewed historically contains the whole clue to man's specific quality as a species: his social organization, justice and law are themselves developments of that same kind of faculty which lit the first fire or lifted the first wooden club."<sup>27</sup> The difference is that the club is a blunt tool for limited purposes, while social organization is a technology based on the far more advanced *technai* as law, justice, and communication.

Dewey's interpretation of *technē* clearly fits into the Protagorean tradition. As Hickman has shown, Dewey interpreted *technē* to mean "that technological instruments include immaterial objects such as ideas, theories, numbers, and the objects of logic."<sup>28</sup> Thus, in contradistinction to Aristotle and Plato, Dewey conceived of *epistemē*, or what was traditionally considered

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<sup>24</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> John Dewey, "Logic," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 8, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1986; original work published 1933), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 268.

<sup>27</sup> Havelock, 184.

<sup>28</sup> Larry A. Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992), *xiii*. I am indebted to Hickman for his insights into Dewey's interpretation of *technē*, and I credit the final form of this dissertation in part to his work.

“contemplative” scientific knowledge, as a form of *technē* that served instrumental purposes. According the Hickman, “technology is for Dewey...productive skill brought to bear by human beings on the project of *altering* their environments and *accommodating* themselves to those environments,” and within this project, “ideas, knowing, and active engagement with experiential contexts are artifacts of inquiry in just as important a sense as are works of art that are made of canvas and paint, stone, metal, plastic, steel, or shoe leather.”<sup>29</sup> Hickman also notes, however, that for Dewey, “communication is a technological artifact.”<sup>30</sup> This point is reinforced by Sleeper’s claim that, in Dewey’s work, “it is communication that makes all things possible that *are* possible of human achievement”<sup>31</sup> for it is a “*social art* invented to turn the powers of nature to account.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Dewey’s embrace of what Sleeper calls “the transformational art of communication”<sup>33</sup> rejects the conservative spirit of Aristotelian thought in favor of the liberal temper of the sophists; for, as John Poulakos describes, “the Sophists tend to look at the world not as it is but as it is not. Accordingly, they venture into the sphere of possibility searching for that which is not yet but which can be; therefore, we can say that their rhetoric aims at creating possibilities, opening what is closed, undoing what is done.”<sup>34</sup> In light of the above analysis, the same can be said about Dewey’s philosophy of communication.

However, despite Dewey’s early exposure to early Greek thought, including that of Protagoras, during his time at Johns Hopkins,<sup>35</sup> he failed to investigate fully his connection with

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<sup>29</sup> Hickman, 70.

<sup>30</sup> Hickman, 169.

<sup>31</sup> R. W. Sleeper, *The Necessity of Pragmatism: John Dewey’s Conception of Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986), 117.

<sup>32</sup> Sleeper, 119.

<sup>33</sup> Sleeper, 143.

<sup>34</sup> John Poulakos, “Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible,” *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 221.

<sup>35</sup> Dewey’s mentor, George Sylvester Morris, was keenly interested in recovering the wisdom of the ancient Greeks. Here, Dewey describes Morris’s classroom method in a letter: “We begin by reading Plato’s *Theaetetus* (in translations) and along with it are given subjects relating to the matters suggested by the text—the writings of Heraclitus, Democritus, Protagoras &c— One subject is given to each, & he is expected to look up the fragments

the sophistic tradition. Although in his only attempt at a “Socratic dialogue” he mentions the possibility (in the form of an accusation) that “the origins and consequences” of his pragmatism might be found in the doctrine of Protagoras,<sup>36</sup> Dewey did not ultimately see himself as a sophist; he saw himself as a naturalist. In Dewey’s account, “Protagoras, like the Cyrenaics, is a humanist, not a naturalist. He solves the question of the teaching of virtues by a glorification of the *social* in humane arts.”<sup>37</sup> For Dewey, art as *technē* involved a necessary connection between human beings and *nature*, and in this way Dewey was closer to Aristotle. As Randall has observed, “in his naturalism, his pluralism, his logical and social empiricism, his realism, his natural teleology, his ideas of potentiality and actuality, contingency and regularity, qualitatively diverse individuality—above all, in his thoroughgoing functionalism...he is nearer to the Stagirite than to any other philosopher.”<sup>38</sup> All of this may be true, but in Dewey’s humanism, his praise of *technē* over *epistemē*, his belief in the unlimited potential of human experience, his view of communication as a transformative art, and above all, in his advocacy of the metaphysics of Becoming over that of Being, he is nearer to Protagoras than to Aristotle. In a way, then,

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that remain of that authors’ writings, consult leading authorities &c, and then give an account of it before the class— We then take up Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’ & treat in a similar manner. By the time of finishing we will be supposed to have a pretty good knowledge of Greek Phil. & from original sources as much as possible—at least of Gk. Phil in so far as it relates to the question of the origin, meaning &c of knowledge.” It is interesting that Morris did not rely only on Plato’s interpretation of the sophists and pre-Socratics, but actually went back to their original fragments. See John Dewey to H. A. P. Torrey, October 5, 1882. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Unless otherwise noted, all correspondence from John Dewey is taken from in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, ed. Larry Hickman (Carbondale: The Center for Dewey Studies, 2001). I am grateful to Dr. Larry Hickman from The Center for Dewey Studies and the Morris Library at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale for permission to quote from the correspondence.

<sup>36</sup> John Dewey, “Nature and Its Good: A Conversation,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1977; original work published 1907), 20. The dialogue in which this passage occurs involves a conversation between five men, each representing a different philosophical position. The comparison with Protagoras is actually made in the form of an accusation by the idealist, “Moore,” against the pragmatist, “Eaton.” Moore interrupts after Eaton mentions Plato and says: “Yes, and Protagoras—don’t forget him; for unfortunately we know both the origin and the consequences of your doctrine that being and seeming are the same.” It is interesting, however, that Eaton neither refutes nor acknowledges the charge, indicating, I believe, Dewey’s ambivalence on the issue. See Dewey, “Nature’s Good: A Conversation,” 20.

<sup>37</sup> John Dewey, “The ‘Socratic Dialogues’ of Plato,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1925), 135 (emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> John Herman Randall, Jr., “Dewey’s Interpretation of the History of Philosophy,” in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Paul A. Schilpp (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1989; original work published 1939), 101.

Dewey's "naturalistic humanism"<sup>39</sup> was analogous to an Aristotelian naturalism grounded on the ethics of Protagorean humanism.

However, these intellectual continuities were largely lost on Dewey, who often seemed to play fast and loose with the classical tradition. As one commentator has pointed out, Dewey had a habit of vacillating between aggressive polemics against the Greek dualistic tradition and glowing admiration for the Greek spirit and temperament, leaving a reader with "the feeling that we learn more about Dewey, in his discussions of Athenian philosophy, than we do about the Greeks."<sup>40</sup> Although Dewey clearly gained inspiration from the art and civilization of the Greeks, more often than not he used its philosophers for his own purposes (usually to identify the root of some dualism) rather than trying to identify continuity between his own thought and theirs. However, Dewey was not being irresponsible, for he was using the Greeks to make a point about modern philosophy, not about Greek antiquity. According to Randall, Dewey "used his wealth of historical knowledge, not for a display of brilliant erudition, but as material to be brought to bear upon the present-day problems of the logic of inquiry."<sup>41</sup> Thus, as Chambliss points out, for Dewey, "critical examination of the past is not for the sake of criticizing the past, but for the sake of finding elements there which are continuous with, and components of, the critical thinking of the present."<sup>42</sup> Consequently, Dewey developed a habit of referring to Plato, Aristotle, or other Greeks only when he had a point to make about some problem in contemporary philosophy, otherwise remaining silent on the broader question of how much his own thinking reflected their ideas.

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<sup>39</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Frederick M. Anderson, "Dewey's Experiment with Greek Philosophy," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 7 (1967): 87.

<sup>41</sup> Randall, "Dewey's Interpretation of the History of Philosophy," 79.

<sup>42</sup> J. J. Chambliss, *The Influence of Plato and Aristotle on John Dewey's Philosophy* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 2.



Dewey's critical approach to reading Greek philosophy might help explain another glaring absence in his reading of the sophists—the absence of any mention of *rhetoric*. Even in the only comprehensive treatment that remains by Dewey of the history of Greek philosophy, the lecture notes by Elsie Ridley Clapp for Dewey's course in "Philosophy and Education in their Historic Relations" taught at Columbia University in 1910-1911, Dewey fails to mention rhetoric despite the fact that he includes two days of lecture on "The Greek Sophists." Instead, Dewey treats the sophists as "symptoms of the change from the regime of custom to the regime of analysis and reflective thought" who thus embodied "a certain opposition between social customs organized in institutions, and the procedure of critical, analytical intelligence."<sup>43</sup> For Dewey, the sophists represented not rhetoric, but rationality, and as an example of their rational character he points to the fact that they took the time to write treatises on "all the mechanical and industrial arts, defense of persuasion, of writing dramas, athletic arts, dyeing, bleaching, metal working."<sup>44</sup> This observation, which places "defense of persuasion" alongside dyeing, bleaching, and metal working, shows just how little Dewey was concerned with rhetoric as a *unique* art when compared with the overall impact that *technē* based on rational knowledge and critical method had on the growth of civilization.

Thus, for Dewey, the great accomplishment of the Greeks was not their rhetoric *per se*; it was how their rhetoric was based on the new science of logic, or the giving of reasons. In fact, because of Dewey's focus on logic, he had a tendency throughout his career to align rhetoric with merely "formal" arts like grammar,<sup>45</sup> a tendency partially due to his own experience as an

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<sup>43</sup> John Dewey, *Philosophy & Education in their Historic Relations*, transcribed from his lectures by Elsie Ridley Clapp, ed. J. J. Chambliss (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 32, 35.

<sup>44</sup> Dewey, *Philosophy & Education in their Historic Relations*, 32.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, observe how Dewey aligns rhetoric and grammar while simultaneously making both traditions indicative of an attention to merely stylistic and formal concerns. "The decay of art in the Alexandrian period... is a sign of the general loss of civic consciousness that accompanied the eclipse of city-states... Theories about art and the cultivation of grammar and rhetoric took the place of creation. And theories about art gave evidence of the great

undergraduate. Consequently, in Dewey's account of Greek political life, it is logic, not rhetoric, that takes center stage. Even though Dewey acknowledges that the name of the sophists "took on an invidious meaning" from Plato because Plato believed they "aimed not at truth but at persuasion," the sophists are nonetheless described by Dewey as proto-logicians.<sup>46</sup> According to Dewey, the sophists promised to provide their pupils "skilled excellence in the arts, especially the political arts, combined with that power to command the attention of others which would assure civic preeminence. For those going into political life this promise involved training in ability to speak in private groups and in the public forum and formed the beginnings of a kind of practical logic."<sup>47</sup> For Dewey, this skill in "practical logic" was demanded by the political environment of Athenian democracy, an environment he describes in the following way:

In Athens not merely political but legal issues were settled in the public forum. Political advancement and civic honor depended more upon the power of persuasion than upon military achievement. As general intellectual curiosity developed among the learned men, power to interpret and explain was connected with the ability to set forth a consecutive story. To give an account of something, a logos, was also to account for it. The logos, the ordered account, was the reason and the measure of the things set forth. Here was the background out of which developed a formulated theory of logic as the structure of knowledge and truth.<sup>48</sup>

Although Dewey's origin-story for logic is plausible, it comes at the expense of rhetoric.

Dewey may not have seen this as a problem, but in fact it reveals a major gap in his social

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social change that had taken place. Instead of connecting arts with an expression of the life of the community, the beauty of nature and of art was regarded as an echo and reminder of some supernal reality that had its being outside social life." For those used to making rhetoric a sign of the *growth* of civic consciousness, Dewey's account must sound a bit lopsided. See John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987; original work published 1934), 331.

<sup>46</sup> Dewey, "Logic," 4.

<sup>47</sup> Dewey, "Logic," 4.

<sup>48</sup> Dewey, "Logic," 4.

thought. Observe, for instance, the great leap Dewey makes from his acknowledgement of the role that the new art of “persuasion” had in settling legal and political issue in the public forum and his implied conclusion that the only thing needed to accomplish this persuasion was an “ordered account” based on the principles of a theory of logic. If he had not also talked a great deal about the aesthetic significance and social impact of Greek poetry and drama we might think this was an argument by a traditional rationalist. Dewey was neither a rationalist nor a romantic, but because Dewey never took the time to seriously interrogate the scope, function, and ontological foundations of rhetorical persuasion, he never was able to combine the insights of his logical and aesthetic theories within a satisfactory account of the decision-making processes of actual citizens in practical situations in which public discourse is employed to debate and decide important questions of law, policy, and morality. Dewey offers analyses of Greek logical theory, religious rituals, aesthetic worldviews, and traditional occupations, but one looks in vain for a comprehensive description of how ordinary Athenians participated and made judgments in their social and political life. This absence might be excused if Dewey had provided such a description for a modern citizen, but instead one finds the pregnant, if not elliptical, remark in *The Public and Its Problems* that democracy “will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication.”<sup>49</sup>

What, however, does Dewey mean by “the art of full and coming communication”? And does this art play the role in Dewey’s thought that otherwise would be played by rhetoric? There are certainly indications that this might be the case, as some scholars have suggested.<sup>50</sup> Not only

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<sup>49</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 2 ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work public 1927), 350.

<sup>50</sup> See Christopher Lyle Johnstone, “Dewey, Ethics, and Rhetoric: Toward a Contemporary Conception of Practical Wisdom,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 16 (1983): 185-207; James A. Mackin, Jr. “Rhetoric, Pragmatism, and Practical Wisdom,” in *Rhetoric and Philosophy*, ed. Richard A. Cherwitz (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1990). However, Johnstone fails to distinguish between Dewey’s early and later works, thereby creating a vision of rhetoric that is

does Dewey assert that “of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful,” but he also claims that it is “a wonder by the side of which transubstantiation pales.”<sup>51</sup> The concept of “communication” eventually became so important for Dewey that much of his entire philosophical system came to rest on assumptions about how it functions. For him communication is the highest of the “arts of life,” for it is in communication that society is born and nurtured. It is by communication that we discover the possibilities of nature. And it is through communication that we make our shared experience meaningful. As Sleeper explains, for Dewey, “if anything is foundational about philosophy, it is communication, since everything else depends on it.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, Sleeper claims that *Experience and Nature* is not so much about “experience” or “nature,” but is rather “an attempt to work out a theory of how communication is possible, and why we need it.”<sup>53</sup>

Given such praise, it is no wonder that scholars of communication have often paid homage to Dewey. James Carey, for instance, relates with fondness the pivotal moment in his academic study of communication when a “wise man” suggested that he begin with Dewey’s work.<sup>54</sup> To Carey, Dewey had “a depth to his work, a natural excess common to seminal minds, that offers permanent complexities, and paradoxes over which to puzzle.”<sup>55</sup> However, Carey also notes a situation that continues today—the regular quoting of Dewey’s remarks about the wonderful nature of communication “without comment or interpretation.”<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, Dewey’s abstract way of writing about communication has contributed to this tendency. Because Dewey never outlined a rhetorical theory that put his ideas about communication to practical use,

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inconsistent with Dewey’s perspective during either period. Mackin, meanwhile, draws from Peirce and James as well as Dewey, thereby articulating a “pragmatist’s” view of rhetoric, not a Deweyan one.

<sup>51</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 132.

<sup>52</sup> Sleeper, 117.

<sup>53</sup> Sleeper, 117.

<sup>54</sup> James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 13.

<sup>55</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 14.

he all too frequently leaves his readers to muddle through obscure declarations like “when the emotional force, the mystic force one might say, of communication, of the miracle of shared life and shared experience is spontaneously felt, the hardness and crudeness of contemporary life will be bathed in the light that never was on land or sea.”<sup>57</sup> Such proclamations hardly amount to a workable rhetorical theory that can effectively explain the ways in which people persuade and are persuaded by discourse. In other words, while we sense that there is something of deep significance Dewey’s ponderings on communication’s wonderfulness, we also wish that Dewey had been a more wonderful communicator.

As a result of Dewey’s lack of clarity about “communication,” interpretations of his theory of communication tend to fall into one of two categories—those that emphasize the ethical value of his communitarian ideals,<sup>58</sup> and those that focus on the historical relevance of writings on mass communication.<sup>59</sup> In the first case, Dewey’s communitarian ideals are embodied in Carey’s “ritual view” of communication, which posits that “communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.”<sup>60</sup> In the second case, Dewey is less a theorist and more a historical exemplar of a time when youthful optimism dominated discussion of the democratic possibilities of new communication

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<sup>57</sup> John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 12, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982; original work published 1920), 201.

<sup>58</sup> See Peter Simonson, “Dreams of Democratic Togetherness: Communication Hope from Cooley to Katz,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13 (1996): 324-342; John Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); James Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication,” *Communication*, 2 (1975), 1-22; Larry S. Belman, “John Dewey’s Concept of Communication,” *Journal of Communication*, 27 (1977): 29-37.

<sup>59</sup> James Carey, “Mass Media: The Critical View,” in M. Burgoon ed., *Communication Yearbook 5*: 18-33. (New Brunswick, NJ: International Communication Association, 1982); James Carey, “Communications and the Progressives,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6 (1989): 264-282; John Peters, “Democracy and American Mass Communication Theory: Dewey, Lippmann, Lazarsfeld,” *Communication*, 11 (1989): 199-220; John Peters, “Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6 (1989): 247-263; J. Michael Sproule, “Progressive Propaganda Critics and the Magic Bullet Myth,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6 (1989): 225-246; Joli Jensen, “Questioning the Social Powers of Art: Toward a Pragmatic Aesthetics,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12 (1995): 365-379.

<sup>60</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 23.

technologies.<sup>61</sup> Peters sums up this characterization well: “Dewey is arguably the quintessential ‘Progressive’ who embodies the contradiction of his age: he is at once a bright-eyed humanist liberal hopeful for the ultimate triumph of democracy and a scientific social engineer who advocates the social control of human nature.”<sup>62</sup> These two perspectives, however, often seem at odds. On the one hand, Dewey serves as a valuable theoretical resource for emphasizing how communication functions to cultivate shared social norms, habits, and rituals; on the other hand, his communitarian ethics appear contradictory, impractical, and anachronistic when combined with his faith in science and then applied to practical problems of democracy, public opinion, rhetoric, and the mass media.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, I claim that one will not be able to overcome these tensions to grasp the full breadth and significance of Dewey’s philosophy of communication without also attempting to construct a rhetorical theory from his work. The reason is that Dewey often used “communication” in such a broad sense that the term became virtually universal; it seemed almost to take the place of the Hegelian “Spirit” which was everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Therefore, (to borrow Hegelian terminology), if Dewey’s theory of communication is to become functional in actual situated practice, it needs to become “concrete.” I believe the most effective way to accomplish this task is to construct a complementary rhetorical theory from Dewey’s writings that demonstrates how communication might function rhetorically. In other words, to understand the nature of communication as a situated and productive art—to understand it as a *technē*—we must move beyond the often abstract manner in which Dewey talks about “communication” and draw from his extensive writing on other topics to construct a productive new theory of rhetoric. For Dewey’s interest in

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<sup>61</sup> See Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind from Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

<sup>62</sup> Peters, “Democracy and American Mass Communication Theory: Dewey, Lippmann, Lazarsfeld,” 202.

“communication” as a leading concept came late in his career, gaining prominence only with the 1916 publication of *Democracy and Education*. By contrast, Dewey’s early writings on psychology, ethics, logic, nature, politics, science, and art provide enough insights to construct a workable rhetorical theory as far back as his 1886 *Psychology*. Accordingly, this dissertation traces Dewey’s theoretical development and constructs, through his public essays and private correspondence, three distinct, but related, philosophies of rhetoric that are still very much applicable (depending on one’s metaphysical commitments) to contemporary rhetorical education, practice, and criticism.

Conceiving Dewey’s theoretical development in rhetorical terms not only aids in our understanding of his work; it also contributes to the task Dewey always set for philosophy. It demonstrates the ways in which his “philosophy grows out of, and in intention is connected with, human affairs.”<sup>63</sup> In other words, to turn Dewey’s philosophy into a rhetorical theory is, in effect, to show how his philosophy contributes to practical life, which was always what he himself tried to do with other philosophers. For example, one of Dewey complaints about modern commentators of Plato was their tendency to “force him into the frame of a rigidly systematized doctrine” and thereby “treat him as the original university professor.”<sup>64</sup> Dewey remarked as late as 1930 that such unimaginative approaches eviscerated the Plato that he had grown to admire, “the dramatic, restless, cooperatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield...whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn.”<sup>65</sup> Dewey’s Plato was not Plato the *philosopher*, it was Plato the *rhetorician*. I believe we can do the same justice to Dewey’s thought by reading it through the classical rhetorical tradition.

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<sup>63</sup> Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 260.

<sup>64</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 155.

<sup>65</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 155.

To approach Dewey in such a manner, however, requires some further clarification to avoid an anachronistic reading of his thought. After all, during his lifetime Dewey demonstrated little interest in either rhetoric or the rhetorical tradition. How, then, can one justify constructing “rhetorical theories” based on his work and using examples and insights drawn from classical rhetoric to highlight aspects of those theories? First, I believe the choice of “rhetoric” as a unifying concept makes it easier to maintain a clear distinction between his ideas in their historical context and his ideas as they are being applied to constructing new rhetorical theories. Because Dewey rarely uses the term, “rhetoric” thus acts as a signal that I am engaging in a constructive, interpretive reading of his philosophy in contrast to the times when I focus specifically on how Dewey defined a particular concept, such as “habit” or “experience” or “mind,” in some other context. My use of “rhetoric” as a unifying concept, as opposed to “communication,” therefore allows for greater freedom to piece together a novel theory of rhetorical persuasion while preserving the integrity of his writing.

Second, my continual references to the classical rhetorical tradition, including Plato, Aristotle, and the sophists, serve as a “common ground” on which Dewey and the representatives of classical rhetoric can interact. On the historical side, I have already pointed out that Dewey was intimately familiar with, and often inspired by, the life and thought and the ancient Greeks, so the use of them as examples is already justified in part by the fact that Dewey would have been acquainted with their writing and ideas. I am not, however, primarily interested in proving any particular influence or causal relationship; rather I am interested in pointing out continuities between Dewey and the Greeks. My purpose is a pragmatic one. Because I am *constructing* new theories of rhetoric from his work, it only makes sense to demonstrate how these theories might resonate with the tradition out of which rhetoric was born. Furthermore, these continuities create



bridges between the discourses of rhetoric and philosophy by showing how Dewey's ideas can in part be traced to their roots in sophistic, Platonic, and Aristotelian thinking. To use a Darwinian metaphor, returning to the Greeks helps to overcome the barriers between these specialized discourses by returning to their beginnings in a common ancestor.

Given my appropriation of the Greek tradition, I will provide a working definition of "rhetoric" by taking as my starting point what Aristotle defined as "the faculty [*dynamis*] of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."<sup>66</sup> Aristotle's account of rhetoric as the situated, practical, inventive, productive, formal, and stylistic art of persuasive discourse accords with the majority of scholarly and common sense definitions. By "rhetorical theory," I mean a theory concerned with the production and reception of persuasive discourse, the goal of which is to increase our understanding of rhetoric by situating it within the context of a wider human and natural environment. For an example, I refer to Dewey's discussion in *Art as Experience*, which compares the *enjoyment* of art with the *understanding* of art: "Flowers can be enjoyed without knowing the interactions of soil, air, moisture, and seeds of which they are the result. But they cannot be *understood* without taking just these interactions into account—and theory is a matter of understanding. Theory is concerned with discovering the nature of the production of works of art and of their enjoyment in perception."<sup>67</sup> Likewise, rhetoric can be enjoyed and even practiced without theoretical knowledge, but once it becomes an object of criticism, it requires a theoretical understanding that makes productive links between rhetoric and the wider cultural, historical, and natural environment in which it interacts. In this way,

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<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. Edward P.J. Corbett (New York: The Modern Library, 1984), 1355b27. See Corbett's introduction in regards to rhetoric as a *technē*: "Although the generic term that Aristotle uses here to define rhetoric is *dynamis* ("faculty" or "power" or "ability"), in most other places in the text, he speaks of rhetoric as being an *art* (*technē*). We can reconcile these two terms by taking the position that if one has mastered the *art* of rhetoric, one has the *faculty* or *ability* to discover the available means of persuasion," xv.

<sup>67</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 18.

rhetorical theory enables the possibility of a rhetorical criticism which act as “a disclosure of part as parts of a whole; of details and particulars as belonging to a total situation.”<sup>68</sup> In addition, the end of any theory is practical, much in the same way that “surveys may be of assistance in the direct experience of others, as a survey of a country is of help to the one who travels through it.”<sup>69</sup> Dewey describes the pragmatic nature of theoretical abstraction in the following way:

Abstraction from any particular consequence...opens the way to new uses and consequences...In being placed in a context of other meanings, (theoretically and scientifically discussed), it is liberated from the contingencies of its prior use. The outcome may be a new and improved system of semaphores which exercise regulation on human interaction more effectively.<sup>70</sup>

Dewey’s use of the term “semaphore” to highlight the value of theoretical abstraction is striking. A semaphore is literally part of a system of visual signals typically associated with the use of flags to guide aircraft on a runway. When combined with his metaphor of a “survey,” it advances a view of theory as both map and guide; it surveys the land in order to situate people within a larger environment and also gives active advice to help them get from one place to another. Dewey’s perspective is reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s observation that language is a game played by rules, in which “a rule stands there like a sign-post” pointing out directions along a path.<sup>71</sup> For Dewey, a theory is much like a system of rules, and the important factor is not its degree of particularity or abstraction, but how well its level of particularity or abstraction functions as a guide for accomplishing some chosen task,<sup>72</sup> whether that task is giving a speech,

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<sup>68</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 314.

<sup>69</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 313.

<sup>70</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 151.

<sup>71</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1958), 39e.

<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to note that Dewey articulated this pragmatic orientation even during his early idealistic period. In his 1888 book on Leibniz, Dewey wrote that “It is not what comes before the formulation of a theory which proves

criticizing a text, or conceptualizing the function of rhetoric within the larger movements of history and society.

However, the legacy of Western philosophy has demonstrated that problems do arise once we move beyond the observation that rhetoric is the art of persuasion and attempt to construct a theory that helps us understand what Bryant calls its “function and scope” within human affairs.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the conflict between Plato and the sophists first enshrined in the *Gorgias* is reenacted in the subsequent see-saw battles between Boethius and Augustine, Ramus and Erasmus, Descartes and Vico, and Kant and Nietzsche in the effort to amplify or diminish the scope of rhetoric. Even in contemporary discourse, the problem in defining the character of rhetoric has not diminished. The situation Bryant described in 1953 remains relevant today: “Either everything worth mentioning is rhetorical, or nothing is; so let’s talk about something encompassable—say logic, or semantics, or persuasion, or linguistics, or scientific method, or poetics, or social psychology, or advertising, or salesmanship, or public relations, or pedagogy, or politics, or psychiatry, or symbolics—or propaganda.”<sup>74</sup> The sheer quantity of disciplinary subjects Bryant strings together reveals the burden that rhetorical theory must take on when it ventures beyond the confines of the study of tropes and figures. On the positive side, however, it also shows rhetoric’s potential. After all, if rhetoric can be divided up into innumerable elements, it can also help to connect those elements back into a coherent whole. Particularly with a thinker of Dewey’s magnitude, who wrote essays, if not entire books, on each of the items in Bryant’s list, rhetoric can serve as a concept to unite and make sense of these wide-ranging subjects.

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it; it is not the facts which suggest it, or the processes which lead up to it: it is what comes after the formulation of the theory,—the uses that it can be put to; the facts which it will render significant.” See John Dewey, *Leibniz’s New Essays Concerning the Human Understanding*, in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1967; original work published 1888), 290-291.

<sup>73</sup> Donald C. Bryant, “Rhetoric: Its Function and Scope,” in *The Province of Rhetoric*, eds. Joseph Schwartz and John A. Rycenga (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1965), 7.

<sup>74</sup> Bryant, 3.

Furthermore, the long-standing interest in defining, confining, and liberating rhetoric shows the continued practical significance of these efforts. Everett Lee Hunt, in an early work on Plato and the sophists, makes this very point:

In the problem of the relation of Plato to Protagoras, of philosopher to sophist and rhetorician, are involved the issues which we debate when we discuss the aims of a liberal education, the desirability of government by experts, the relation of a university to the state, the duty of a scholar in a democracy, the function of public opinion in a popular government the difference between a conventional and a rational morality, to say nothing of more speculative questions.<sup>75</sup>

If Hunt is correct, then in Dewey's work, we find the spirit of philosopher and rhetorician combined. Rather than accept the traditional separations of ends from means, of form from matter, and of theory from practice, which have consistently opposed the realm of the mind and its higher ideals to the life of the body and its fallen language, Dewey articulated a vision that would bridge these dualisms and give both philosophy and rhetoric a valuable role in the enrichment of human experience. Thus, I agree with Don M. Burks, who announced in 1968 that "Dewey's many-sided philosophy has numerous applications for rhetorical theory. Perhaps no philosopher since Aristotle has more to offer the rhetorician than does John Dewey."<sup>76</sup> However, despite the renewed interest on Dewey's theory of *communication*, what Christopher Lyle Johnstone said in 1983 remains true today—that "Dewey's work remains largely unexamined by contemporary theorists and philosophers of *rhetoric*."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Everett Lee Hunt, "Plato and Aristotle on Rhetoric and Rhetoricians," in *Readings in Rhetoric*, ed. Lionel Crocker, & Paul A. Carmack (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1965), 159.

<sup>76</sup> Don M. Burks, "John Dewey and Rhetorical Theory," *Western Speech* 32 (1968): 126.

<sup>77</sup> Johnstone, 185 (emphasis added).

This dissertation is written in the spirit of Burks and Johnstone, for it traces Dewey's theoretical development through time and constructs, through published works, private correspondence, and biographical material, three Deweyan rhetorical theories that account for the scope, function, and ontological foundations of rhetoric. These rhetorical theories correspond to the three "periods" in Dewey's thinking, each lasting about twenty years.<sup>78</sup> These include the "idealistic" period beginning in 1882 after his graduation from Johns Hopkins, the "experimental" period beginning in 1903 with the publication of *Studies in Logical Theory*, and his "naturalistic" period beginning in 1925 with the publication of the first edition of *Experience and Nature*.<sup>79</sup> However, because Dewey's middle period was focused more on issues of logic, epistemology, and scientific method than on those of language, ontology, or art, only the first and third periods provide sufficient resources to construct a comprehensive rhetorical theory. Thus, the chapter on his middle period focuses more on tracing his intellectual growth through his works and letters and less on constructing a theory of rhetoric based on Dewey's writings.

The first of Dewey's theories envisions rhetoric as *eros*, or as a way of inspiring individual desire for aesthetic union with the divine by using eloquence to reveal the nature of the self *to* itself in its growth toward Absolute self-consciousness. According to Rockefeller, Dewey's *Psychology* of 1886 "is a study of the way in which the self finds its true self and union with the divine in and through science, philosophy, art, social relations, and religion."<sup>80</sup> In my reading Dewey, however, rhetoric also plays a vital role in this process. Following Socrates's dictum "know thyself," Dewey seeks a loving form of rhetoric that lifts us to that higher plane of

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<sup>78</sup> The division of Dewey's works into distinct "periods" was first put forth by Richard J. Bernstein in his introduction to *On Experience, Nature, and Freedom* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1960).

<sup>79</sup> The labels for these periods are taken from Raymond D. Boisvert, *Dewey's Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988).

<sup>80</sup> Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religion Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 101.

divine self-knowledge. Dewey's second period is marked by a dramatic turn away from aesthetic and religious considerations, which had dominated his early work, and toward science, logic, and practice. In this period, rhetoric emerges as a form of inquiry whose goal is the development of *phronēsis*, practical wisdom. Beginning with *Studies in Logical Theory* in 1903, Dewey rejects both his earlier Hegelian teleology and Platonic ethical idealism and fully embraces a Darwinian worldview of contingency and adaptation in which the human subject grows through the use of intelligence to resolve uncertain situations. Here, ideas are no longer *ideals*, but *instruments*: "an idea is a meaning that is tentatively entertained, formed, and used with reference to its fitness to decide a perplexing situation,—a meaning used as a tool of judgment."<sup>81</sup> However, in his fixation on the nature of inquiry, Dewey indirectly limits rhetoric to a narrow instrumentalism and opens himself up to charge that he has eviscerated both art and human experience of its intrinsic aesthetic quality.

Reacting to these criticisms, Dewey's third and final phase heralds a return to the comprehensive vision of his earlier work, only without the baggage of idealism. Instead, Dewey echoes the sophistic tradition by seeing rhetoric as a productive *technē* responsible for turning imagined possibilities into actualities. Marked by the publication of *Experience and Nature*, Dewey's thought took an ontological turn that went beyond experimental logic to inquire about how art helps constitute the nature of our being-in-the-world. According to Sleeper, Dewey began actively emphasizing the transactional nature of reality and "the role of the knower in determining the character of the known."<sup>82</sup> Thus, as Hickman points out, "active productive skill offered Dewey a key to understanding the place of human beings within and at the cutting edge

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<sup>81</sup> John Dewey, *How We Think*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 6, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1978; original work published 1910), 264.

<sup>82</sup> Sleeper, 23.

of the activities of nature.”<sup>83</sup> In Dewey’s hands, rhetoric as *technē* is more than an imitation of nature,<sup>84</sup> it is a *part* of nature and in some ways a consummation of it. As Dewey announces in the revised preface of *Experience and Nature*, “art thus represents the culminating event of nature as well as the climax of experience.”<sup>85</sup> But in Dewey’s mind, the highest “art” is the art of communication. Since rhetoric has traditionally been viewed as one of the most powerful of all communicative acts, I show how rhetoric, when read through Dewey’s work, becomes a form of art that has the power to transform both nature and society through its transactional character. Finally, I conclude by demonstrating the ways in which his perspectives on rhetoric complement his cultural and political writings in order to show how the cultivation of rhetoric in the citizen body is necessary for creating and sustaining a democratic way of life.

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<sup>83</sup> Hickman, *John Dewey’s Pragmatic Technology*, 19.

<sup>84</sup> Hickman, *John Dewey’s Pragmatic Technology*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 8.

## 2. JOHN DEWEY'S RHETORICAL EDUCATION

Three days before Christmas came to Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1885, John Dewey, finding himself in a poetic mood, wrote: “It is with feelings akin to emotion, as Homer w’d say, that I watch the sun dissolve the snow, the mud come forth and reflect upon a week in the lovely borough of Lapeer.”<sup>1</sup> That morning, Dewey was caught between joy and melancholy—joy at the thought of receiving love letters from a former student named Alice Chipman with whom he had been cultivating a relationship since the previous spring, and melancholy at the prospect of spending the holidays away from her, obligated instead to visit his aunt in Lapeer, Michigan. Despite being apart from his new love, however, Dewey looked on the bright side: “The time will be all the longer in which to think of you, my own, my love, my all.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the time had already given Dewey the greatest gift for which he could have asked—the gift of epiphany. As he writes to her with a palpable sense of joy: “You don’t know how much brighter the whole world is this morning. Sweetheart, I have found out that I am only an abstractly subjective standpoint without you.”<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, Dewey was not destined to write for Hallmark. However, before judging his prowess as a romantic poet, we must consider the perspective from which Dewey was writing. Although Dewey’s confession that without Alice he is merely “an abstractly subjective standpoint” sounds abrasive to modern ears, for Dewey and his future wife Alice, their shared emergence from “an abstractly subjective standpoint” had highly spiritual implications. It meant

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, December 22, 1885. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, December 22, 1885. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, December 22, 1885. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.



that their souls were being liberated from isolation to mingle together in a higher plane of Being, a place Dewey called “the All.”<sup>4</sup> This belief, of course, was simply applied Hegelianism. According to Hegel, “to start from the self, to live in the self, is the...extreme of abstract subjectivity, when it is still empty, or rather has made itself to be empty; such is pure formalism, the abstract principle of the modern world.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, modernity had achieved “individuality” only at the expense of communion, and to emerge from this state of isolation, one had to merge the modern concept of subjectivity with the Greek sense “of the natural unity between the spiritual and the natural.”<sup>6</sup> As Rockefeller observes, inspired in large part by the Christian Hegelianism of George Sylvester Morris, Dewey’s mentor at Johns Hopkins University, Dewey interpreted these insights to mean that “what is really good, true, and divine is to be found and realized in the relations between persons.”<sup>7</sup> Alice was simply the most significant of those persons. Thus, Dewey’s invocation of the idea that without Alice’s love he reverts to an “abstractly subjective standpoint” (rather than progressing toward a Hegelian “concrete universal”<sup>8</sup>) must have been analogous to giving her his class ring.

There is a sense, then, that Dewey saw their shared dissolution into the unity of Spirit as an *eros* of spirituality that was facilitated, in part, through intimate moments of communication. In other words, Dewey thought that loving communication with each other (either in letters or in

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<sup>4</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, April 8, 1886. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>5</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures in the History of Philosophy, vol. 1: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. E.S. Haldane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995; original work published 1840), 152.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Lectures in the History of Philosophy*, 152.

<sup>7</sup> Rockefeller, 148.

<sup>8</sup> As we shall see in section 2.6, Hegel’s system follows the growth of Spirit from abstract subjectivity to concrete universality. In other words, Spirit begins alienated from itself and others, but through “concrete” reflective actions (such as the use of language), Spirit eventually attains “concrete universality”—the actual embodiment of abstract universal content within concrete sensuous and rational form. According to Dewey’s mentor, George Sylvester Morris, “Intelligence is itself a *concrete universal*, for it is an *organism*. Every natural organism is a direct illustration of the *one* subsisting only in and through the *many*, the one life in and through the many members. The ‘members’ of intelligence are the forms of fundamental categories of knowledge, the framework of all our conscious intelligence. The ‘one life’ stands self-revealed in self-consciousness.” George Sylvester Morris, *Philosophy and Christianity* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1883), ix (emphasis added).

dialogue) could help him and Alice realize their potential as Ideal Selves. Thus, my reading of a “Dewey’s Idealist rhetorical theory” begins with the premise that rhetoric functions as a form of *eros* in its ability to inspire in oneself and others a desire toward a higher plane of being. This view resonates with Richard Weaver’s interpretation “that all speech, which is the means the gods have given man to express his soul, is a form of *eros*.”<sup>9</sup> But Dewey’s Hegelianism goes even further than Weaver’s Platonism; rhetoric is not only the tool of the soul’s expression, it is the tool of the soul’s realization. Through its ability to inform the Cognition, awaken the Feeling, stimulate the Imagination, and move the Will,<sup>10</sup> rhetoric aids in the progressive realization by the self of its Ideal Self, a process Dewey described as the “progressive appropriation of that self in which real and ideal are one; in which truth, happiness, and rightness are united in one Personality.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, rhetoric functions as a form of *eros* for the universal Personality by embodying truth, happiness, and rightness in a kind of discourse that helps oneself and one’s community grow towards Absolute self-consciousness.

From a modern perspective, such grand pronouncements sound like nothing more than a throwback to an outdated idealism. Consequently, we are tempted to pass over them as quaint reminders of a bygone age. But we should be wary of ignoring the revolutionary quality of this view of rhetoric given Dewey’s historical context. We must keep in mind that the philosophy of the late 19<sup>th</sup> was still dominated by the dualist systems of Immanuel Kant and John Locke, who, despite their metaphysical differences, nonetheless agreed that language was a vehicle for representative truth for which rhetoric served no legitimate purpose. Thus, from the perspective

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<sup>9</sup> Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1985), 26.

<sup>10</sup> Although I believe this phrasing effectively summarizes Dewey’s conception of rhetoric, the phrasing is not Dewey’s. Instead, I borrow the phrasing of George Campbell, who wrote that the ends of rhetoric are to “enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will.” See George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963; original work published 1776), 1.

<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, *Psychology* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886), 424.

of philosophy, to rehabilitate rhetoric one also had to reconstruct the entire metaphysical basis of language. Dewey was fortunate to be a part of a contingent of American philosophers attempting such a reconstruction, including James Marsh and George Sylvester Morris, and how Dewey carried forward and adapted their ideas is an important chapter in the development of American thought. To skip this chapter and concentrate only on the ending not only misses out on a great deal of insight into the development of Dewey's philosophy, but also risks trivializing the long-standing intellectual problems Dewey attempted to overcome. If there is any lesson in the history of philosophy worth learning, it is that such problems rarely disappear; they only go into hiding to reemerge in a new guise.<sup>12</sup> Thus, this chapter explores the historical context in which Dewey was educated in order to understand the challenges he had to overcome on his way to developing a philosophy that would enrich our appreciation of rhetoric and language.

## 2.1. PHILOSOPHY AND THE LIMITS OF RHETORIC

Maurice Natanson once wrote that “if rhetoric is bound to and founded on dialectic, and dialectic on philosophy, then the limits of rhetoric find their expression in the matrix of philosophical inquiry.”<sup>13</sup> Such has been the philosopher's view of rhetoric since the days of Plato. Thus, to appreciate the accomplishment of Dewey's early rhetorical theory, we first must appreciate the long history of dualist philosophy that had spurned rhetoric in its obsession with the rational and the eternal. In this section I briefly review how Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant defined

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<sup>12</sup> For an ideal example, see Section 5.1 on “The Rhetorical Situation.”

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Natanson. “The Limits of Rhetoric,” in *The Province of Rhetoric*, 65.

rhetoric in order to show the philosophical obstacles Dewey had to overcome in order to articulate a non-dualist theory of language.

John Locke was one of the first real theorists of “communication” in the modern sense of the term, expressing both a great respect for and a deep suspicion of the arts of language. On the one hand, Locke praised language as “the great Instrument, and common tye of Society.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Locke warned of “the great abuse of Words” that happens “when I make them stand sometimes for one thing, and sometimes for another; the wilful doing whereof, can be imputed to nothing but great Folly, or greater dishonesty.”<sup>15</sup> The warning follows directly from the nominalistic empiricism on which his philosophy of language was based. For Locke, words do not stand for things, but for *ideas* of things; we first get simple ideas of things through sensation of *primary qualities* (bulk, figure, number, and motion<sup>16</sup>) and *secondary qualities* (color, sound, smell, taste, etc.<sup>17</sup>). Through reflection,<sup>18</sup> we then rearrange these simple ideas into abstract ideas<sup>19</sup> that form the basis of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> For true communication to happen, therefore, everyone person must share “in his Mind the clear and distinct *Ideas*, that these Names stand for.”<sup>21</sup> Otherwise, commerce, knowledge, and cooperative activity are impossible.

In this system, rhetoric does not fare well. Locke had already approached rhetoric with a skeptical eye, defining it as the “artificial and figurative application of Words.”<sup>22</sup> Consequently, when judged by the strict standards of clarity that Locke had set forth, rhetoric would inevitably fail, leading Locke to conclude that “all the art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness...are

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<sup>14</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (London: Oxford UP, 1975; original work published 1690), 3.1.1. Citations from Locke’s *Essay* will be by Book, Chapter, and Paragraph.

<sup>15</sup> Locke, 3.10.5.

<sup>16</sup> Locke, 2.8.15.

<sup>17</sup> Locke, 2.8.17.

<sup>18</sup> Locke, 2.1.4.

<sup>19</sup> Locke, 2.2.9.

<sup>20</sup> Locke, 2.32.6.

<sup>21</sup> Locke, 1.2.16.

<sup>22</sup> Locke, 3.10.34.

for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat.”<sup>23</sup> As if anticipating the critique of the logical positivists three centuries later, Locke formally establishes the tension between logic and rhetoric, a tension that persists today. Rhetoric is aligned with falsity and evasion because it influences belief and behavior through eloquence instead of communicating Cartesian “clear and distinct ideas” from one mind to another through the precise and logical use of language.

The rhetorical qualities of language seemed to be given greater importance in the idealism of George Berkeley, for Berkeley accused Locke of misstating the ends of language. As an experienced preacher, Berkeley knew that “clarity” was not the primary goal of language. In what at first seems to be a powerful statement on the rhetoricity of language, Berkeley says that “the communicating of ideas marked by words is not the chief and only end of language, as is commonly supposed. There are other ends, as the raising of some passion, the exciting to or deterring from an action, the putting the mind in some particular disposition.”<sup>24</sup> However, Berkeley’s idealist philosophy points away from the world of practice, and thus from the realm of rhetoric. Berkeley had mounted a devastating assault on Locke’s distinction between *primary qualities* (those intrinsic to the object) and *secondary qualities* (those interpreted in part by the mind). In showing how even properties like bulk or figure were also mind-dependent, Berkeley argued that “*esse is percipi*”<sup>25</sup> which means that, for any object, “their being is to be perceived or known.”<sup>26</sup> Berkeley concluded that since all matter is dependent on mind, then everything that

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<sup>23</sup> Locke, 3.10.34.

<sup>24</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *Berkeley: Essay, Principles, Dialogues with Selections from Other Writings*, ed. Mary Whiton Calkins (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929; original work published 1710), I.20. Citations from Berkeley’s *Treatise* will be by Section (I=Introduction, 1=Part First) and Paragraph.

<sup>25</sup> Berkeley, 1.3

<sup>26</sup> Berkeley, 1.6.

exists must “subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit.”<sup>27</sup> Consequently, since rhetoric is so clearly the tool of the body, one must separate one’s ideas from “that dress and incumbrance of words which so much contribute to blind the judgment and divide the attention.”<sup>28</sup> Believing that a faithful soul could commune directly with the Eternal Spirit through faith, he recommended that “we need only draw the curtain of words, to behold the fairest tree of knowledge, whose fruit is excellent, and within the reach of our hand.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, despite his initial acknowledgement of the rhetorical elements of language, Berkeley ends up, like Locke, discarding rhetoric in favor of the purity of ideas. The only difference is that Locke sought ideas of the world where Berkeley sought ideas of God.

In many ways, however, it was David Hume who dealt the most devastating blow to rhetoric. Locke had at least recognized the instrumental quality of language, while Berkeley had acknowledged its inherent persuasiveness. Hume had no patience for either subject. After having mounted his famed critique on the nature of causation that made the relation of cause and effect a matter of habit and custom,<sup>30</sup> Hume concentrated his efforts on turning language into a completely rational, logical system of meanings. He did so by dividing “all objects of human reason” into two kinds: *Relations of Ideas*, or those inquiries dealing with purely logical relations of propositions, such as geometry and mathematics, and *Matters of Fact*, or those inquiries that deal with factual matters derived from the senses.<sup>31</sup> These distinctions, which would later be termed by W.V.O. Quine “The Two Dogmas of Empiricism,”<sup>32</sup> left no role for rhetoric within any respectable inquiry. For, as Hume describes, “eloquence, when at its highest pitch, leaves

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<sup>27</sup> Berkeley, 1.7.

<sup>28</sup> Berkeley, I.24.

<sup>29</sup> Berkeley, I.24.

<sup>30</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999; original work published 1748), 4.8. Citations from Hume’s *Enquiry* will be by Section and Paragraph.

<sup>31</sup> Hume, 4.1-2.

<sup>32</sup> Willard Van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980), 20.

little room for reason or reflection; but addressing itself entirely to the fancy or the affections, captivates willing hearers, and subdues their understanding.”<sup>33</sup> To guard against these effects, Hume goes on to articulate a method that would effectively eliminate rhetoric entirely: “Let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Hume does not even grant language the practical utility that had been acknowledged by Locke and Berkeley. Dismissing both the search for true causes and communion with God, Hume left only the quest for pure logical reason, a quest in which rhetoric was not only unwelcome, but explicitly condemned.

Finally, it was Immanuel Kant, the thinker with whom Dewey probably struggled most throughout his long career, who attempted to synthesize the critical insights of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume into a comprehensive metaphysical system. On the one hand, Kant accepted Locke’s premise that the external world existed apart from human experience, and to this world beyond experience which was made up of “beings of understanding” he gave the name *nuomena*.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, Kant rejected Locke’s premise that such objects could be directly known. Thus, he agreed with Berkeley’s premise that any *experienced* object required the active powers of the mind for its constitution. To this world of sensory experience that was made up of “beings of sense” Kant gave the name *phaenomena*.<sup>36</sup> In Kant’s view, it was the world of *phaenomena* that had given Hume so much trouble, and Kant believed that he had “succeeded in solving Hume’s

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<sup>33</sup> Hume, 10.18.

<sup>34</sup> Hume, 12.34.

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998; original work published 1781), B306. Citations of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* will be by original pagination of the first or second editions, indicated by A or B.

<sup>36</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B306.

problem” through his analysis of “the whole faculty of pure reason.”<sup>37</sup> What Kant had discovered was that to make any “sense” of the flux of experience, humans had to possess *a priori* faculties that organized their sensory input. These active powers consist of the “categories” of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Modality<sup>38</sup> and mental forms of Space and Time,<sup>39</sup> which were given to each individual as a way of ordering the materials of sense. The recognition of these powers of mind solved Hume’s problem by showing how “understanding is itself the source of the laws of nature” rather than being a mere passive observer of them.<sup>40</sup>

However, human beings were not restricted only to the realm of the world of *phaenomena*, for then we would only have sensory knowledge without moral value. Kant also desired certainty in the sphere of morality, law, and practice. Thus, in Kant’s system, there was a hierarchical ordering of faculties in which “all our cognition starts from the senses, goes from there to the understanding, and ends with reason.”<sup>41</sup> What is unique about Reason in Kant is that it is, like the Aristotelian *Nous*, “a special kind of intuition, namely intellectual intuition”<sup>42</sup> that has special access to the realm of *nuomena*, access that is denied the Understanding. In Kant’s words, “if the understanding may be a faculty of unity of appearances by means of rules, then reason is the faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles.”<sup>43</sup> The most important of these principles are *moral* principles, discovered by Reason and embodied in the categorical imperative, which demands that we “act upon a maxim that can also hold as a

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<sup>37</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that Will Be Able to Come Forward as a Science*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1977; original work published 1783), section 261.

<sup>38</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B106.

<sup>39</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B56.

<sup>40</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B53.

<sup>41</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A128.

<sup>42</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B307.

<sup>43</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B359.



universal law.”<sup>44</sup> The foundation of this moral law was not based on good works and deeds, but rather on the obligation of *duty* to obey the dictates of Reason, regardless of the consequences. Kant justified this praise of *duty* over *effect* by reference to his dualistic ontology, which valued the moral realm of the “pure world of understanding,” which was a world of Being, over the merely physical “world of sense,” which was a world of Becoming.<sup>45</sup> In this way, what Dewey called Kant’s “two worlds” solution preserved the superiority of religious and transcendental forms of morality while at the same time providing a justification for scientific practice. Dewey believed that

Kant’s decisive contribution is the idea of a dual legislation of reason by which are marked off two distinct realms—that of science and that of morals. Each of these two realms has its own final and authoritative constitution: On one hand, there is the world of sense, the world of phenomena in space and time in which science is at home; on the other hand, is the supersensible, the noumenal world, the world of moral duty and moral freedom.<sup>46</sup>

However, the rosy future that Kant had imagined after his “Copernican Revolution” did not materialize. Although Kant had anticipated the future direction of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy in his statement that “perception without conception is blind, while conception without perception is empty,”<sup>47</sup> his dualist solution proceeded to evacuate morality of content while rendering intelligence impotent. In other words, because science dealt only with the outer world of appearances, it dealt with neither truth nor goodness; because morality dealt only with the inner

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<sup>44</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mart Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991; original work published 1798), section 223.

<sup>45</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002; original work published 1788), section 43.

<sup>46</sup> John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 8, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1979; original work published 1915), 20.

<sup>47</sup> See John Dewey, “The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1972; original work published 1897), 4.

world of duty, it was separate from the world of action. Kant's ethics told us that "it is not enough to do what is right, but we should practice solely on the ground of its being right."<sup>48</sup> But since what it means to "be right" cannot be determined empirically, but solely through an inner sense of duty to an abstract moral law, "rightness" becomes, as Dewey points out, "empty and formal."<sup>49</sup> The world of practice is severed from the world of thought, leaving both worlds barren. As one might expect, Kant's view of rhetoric reflected these tensions.

Rhetoric, so far as this is taken to mean the art of persuasion, i.e., the art of deluding by means of a fair semblance (as *ars oratoria*), and not merely excellence of speech (eloquence and style), is a dialectic, which borrows from poetry only as much as is necessary to win over men's minds to the side of the speaker before they have weighed the matter, and to rob their verdict of its freedom...Force and elegance of speech (which together constitute rhetoric) belong to fine art; but oratory (*ars oratoria*), being the art of playing for one's own purpose upon the weaknesses of men (let this purpose be ever so good in intention or even in fact) merits no *respect* whatever.<sup>50</sup>

Kant's criticism is unique in its explicit condemnation of persuasion *regardless of its good intentions or beneficial consequences*. The previous thinkers had based their critiques to some degree on the notion that rhetoric confuses words, incites passions, and thereby misleads judgment, all of which implies that rhetoric is to be avoided because it has negative practical consequences. Kant, however, condemns persuasion outright, regardless of its consequences, solely because persuasion dwells within the realm of practice rather than world of pure Reason. Furthermore, his "two worlds" solution leads him to divide rhetoric into a fine and a base art.

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Robert J. Dostal, "Kant and Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 13 (1980): 235.

<sup>49</sup> Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 163.

<sup>50</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment: Part 1, Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952; original work published 1790), section 53.

The former eloquently presents beautiful objects for contemplation; the latter deludes the mind for purposes of immoral action. Thus, according to Dostal, “with Kant rhetoric is reduced to a matter of style—dispensable in serious philosophical matters,”<sup>51</sup> while “the political function of rhetoric is viewed as immoral, external, heteronomous—in short, phenomenally coercive.”<sup>52</sup> However, by discarding the practical arts of rhetoric in favor of the transcendental logic of Reason, Kant also removed the primary tool of the individual citizen not only to influence the political sphere, but also to interact as a member of a social community. As Dewey observed, the irony of Kant’s attempt to make the free individual “the standard and the end” of truth was that he caused individuals to feel “their own social life disintegrated, dissolving under their very feet.”<sup>53</sup>

It was within an academic culture still influenced by Kant’s philosophy that Dewey was educated at the University of Vermont. As John Dewey later remarked, “everybody studied Kant in those days.”<sup>54</sup> As we shall see, however, the critical interpretation of Kant given by the Vermont Transcendentalists had a decidedly ethical, social, and practical bent to it that would heavily influence the direction that Dewey would later take idealism, a direction that would open new possibilities for our philosophical understanding of rhetoric and language. Before that happened, however, Dewey had to struggle to reconcile two conflicting views of rhetoric that were taught at the University of Vermont, one from a psychologist and rhetorical scholar Alexander Bain and the other from the then late university president, James Marsh.

## 2.2 ALEXANDER BAIN AND THE TEACHING OF RHETORIC

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<sup>51</sup> Dostal, 235.

<sup>52</sup> Dostal, 236.

<sup>53</sup> Dewey, “The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge,” 13.

<sup>54</sup> John Dewey to Jerome Nathanson, August 9, 1949. Quoted in Rockefeller, 52.

Given Dewey's reputation for what William James called a "damnable" style of writing, it may come as some surprise that Dewey took three semesters of rhetoric between 1875 and 1879 while at the University of Vermont.<sup>55</sup> According to the catalogues distributed to all the officers and students in those years, these courses in rhetoric emphasized regular assignments in writing and speaking. Written essays were required every three to four weeks, Juniors and Seniors were to present "original declamations" in Chapel every Wednesday afternoon, and one public oration was required every year after the first.<sup>56</sup> The primary texts used, besides Chaucer and Shakespeare, were the popular rhetorical textbooks of the day, including those by Hart, Bain, Theremin, and Abbot.<sup>57</sup> Complementing the rhetoric classes were the courses in Greek and Latin, which exposed students to classical works by Homer, Thucydides, Demosthenes, Quintilian, Horace, Plato, Herodotus, and the Greek Dramatists.<sup>58</sup>

On first sight, it might seem that Dewey received a well-rounded education in the rhetorical tradition—certainly more than most modern-day students. However, the actual teaching of "rhetoric" as a skill, as opposed to an historical artifact, adhered to the Kantian division between form and content and thus restricted rhetoric to the study of eloquence and style. One example of this division was Alexander Bain's *English Composition and Rhetoric*, which followed the form/content distinction by being what Bereton characterizes as "extremely clear and outspoken in recommending this divorce of writing from thinking."<sup>59</sup> Bain writes in the 1871 edition of his textbook that "the writing of Themes involves the burden of finding

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<sup>55</sup> University of Vermont Registrar's Office to To whom it may concern, June 1979.

<sup>56</sup> *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the University of Vermont* (Burlington: Free Press Book Print, 1878), 14-15.

<sup>57</sup> *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the University of Vermont* (1878), 15.

<sup>58</sup> *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the University of Vermont* (Burlington: Free Press Book Print, 1877), 19.

<sup>59</sup> John C. Bereton, ed., *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925: A Documentary History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 305.

matter as well as language; and belongs rather to classes in scientific or other departments, than to a class in English composition. The matter should in some way or other be supplied, and the pupil disciplined in giving it expression.”<sup>60</sup> Other required texts go on to support this method. Edwin A. Abbott’s *How to Write Clearly: Rules and Exercises on English Composition* favorably cites Bain, including this passage, “I know of no better method than to prescribe passages containing good matter, but in some respects imperfectly worded, to be amended according to the laws and properties of style.”<sup>61</sup> Bain’s textbook was structured accordingly. The entire first half of the book is given to an examination of tropes and figures, while the second half includes major sections on Style, Arrangement, the Sentence, the Paragraph, Description, Narration, Exposition, Persuasion, and Poetry, each with an example from literary classics that students can use as a template for imitation.<sup>62</sup> Given the way in which Dewey, in his mature writings, tended to equate “rhetoric” with the application of stylistic rules akin to grammar, it is reasonable to attribute this habit, at least in part, to his undergraduate experience.

At the same time, Bain’s textbook was not totally devoid of insight. In his introduction, Bain aligns his book with the Enlightenment rhetorics of George Campbell, Richard Whately, and Hugh Blair.<sup>63</sup> Bain clearly favors Whately over the other two rhetorical theorists. Whately contrasted Campbell’s four-part system of Understanding, Imagination, Passion, and Will with his own a three-part system of Reason, Feeling, and Will.<sup>64</sup> The diminished role for the

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Bereton, 305.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Bereton, 317-318.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander Bain, *English Composition and Rhetoric* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873).

<sup>63</sup> Bain, 4.

<sup>64</sup> “Whately constructed a complex set of interactions guiding the use of reason in influencing action. Because the mind is active, it can ‘will’ itself to reason about any subject. Reason, once actuated, can indirectly influence the feelings by focusing thoughts on an object likely to arouse the passions. The feelings, having been aroused, directly influence the will, thus resulting in action.” See Ray E. McKerrow, “Whately’s Theory of Rhetoric,” In *Explorations in Rhetoric: Studies in Honor of Douglas Ehninger*, Ray E. McKerrow ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1982), 149.

Imagination was deliberate.<sup>65</sup> Insofar as Campbell was influenced by Locke, he found the driving force of persuasion in the appeal to the Imagination by use of “lively and glowing ideas.”<sup>66</sup> For Whately, however, “argumentative discourse requires only that the claim be understood.”<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Whately reaffirmed the form/content distinction that Bain favored. According to Bizzell and Herzberg, Whately believed that “rhetoric’s proper province is therefore to argue for truths found by other means—science or revelation, as the case may be.”<sup>68</sup> Echoing Kant, Whately favors Reason over Imagination and makes rhetoric a stylistic art dependent on the results of logic for its material.

Bain’s affinity for Whately first appears in the psychological framework he lays out in order to justify the structure of his textbook. He says: “Rhetoric discusses the means whereby language, spoken or written, may be rendered effective. There are three principal ends in speaking,—to inform, to persuade, to please. They correspond to the three departments of the human mind, the Understanding, the Will, and the Feelings.”<sup>69</sup> Using this slightly modified terminology, Bain then declares that one should use Description, Narration, and Exposition to inform the Understanding, Poetry to please the Feelings, and Persuasion to persuade the Will.<sup>70</sup> How the basic process of “persuasion” happens is then articulated in a direct quote by Whately (an honor given neither Campbell nor Blair). According to Whately, “In order that the Will may be influenced, two things are requisite; viz. 1. that the proposed *Object* should be desirable, and

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<sup>65</sup> This is not to say Whately dismissed the Imagination. In fact, he did refer to it as a “faculty” and defined it functionally. According to Whately, Imagination was “a faculty which consequently a skilful narrator must himself possess and to which he must be able to furnish excitement to others.” See Richard Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric* (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimilies and Reprints, 1991; original work published 1846), p.ii, ch. ii, §2.

<sup>66</sup> Whately, 149.

<sup>67</sup> Whately, 149.

<sup>68</sup> Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds., *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 829.

<sup>69</sup> Bain, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Bain, 19.

2. that the *Means* suggested should be proved to be conducive to the attainment of that object.”<sup>71</sup> Bain elaborates on this procedure in the following way: ““When people are indifferent to the end, we have to work upon their feelings. As regards the choice of means, we address the reason or understanding, which alone can judge of the fitness of means to ends.””<sup>72</sup> Thus, Bain’s rhetoric did more than teach Dewey about the names of figures and tropes; it also taught him a rhetorical theory based on the latest faculty psychology, an exposure that, as we shall see, may have had a lasting impact on Dewey’s own thinking. This impact however, was minor compared to the shaping influence of James Marsh, whose work formed the basis of the university’s ideology and provided Dewey his first metaphysical foundation as a budding philosopher.

## 2.2. JAMES MARSH AND THE METAPHYSICS OF LANGUAGE

As Dewey tells it, Marsh holds a unique place in American history as “almost the first person in the United States to venture upon the speculative and dubiously orthodox seas of German thinking—that of Kant, Schelling, and Hegel.”<sup>73</sup> However, it was neither Schelling nor Hegel that was dominant in Marsh’s own thinking, but rather “an Aristotelian version of Kant”<sup>74</sup> that came “by way of Coleridge.”<sup>75</sup> According to Dewey, “the interest that Marsh had in Coleridge sprang primarily from a common interest in religion and a common desire to arouse among

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Bain, 213.

<sup>72</sup> 214. Note also how he makes “reason” and “understanding” synonymous, thus making his psychological system identical with Whately’s.

<sup>73</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 148.

<sup>74</sup> John Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1941), 184.

<sup>75</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 148.

believers in Christianity a vital realization of its spiritual truth.”<sup>76</sup> Marsh made free use of Kantian ideas and terminology but adapted them so they could support the goal of spreading liberal Christian beliefs and ideals. Consequently, the social and evangelical quality of Marsh’s philosophy led him to place a much greater metaphysical importance on the rhetorical functions of language than had Kant or even Bain, functions that were eventually to be explored in much greater detail in Dewey’s later writings. To understand Marsh’s view on language, however, we must start with that of Coleridge as it is articulated in his *Aids to Reflection*, the book that Marsh had edited and introduced to American readers:

Language (as the embodied and articulated spirit of the race, as the growth and emanation of a people, and not the work of any individual wit or will) is often inadequate, sometimes deficient, but never false or delusive. We have only to master the true origin and original impact of any native and abiding word, to find in it, if not the solution of the facts expressed by it, yet a finger-mark pointing to the road on which this solution is to be sought.<sup>77</sup>

With its pragmatic and sociological spirit, one can see continuities between Coleridge’s perspective and contemporary twentieth-century theories of language and discourse, one of which belonged to John Dewey. Yet the passage is also deceptive when examined on its own. Coleridge, after all, was no pragmatist. As Rockefeller notes, he was a firm believer in original sin and held that “the human spirit is held in bondage to nature and is but a potentiality until awakened through repentance and faith by God’s act of redemption in Christ.”<sup>78</sup> However, Coleridge did anticipate the pragmatists’ ethical position by giving practical reason. As

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<sup>76</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 180.

<sup>77</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection, with a Preliminary Essay, by James Marsh, D.D.* (Burlington : C. Goodrich, 1840), 230f.

<sup>78</sup> Rockefeller, 63.



Rockefeller points out, “the heart and the emotions a much greater role in the life of the spirit” in Coleridge than in Kant, and in doing so he put forth “an idea that had a lasting influence on Dewey.”<sup>79</sup>

In Dewey’s account given in his commemorative lecture on James Marsh in 1941, Coleridge accomplished this task by making two vital changes to Kant. First, he declared that “faith was a state of the will and the affections, not a merely intellectual assent to doctrinal and historical propositions.”<sup>80</sup> In doing so, he inverted Kant’s ethics by making religious morality dependent on practical rather than pure reason. However, since Coleridge did not wish to simply abandon Kantian rationality, he made a second change by rationalizing Christian doctrine. In Dewey’s account, “he held with equal firmness that Christianity is itself a system of truth which, when rightly appropriated in the rational will and affection of men, is identical with the truth of philosophy itself.”<sup>81</sup> His belief that the growth in “the rational will and affection of men” could eventually unite moral action and the truths of reason within the ideal Christian life naturally led him to his insights about language. Because, for Coleridge, language was the primary tool for moving the will and directing the affections, one could not condemn language without condemning the primary means for humanity’s salvation. Thus, Coleridge saw language as reflective and instrumental—reflective of the “the growth and emanation of a people” at any given historical moment and instrumental toward pointing the way toward the true path of God.

Marsh was deeply inspired by Coleridge and wanted to introduce the English writer to an American audience. In a personal letter dated March 23, 1829, Marsh suggests the idea of writing an introduction to *Aids to Reflection* and asks Coleridge whether it is possible that “the

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<sup>79</sup> Rockefeller, 60.

<sup>80</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 181. I am relying heavily on Dewey’s interpretation of Marsh not necessarily because it is the best, but because it shows more clearly how Dewey interpreted Marsh and incorporated his insights into his own thought.

<sup>81</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 181.

seed which you have been sowing beside all waters, is likely to bring forth any valuable fruits in these ends of the earth.”<sup>82</sup> Marsh’s wish was eventually fulfilled. Dewey notes that Marsh “was the means of directing Emerson to Coleridge, and indirectly at least made a profound impress upon the American ‘transcendental’ movement.”<sup>83</sup> However, Marsh’s own philosophy was not simply a reproduction of Coleridge. His interpretation of Kant was heavily influenced by Aristotle. As Dewey writes, “the *Metaphysics* and the *De Anima* of Aristotle were always by him.”<sup>84</sup> Marsh dismissed Kant’s phenomenal and subjective view of Nature in favor of Aristotle’s objective and teleological view. Not surprisingly, this shift was to have a dramatic impact on his perspective on rhetoric.

Dewey observes that the key to understanding Marsh’s metaphysics is his redefinition of the Kantian faculties of Sense, Understanding, and Reason. As Dewey tells it, sensations, for Kant, are “mental in character” and are “organized by forms of space and time which are themselves ultimately mental in character.”<sup>85</sup> The role of the Understanding, then, is to “provide universality and constancy for these sense impressions,” even though this universality never gets beyond the phenomenal level.<sup>86</sup> Finally, Reason “furnishes ideals of unity and complete totality which go beyond the scope of the understanding,” but are nonetheless unrealizable ideals.<sup>87</sup> Thus, despite Kant’s assurances that Reason, like *Nous*, provides us access to the supersensible

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<sup>82</sup> James Marsh, *The Remains of Rev. James Marsh, D.D.*, ed. Joseph Torrey (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1843), 138.

<sup>83</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 184. Also note, however, the differences between Emerson and Marsh: “Here lies the major difference between Vermont Transcendentalism and the thought of Emerson. Coleridge and Marsh argue that the controlling principle of action in every unredeemed human will is inevitably a principle contrary to the Law of God, the universal law of right reason, and all human beings share the burden of responsibility for this sinful condition of the will.” See Rockefeller, 62.

<sup>84</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 185.

<sup>85</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 185.

<sup>86</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 185.

<sup>87</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 185.

world, there is always a feeling of being trapped behind a veil, forever struggling to see through to the other side.

According to Dewey, Marsh thoroughly rejected this conclusion. Despite the fact that he utilized the same terminology, he interpreted them as an Aristotelian would. The three terms thus “present themselves in Marsh’s account as three successive stages in a progressive realization of the nature of ultimate reality.”<sup>88</sup> Sensation turns from something purely mental into something objective, “as qualities of an object existing outwardly and independently.”<sup>89</sup> Understanding then operates on the materials of sense by “distinguishing, comparing” and thus bringing out “the relations implicit in sensuous material.”<sup>90</sup> Again, contra Kant, Marsh’s relations are not mental forms, but are real properties of the objective world that give us reliable scientific knowledge of nature.

What distinguished Marsh from a traditional realist, however, was his belief that the faculty of reason takes us beyond mere scientific knowledge and allows us to transcend the limits of our immediate experience. In Dewey’s words, although science was a necessary step in this process of transcendence, the true goal was to become self-conscious of the operations of Rational Will, which is “identical with the divine intellect which is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”<sup>91</sup> Although this claim sounds suspiciously like a return to a Kantian “two worlds” solution that divided the realms of sense and reason, Marsh adds an important element to his concept of reason that gives his philosophy a distinctively American flair—“the conception of reason as *will*.”<sup>92</sup> Marsh saw reason not as a disembodied mental faculty, but as an active process that can only “realize itself and be truly aware or conscious of its

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<sup>88</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 186.

<sup>89</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 187.

<sup>90</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 187.

<sup>91</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 187.

<sup>92</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 188.

own intrinsic nature only as it operates to make over the world, whether physical or social, into an embodiment of its own principles.”<sup>93</sup> Marsh thus held, against Kant, that “knowledge of spiritual truth is always more than theoretical and intellectual. It was the product of activity as well as its cause. It had to be lived in order to be known.”<sup>94</sup>

What Dewey fails to point out in his commemoration, however, was that Marsh also believed that knowledge often has to be spoken before it can be lived. As a student of Aristotle and other classical Greek and Roman thinkers, Marsh was well acquainted with the rhetorical tradition and was not hesitant to apply its insights to fulfill his social and religion ends. As he states in his “Tract on Eloquence,” it is “only by the habitual and yearning contemplation of the great masters of eloquence in the magnificent proportion of their own monuments, that we can hope to attain sympathy with their minds.”<sup>95</sup> Marsh thus employs references to Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Cicero, and Quintilian to make the point that true eloquence is not concerned with the “external dress of oratory” as taught by Bain, but deals with the union of oratorical style and wisdom.<sup>96</sup> The ideal of eloquence is found in the figure of what Marsh calls the “sacred orator,”<sup>97</sup> exemplified by the figure of St. Paul. For it was because of both the “learning and inspiration” of St. Paul that he was able to “sustain the impassioned and divine enthusiasm...and clothe it in forms of human language and human art.”<sup>98</sup> Paul’s example taught that “we must have eloquence of the soul, before we have eloquence of the tongue.”<sup>99</sup>

But make no mistake—eloquence of the tongue is still important. In his introduction to *Aids to Reflection*, Marsh states that “the spiritual seed of the divine word, thought mingled with

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<sup>93</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 189.

<sup>94</sup> Dewey, “James Marsh and American Philosophy,” 196.

<sup>95</sup> Marsh, *The Remains of Rev. James Marsh, D.D.*, 628.

<sup>96</sup> Marsh, *The Remains of Rev. James Marsh, D.D.*, 628.

<sup>97</sup> Marsh, *The Remains of Rev. James Marsh, D.D.*, 625f

<sup>98</sup> Marsh, *The Remains of Rev. James Marsh, D.D.*, 625f.

<sup>99</sup> Marsh, *The Remains of Rev. James Marsh, D.D.*, 628.

many tares of wordly wisdom and philosophy so called, will yet spring-up, and bear fruit unto everlasting life.”<sup>100</sup> Marsh’s recurring references to the metaphor of the “seed” is indicative of his teleological worldview, which emphasizes the importance of active growth. For Marsh, the Emotions and the Will work in concert with Reason. Thus, he rejected Kant’s rationalism and insisted, instead, that “the acquisition of merely speculative knowledge cannot itself communicate the principles of the spiritual life.”<sup>101</sup> The rhetorical arts thus have an important role to play by implanting the “seed” of divine wisdom in the spirits of individual souls and by inspiring action by the Rational Will. His hope was that, through training in eloquence, one could reach a state (such as Coleridge had) where “language becomes...a living power, ‘consubstantial’ with the power of thought, that gave birth to it, and awakening and calling into action a corresponding energy in our own minds.”<sup>102</sup> In this way, rhetoric could assist to spread the wisdom of “our blessed Savior...himself the essential Form and Living Word.”<sup>103</sup>

### 2.3. KANTIAN RUMINATIONS IN OIL CITY

When Dewey graduated from the University of Vermont in 1879, he left with a renewed religious faith bolstered by the ideas of Marsh and Coleridge. As Rockefeller explains, they had given “Dewey a sense that there is in Christianity profound personal truth, which is at once universal truth, because it involves real insight into the nature and destiny of the human being understood as a rational will.”<sup>104</sup> However, the University of Vermont was still a university, not a

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<sup>100</sup> James Marsh, “Introduction,” in *Aids to Reflection, with a Preliminary Essay, by James Marsh, D.D.*, 29.

<sup>101</sup> Marsh, “Introduction,” 26.

<sup>102</sup> Marsh, “Introduction,” 52.

<sup>103</sup> Marsh, “Introduction,” 27.

<sup>104</sup> Rockefeller, 63.

seminary, and while there Dewey was exposed to more than just Christian interpretations of Kantian doctrine. Especially in his senior-year course, Dewey was introduced to various branches of speculative and social philosophy, including August Comte and Herbert Spencer.<sup>105</sup> In particular, Dewey pointed to the influence of T.H. Huxley's *Physiology*, which he said led him to "desire a world and a life that would have the same properties as had the human organism in the picture of it derived from study of Huxley's treatment."<sup>106</sup> As Rockefeller observes, "for Dewey the idea of organic unity had all the attractive power of a great and beautiful sacred symbol. It awakened in his young mind and heart the passion of Plato's *eros* and led him into his own 'quest for certainty.'"<sup>107</sup> Thus, during the years before entering graduate school at Johns Hopkins in 1882, during which time Dewey worked as a high school teacher in Oil City, PA, Dewey spent little time reflecting on the insights of Coleridge or Marsh and instead pursued his budding interest in logic, epistemology, and metaphysics by reading Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel.<sup>108</sup> The results of these studies were his first two published essays in 1882 by W.T. Harris in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism" and "The Pantheism of Spinoza."

These early essays are significant for understanding the development of Dewey's thinking on communication if only because of their complete absence of any concern for the subtleties of rhetoric, language, or human behavior. The first essay, for example, explores only the Kantian question: How is knowledge possible? Not surprisingly, he gives a Kantian answer: "To know substance, matter, is required substance, mind."<sup>109</sup> Based on this premise, Dewey's

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<sup>105</sup> Neil Coughlan, *Young John Dewey: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 8.

<sup>106</sup> Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," 148.

<sup>107</sup> Rockefeller, 49

<sup>108</sup> Rockefeller, 64.

<sup>109</sup> John Dewey, "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (reprint Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1882), 5.

essay then castigates materialism for positing that this same “mind” is only an effect of matter and not the cause of its being known. For Dewey, “to have real knowledge of real being, there must be something which abides through the successive states”<sup>110</sup> (or what he calls the “mere succession of phenomena”<sup>111</sup>), and that thing is the synthetic power of the mind. Thus, in his fixation on epistemological problems, Dewey reverts to Kant and ignores the insights of Marsh and Coleridge. No longer is knowledge partly a factor of emotions or the Rational Will that can be influenced by language, but it is purely dependent on the synthetic power of the intellect to constitute objects of the phenomenal realm.

His second essay, “The Pantheism of Spinoza,” again asks a Kantian question, but this time a metaphysical rather than an epistemological one: What is the relationship between Thought, Nature, and God?<sup>112</sup> Spinoza had suggested that Nature and God were both one and purely rational, and that the role of Thought was to understand the nature of this rationality. In Dewey’s terminology, “God becomes the Absolute, and Nature and Self are but his manifestations.”<sup>113</sup> The problem with this position, however, was that by reverting to a pantheistic monism that makes Absolute Perfect Being one with the relative chaos of the experienced world, Spinoza is caught between two impossible alternatives. Either he must “start with the conception of things as they seem to be” and then bring “God down to them,” or “deny what they are what they seem to be and elevate them into the Divine.”<sup>114</sup> Either way, the problem of why we must go through this process remains unclear. Even more unclear is what role “Thought” or the “Self” plays in this process, and why, given either alternative, we should

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<sup>110</sup> Dewey, “The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism,” 5

<sup>111</sup> Dewey, “The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism,” 4

<sup>112</sup> John Dewey, “The Pantheism of Spinoza,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1882), 9.

<sup>113</sup> Dewey, “The Pantheism of Spinoza,” 9.

<sup>114</sup> Dewey, “The Pantheism of Spinoza,” 18.

concern ourselves with the seemingly petty world of human language and behavior when in the end, everything is “one” anyway. Neither Spinoza nor Dewey provide an answer.

Given his exposure to Marsh and Coleridge, Dewey’s apparent lack of interest in rhetoric, communication, and practical human affairs might seem surprising. However, it must be noted that these humanist subject-matters were only given theoretical weight within the context of American Christianity. As soon as Dewey departed that sphere of comfort for the hard edges of German philosophy, he naturally gravitated back to the welcoming arms of Kant. Yet the influence of Vermont Transcendentalism had not disappeared. What Dewey wanted was a philosophical position that would incorporate his liberal Christian ideals within a more satisfactory logical and epistemological metaphysics. Dewey found such a position when he entered Johns Hopkins in 1882 and came under the tutelage of the neo-Hegelian professor George Sylvester Morris. Under the joint influence of Morris and Hegel,<sup>115</sup> Dewey would gradually piece together his own unique philosophy, which gave communication a new and important role in helping create a moral society of truly self-conscious individuals.

#### **2.4. GEORGE SYLVESTER MORRIS AND THE HEGELIAN SPIRIT**

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<sup>115</sup> I have left out British thinker Thomas Hill Green from consideration in this chapter. Green had an undeniable influence on both Morris and Dewey through his ethical idealism that showed how “the eternal intelligence reproduces itself in us, partially, gradually” and how “in this unity of the world there is further implied the existence of a single, permanent, and all-inclusive system of relations” that exist in the mind of God. See John Dewey, “The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol.3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1889), 22. However, for the purposes on this essay, most of Green’s contributions were absorbed “almost whole” by Morris’s own system. See Coughlan, *Young John Dewey: An Essay in Intellectual History*, 25. Furthermore, Green lacked any unique perspective on language that contributed to Dewey’s understanding of rhetoric. The one aspect of his system worth highlighting, however, is Green’s division of human faculties into “Desire, Intellect, and Will” in his *Prolegomena to Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906). This division closely matches Dewey’s system of “Cognition, Feeling, and Will,” and likely had some influence on Dewey’s choice of terminology.



When Dewey entered Johns Hopkins University at the age of 22, he was trapped in an unhappy middle ground between Kant and Spinoza. On the one hand, he sympathized with Spinoza's effort to show how human beings could be one with God while simultaneously being one with Nature. In Spinoza's system, God's love and human reason are one: "the love of God towards men and the intellectual love of minds towards God are one and the same thing."<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, Dewey could not accept Spinoza's monism over Kant's dualism. He recalled one of his teachers and close friends at Vermont, H.A.P. Torrey, saying to him that "undoubtedly pantheism is the most satisfactory form of metaphysics intellectually, but it goes counter to religious faith"<sup>117</sup> Given these restrictions, Dewey had been left with the Kantianism of Marsh and Coleridge, who, despite their emphases on the importance of concrete practices and human feelings, nonetheless maintained a dualist epistemology and a concept of original sin that sought transcendence from a fallen world through the word of God. This unhappy compromise would not do. In Rockefeller's words, "young Dewey was looking for an inspiring vision of reality that fused *eros* and intellect—that integrated his deeper longings and aesthetic intuitions with his philosophic understanding."<sup>118</sup> He found such a vision in the Christian neo-Hegelianism of George Sylvester Morris.

Morris was a sensitive and passionate individual who had a distinctively moral view on the work of philosophy. As Jones explains, for him, "the ideal of a noble man is of one whose philosophy, intelligently thought out, rounded off, and adopted, is but the conscious, theoretical accompaniment and reflex of a noble life and character."<sup>119</sup> From Dewey's perspective, Morris

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<sup>116</sup> In Joseph Ratner, ed., *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Selected from his Chief Works* (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), 365.

<sup>117</sup> Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," 148.

<sup>118</sup> Rockefeller, 83.

<sup>119</sup> Marc Edmund Jones, *George Sylvester Morris: His Philosophical Career and Theistic Idealism* (Philadelphia: David McKay Co., 1948), 335.

both talked the talk and walked the walk. Even at age 70, long after Dewey had rejected the teachings of his mentor, Dewey said of Morris: “I have never known a more single-hearted and whole-souled man—a man of a single piece all the way through.”<sup>120</sup> Given such praise, it is hardly surprising that Dewey soon established himself as Morris’s “prize pupil.”<sup>121</sup> As the only student interested in Morris’s particular specialization of the history of philosophy, it was not long after Dewey had begun his first semester that he wrote enthusiastically to H.A.P. Torrey to describe Morris’s metaphysical system.

Prof. Morris...is a pronounced idealist—and we have already heard of the “universal self.” He says that idealism (substantial idealism as opposed to subjectivistic, or agnosticism) is the only positive phil. that has or can itself exist. His whole position is here, as I understand it. Two starting points can be taken—one regards subject & object as in mechanical relation, relations in and of space & time, & the process of knowledge is simply impact of the object upon the subject with resulting sensation or impression. This is its position as science of knowing. As science of being, since nothing exists for the subject except these impressions or states, nothing can be known of real being, and the result is scepticism, or subj. idealism, or agnosticism. The other, instead of beginning with a presupposition regarding subj. & object & their relation, takes the facts & endeavors to explain them—that is to show what is necessarily involved in knowledge, and results in the conclusion that subj. & object are in organic relation; neither having reality apart from the other. Being is within consciousness. And the result on the side of

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<sup>120</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 152.

<sup>121</sup> Coughlan, 39.

science of Being is substantial idealism—science as opposed to nescience. Knowing is self-knowing, & all consciousness is conditioned upon self-consciousness.<sup>122</sup>

The kind of idealism Dewey articulated in his letter to Torrey might have sounded suspiciously like Pantheism to his old teacher. However, Dewey did not see it that way. Spinoza's pantheism completely absorbed the individual into God and Nature, thereby erasing all difference as illusory. However, according to Westbrook, Morris's version of idealism "did not sacrifice the individual moral will to that of some abstract universal but rather posited a 'concrete universal' that not only preserved the reality of individual will but required such individuality for its manifestation."<sup>123</sup> In other words, Morris sought union with God neither through Pantheism nor through the hope of the Vermont Transcendentalists that we could eventually free ourselves from original sin through the miracle of divine intervention. Instead, Morris put forward a teleological idealism according to which the ethical life is identified what Rockefeller calls "a process of growth in and through which a person realizes the ideal or universal self by identifying his or her will with the will of God."<sup>124</sup> No longer would man seek to leave this earth for union with the supernatural. For Morris, to create an ethical society based on Christian philosophy is enough to find unity with God.

Morris constructed a metaphysical justification for this vision through a unique synthesis of the Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and the Gospel of St. John. According to Dewey, Morris took from St. John the belief in "the unity of God and man so that the spirit which is in man, rather which is man, is the spirit of God."<sup>125</sup> The influence of Aristotle, however, tempered the mind/body

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<sup>122</sup> John Dewey to H. A. P. Torrey, October 5, 1882. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>123</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 19.

<sup>124</sup> Rockefeller, 83.

<sup>125</sup> John Dewey, "The Late Professor Morris," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1889), 8.

dualism implicit in this notion by reinforcing man's connection with nature. From Aristotle, Morris took the belief that the soul is the form, or the entelechy, of the body.<sup>126</sup> As Rockefeller points out, Aristotle's naturalism led Morris to assert that "there is nothing inherently evil about the realm of the flesh, and spirit requires the material and mechanical in order to realize its divine possibilities."<sup>127</sup> He then read both his naturalistic and evangelical notions into Hegel's objective idealism, which had dissolved Kant's metaphysical dualism between the supernatural and the natural by showing that the natural was Dewey termed "only the partial and dependent manifestation of the spiritual" and that history was the "showing forth" of a process of dialectical unfolding of this spirit.<sup>128</sup> In Morris's words, Hegel had shown "man in an organic-social relation with nature, with his fellows, and with God...and the whole course of history illustrating the growth and gradual perfection of this unity, in a process, in which nature, man, and God work together to manifest the power and sovereignty of spirit."<sup>129</sup> Lastly, according to Dewey, from Plato he took the appreciation for "the beauty of spirit, the beauty of the eternal idea manifesting

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<sup>126</sup> John Dewey quoted in Robert M. Wenley, *The Life and Work of George Sylvester Morris* (New York: MacMillan, 1917), 313.

<sup>127</sup> Rockefeller, 86. Morris's attempted synthesis of Aristotle and the New Testament is later echoed in Dewey's essay, "Soul and Body," in which he states: "There is the body, the natural body, first. Spirit indwells within the body, and manifesting itself, realizing its own nature, it makes that body its own organ and servant. It thus makes it the spiritual body. Let it be no surprise that physiological psychology has revealed no new truth concerning the relations of soul and body. It can only confirm and deepened our insight into the truth divined by Aristotle and declared by St. Paul, and with good reason. *Das Wahre war schon längst gefunden.*" See John Dewey, "Soul and Body," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1886) 115. Interestingly, the final quote is one of Hegel's favorite quotes from Goethe, referring to the lines "The true has long been found / The ancient true, take hold of it!" See Walter Kaufman, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1966), 180.

<sup>128</sup> Dewey, "The Late Professor Morris," 9.

<sup>129</sup> Jones, *George Sylvester Morris: His Philosophical Career and Theistic Idealism*, 406. Again, Dewey later expands on this theme, showing in "Christianity and Democracy" how democracy is the means by which we create the Kingdom of God on earth. Dewey declares: "Christianity is revelation, and revelation means effective discovery, the actual ascertaining or guaranteeing to man of the truth of his life and the reality of the Universe. It is at this point that the significance of democracy appears. The kingdom of God, as Christ said, is within us, or among us. The revelation is, and can be, only in intelligence...In final analysis man's own action, his own life movement, is the only organ he has for receiving and appropriating truth. Man's action is found in his social relationships—the way in which he connects with his fellows. It is man's social organization, the state in which he is expressing himself, which always has and always must set the form and sound the key-note to the understanding of democracy." See John Dewey, "Christianity and Democracy," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971; original work published 1892), 7.

itself in outward form.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, it was ultimately Plato’s sense of beauty that made Morris’s “idealism poetic as well as philosophic.”<sup>131</sup> The passage from Morris that Dewey selects to demonstrate this point is worth quoting.

He [Plato] is the intelligent poet of philosophy rapt with the moral power and fascination of philosophic truth, and in his wonderful dialogues bringing its resistless spell nearer home to the mind and heart of humanity than any other one whom the earth has been privileged to see. Reason in him is all aflame with feeling, but not mastered by it. He has not simply the acute perception, but the warm impression of eternal and essential being—of truth, beauty, goodness—and he is consequently enabled with the electrical effectiveness of a poetic touch to deliver this impression to mankind.<sup>132</sup>

Morris’s admiration of Plato is interesting for its emphasis not just on Plato’s philosophical insights, but on his skills as a poet. As Dewey points out, while Morris “did not draw his essential intellectual nutriment from Plato, he did derive from him, in large measure intellectual inspiration.”<sup>133</sup> A different interpretation, however, might be that Morris derived from Plato his *rhetorical* inspiration. Although Morris speaks of poetry and not rhetoric, his description of Plato’s eloquence in terms of “electrical effectiveness” is thoroughly rhetorical. In fact, Plato’s eloquence may have been proof for Morris of a truth he had learned from a rhetorical theorist already familiar to Dewey—Richard Whately. Whately’s *Rhetoric*, along with the *Rhetoric* of Campbell, had been early influences on Morris’s thinking about language and logic.<sup>134</sup> Whately had refuted the notion that “*Reasoning* may be carried on altogether independently of *Language*,” and had insisted instead on defining “the use of *Signs*...as an

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<sup>130</sup> Dewey, “The Late Professor Morris,” 8.

<sup>131</sup> Dewey, “The Late Professor Morris,” 8.

<sup>132</sup> Morris quoted in Dewey, “The Late Professor Morris,” 8.

<sup>133</sup> Dewey, “The Late Professor Morris,” 8.

<sup>134</sup> Jones, 37.

*Instrument of thought.*”<sup>135</sup> Thus, according to Jones, Whately’s view that “makes language a functional or living phase of mind rather than a mechanical or wholly external process” contains “certain distinct characteristics of Morris in embryo.”<sup>136</sup> To understand how Morris applied these insights within his own objective idealism, however, we must return to the philosopher who would have the largest impact on Dewey’s view of communication—Hegel.

## 2.5. HEGEL’S VIEW OF LANGUAGE

It would not be an exaggeration to say that after 1882, Dewey spent the rest of his life partially under the influence of Hegel. Unlike Kant, whose dualist metaphysics Dewey rejected soon after entering Johns Hopkins, Hegel provided a dialectical method that Dewey continued to employ even after he had abandoned Hegel’s Absolute Idealism. The authority for this assertion comes from none other than Dewey himself. In a letter to Arthur F. Bentley in 1945, Dewey confesses: “I jumped through Hegel, I should say, not just out of him. I took some of the hoop (continuity, anti-hard-and-fast separations) with me, and also carried away considerable of the paper the hoop was filled with. He did me one service—he saved me from the Kantian bug.”<sup>137</sup> As we have seen, this “Kantian bug” was present in his early essays, but it manifested itself primarily as a method of criticism. Kant provided a way of pointing out the faults in materialism and pantheism, but he did not provide a rich enough alternative to satisfy Dewey’s craving for unity.

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<sup>135</sup> Whately, quoted in Jones, 40-41.

<sup>136</sup> Jones, 41.

<sup>137</sup> John Dewey to Arthur F. Bentley, July 9, 1945, in *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence, 1932-1951*, Sidney Ratner and Jules Altman, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1964), 439.

This is how Dewey explained his initial attraction to Hegel after being introduced to him by Morris:

There were...“subjective” reasons for the appeal that Hegel's thought made to me; it supplied a demand for unification that was doubtless an intense emotional craving, and yet was a hunger that only an intellectualized subject-matter could satisfy...the sense of divisions and separations that were, I suppose, borne in upon me as a consequence of a heritage of New England culture, divisions by way of isolation of self from the world, of soul from body, of nature from God, brought a painful oppression—or, rather, they were an inward laceration. My earlier philosophic study had been an intellectual gymnastic. Hegel’s synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and the human, was, however, no mere intellectual formula; it operated as an immense release, a liberation. Hegel’s treatment of human culture, of institutions and the arts, involved the same dissolution of hard-and-fast dividing walls, and had a special attraction for me.<sup>138</sup>

Dewey leaves out the significance of Hegel’s theory of language, but it is hard to ignore the continuities between Dewey and Hegel on this matter. Hegel’s great contribution to our understanding of language was to view language as *itself* constitutive and substantive, rather than merely reflective or stylistic. As Cook observes, for Hegel “language is the existential form of Spirit itself because it embodies this mediating process between the individual and his world.”<sup>139</sup> The revolutionary quality of this definition, despite its idealistic underpinnings, should not go unrecognized; for in all the previous theories we have examined, rhetoric and language have been considered one of two things (1) a means of transportation, or (2) a means of motivation. Hume, Kant, and most of all, Locke, are the clearest promoters of the transportation view, in

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<sup>138</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 153.

<sup>139</sup> Daniel J. Cook, *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel* (Paris: Mouton, 1973), 85.

which language is primarily a vehicle for transporting “clear and distinct” ideas from one rational mind to another.<sup>140</sup> More rhetorically-minded thinkers like Berkeley, Bain, Marsh, and Coleridge see language as a way of motivating people to act or feel in certain ways. However, this motivational quality has a hollowness to it. For Bain and Berkeley, rhetoric may be motivational, but it should still be kept separate from the activity of thinking. Marsh and Coleridge advance beyond this view by making motivation a vital tool for self-realization and ultimate union with the divine, but they nonetheless credit the spirit and will of God with doing the real work, not language. Hegel changed all of this, not just by making language the *tool* of Spirit, but by also making language the *manifestation* of Spirit. In other words, language, under Hegel, became *objective*.

To understand what Hegel means by this “concrete” turn toward language, we must briefly tread the waters of his dynamic ontology. Hegel had reacted to Kant by rejecting his static dualism but nonetheless finding in his thinking the germ of what he calls the “triadic form” that was but “still lifeless and uncomprehended.”<sup>141</sup> It was up to Hegel, therefore, to bring the triadic form to life within his logic of Absolute Idealism. Hegel took the binary of Idea and Nature (which in Kant was the binary of *nuomena* and *phaenomena*, and in Spinoza of God and Nature) and showed that neither side had a real, isolated existence. Quite the opposite, Idea and Nature were both one-sided abstractions of Spirit (*Geist*), or what Cook terms the “reflective, ordered articulation and institutionalization of man’s experience”<sup>142</sup> as it unfolds through time and

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<sup>140</sup> The “transportation view” mentioned here is slightly different from James W. Carey’s “transmission view” in which “communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people.” Carey’s view, which emphasizes control and dissemination, actually clashes with Kant, who would believe such interests too crassly utilitarian (although Locke would probably disagree). Transportation simply emphasizes the fact of getting from here to there, regardless of the consequences that happen after the process is finished. See Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 15.

<sup>141</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977; original work published 1807), §50.

<sup>142</sup> Cook, 28.



progresses toward the Absolute. However, as Kaufmann points out, unlike that of Fichte, Hegel's system "was not conceived as a ladder but as a circle,"<sup>143</sup> and the Absolute was not an already finished product awaiting expression, but was the ideal limit, or what Hegel called a "result,"<sup>144</sup> of Spirit as it came to Absolute self-consciousness through historical time.

The three parts of the "circle" that interact with one another within this process are the three aspects of Spirit. The first is Subjective Spirit, or human beings in their individual manifestations (psychology and phenomenology); the second is Objective Spirit, or human beings in social relations (law and morality); and the third is Absolute Spirit, or the highest manifestations of Spirit as it approaches self-consciousness (art, religion, and philosophy).<sup>145</sup> Looked at as a ladder, each of these aspects represent a higher form of spirit—Subjective Spirit is Spirit that is indeterminate and alienated from itself (what Dewey had called an "abstractly subjective standpoint" in his letter to Alice), Objective Spirit is Spirit recognizing itself within the actions of a community, and Absolute Spirit is Spirit fully revealing itself *to* itself through sensuous, objective, and rational forms. However, looked at as a circle, each aspect is necessary for the growth of the other two. Individuals may come together to form communities, but communities in turn provide and create new forms of individuality. Meanwhile, art, religion, and philosophy are only possible within developed cultures, but once they are present, they provide new possibilities and directions for those cultures, which then create new individuals, and so on. Through this cyclical process, Spirit eventually evolves from what Shapiro describes as "undifferentiated subjective feeling to philosophical self-knowledge."<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation*, 236.

<sup>144</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §20.

<sup>145</sup> Kaufmann, 236.

<sup>146</sup> Gary Shapiro, "Hegel on the Meanings of Poetry," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 8 (1975):103.

The engine that drives this circular movement is *dialectic*—or what Hegel called a “negative movement” of a “medley of sensuous and intellectual representations whose differences coincide, and whose identity is equally again dissolved.”<sup>147</sup> Dialectic is a process in which Spirit overcomes contradictions and oppositions in order to discover organic unity in what had previously been alienated and isolated.<sup>148</sup> Dewey, while still a neo-Hegelian, defined Hegel’s dialectic as “the construction by Reason, through its successive differentiations and resumptions of these differences into higher unities.”<sup>149</sup> Within this process, both *action* and *language* play vital roles. Action is necessary for an individual consciousness to overcome its alienation and recognize itself as an organic member of the world. In a passage to which Dewey later refers in order to show a resemblance between his early idealism with William James’s pragmatism,<sup>150</sup> Hegel says that “consciousness must act merely in order that what it is in itself may become explicit for it...an individual cannot know what he [really] is until he has made himself a reality through action.”<sup>151</sup> It is the action of *language*, however, that makes, the most significant contribution to the self-realization of Spirit due to its unique ability to externalize and make universal what had before been internal and subjective. Hegel observes:

Here again, then, we see language as the existence of Spirit. Language is self-consciousness existing *for others*, self-consciousness which *as such* is immediately

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<sup>147</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §204-205.

<sup>148</sup> This description is different from what is given in Kaufman calls the “Hegel Legend,” which sees Hegel putting forth a simplistic process in which a *thesis* posits its *antithesis* in order to unify these differences into a higher *synthesis*. “Fichte introduced into German philosophy the three-step of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis...Hegel did not. He never once used these three terms together to designate three stages in an argument or account in any of his books...Whoever looks for the stereotype of the allegedly Hegelian dialectic in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* will not find it.” See Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation*, 154.

<sup>149</sup> John Dewey, “Kant and Philosophic Method,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1884), 145.

<sup>150</sup> Dewey actually says in a footnote to James’s theory of emotions put forward in his *Principles of Psychology* that “On the historical side, it may be worth noting that a crude anticipation of James’s theory is found in Hegel’s *Philosophie des Geistes*, §401.” See John Dewey, “The Theory of Emotion,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971; original work published 1894), 171f.

<sup>151</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §401.

*present*, and as *this* consciousness is universal. It is the self that separates itself from itself, which as pure ‘I’=‘I’ becomes objective to itself, which in this objectivity equally preserves itself as *this* self, just as it coalesces directly with other selves and is *their* self-consciousness. It perceives itself just as it is perceived by others, and the perceiving is just *existence which has become a self*.<sup>152</sup>

Hegel’s prose is notoriously cryptic, but we can gain a clearer understanding of what he means by examining how language functions within the three aspects of Spirit. In Cook’s account of Hegel, in the first aspect, Subjective Spirit, “language is the means whereby *Geist* first develops an external, rational form”<sup>153</sup> by “the making of an object into a sign, into Another-than-it-is-for-itself.”<sup>154</sup> Language thus gives concrete embodiment to what before had been an inchoate or unarticulated thought, feeling, or idea, and in doing so it brings self-awareness to a previously isolated consciousness. In the second aspect, Objective Spirit, language “transcends its own isolated existence and realizes that its experiences are not arbitrary or unique, but part of a larger community or ethos.”<sup>155</sup> Like Coleridge, Hegel thus shows how, “through language, a people expresses or articulates its own essence and being.”<sup>156</sup> Finally, as Shapiro describes, in Absolute Spirit, language reaches its highest manifestation in the art of poetry, which expresses “spiritual content within a sensuous form.”<sup>157</sup> No longer restricted to the realm of the subjective or even the inter-subjective, language in the form of poetry becomes a universal expression of the Spirit’s self-consciousness. Thus, “poetry’s cognitive value, like that of philosophy, religion,

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<sup>152</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §652.

<sup>153</sup> Cook, 37.

<sup>154</sup> Cook, 33.

<sup>155</sup> Cook, 78.

<sup>156</sup> Cook, 71.

<sup>157</sup> Shapiro, 91.

and other forms of art, can be expressed most generally by saying that it is a form of absolute spirit in which knowledge is thorough self-knowledge.”<sup>158</sup>

Where, however, is rhetoric in all of this? One might expect, given Hegel’s reputation for “rehabilitating” the Sophists, that he also rehabilitated rhetoric as well. Unfortunately, this is not the case. As Poulakos observes, “Hegel did not so much rehabilitate as philosophize the Sophists,” and by doing so he “domesticated sophistical rhetoric, in effect divesting it of its capacity to shape the public sphere.”<sup>159</sup> What Hegel valued in the Sophists was not their rhetoric, but their realization that “things can be seen not from one but from various points of view.”<sup>160</sup> In Hegel’s words, “the particular characteristic of eloquence is to show the manifold points of view existing in a thing, and to give force to those which harmonize with what appears to me to be the most useful.”<sup>161</sup> This realization, of course, was historically necessary, for it made up the core of Hegel’s dialectical method. However, it also denied eloquence one of its most powerful qualities—its ability to change minds, encourage action, invert norms, inspire passions, and act as a means of altering the world in which it is created. Thus, under Hegel’s hands the Sophists suffered, perhaps, a worse fate than they had under the hands of Plato; for “on account of his [Hegel’s] intellectual totalitarianism, their personalities are dismissed or crushed under the weight of the One, while their rhetoric loses its capacity to commit symbolic violence by engaging in paradox, indulging in excesses, or turning any argument on its head.”<sup>162</sup> In other words, Hegel had drained the energy out of rhetoric and turned it into metaphysical poetry.

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<sup>158</sup> Shapiro, 88.

<sup>159</sup> John Poulakos, “Hegel’s Reception of the Sophists,” 161.

<sup>160</sup> John Poulakos, “Hegel’s Reception of the Sophists,” 162.

<sup>161</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. T.M. Knox and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985; original work published 1840), 62.

<sup>162</sup> John Poulakos, “Hegel’s Reception of the Sophists,” 168.

## 2.6. CONCLUSION

Despite Hegel's ultimate failure to fully "rehabilitate" either the Sophists or their rhetoric, he nonetheless provided a new way to define language as more than simply a method of transportation or motivation. For Dewey, Hegel's worldview was nothing short of a liberation, for it allowed him a way to overcome the dualisms that had long been a part of both the philosophical and the rhetorical traditions. No longer would language be simply the external trappings of Thought or Reason to be relegated to the formal study of tropes and figures. Instead, language was the objective manifestation of Spirit, and it played a vital role in bringing Spirit to Absolute self-consciousness. While it is true that Hegel ultimately aligned Absolute self-consciousnesses with philosophical knowledge, and not with art, language, or action, he nonetheless provided art, language, and action significant ontological standing, especially when compared with the philosophy of Kant. Rhetoric remained subservient in his metaphysics, but language as a whole was often praised as if it were the external form of the Absolute itself.

However, it is important to remember that Dewey was never purely a Hegelian. He came to Hegel through Morris and after having had at least some exposure to classical rhetorical concepts. Morris's praise of Plato's eloquence as a poet, in fact, can be seen as a rejection of Hegel's definition of eloquence as a multiplicity of perspectives and an embrace of a more traditional rhetorical view. Recall that Morris had praised Plato for having "not simply the acute perception, but the warm impression of eternal and essential being," and for being "consequently enabled with the electrical effectiveness of a poetic touch to deliver this impression to mankind."<sup>163</sup> This difference was due in large part to the fact that, unlike Hegel, Morris was a

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<sup>163</sup> Morris quoted in Dewey, "The Late Professor Morris," 8.

devout Christian who believed that the Good, the Beautiful, and the True were actually embodied in the spirit of God rather than simply being one-sided abstractions within the unfolding of a sometimes very secular-sounding Spirit. Morris thus carried over much of the rhetorical sensibilities of his fellow Christians, Marsh and Whately, who placed a high value on the rhetorical tradition. Note, for instance, the unique synthesis of Hegelian ontology and rhetorical awareness in Morris's most important book, *Philosophy and Christianity*:

Neither the work of art, as such, nor the state, as such, is the most direct and characteristic result or expression of what we may call the working of the religious genius in man. This 'result or expression' is found, rather, in what are termed religious ideas—opinions, views, beliefs, dogmas, expressed and, according to the belief common to most forms of religion, divinely communicated to man in the form of myths, stories, historic narratives, songs, prophecies, proverbs, and precepts, which are, in form and language, adapted, as nearly as may be, to the comprehension of the minds of all classes...It also belongs to the very sense of religious ideas that they are held, not simply as conscious intellectual possessions, and objects of a purely abstract and uninterested intellectual assent, but as a power to mould the heart and direct the life. They are, in short, not merely theoretical, but also practical.<sup>164</sup>

Evidence that Dewey retained, despite Hegel's influence, similar views on the practical qualities of language, faith, and knowledge are found in a speech Dewey gave in 1884 to the *Students' Christian Association*, titled "The Obligation to Knowledge of God." In this presentation, Dewey wishes to demonstrate that knowledge, to be real knowledge, must also possess traditional rhetorical qualities: "knowledge cannot arise except as our feelings and

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<sup>164</sup> Morris, 257-258.

desires are involved.”<sup>165</sup> True knowledge, he argues, is not the mere collection of intellectual facts, but is this collection of facts as “they have been brought into relation with the *whole nature of man*, or with his activities, social and moral.”<sup>166</sup> Consequently, one can neither know anything nor convey anything without taking into consideration the entire breadth of human experience. “The evangelist, ignorant though he be, who is in constant contact with the needs, the sins, the desires and the aspirations of actual human nature is a better judge of religious truth, than the man of science.”<sup>167</sup> Thus, Dewey’s neo-Hegelian evangelism provides him the platform to finally unite *eros* and intellect. Knowledge of *physical* nature requires knowledge of God, but knowledge of God cannot be had without knowledge of *human* nature. Our most urgent task, therefore, is to love one another in “sympathy and living intimacy,” for “that science or philosophy is worthless which does not ultimately bring every fact into guiding relation with the living activity of man, and the end of all his striving—approach to God.”<sup>168</sup> What Dewey does not acknowledge is that a rhetoric which also fails this task is equally worthless within his system, just as one which succeeds will reveal to us the greatest truth: that “God is everlastingly about us.”<sup>169</sup> However, as Dewey further developed his own psychological standpoint, he began to see the intimate, if not fully ontological, connection between rhetoric and the universal Spirit. There is no more revealing passage than this one, in which rhetorical terminology is used to describe the metaphysical worldview of “The New Psychology”<sup>170</sup>:

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<sup>165</sup> John Dewey, “The Obligation to Knowledge of God,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1884) 61.

<sup>166</sup> Dewey, “The Obligation to Knowledge of God,” 62.

<sup>167</sup> Dewey, “The Obligation to Knowledge of God,” 62.

<sup>168</sup> Dewey, “The Obligation to Knowledge of God,” 62.

<sup>169</sup> Dewey, “The Obligation to Knowledge of God,” 63.

<sup>170</sup> Dewey’s “New Psychology” was based on the assumption that since the individual is a microcosm of the world that reproduces the universal consciousness within concrete experience, then the study of individual experience is the study of the universe. Therefore, Psychology absorbs and takes the place of Philosophy. As he explains, “the New Psychology would not have necessary truths about principles; it would have the touch of reality in the life of the soul. It rejects the formalistic intuitionism for one which has been termed dynamic. It believes that truth, that

We see that man is somewhat more than a neatly dovetailed psychological machine who may be taken as an isolated individual, laid on the dissecting table of analysis and duly anatomized. We know that his life is bound up with the life of society, of the nation in the *ethos* and *nomos*; we know that he is closely connected with all the past by the lines of education, tradition, and heredity; we know that man is indeed the microcosm who has gathered into himself the riches of the world, both of space and of time, the world of physical and the world psychical. We know also of the complexities of the individual life. We know that our mental life is not a syllogistic *sorites*, but an enthymeme most of whose members are suppressed; that large tracts never come into consciousness; that those which do get into consciousness, are vague and transitory, with a meaning hard to catch and read; [and which] are infinitely complex, involving traces of the entire life history of the individual.<sup>171</sup>

In this one passage, Dewey announces that his ontology would no longer be restricted by the constraints of the syllogism, in which the contingencies of human existence were suffocated under the weight of fixed, logical categories. Instead, his ontology would follow the dynamic logic of the enthymeme, in which individuals unfolded within the *ethos* and *nomos* of a society and discovered new possibilities and potentialities through interaction with their world. In Dewey's idealistic metaphysics, the rhetorical enthymeme of Aristotle met the ontological enthymeme of Hegel, and the art of communication becomes the primary means for moving the human Will toward its union with the divine. The euphoria this movement inspired was what had

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reality, not necessary *beliefs about* reality, is given in the living experience of the soul's development...As it goes into the depths of man's nature it finds, as stone of its foundation, blood of its life, the instinctive tendencies of devotion, sacrifice, faith, and the idealism which are the eternal substructure of all the struggles of the nations upon the alter stairs which slope up to God." See John Dewey, "The New Psychology," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1884), 59-60.

<sup>171</sup> Dewey, "The New Psychology," 60.



made Dewey feel so joyous when dawn broke on the morning of December 22, 1885, for in that movement he believed he had felt the true meaning of *eros*. What he had not fully recognized, however, was that, within his metaphysical system, bringing about this feeling of *eros* was also the true function of rhetoric, and that within this early writings he had unknowingly laid the foundation for a rhetorical theory based on this assumption.

### 3. RHETORIC AS *EROS*: JOHN DEWEY'S IDEALIST RHETORICAL THEORY

Plato was the first to discuss rhetoric as a form of *eros*. According to Cornford, for Plato, “the name for the impulse of desire in all its forms” is “a single force or fund of energy, called Eros, directed through divergent channels towards various ends.”<sup>1</sup> These ends could lead upward or downwards—downward would lead to what Plato calls “the hell of sensuality in the tyrannical man” such as the evil-lover of the *Phaedrus*, and upward would lead to the vision of moral beauty and wisdom described in the *Symposium*, in which love becomes the desire to “possess the good forever.”<sup>2</sup> Within Plato’s ontology, rhetoric plays a necessary, albeit subservient, role. For Plato, rhetoric is “a way of directing the soul by means of speech,”<sup>3</sup> and since he believed that rhetoric could influence which direction our souls would take, his hope was to cultivate a noble rhetoric based on philosophical wisdom that might turn our gaze toward the realm of the divine. Thus, from Weaver’s reading of the *Phaedrus*, we should “think of all speech having persuasive power as a kind of ‘love’,”<sup>4</sup> either of superficial beauty (in base rhetoric) or of spiritual beauty (in noble rhetoric). For Weaver, then, “rhetoric at its truest seeks to perfect men by showing them better versions of themselves, links in that chain extending up toward the ideal, which only the intellect can apprehend and only the soul have affection for.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Weaver concludes that, for Plato, “all speech, which is the means the gods have given man to

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<sup>1</sup> F. M. Cornford, “The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*,” in *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays II: Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion*, ed. Gregory Vlastos, 119-131 (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), 121.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 206b.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 261b.

<sup>4</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 25.

express his soul, is a form of *eros*,”<sup>6</sup> and Plato’s goal was to cultivate a noble rhetoric which could act “as a means by which the impulse of the soul to be moving is ever redeemed.”<sup>7</sup>

It is this Platonic notion of rhetoric as a form of *eros*, in which rhetoric unites intellect and affection in an effort to move the will toward union with the divine, which I use to frame my construction of Dewey’s rhetorical theory. However, given his mild-mannered temperament, his love of community life, and his Christian background, characterizing any theory of Dewey’s as “erotic” needs some qualification. In fact, if any form of love seems to embody the spirit of Dewey’s youthful philosophy, it is the Christian notion of *agape*, or that kind of universal, unqualified love as represented in God’s love for all mankind, saints and sinners alike. In Nygren’s interpretation, the difference between the two forms of love is that “*eros* is the way by which man mounts up to the Divine, not the way by which the Divine stoops down to man,” as in *agape*.<sup>8</sup> In sum, where *eros* is egocentric, acquisitive desire and longing for the beauty and nobility of a life divine, *agape* is unselfish, sacrificial love that flows down to any and all individuals from God.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when we view Dewey’s well-known communitarian sentiments in the context of these two forms of love, it is clearly the tradition of *agape*, not of *eros*, with which he shares the greatest affinity.

Nonetheless, I believe that Dewey’s early *Psychology*, despite its *agapic* spirit, is grounded on a fundamentally erotic premise. This premise is that the wellspring of action is not self-sacrifice but *desire*, specifically a desire for bringing into existence a more fully realized self. Thus, despite the fact that we often talk about desiring this or that *object*, “the truth is that a

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<sup>6</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Anders Nygren, “Agape and Eros,” in *Eros, Agape, and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love*, ed. Alan Soble (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 90.

<sup>9</sup> Nygen, 94.

certain conceived state of the self is the object of desire.”<sup>10</sup> For example, when a man tells the truth, “what the man desires is himself in conformity with a certain idea of himself—himself as truth-telling. The object which satisfied the impulse is only the *means* through which the desire is realized.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, Dewey’s *Psychology* uses *erotic* principles of egocentrism and desire to explain human behavior, even while it advances an ethical social ideal based on *agape*. In other words, because, with Dewey, our *eros* is directed toward the Christian ideal of a generous, self-sacrificing individual, *eros* is the means by which we form a society guided by *agape*. Consequently, since rhetoric is the use of language to motivate individuals to action, a Deweyan rhetorical theory will focus on how language creates desire for certain kinds of objects or ends that will bring into realization certain kinds of ideal self.

In this way, our rhetorical theory based on Dewey’s early idealist is similar to the view of rhetoric advanced by Plato. At the same time, however, Dewey’s idealist psychology differs in important ways from that of Plato. Dewey’s exposure to the thinking of Hegel, Morris, and the Vermont Transcendentalists, in addition to his own rhetorical education, led him to articulate an ontology that gives rhetoric a constitutive rather than merely a motivational function. Dewey considered the rhetorical uses of language a topic of serious philosophical concern rather than as a distraction or a necessary evil, and he believed that the study of language held great potential for any student of the New Psychology. As he explains:

Take the matter of language. What a wealth of material and of problems it offers. How did it originate; was it contemporaneous with that of thought, or did it succeed it; how have they acted and reacted upon each other; what psychological laws have been at the basis of the development and differentiation of languages, of the development of their

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<sup>10</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 362.

<sup>11</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 362.

structures and syntax, of the meaning of words, of all the rhetorical devices of language? Anyone at all acquainted with modern discussion of language will recognize at a glance that the psychological presentation and discussion of such problems is almost enough of itself to revolutionize the old method of treating psychology.<sup>12</sup>

In a complete inversion of Plato's method, Dewey argues that the study of language, including its rhetorical elements, can potentially "revolutionize" the philosophical study of mind.<sup>13</sup> However, because Dewey's primary concern is to articulate the psychology of Absolute Idealism,<sup>14</sup> and not to construct a rhetorical theory, the study of language for him was primarily a means, not an end. Yet as a neo-Hegelian, Dewey undoubtedly would have seen the dialectical value in turning around and using his psychological standpoint to enrich our understanding of language. It is in this dialectical spirit that I draw upon Dewey early works to construct a rhetorical theory from his writings, a theory that supports the ethical goals of his idealistic system. In this chapter, I examine how each of the components of Dewey's philosophical psychology contributes to an idealistic rhetorical theory that shows how rhetoric utilizes the resources of art and science to inform the Cognition, awaken the Feeling, stimulate the Imagination, and enable the Will toward the progressive realization of the ideal and universal Self.

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<sup>12</sup> Dewey, "The New Psychology," 57.

<sup>13</sup> Remember that, for Dewey, psychology, properly studied, *was* philosophy. "Psychology is the completed method of philosophy, because in it science and philosophy, fact and reason are one." See John Dewey, "Psychology as Philosophic Method," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1886), 157-158.

<sup>14</sup> John Dewey, "The Psychological Standpoint," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1886), 134.

### 3.1. THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DEWEY'S IDEALIST RHETORICAL THEORY

The guiding principle of Dewey's idealism, and therefore of the rhetorical theory based on that idealism, is that of "organic unity." Dewey first embraced this principle after reading T.H. Huxley, but it was a principle already present in the Vermont Transcendentalists and then strongly advocated by Morris. For Morris, intelligence and nature, individual and world, are all part of the same organism, and "a whole organism is something more than any of its particular members, or than the mere mechanical aggregate of all its members. It is, or represents, the common life or animating and uniting principle of all its parts."<sup>15</sup> Dewey adopted this notion of organism and applied it to psychology. For him, "the ideal self, or God, is a principle of organic unity, and the activities of the will are the process in and through which this harmony is imaginatively set up as the ideal and then actualized."<sup>16</sup> Psychology is, then, the study of how this process unfolds from the perspective of an individual consciousness. In Dewey's words, psychology is "defined as the science of the realization of the universe in and through the individual,"<sup>17</sup> and its aim "is to see in every part of nature the law of the whole; to see exemplified in any fact the relations of the whole system."<sup>18</sup> To exemplify what he means by this statement, Dewey quotes a passage from one of Tennyson's poems:

Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies;—  
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,

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<sup>15</sup> Morris, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Rockefeller, 107.

<sup>17</sup> Dewey, "Psychology as Philosophic Method," 113.

<sup>18</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 240.

Little flower—but if I could understand

What you are, root and all, all in all,

I should know what God and man is.<sup>19</sup>

Dewey's choice to draw upon the natural imagery of a wild flower taking root in the crag of a wall is not incidental. As we have seen, he admired Pantheism for its ability to find unity between Nature, God, and Man, so that human beings were in many ways like wild flowers—expressions of the beauty, mystery, and grace of God's will. Accordingly, Dewey agreed that “there must be an organic connection between man and nature. Man must find himself in some way in nature.”<sup>20</sup> However, unlike Pantheism, Dewey did not want to flatten all differences into a static monism. He saw not an undifferentiated unity expressed through a fixed reason and logic, but an organic unity expressed through dynamic growth and relations. Within Dewey's organic ontology, “the world is not a series of unconnected, unrelated objects. Each is joined to every other in space and in time. We never really experience any breach of continuity... We live, in short, in an ordered, harmonious world, or cosmos; not in a chaos.”<sup>21</sup> As shown in the example of the flower, even the smallest detail of the most delicate object possesses an infinite number of relations, and for Dewey, the whole of these relations embodies the meaning of God. In Dewey's words, “the true self-related must be the organic unity of the self and the world, of the ideal and the real, and this is what we know as God.”<sup>22</sup> The goal of the New Psychology, therefore, is to trace our journey towards God, which is to say our journey from abstract individual consciousness to concrete universal consciousness.

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<sup>19</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 241.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 199.

<sup>21</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 82.

<sup>22</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 244.

However, following the spirit of Hegel, Dewey does not believe the two sides of consciousness are distinct and separate entities; they are simply two perspectives on the same organic whole. On the one hand, individual consciousness represents the partial and particular side of consciousness that is still in the process of realizing itself: “the individual consciousness is but the process of realization of the universal consciousness through itself”<sup>23</sup> and is associated with what we commonly call “feeling.”<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, universal consciousness represents the complete and fully realized self-consciousness, or that “perfect Personality or Will” that was God.<sup>25</sup> Thus, “universality of consciousness means knowledge,”<sup>26</sup> and “the knowledge of the finite individual is the process by which the individual reproduces the universal mind.”<sup>27</sup> Because of the impossibility of separating any part of the universe off from any other part, the only “reality” is the totality of the process of growth itself. “Looked at as process, as realizing, it is individual consciousness; looked at as produced or realized, as conscious of the process, that is, of itself, it is universal consciousness.”<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Dewey focuses not on the metaphysical attributes of each side of consciousness, but rather on their ontological relations within conscious activity.

The universe gets conscious existence for us as the individual self is read into it; the individual self becomes real as it finds itself in this universe. One side of the process of knowledge makes the universe individual by giving it its conscious unified existence in the self; the other makes the individual self universal by realizing its capacities in

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<sup>23</sup> Dewey, “The Psychological Standpoint,” 108.

<sup>24</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 422.

<sup>26</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 157.

<sup>28</sup> Dewey, “The Psychological Standpoint,” 108.



concrete forms of knowledge. Psychologically speaking, the world is objectified self; the self is subjectified world.<sup>29</sup>

That in these passages we find an anticipation of Dewey's turn to *technē* is easy to lose in the midst of his abstractions. Although present in only an idealized form, the notion of *technē* is here already working its way into Dewey's vocabulary. When Dewey says that the universal acquires "conscious existence" within "concrete forms of knowledge," he means that the one-sided abstractions of the universal and the individual sides of consciousness only gain real being within a *concrete universal*. In other words, individuals cannot attain universality by mere *Cognition* or *Feeling* alone; they require concrete acts of *Will* that culminate in individual moral actions that apply universal principles. Although Dewey's concept of Will, as we shall see, is a far cry from the sophistical understanding of *technē* as the art of productive transformation, it nonetheless bears a closer affinity to the sophistical appreciation for actual practice than it does to the Platonic celebration of ideal Form. Furthermore, Dewey's emphasis on how the individual acquires universality through interaction with the social and natural world led him to articulate a vision of social life widely divergent from that of Plato—a vision that praised democracy as the highest expression of the human spirit and also provided communication an important role in that spirit's expression.

### 3.2. COMMUNICATION AND THE ETHICS OF DEMOCRACY

If anything separates Dewey's early thought from that of Plato, it is his conception of the ideal state. In his 1888 "Ethics of Democracy," Dewey articulates his first vision of democracy, and

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<sup>29</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 153.

does so by explicitly comparing his own thinking to Plato's. He begins by acknowledging the fact that aristocracy and democracy share in a common goal—the “development of the individual that he shall be in harmony with all others in the state, that is, that he shall possess as his own the unified will of the community.”<sup>30</sup> The difference between the two perspectives is not found in what they envision the end of an ideal society to be, but in the means to achieve that end. “According to Plato (and the aristocratic idea everywhere) the multitude is incapable of forming such an ideal and of attempting to reach it” and so “it is to the wise man, or to the few, that Plato looks for redemption.”<sup>31</sup> Advocates for democracy, however, (like Dewey) believed “that the ideal is already at work in every personality, and must be trusted to care for itself.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, for Dewey, “democracy means that *personality* is the first and final reality” and that “every man in an absolute end in himself.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, Dewey believed the ends and means of democracy is the cultivation of what the Greeks called *ethos*, human character.

Dewey's early conception of democracy, however, was no secular paradise. His concept of “personality” was loaded with both Hegelian and Christian connotations. For Dewey, personality “means that in every individual there lives an infinite and universal possibility; that of being a king and priest.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, there is personality (individual) and then there is *Personality* (universal), and democracy is the form of society in which a community of personalities comes to express the nature of Personality. Consequently, the ideal democracy culminates in “a society in which the distinction between the spiritual and the secular has ceased, and as in Greek theory, as in the Christian theory of the Kingdom of God, the church and the state, the divine and the

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<sup>30</sup> John Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1967; original work published 1888), 241.

<sup>31</sup> Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” 241.

<sup>32</sup> Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” 243.

<sup>33</sup> Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” 245.

<sup>34</sup> Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” 246.

human organization of society are one.”<sup>35</sup> In Dewey’s democracy, the church and state dissolve into one another as “the idea of *a* personality, with truly infinite capacities, incorporate with every man” in a society based on “liberty, equality, and fraternity.”<sup>36</sup> For Dewey, a civic community makes up not only the congregation, but the object of worship itself, and the Church of Democracy stands only as long as its members can express their true natures within a shared community life.

The glue that holds together this society is “sympathy,” which is the emotional consequence that followed from what Dewey called “The Ethical Postulate.” This postulate, which embodies the social ethics he had learned from Morris and later adopted within his pragmatic naturalism, states that “in the realization of individuality there is found also the needed realization of some community of persons of which the individual is a member; and, conversely, the agent who duly satisfied the community in which he shares, by that same conduct satisfied himself.”<sup>37</sup> For Dewey, there is a reciprocal and organic relationship between the individual and the community, so that to improve the state of the one is to improve the state of the other. Sympathy is the natural outgrowth of this postulate, for it is “the sole means by which persons come within the range of our life. It is thus a thoroughly universal feeling, for it takes us beyond what constitutes our immediate personality, our private interests and concerns, into what universally constitutes personality.”<sup>38</sup> Reminiscent of the imagery of the Tennyson poem, Dewey draws another analogy between physical and human nature, observing that sympathy “is to the social sphere what gravitation is to the physical. It is the expression of the spiritual unity of

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<sup>35</sup> Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” 248-249.

<sup>36</sup> Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” 248 (emphasis added).

<sup>37</sup> John Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1891), 322.

<sup>38</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 332.

mankind.”<sup>39</sup> In this way, sympathy is what makes democracy, and by association, the Kingdom of God, possible. Yet sympathy is not a purely native, mystical force for Dewey, even within his idealism. Sympathy had to be cultivated:

Sympathy, in short, is the reproduction of the experience of another, accompanied by the recognition of the fact that it is his experience...The conditions of sympathetic feelings are, therefore, first, ability to apprehend, consciously or unconsciously, the feelings of others, and to reproduce them in our minds; and, secondly, the ability to forget self, and remember that these feelings, although our own feelings, are, after all, the experience of some one else. Sympathy involves distinction as well as identification.<sup>40</sup>

However, sympathy also involves is necessitated upon our ability to *communicate* to one another about our individual states. Otherwise, sympathy would involve an incredible combination of telepathy and empathy. Although Dewey doesn't make this connection explicit in his early works, he nonetheless provides enough passages to make a reasonable connection between sympathy and communication. For Dewey, communication involves two steps. “The first step in this communication is changing it from a psychical fact to a physical fact. It must be expressed through non-conscious media—the appearance of the face, or the use of sounds. These are purely external. They are no longer individual facts.”<sup>41</sup> Echoing Hegel, communication first involves making concrete and public something that had formerly been abstract and private. This externalization then allows for the second step to happen, which is “for some other individual to translate this expression, or these sounds, into his own consciousness.”<sup>42</sup> Translation, however, does mean what Locke meant by the communication of clear and distinct ideas from one mind to

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<sup>39</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 332.

<sup>40</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 330-331.

<sup>41</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 3.

another. For Dewey, “one individual never knows directly what is in the self of another; he knows it only so far as he is able to reproduce it in his own self.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, there is always something lost and something added in translation, based on the differences or similarities in the personal experiences of those communicating.

What, however, provides the ground for translation to begin with? If we cannot know what is in the mind of someone else, how does language acquire meaning that can be shared? Dewey’s answer draws almost verbatim from Morris, who in turn shared similar sentiments with Hegel, Coleridge, and the Vermont Transcendentalists—language acquires meaning by being used to generate, promote, or change cultural norms and habits. As Dewey explains, “the morality of a time becomes consolidated into proverbs, maxims and law-codes. It takes shape in certain habitual ways of looking at and judging matters. All these are instilled into the growing mind through language, literature, association and legal custom, until they leave in the mind a corresponding habit and attitude towards things to be done.”<sup>44</sup> In an anticipation of his later instrumentalism, Dewey shows how the growth of society is tied up in the processes of communication and language use. Furthermore, within his idealism, communication takes on an added function as a primary means to cultivate sympathy and thereby act to release the potentials of personality within a democratic community. Yet this function deals mainly with *communication* writ large. To understand the more specific functions of *rhetoric*, we must begin to look descend from the lofty heights of Dewey’s idealist vision and ground our rhetorical theory in concrete practice. We begin with the “moral situation.”

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<sup>43</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 355.

### 3.3. THE MORAL SITUATION

Given Dewey's emphasis on the moral primacy of self-realization, it is hardly surprising that he would look to Socrates for inspiration when it came to a discussion of moral virtue and character. As Dewey reminds us, "to know one's self was declared by Socrates, who first brought to conscious birth the spirit of the moral life, to be the very core of moral endeavor."<sup>45</sup> However, Dewey gives a naturalistic touch to Socrates, adding that "when man does get back to himself it will be as a victor laden with the spoils of subdued nature."<sup>46</sup> What Dewey means by "the spoils of subdued nature" is that self-realization is no longer a matter of private introspection, but deals with how the self interacts with its natural and social environment. For Dewey, this shift in definition is not due to the insights of Hegelian idealism, but to the revelations of liberal Christianity. "While the old struggle had been an effort to get away from evil to a good beyond, Christianity made the struggle itself a good. It, then, was no longer the effort to escape to some fixed, unchanging state; the constant onward movement was itself a goal. Virtue, as Hegel says, is the battle, the struggle, carried to its full."<sup>47</sup> Consequently, Dewey places far more importance on situational ethics than had Plato or Socrates, even if, in the end, he saw all those situations eventually converging toward a single point.<sup>48</sup>

Within Dewey's early psychology, moral situations arise when one is confronted with conditions that reveal the incompleteness and alienation of our actual selves compared with the ideal form of our true selves. "Moral feeling lays hold of our own true self...and says that this

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<sup>45</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 388.

<sup>46</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 388.

<sup>47</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 380

<sup>48</sup> Dewey seemed divided on this view in his early years, for in the *Psychology* he states that "Religious feeling is, therefore, the completely universal feeling, and with it the progressive development of feelings ends." The five years in between these passages likely saw Dewey moving closer toward the progressive spirit of Hegel of the *Phenomenology*. See Dewey, *Psychology*, 338.

ought to be made real, and that our actual self must be made into conformity with it. Moral feeling involves, therefore, a gulf between the actual and the ideal or universal self.”<sup>49</sup> Resolving this feeling of “conflict,”<sup>50</sup> however, requires more than simply an adjustment of our private mental states. “Our nature can be completely objectified or realized only when the chasm between what is and what ought to be, between the actual and the ideal self, is overcome.”<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the self must act in such a way as to realize moral ends and thereby objectify the ideal self in practice. “The realization of moral ends must bring about a changed situation, so that the repetition of the same ends would no longer satisfy.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, resolving the conflict of moral feeling requires the self to realize itself, and by realizing itself alter the situation through “the creation of new capacities and wants” within “wider and more complex social relationships.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, following the “Ethical Postulate,” to realize one’s ideal self is also to help realize the ideal community to which that self belongs.

It is here where we find Dewey acknowledging the importance of love, in both its *erotic* and *agapic* forms, for the attainment of moral character. Within his social theory, Dewey had already pointed out the importance of love’s sister-virtue, *sympathy*. However, sympathy is largely functional; it is the practical means by which communication happens and society hangs together. Love, however, is “the basis of all social relations”<sup>54</sup> for it is “necessarily creative. Wonder creates science, admiration creates the fine arts; love creates various forms of personal relations and institutions...it is the most immediate and intimate form which interest in others takes.”<sup>55</sup> In this context, Dewey is implicitly employing a definition of love as *eros*. Note, for

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<sup>49</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 338.

<sup>50</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 338.

<sup>51</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 338.

<sup>52</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 368.

<sup>53</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 368-369.

<sup>54</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 343

<sup>55</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 342.

example, however Dewey associates love with *wonder*, *admiration*, and *interest*, thus indicating that love represents a *desire* of the self to find itself through the truths of science, the beauty of art, and the goodness of human relations. Therefore, because it is the source of that inner drive for the self to progress toward a moral ideal, “love is the only motive which can be relied upon for efficient and sure action; and only the man of character has fixed love of a thing for its own sake; and that which is sought for anything but itself is not a moral end.”<sup>56</sup> However, Dewey then moves toward an interpretation of love as *agape* when he articulates how love functions as a social ethic. For Dewey, love is absolutely necessary for any true resolution of a moral situation, for love as *agape* is inherently universal—it seeks “the complete identification of subject and object, of agent and function, and...is complete in every phase.”<sup>57</sup> In this way, *eros* is that desire of individual personalities to cultivate a shared virtue of such moral worth that they would embody universal *agape* in the form of Personality, which for Dewey was synonymous with democracy. Acting from any other desire than love is selfish and leads to a corruption of virtue and an alienation of the self from its ideal form. Yet Dewey does not stop there, for he knows that love is not a sufficient condition for moral action. One must also possess the ability to act, and that requires an idealist conception of *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom.

### 3.4. ELEMENTS OF *PHRONĒSIS*: MEANING, HABIT, AND JUDGMENT

As we have seen, although Dewey’s psychology was primarily concerned with the realization of the form of the *ideal* Self, this realization was necessitated upon the development of the character

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<sup>56</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 416.

<sup>57</sup> Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, 361.



of the *actual* Self. Thus, Dewey needed to develop an account of practical wisdom, which was a key component in the development of virtue. He did so in part by drawing from Aristotle's concept of *phronēsis*. Dewey writes: "the practical efficiency of character is suggested by Aristotle when he says that the man who rejoices in abstinence is temperate; the man who abstains but is grieved thereby is still intemperate."<sup>58</sup> For both Dewey and Aristotle, the ideal of *phronēsis* is the development of a character that both *wills* to do good and has the capacity to actually *do* good. However, to achieve the level of character that embodies *phronēsis*, an individual has to develop the ability to do three things: (1) to understand the meaning of one's situation, (2) to cultivate habits that react wisely in response to familiar situations, and (3) to develop the skills of judgment needed when one is faced with novel situations.

We begin with the nature of "meaning." For Dewey, the definition of meaning follows directly from the organic nature of the world. Thus, "relationship is the essence of meaning."<sup>59</sup> Within Dewey's ontology, there is no such thing as the Kantian *noumena*, or the object *in-itself*. Consequently, meaning, like existence, is purely relational. "Meaning always takes us beyond the bare presentation, to its connections and relations to the rest of experience. We select not what a thing is, but what it points to."<sup>60</sup> Yet for meaning to be relational also means that its content "must be supplied by the self or mind, and hence is ideal."<sup>61</sup> Echoing his earlier Kantian position in "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism," Dewey rejects any form of realism that posits a passive consciousness upon which the world imprints itself; for Dewey, consciousness is active in the determination of meaning. "The sensations furnish the data, but these data must be neglected, selected, and manipulated by the self before they become

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<sup>58</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 415.

<sup>59</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 86.

<sup>60</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 138.

knowledge.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, the determination of the meaning of any object, event, or situation is a combination of perception and conception. “The concept always returns into and enriches the percept, so that the distinction between them is not fixed but moveable.”<sup>63</sup>

So far, Dewey sounds no different than Kant. What makes Dewey’s position unique, and far more amenable to a rhetorical perspective, is that he makes the mind’s creation of meaning contingent upon actual *interests* of the self rather than the mechanical operations of *a priori* Categories. “Experience, accordingly, or the world of known objects, is not a colorless copy of what actually exists, stereotyped or impressed upon us, but is an experience produced by the mind acting according to the interests of self in interpreting sensuous data.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, Dewey thus links an active notion of experience to the Aristotelian notion of *phronēsis*, resulting in a situation in which the mind interprets and gives meaning to sensuous data for the purposes of *adjustment*, or of accomplishing some end. For example, “the perfection of an intellectual act depends... upon the definiteness and completeness with which an act of adjustment can be performed, and this depends upon the extent that the mind can anticipate what is coming.”<sup>65</sup> The ability of consciousness to interpret one’s situation in such a way as to facilitate appropriate action that satisfies the interests of the Self is thus the first step in the development of *phronēsis*.

Once the mind has gone through this process of adjustment several times, the next step in the development of *phronēsis* is the cultivation of habit. For Dewey, habit serves two important

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<sup>62</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 138. Compare this statement with that of Kenneth Burke. “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality.” Burke identifies this process with a linguistic terminology, but the entire idea of a “terministic screen” is contingent upon the ability of mind to neglect, select, and manipulate experience by means of concepts. It has become the norm to shift from mental-talk to language-talk, but the latter nonetheless rests on assumptions of the former. See Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966), 45.

<sup>63</sup> John Dewey, “How Do Concepts Arise From Percepts?” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1891), 146.

<sup>64</sup> Dewey, “How Do Concepts Arise From Percepts?”, 136. This statement anticipates Dewey’s more explicit declaration that “knowledge can define the percept and elaborate the concept, but their union can be found only in action.” See Dewey, “The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge,” 21.

<sup>65</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 139.

functions. First, it “forms a self-executing mechanism whereby the mind apprehends readily and expeditiously those elements in its cognitive life which are regularly recurring, and adjusts itself in its actions to the permanent demands of its surroundings.”<sup>66</sup> As Dewey explains, it is impossible for us to encounter each moment as it were entirely original and unique, for “the result would be utter confusion of mind.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, we would be so fixated on the “infinity of detail” present in any immediate situation that there would “be no perspective, no background nor foreground, in psychical life.”<sup>68</sup> We would be trapped in an unending immediacy. By allowing us to react in similar ways to familiar situations, habit serves its second function, which is enabling “conscious intelligence to devote itself to the apprehension of variable elements, and the will to apply itself to the mastery of novel and changing acts.”<sup>69</sup>

Thus, habit frees our minds to develop the capacity for *judgment*, which is the core of *phronēsis*. Judgment, in sum, is the ability to apply some universal element to a particular case for the purposes of making the particular case meaningful and intelligible. Thus, “a judgment expressed in language takes the form of a proposition, and includes two elements, the subject and the predicate.”<sup>70</sup> Judgment, then, is distinct from perception by being propositional act which entails elements of truth or falsity. In other words, *before* being interpreted, “the sensuous element is really there, and is just what it is”<sup>71</sup>; but *after* being interpreted, the sensation becomes

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<sup>66</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 113.

<sup>67</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 119.

<sup>68</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 119.

<sup>69</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 113.

<sup>70</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 214.

<sup>71</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 217. Compare this statement with that of Protagoras when addressing the situation of the different perceptions of a sick and healthy man: “What never happens is that a man who judges what is false is made to judge what is true. For it is impossible to judge what is not, or to judge anything other than what one is immediately experiencing; and what one is immediately experiencing is always true.” Dewey at first seems to be agreeing with Protagoras here, but his resolution to the problem is far different. Dewey goes on to say that truth is determined by how a judgment accords with the current logical system of knowledge, which is closer to the Platonic position. Protagoras, however, asserts that “what we have to do is not to make the one of these two wiser than the other—that is not even a possibility...What we have to do is to make a change from the one to the other, because the other state is better.” Protagoras thus makes the pragmatic move to justify judgments by consequences. Dewey,

incorporated into a system of other meanings and past judgments with which it must accord. Dewey thus articulates a coherence version of truth in which “a judgment is called true when it harmonizes with all other judgments; false when it is in contradiction to some other.”<sup>72</sup> However, because “there is no simple criterion or rule for determining truth which can be applied immediately to every judgment” then “the only criterion is relation to the whole body of acquired knowledge...so far as it is realized.”<sup>73</sup> But since this knowledge is always in the process of being realized, there is always flexibility and room for novel judgments as long as the entire body of knowledge adapts to account for them.

To demonstrate what he means by judgment, Dewey uses the example of a ghost. In the initial perception of ghostly qualities, such as wispy features or moaning sounds, there is no real matter of true or false, because “in perception and in memory the sensuous element is always true...at most it may be called normal or abnormal.”<sup>74</sup> Matters of truth or falsity only arise when one makes the propositional judgment, “I’ve just seen a ghost!”, for then “the sensuous presentation is *interpreted* by the act of mind, as an existing ghost.”<sup>75</sup> To determine the accuracy of this judgment, one must then see how this proposition accords with the “whole system of knowledge” about the existence of ghosts and their manifestations.<sup>76</sup> Mind “thus arrives at a state of suspense; it is not sure whether this particular judgment agrees or not with itself” or with the “conditions of universal intelligence.”<sup>77</sup> Realizing in this case that ghosts do not exist, “it no longer assumes truth, as the child’s mind does; it waits for evidence” and “learns to assume a

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however, had not yet made that move, reverting to coherence as the primary criteria. See Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. M.J. Levett and rev. Myles Burnyeat, in *Plato: Collected Works*, 166d-167b.

<sup>72</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 217.

<sup>73</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 218.

<sup>74</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 217.

<sup>75</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 217.

<sup>76</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 219.

<sup>77</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 219.

state of suspended judgment.”<sup>78</sup> Through this process of trial and error, individuals cultivate the ability for critical judgment so that they do not make rash decisions yet can still act with prudence and timeliness.

Although Dewey’s example is a scientific and empirical one, he clearly desired *phronēsis* to extend into the moral realm. Thus, *phronēsis* needs more than the resources of empirical science to make judgments; it also requires the resources of art. Consequently, Dewey boldly asserts that science and art are “the preeminent moral means” because “through them wants are interconnected, unified and socialized.”<sup>79</sup> In fact, as Dewey earlier pointed out, science and art are the social consequences of love, for they represent universal interest in moral ideals in concrete form. These forms of interest, meanwhile, can be conveniently broken down using three categories;<sup>80</sup> there is interest “contemplation (knowledge)”, interest in “production (art)”, and interest in “productive of things to be contemplated (fine art).”<sup>81</sup> But Dewey refused to privilege one form of interest over another. Because the moral end was the development of self, and not the attainment of philosophical wisdom as such, then “the Good will consist in the exercise of these interests, varied as they may be in each individual by the special turn which his capacities and opportunities take.”<sup>82</sup>

By placing productive arts on equal par with contemplative arts, Dewey opens the door for rhetoric to play a significant role in his idealistic ontology. Unfortunately, Dewey did not focus on rhetoric in his early writings, but in the relationship between production and

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<sup>78</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 219.

<sup>79</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 388.

<sup>80</sup> Although Dewey’s distinctions are reminiscent of the Aristotelian distinction between *theoria* and *technē*, Dewey’s addition of “fine art” is a modern conception. “For Aristotle, there is no distinction at all between what have come to be called in modern times the so-called ‘fine arts’ and the ‘practical arts’...For Aristotle and the Greeks, the ‘artist’ is a maker, a craftsman, like the shipbuilder or the physician.” See John Herman Randall, Jr., *Aristotle* (New York: Columbia UP, 1960), 278.

<sup>81</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 306.

<sup>82</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 306.

contemplation we find the resources for constructing a theory of rhetoric as a productive art. However, because Dewey's discussion of science and art are intimately connected with his analysis of the psychological faculties of Cognition, Feeling, Will, and Imagination, we must examine the nature of these faculties before returning to a discussion of science and art that will provide the final pieces for an idealist rhetorical theory.

### **3.5. THE THREE FACULTIES: COGNITION, FEELING, AND WILL**

#### **3.5.1. The relationship between Cognition, Feeling, and Will**

Dewey's three primary faculties of Cognition,<sup>83</sup> Feeling, and Will<sup>84</sup> effectively absorb the principles of his idealist ontology within his effort to explain individual human consciousness and behavior. However, because Dewey often describes their function without reference to his idealist ontology, one might get the impression that he was a thorough-going pragmatist. For instance, he rejects the notion that a "self" is transcendental entity akin to a "soul," or something that exists apart from the activities of day-to-day life. For Dewey, "self is, as we have so often seen, an activity. It is not something which acts; it *is* activity."<sup>85</sup> Given Dewey's grounding of the self in activity, the natural consequence is that the faculties also do not possess independent

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<sup>83</sup> Dewey often uses "knowledge" as a synonym for Cognition, even though it seems to indicate actual content where Cognition indicates an activity or faculty.

<sup>84</sup> Dewey's choice of primary faculties follows a tradition that originated in Germany in the period between Leibniz and Kant during the Enlightenment, "a period that gave rise to an interest in individual man, his consciousness, and the powers of his mind." Kant formalized the faculties when he effectively "took over the classificatory scheme. Pure reason corresponds to intellect or cognition, practical reason to will, action, or conation, and judgment to feeling pleasure or pain, hence affection." For a review of the history of these "faculties," see Ernest R. Hilgard, "The Trilogy of Mind: Cognition, Affection and Conation," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 16 (1980): 107-117.

<sup>85</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 247 (emphasis added).

existence apart from this activity. Thus, “will, knowledge, and feeling are not three kinds of consciousness, but three aspects of the same consciousness.”<sup>86</sup> Analogous to his description of the universal and individual consciousness, Dewey explains that “feeling is the subjective side of consciousness, knowledge its objective side. Will is the relation between subjective and the objective.”<sup>87</sup> Will as activity functions as the unifying ground of the universal and individual, and the whole circuit makes up what we know as consciousness. For purposes of analysis we can abstract different faculties from this whole, but we must always remember their intrinsic interrelatedness; for “any state of consciousness is really knowledge, since it makes us aware of something; feeling, since it has a certain peculiar reference to ourselves, and will, since it is dependent upon some activity of ours.”<sup>88</sup> With this holistic premise in mind, I now examine each faculty separately.

### **3.5.2. The Cognition**

By far the least complex faculty in Dewey’s system is Cognition. Dewey spends very little time on Cognition, and more often than not simply refers to it as “knowledge.” The most explicit definition of “Cognitive Consciousness” is found in his observation that since “every activity or idea of the mind may be regarded as telling us about something,”<sup>89</sup> then we should define Cognition as “the state of being aware of something.”<sup>90</sup> Cognition thus appears to absorb the ideas of Hegelian Reason, which grasps some aspects of the Spirit within a concrete universal. Dewey uses less grandiose language, but nonetheless expresses a similar view when he says that

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<sup>86</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 23.

<sup>88</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 17.

<sup>89</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 16.

“knowledge may be defined as the process by which some universal element—that is, element which is in possible relation to all intelligences—is given individual form, or exist in a consciousness.”<sup>91</sup> He then adds that “knowledge is not an individual possession.”<sup>92</sup> However, because knowledge is not an individual possession, then there really isn’t much else to say about Cognition from a psychological standpoint. Since knowledge belongs to some universal Personality, then Cognition appears as a rather formal category. Consequently, Dewey says little about it and moves on to the far more active faculties of Feeling and Will.

### **3.5.3. The Feeling**

As opposed to Cognition, Feeling is wholly individual. Cognition provides information about the interrelated facts of the organic world, but Feeling represents “the value which this information has for the self.”<sup>93</sup> Feeling thus has a twofold function. First, because Feeling involves an emotional relation between Self and world, it makes us interested in this world rather than just passively aware of it. Thus, “it is this peculiar fact of interest which constitutes the emotional side of consciousness, and it signifies that the idea which has this interest has some unique connection with the self.”<sup>94</sup> Second, Feeling provides the emotional ground for unity between disconnected facts. “Feeling, in all cases, seems to serve as a matrix in which ideas are embedded, and by which they are held together. There is no more permanent tie between ideas than this identity of emotion.”<sup>95</sup> Cognition on its own does not have the inspirational power to truly bring knowledge to life within an individual Self; it requires the unity of Feeling. For

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<sup>91</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 16.

<sup>94</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 16.

<sup>95</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 106.



example, “the power of a flag to awaken patriotic ideas and resolves, of a cross to arouse religious meditation or devout action, is due to the tie of feeling rather than to that of intellectual process.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, with Feeling we see Dewey shifting attention away from abstract universals and toward the concrete practices of actual people, and we begin to see the practical rhetorical implications of Dewey’s psychology beginning to emerge. These implications continue to unfold within Dewey’s concept of Will.

#### 3.5.4. The Will

Like Marsh before him, Dewey places upon the Will virtually the entire burden of self-realization. However, unlike Marsh, his was not the *rational* will; it was just Will, or “the activity of the mind as devoted to realizing or bringing about a certain intention, purpose, or end that we have to do.”<sup>97</sup> The difference is crucial. Marsh, being a Kantian, still saw the universe as wholly rational, and he thus placed a great deal more emphasis on Reason and the importance of grasping philosophical (i.e. religious) truth. Dewey, however, was a neo-Hegelian, and he the universe as wholly *personal*. Rationality still played an important role, but it was subservient to the goal of developing *character* through actions of the *will*. For Dewey, “character is the will changed from a capacity into an actuality. The will is the power to realize self morally. Character is the self realized.”<sup>98</sup> Or, in Aristotelian terms, the will is potential character, and character is actualized will. The entire goal of Dewey’s *Psychology*, therefore, is ultimately to provide a roadmap for turning will into character.

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<sup>96</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 106.

<sup>97</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 17.

<sup>98</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 412.

What, however, is Will? As we have already indicated, Will manifests itself in an activity which unites Cognition and Feeling. It thus provides the productive ground that unites content with form. “Will always unites me with some reality, either transforming an element of the me into objective reality, or bringing that objective reality into the sphere of my immediate feeling. It thus connects the content of knowledge with the form of feeling.”<sup>99</sup> Once again, we see in Will the spirit of *technē*. Unlike the idealism of his predecessors, Dewey’s idealism is active; it requires something to be changed or produced, not merely recognized or believed. Furthermore, the actions of Will, being productive, also implicate them in the act of communication. On the translation end, Will “manifests itself...by going out to some universal element and bringing it into relation to self, into individual form”; on the transmission end, it manifests itself “by taking some content which is individual and giving it existence recognizable by all intelligences.”<sup>100</sup> Of course, the sense of “communication” here has a distinctly idealistic flavor, but it nonetheless posits the need for “concrete” forms of activity for its success.

However, in the end, it is not *technē* which drives the actions of will to realize character. The driving force of moral action is the “Ideal Will,” which is the active part of the universal Personality which “serves as a spur to the actual self to realize itself.”<sup>101</sup> Within Dewey’s organic ontology, each individual Will has an intrinsic connection to the Ideal Will, but it is a connection that is at first inchoate. “The self has always presented to its actual condition the vague ideal of a completely universal self, by which it measures itself and feels its own limitations...What his will or self as complete is, it does not know.”<sup>102</sup> However, through actions of Will, the Self experiences feelings of “abiding satisfaction” that acts as guide markers on the path to self-

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<sup>99</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 347.

<sup>100</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 22.

<sup>101</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 418.

<sup>102</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 418.

realization.<sup>103</sup> Thus, “the feeling of harmony, which is the mind’s ultimate test of intellectual truth, aesthetic beauty, and moral rightness, is simply the feeling of the accord between the accomplished act and the completed activity which is the ideal.”<sup>104</sup> In a dramatic departure from Kantian rationalism, Dewey chooses the harmony of the Ideal Will over the duty to Pure Reason. Thus, he returns to the Platonic desire to hold Truth, Goodness, and Beauty within a single vision, and in doing so, establishes the idealistic framework for a *technē* of rhetoric based on *eros*, or the desire of individual selves to realize universal ideals in action.

### 3.6. THE FOURTH FACULTY: IMAGINATION

To fully account for the creative character of rhetoric we need to examine a faculty that didn’t conveniently fit into Dewey’s three-part system. This faculty is the Imagination, which Dewey formally considered a subset of Cognition. Yet Dewey actually gives to Imagination a great deal more responsibility than the rather empty vessel of Cognition. Where Cognition is merely “that side of consciousness which reports to us something that is,”<sup>105</sup> Imagination is “an organ of penetration into the hidden meaning of things.”<sup>106</sup> Imagination is inherently creative and is the source of new objects and ideas in the world. For instance, Dewey says that “the function of the creative imagination everywhere is to seize upon the permanent meaning of facts, and embody them in such congruous, sensuous forms as shall enkindle feeling, and awaken a like organ of penetration in whoever may come upon the embodiment.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 418.

<sup>104</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 419.

<sup>105</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 347.

<sup>106</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 195.

<sup>107</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 198.

It is hard to miss the rhetorical implications of that definition. Imagination, for Dewey, is a capacity (what Aristotle would call a *dynamis*) to give sensuous form to disembodied content in an effort to awaken the Feeling and enlighten the Cognition for the better moving of the Will.<sup>108</sup> Despite Imagination being subsumed under Cognition, it nonetheless emerges as one of the most important faculties for assisting the Will on its journey toward the Ideal by acting as a source of inspiration for new activities, thoughts, and feelings. Without it, we would be “confined to isolation and combination of experienced already had.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, Imagination “is virtually creative. It makes its object new by setting it in a new light. It separates and combines...Creative imagination, in short, is only the free action of that idealizing activity which is involved in all knowledge whatever.”<sup>110</sup> For Dewey, Imagination manifested itself in what he considered the two most important products of human society—science and art. However, as I shall now show, science and art achieve their highest expression when unified in a form of communication, like rhetoric, which draws on the resources of both.

### 3.7. SCIENCE, ART, AND RHETORIC

The simple elegance of Dewey’s triadic system of faculties becomes most evident when we see how easily they match up to Dewey’s triadic division of “interests.” Contemplative knowledge appeals to the Cognition, or the universal aspects of consciousness. Fine art appeals to the Feeling, or the individual aspects of consciousness. This seemed to leave Productive art to appeal

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<sup>108</sup> This phrasing borrows from Francis Bacon, who wrote that “The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the Will.” Dewey would probably agree. See Francis Bacon, *The Collected Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 3, Part 1. (London: Routedledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996; original work published 1876), 409.

<sup>109</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 196.

<sup>110</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 196.

to the Will, or that part of the self that acts to realize moral ends. What makes this system appear so amenable to rhetoric is that it matches almost exactly the triadic system of Alexander Bain that Dewey had learned at the University of Vermont, a system in which “there are three principle ends in speaking,—to inform, to persuade, to please,” and which in turn “correspond to the three departments of the human mind, the Understanding, the Will, and the Feelings.”<sup>111</sup> Dewey had added a subsidiary faculty of the Imagination, of course, but since this faculty cut across all the others, it had no fixed responsibility. His psychology, therefore, seemed to be following rhetorical trajectory that would show how rhetoric unites science and art (as they function in their traditional disciplinary senses of the “arts” and the “sciences”) in a productive discourse that moves the Will toward an ideal.

However, Dewey never makes the connection between Will and rhetoric. One reason for this conspicuous absence may have been Dewey’s reluctance to see the Will as something as susceptible to the manipulation by external forces. He wanted to posit the ethical principle that “Will is the cause of itself.”<sup>112</sup> In this way, he still held to the Kantian notion that true morality is only possible when human beings possess freedom of will. However, he tempered Kant’s rigid interpretation of free will with a Hegelian concept of growth, or unfolding. Thus, although “this ideal of self-realization depends for its form upon the self and upon that alone...its content, its specific and concrete filling up depends, as previously shown, upon his education, surroundings, etc.”<sup>113</sup> Dewey therefore struck a compromise position—Will was “the source of the empty form” as well as “the moving spring to realization,”<sup>114</sup> but for its content it had to draw from the resources of its social and natural environment. One could not *force* the Will to act, as in

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<sup>111</sup> Bain, 19.

<sup>112</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 385.

<sup>113</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 410-411.

<sup>114</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 372.

sophistical persuasion, but one *could* lovingly set forth objects, resources, and possibilities before the Will of another person and in so doing provide that Will the opportunity to realize itself in moral action. These objects, resources, and possibilities, meanwhile, had to possess *ideal* significance, for in Dewey's idealism, the only things of real value are ideal, not material. There is no more elegant passage in Dewey's entire *Psychology* than the one that follows, which articulates the function he believes the arts and sciences fulfill within his idealist ontology:

The epic of Homer, the tragedy of Sophocles, the statue of Phidias, the symphony of Beethoven are *creations*. Although having a correspondence with actual existences, they do not reproduce them. They are virtual additions to the world's riches; they are ideal. Such creations are not confined to art, nor are they remote from our daily existence. When shall we *see* justice? Who has touched righteousness? What sense or combination of senses gives us the idea of the state or church; of history, as the development of man; of God, or the source and end of all our strivings? What a meager life were left us, were the ideal elements removed! It would be, as has been well said, a world in which the home would be four walls and a roof to keep out the cold and wet; the table a mess for animals, and the grave a hole in the ground. A world in which everything is regarded simply as a fact presented to the senses would hardly be a world in which we should care to live. The processes we are about to study must, therefore, be capable of transmuting sensations into these ideals which make life rich, worthy, and dignified.<sup>115</sup>

Two of the processes that contribute to these goals are art and science, which I will first examine separately before showing how they are connected. For Dewey, science "differs from ordinary knowledge in being unified, systematic, connected knowledge."<sup>116</sup> Again, this definition

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<sup>115</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 83-84.

<sup>116</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 83.

follows directly from the principle of organic unity in which the goal is to link any isolated fact within an entire system of meaning. Thus, “the ultimate aim of science is to unify all facts and events whatever, so that it may not only feel that they are members of one system, but may actually realize their systematic unity.”<sup>117</sup> The scientific mind, meanwhile, belongs to “the world’s investigators and formulators” who “wish to know every step of the road, the way in which each part of it is connected with every other, and how all conduct to the goal.”<sup>118</sup> They are those who revel in “intellectual feeling,” or the “those feelings which are due to the connection of objects with each other, and which have, therefore, no immediate relation to the individual self. They are the feelings which are due to the development of the universal side of self.”<sup>119</sup> Therefore, science appeals not only to the Cognition, but to the universal Feeling one gets by realizing the inherent interrelatedness of all things.

By contrast, where “science reproduces by the understanding; art creates by the imagination.”<sup>120</sup> Art does “not confine itself to a detailed portrayal of fact, but must depict the value, the significance for the self, of the fact.”<sup>121</sup> In this way, art appeals to the Feeling by connecting us emotionally and individually to our surroundings. Where science deemphasizes the individual by focusing on the system of the universal relations, art takes universal ideas and reveals their relevance to the individual. Compared to the steady and meticulous method of the scientists, the minds of “the world’s artists and teachers” proceed “by analogy, the striking simile, and the quick metaphor. They express in a single sentence what years of reflective study may not exhaust, the subtle and hidden connections, the points of identity with the whole

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<sup>117</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 83.

<sup>118</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 109.

<sup>119</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 282.

<sup>120</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 312.

<sup>121</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 312.

framework of truth are so many and deep.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, art appeals to that “aesthetic feeling” that occurs when the self “is taken beyond its limitation to its immediate sensuously-present experience, and transferred to a realm of enduring and independent relations.”<sup>123</sup>

Yet Dewey did not impose any hierarchy between science and art. In fact, he wanted to argue for their organic connectedness. For Dewey, “this present separation of science and art, this division of life into prose and poetry, is an unnatural divorce of the spirit... We must bridge this gap of poetry from science. We must heal this unnatural wound.”<sup>124</sup> Indeed, Dewey believed that truth was inherently beautiful, and that the beautiful was inherently true. “The truth is called beautiful because it thrills the soul with a peculiar feeling of an ideal indwelling in nature which finds an expression in this truth; the character is beautiful because of like embodiment of an ideal.”<sup>125</sup> The problem, Dewey felt, is that we have been prevented from seeing the inherent connection between truth and beauty because of philosophy has remained mired in dualist assumptions that narrow and pigeon-hole human interests. Thus, Dewey envisions a new movement of philosophy which will lay “hold of the secret of this movement” and “tell it in straightforward, simple syllables to the common consciousness,”<sup>126</sup> for “thus will be hastened the day in which our sons and our daughters shall prophesy, our young men shall see visions, and our old men dream dreams.”<sup>127</sup> Dewey believed that philosophy was meant to play this role, but in his own words he indicates that philosophy can only hasten this day when philosophy itself becomes rhetorical.

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<sup>122</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 109.

<sup>123</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 282.

<sup>124</sup> John Dewey, “Poetry and Philosophy,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1890), 123.

<sup>125</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 310.

<sup>126</sup> Dewey, “Poetry and Philosophy,” 123.

<sup>127</sup> Dewey, “Poetry and Philosophy,” 124.



### 3.8. RHETORIC AS *EROS*

Each section of this chapter has been leading up to a rhetorical theory based on the structure of Dewey's early idealist psychology. First, I have shown how the universal and individual sides of consciousness are two sides of the same consciousness that finds its fullest expression in the organic unity of the world. Second, I described how the concrete embodiment of this unity is found within an idealist democracy in which individual personalities utilize the resources of sympathy and communication to form a community that expresses the ideal of Personality. Third, I explained how Dewey's psychology charts the growth of the individual self by examining how individuals develop virtue through a combination of *phronēsis* and love. Fourth, I demonstrated how art and science assist in the growth of virtue by interacting with the faculties of Cognition, Feeling, and the Imagination so as to enable the expression of Will through moral action. In this final section, I reveal how each of these components provides resources for constructing an idealist rhetorical theory that is not only consistent with the vision of Dewey's early writings, but which I believe still provides important insights into how we define the scope and function of rhetoric today.

The key to understanding rhetoric from any theoretical perspective is finding out how it functions within the world of practice. Otherwise, discussion of rhetoric drifts into the realm of poetry, on the aesthetic side, or logic, on the intellectual side. As we have seen, Dewey separates productive art from both "fine art" and "contemplative knowledge" because of the practical and situational character of productive art. For Dewey, contemplative knowledge is concerned with objects of truth, and fine art is concerned with objects of beauty. Productive art, or *technē*, thus deals with "production," and Dewey gives the examples of "useful-manufactures, industry,

etc.”<sup>128</sup> Clearly, including rhetoric as a *technē* is not what he had in mind. However, by narrowing his definition of *technology* to only “useful-manufactures, industry, etc.,” he leaves a conspicuous hole within his account of the arts and sciences, which leads him to decry the situation in which art and science have been isolated from the concerns of practical life.

In other words, because he lacks a broader theory of *technē* that includes rhetoric, he ends up assigning to philosophy, the paradigm of the contemplative ideal, the role traditionally assigned to rhetoric—of combining the truths of science with the beauty of art in such a way as to enable the actions of the Will. But this move is to effectively dissolve all of his prior distinctions and undermine his own definition of philosophy as “the attempt to systematize or arrange in their organic unity all special branches of science.”<sup>129</sup> What Dewey required to realize his ethical goals was an expanded definition of *technē* that included rhetoric. Such a definition could preserve the useful distinctions between science, philosophy and art while at the same time showing how rhetoric could draw on all of their resources in service of bringing about Dewey’s moral ideal. Fortunately, I believe Dewey did provide the material for constructing such a vision of rhetoric, but simply did not make that final step. In this final section I shall construct the idealist rhetorical theory that, I believe, is implicit in his early philosophical position.

Before exploring how Dewey might have envisioned rhetoric as *eros*, we must first get a sense of what more Dewey might have said about the *technē* of an idealist rhetoric.<sup>130</sup> Remember that in the original Greek, *technē* referred to “every branch of human or divine skill, or applied intelligence, as opposed to the unaided work of nature.”<sup>131</sup> *Technē* thus dealt with practical skill

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<sup>128</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 306.

<sup>129</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 232.

<sup>130</sup> This is not to be confused with my eventual construction of “rhetoric as *technē*” in Chapter 5. Here it is a *technē* of expressing some higher ideal, while in Chapter 5 it is *technē* only in respect to the art of doing and making from a naturalistic perspective.

<sup>131</sup> Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 115.

applied within particular situations. Being an idealist, young Dewey shared from Plato a great respect for the contemplation of Truth and Beauty, but he differed with Plato by advancing an ethical idealism that was concerned with the realization of universal ideas through the concrete actions of the Will. Consequently, for Dewey, “living is itself the supreme art,”<sup>132</sup> for living “requires fineness of touch; skill and thoroughness of workmanship; susceptible response and delicate adjustment to a situation apart from reflective analysis; instinctive perception of the proper harmonies of act and act, of man and man.”<sup>133</sup> Thus, his praise of *living* as the art of responding to actual situations with “skill and thoroughness of workmanship” suggests that Dewey embraced the original sense of *technē* as any branch of human skill and applied intelligence. Under his definition, rhetoric could easily be considered a *technē*.

Added to Dewey’s sense of *technē* is another concept that was valued in the Greek rhetorical tradition—that of *kairos*, or “timeliness.” For the sophists in particular, who lived at a time of great change, the notion of *kairos* was held in high regard. According to John Poulakos, for them, “*kairos* alludes to the realization that speech exists in time and is uttered both as a spontaneous formulation of and a barely constituted response to a new situation unfolding in the immediate present.”<sup>134</sup> One who genuinely possessed the *technē* of rhetoric, therefore, also possessed the sense of *kairos* that enabled a rhetor to speak at the right moment in such a way as to have the greatest possible impact on his or her situation. Dewey applied an almost identical sense of *kairos* in his own moral theory. He asks: “The right time, occasion, person, purpose and fashion—what is it but the complete individualization of conduct in order to meet the whole demands of the whole situation, instead of some abstraction? And what else do we mean by fit,

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<sup>132</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 316.

<sup>133</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 316.

<sup>134</sup> John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). 61.

due, proper, right action, but that which just hits the mark, without falling short or deflecting, and, to mix the metaphor, without slopping over?”<sup>135</sup> Although Dewey is not speaking specifically of rhetoric, but of moral action in general, he nonetheless articulates an understanding of how practical situations call for the application of a *technē* based on *kairos* that effectively addresses those situations skillfully and in a timely manner.

But Dewey is not unaware of the instrumental character of language. For him, “language can never get hold of existence; it can only get hold of meaning,”<sup>136</sup> and meaning is inherently instrumental, for it acts as the mediator between the isolated particular case and the interrelated organic universal. “It is especially through the medium of language that the universal element of conception gets its reference to particular objects and is made definite. Language is the constant activity of mind seizing upon particular objects and universalizing them by reference to the conception, and seizing upon the conception and particularizing it by connecting it with objects.”<sup>137</sup> In this way, language has a double function. On the one hand, it takes a particular object and reveals its relevance within a larger context, as Pericles did when he used a funeral oration for fallen soldiers to reflect the larger ideals of Athenian democracy. On the other hand, language takes universal ideas and makes them meaningful by connecting them with particular objects, as Martin Luther King Jr. did when he made his dream of racial equality concrete through a succession of images and metaphors that embodied that dream. In both senses, language is the connecting link between the concrete particular and the abstract universal—it is a *concrete universal*.

The most immediate rhetorical consequence of this definition of language is that language is the primary means for facilitating acts of *collective* judgment. Judgment, recall, is the

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<sup>135</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 326.

<sup>136</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 212.

<sup>137</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 211-212.

ability to apply the correct universal concept to the particular case so as to enable *phronēsis*, and in the previous discussion of judgment we saw how language can frame the proposition concerning the existence or non-existence of a ghost. However, this judgment had no clear consequences, being primarily an act of scientific cognition, not of action. By contrast, rhetoric operates in the ethical world, which “is one of action, and not of contemplation like the world of knowledge,”<sup>138</sup> for “the ethical world at any given time is undoubtedly imperfect, and, therefore, it demands a certain act to meet the situation.”<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, the previous example of the ghost dealt only with an *individual* judgment. Judgment becomes a rhetorical concern when language must facilitate *collective* judgment in response to an uncertain moral situation shared by more than a single person. Rhetoric thus functions in the public sphere analogously to laws, “for the sake of realizing the *common* end, of securing that organized unity of action in which alone the individual can find freedom and fullness of action.”<sup>140</sup> Like the application of law in a court case, rhetoric examines the nature of a particular situation and brings to bear appropriate universal concepts to make a correct judgment whereby both common and individual ends are served.

However, the account of language and judgment just given differs little from that of John Locke. Locke saw the problem of judgment as being one of applying universal or abstract concepts to particular cases, and he also believed that language had a role to play in this process. How, then, is the conception of rhetoric based on Dewey’s philosophy any different? The answer is not found in judgment or *phronēsis*. It is found in the meaning of *technē*. For Locke, there is a strong sense of language acting as a means of transporting ideas from one mind to another. The *technē* of rhetoric is thus the art of effective transmission. Dewey’s idealist sense of *technē*, however, was heavily influenced by the ontology of Hegel, in which language was an objective

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<sup>138</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 347.

<sup>139</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 351.

<sup>140</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 348.

embodiment of an inner abstraction for the purposes of revealing some part of the self *to* itself in concrete form. Dewey follows Hegel in rejecting the notion that language is a representation of internal mental states. Thus, the *technē* of an idealist rhetoric, like the *technē* of manufacturing or industry, is fundamentally constitutive. In the case of rhetoric, however, these “parts of the world” are both the speaker and the hearer of rhetorical discourse who are brought to a shared self-realization by turning what was abstract and “subjective” into something concrete and “universal.” Thus, for Dewey,

it is all-important...to recognize that language is not an excrescence of mind or graft upon it; but that it is an essential most of the expression of its activity...Universalizing is, therefore, one form of the activity of mind. But if this activity of mind remained without a name it would be shapeless; it would be abstract beyond recognition. The mind takes this idea, its own universalizing activity, and particularizes it; it renders it sensuous, concrete, by bodying it forth in language. The abstract idea is projected into real existence through the medium of language.<sup>141</sup>

It is here that we finally find the ontological ground of a Deweyan rhetorical theory, for we arrive at the conclusion that rhetoric, when seen in the context of Dewey’s early idealism, is the art of the productive *realization* of self and world through language. Remember that, for Dewey, the self is more than just the sum of the internal states of Cognition, Feeling, and Imagination. The self is Will, or the unity of action that becomes embodied in moral character. However, for the Will to progress toward its true form, it must productively interact with its natural and social environment in such a way that it realizes its inherent interconnectedness with the organic unity of the world. This realization only happens, in turn, when the Imagination creates objects which reveal to the Cognition the content of universal relations while

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<sup>141</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 212-213.

simultaneously arousing the Feeling to establish a personal connection with these relations. The result is the establishment of an organic connection between the individual and universal sides of consciousness. Dewey gives the following example of how the self reads itself into the world through the assistance of Cognition and Feeling:

An object becomes intellectually significant to us when the self reads its past experience into it. But as this past experience is not colorlessly intellectual, but is dyed through and through with interests, with feelings of worth, the emotional element is also read into the object, and made a constituent element of it. The object becomes saturated with the value for the self which the self puts into it. It is a universal law of the mind in apperception that it must objectify itself. The world thus comes to be a collection of objects possessing emotional worth as well as intellectual.<sup>142</sup>

Of course, rhetoric is not the only means of making objects in the world significant. Fine art performs this task as well. What makes rhetoric distinct from fine art is that (1) it explicitly relies on the resources of language, and (2) it uses language to direct the Will in such a way as to resolve problematic moral situations. In other words, rhetoric enables the Will to realize itself through action by objectifying language which transform the significance of one's environment. Although rhetoric cannot, as in classical persuasion, actually *persuade* or *force* the Will or to take any action it has not already disposed to undertake, rhetoric can *enable* the Will by, as it were, clearing a path for its expression. Rhetoric thus removes the scales from the eyes of our souls and, in Johnstone's words, "illuminates a vision of selfhood toward which development should be directed."<sup>143</sup> Unlike Plato's view of development, the self in Dewey's psychology

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<sup>142</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 276.

<sup>143</sup> Johnstone, 198.

needs to do more than contemplate ideal Forms; it must realize itself in moral action.<sup>144</sup> Consequently, a person “has to act not in view of some abstract principle, but in view of a concrete situation.”<sup>145</sup> Rhetoric thus serves as an aid to resolving situations and in doing so promotes the growth of moral character, which is to say, the growth of the actual Will toward its Ideal.

Rhetoric promotes the activity of self-realization by creating concrete forms of language that inform the Cognition, awaken the Feeling, stimulate the Imagination, and thereby embody “unity of substance and unity of form.”<sup>146</sup> First, rhetoric informs the Cognition by drawing from the resources of science to construct the appropriate universal concept to be applied in a particular situation. This aspect provides unity of “reflection, purpose, or argument.”<sup>147</sup> Second, rhetoric awakens the Feeling by embodying this concept in a concrete and sensuous form that arouses the emotions and makes the self feel connected with its environment. This aspect provides “unity of feeling” which “gives artistic unity, wholeness of effect, to the composition.”<sup>148</sup> These two aspects of intellectual content and aesthetic form always work in concert, although with the unities of Feeling nonetheless subservient to Cognitive ends. As Dewey points out, “many of the world’s greatest orations, as well as deeds of valor, are so many illustrations of controlled indignation. Feeling that merely expresses itself is uncontrolled; feeling that subserves the intellect or the will is controlled. Feeling does not cease to be feeling in

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<sup>144</sup> Although Plato is by no means consistent in this principle, I refer in this case to his description of the ideal philosopher in the *Theaetetus*, who cares little for social ethics and spends his time in contemplation of universal ideas. “The philosopher grows up without knowing the way to the market-place, or the whereabouts of the law courts or the council chambers or any other place of public assembly. Laws and decrees, published orally or in writing, are things he never sees or hears...it is in reality only his body that lives and sleeps in the city. His mind, having come to the conclusion that all these things are of little or no account, spurns them and pursues its winged way, as Pindar says, throughout the universe...and never condescending to what lies near at hand.” See Plato, *Theaetetus*, 173d-174a.

<sup>145</sup> Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 351.

<sup>146</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 107.

<sup>147</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 107.

<sup>148</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 106.



becoming thus subservient; on the contrary, it becomes more susceptible, readier, and deeper.”<sup>149</sup> Lastly, rhetoric stimulates the Imagination by juxtaposing the unique against the familiar, for “neither the absolutely customary, nor the entirely novel, attracts the mind; it is the old amid the new, the novel in the wonted that appeal.”<sup>150</sup> Only those who can successfully combine each of these three aspects within a unified rhetorical object can thus truly call themselves rhetoricians in this framework. A rhetorician thus merges the practical mind of the scientist with the soul of a poet, or that person who “not only detects subtler analogies than other men, and perceives the subtle link of identity where others see confusion and difference, but the form of his expression, his language, images, etc., are controlled also by deeper unities.”<sup>151</sup> Consequently, the effect of their rhetoric is to unify the fragmented nature of the actual self and direct the attention of Will on some idea, object, or event that will further the growth of this unity through action:

In *oratory*, indignation, enthusiasm, some passion, brings the whole resource of the mind to beat upon the point at issue. The intensity of feeling shuts out from the discourse all inharmonious images and irrelevant ideas far more effectually than any direct purpose of attention could bring about. The contingent and accidental detail that usually accompany the course of our ideas vanishes, and they follow each other in an original and vital unity, a unity which reflective thought may imitate, but only overmastering emotion produce.<sup>152</sup>

We now are at a point to fully understand why, within Dewey’s idealist ontology, the *technē* of rhetoric emerges as a form of *eros*. For Dewey, rhetoric possesses the unique ability to combine “reflective thought” with “overmastering emotion” within “an original and vital unity,” and in doing so “direct purpose of attention” on those aspects of a situation that will help achieve

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<sup>149</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 398.

<sup>150</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 127.

<sup>151</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 107.

<sup>152</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 106.

some moral end. At first glance, this description does not sound like an act of *eros*, but rather of *phronēsis*. However, this interpretation ignores the underlying principles of organic unity that held together Dewey's ethical idealism. For Dewey, *situations* are not ends in themselves—*individuals* are; and the resolving of a moral situation is a means toward the larger end of developing character, or allowing the self to realize its ideal self through moral action. Furthermore, all individual selves are organically related to the unified Personality known as God, so to enable the moral growth of one member of a community is to enrich the character of the whole. *Eros*, for Dewey, is just the desire of the individual to achieve wholeness and union with the divine spirit through moral action, or what he called “progressive appropriation of that self in which real and ideal are one; in which truth, happiness, and rightness are united in one Personality.”<sup>153</sup> Consequently, rhetoric functions as a form of *eros* when it enables the Will to grow towards its ideal by inspiring feelings of personal desire for the beauty, wonder, and possibility inherent in ourselves and the world around us. Observe, for instance, the sense of love, generosity, and reverence expressed in the way Dewey eulogizes those artists who successfully reveal to us the nature of the universal spirit through art:

The great artists are, after all, only the interpreters of the common feelings of humanity; they but set before us, as in concrete forms of self-revealing clearness, the dim and vague feelings which surge for expression in every human being, finding no adequate outlet. Thus it is that we always find a great work of art natural; in its presence we do not feel ourselves before something strange, but taken deeper into ourselves, having revealed to us some of those mysterious of our own nature which we had always felt but could not

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<sup>153</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 424.

express. The aesthetic judgment, in short, is implicit in all human beings. The artist helps it into light.<sup>154</sup>

The argument I am making is that the rhetorician also helps us into light, but differs from the artist by focusing on active moral growth rather than contemplative aesthetic judgment. In other words, while art may *reveal* to us the ideal form of human nature, rhetoric enables the Will to actually *progress* toward its ideal form through the development of virtue, and by doing so rhetoric acts as an expression of universal *eros*, or that love for what Dewey called “the All” in his letters to Alice. Richard Weaver once wrote that “language...appears as a great storehouse of universal memory, or it may be said to serve as a net, not imprisoning us but supporting us and aiding us to get at a meaning beyond present meaning through the very fact that it embodies others’ experiences.”<sup>155</sup> Young John Dewey would wholeheartedly agree. For Dewey, the language of a culture is the state of the growth of the universal Personality in concrete expression. Through communication we deepen and broaden the net of culture so as to enrich the state of meaning and include more individual selves within the circle of human sympathy. Through rhetoric we bring all the resources of language to bear to resolve moral situations and thereby contribute to the growth of universal character through love. These principles not only form the basis of Dewey’s idealist ontology, but they also provide the basis for an idealist rhetorical theory that can serve as a practical tool for those who still hold to Dewey’s idealist vision of a Democracy guided by the principles of Love and Personality.

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<sup>154</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 322-323.

<sup>155</sup> Richard Weaver, *Language is Sermonic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1970), 44.

#### 4. FROM *EROS* TO *PHRONĒSIS*

The aesthetic unity of Dewey's early *Psychology* has something of a Greek air about it. By including a love of beauty and wisdom, a praise of action, and an admiration for the moral life all within a single, elegant system, Dewey's idealism seems a worthy successor to that of Plato. None of this was lost of Dewey. In a letter to H.A.P. Torrey about one of his first experiences teaching a graduate course, Dewey remarks that "there is certainly a great advantage in beginning with those old Greeks. There is a freshness and humanity about them that modern philosophy seems to have succeeded in losing."<sup>1</sup> Not coincidentally, I believe, he then immediately mentions his own "attempt at a psychology," which he says he intends to write "with the greatest possible unity of principle, so that without ceasing to be a psychology, it shall be an introduction to philosophy in general."<sup>2</sup> Following in the footsteps of Plato, Dewey wanted to write a science of the individual that was also a science of the whole, and in doing so show how a science of the whole was, like the doctrine of Plato's *eros*, "the science of beauty everywhere."<sup>3</sup>

However, by following Plato into a world of Forms and positing such transcendental entities as the "universal consciousness" or the "Ideal Will," he opened himself up to the same line of attack that had long dogged Plato. Put in the words of Plato's student, Aristotle: "One might puzzle over what on earth Forms contribute either to eternal perceptible objects or to those

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey to H.A.P. Torrey, February 16, 1886. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey to H.A.P. Torrey, February 16, 1886. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York, Pantheon Books, 1961), 210e.

that come into being and pass away,”<sup>4</sup> for “it would seem impossible for a thing’s reality to exist separately from the thing whose reality it is.”<sup>5</sup> Dewey’s Aristotle was English psychologist Shadworth H. Hodgson, who dismantled the premises of Absolute Idealism on which Dewey’s early work was built. Hodgson confesses, “I am utterly at a loss to see either how Mr. Dewey justifies on experiential grounds the existence of an universal consciousness, or in what he imagines the relation between the individual consciousness and the universal one to consist.”<sup>6</sup> However, Hodgson did have an idea of the process by which Dewey arrived at his conclusion: “He falls into the common...fallacy of first generalizing his own consciousness...and then reconverting it into a really existent consciousness with the attribute of omniscience.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, Dewey looked into his own mind and made it equivalent with God’s. But this is simply Transcendentalism, which is no psychology at all, for “by one stroke it substitutes psychology for philosophy and makes its psychology illusory.”<sup>8</sup> William James agreed:

Dewey is out with a psychology which I have just rec’d and but ½ read. I felt quite ‘enthused’ at the first glance, but am sorely disappointed when I come to read. It’s no use trying to mediate between the bare miraculous self and the concrete particulars of individual mental lives; and all that D. effects by doing so is to take all the edge and definiteness away from the particulars when it falls to their turn to be treated.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, Dewey’s invocation of the “bare miraculous self” (or James’s name for the “universal consciousness”) also took the edge and definiteness away from rhetoric as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. J. Annas, in *A New Aristotle Reader*, ed. J.L. Ackrill (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), 1079b: 15.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1080a:1.

<sup>6</sup> Shadworth H. Hodgson, “Illusory Psychology,” in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1967; original work published 1886), xli.

<sup>7</sup> Hodgson, xlili.

<sup>8</sup> Hodgson, lvii.

<sup>9</sup> William James to George Croom Robertson, December 27, 1886. William James papers. bMsAm 1092.9 (3543) Houghton Library, Harvard University.

What Dewey had accomplished in his early idealistic system was to give rhetoric a constitutive role in self-realization by showing how it united science and art in such a way as to enable the Will to realize itself in moral action. However, Dewey's idealism overly narrowed the scope of rhetoric to explicitly moral situations in which there was a perceived gap between the real and the ideal self. Therefore, the rhetorical theory that emerges from Dewey's early idealism has two important flaws. First, it fails to account (in anything but a tangential manner) for the traditional function and scope of rhetoric, which is, in Gorgias's words, to "to persuade by speeches judges in a law court, councilors in a council meeting, and assemblymen in an assembly or in any other political gathering."<sup>10</sup> Second, it flattens all rhetorical contingencies by reducing moral action to a single cause—the Ideal Will—which is ultimately unknowable and thereby empty. The combined effect of these two problems is to leave the messy world of politics and social conflict in favor of an idealized moral utopia in which our capacities of love and sympathy just needs to be called forth through language in order to overcome the sins of power, jealousy, greed, intolerance, and hatred.<sup>11</sup>

Although Dewey's Hegelian sympathies would never quite leave him, his infatuation with the Absolute would not last far past the 1890s. In 1889, after Morris's death, Dewey replaced his mentor as the head of the philosophy department at the University of Michigan, where he would remain until leaving for the University of Chicago in 1894. According to Westbrook, during these years, "Dewey's work shifted from metaphysics to ethics," and he

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<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 452d.

<sup>11</sup> Observe, for instance, in the only extended discussion of anger in the *Psychology*, how Dewey accounts for it by once again returning to the notion of the inherent drive of the self to realize itself. In addition, note how all external contingencies are made relative to an inner, personal drive. "If there is store of energy in the individual, but his surroundings are such as not to call it forth, there arises the feeling of isolation, of being out of joint with one's place or age. If it is hemmed in by external obstructions and allowed to find no outlet, there comes into existence the feeling of bondage, of slavery. Or the activities which are prevented their natural outflow may blindly react against whatever obstructs them, and there arises the feeling of injury, of resentment and destructive anger, which would sweep out of existence all hinderance." Rhetoric, within this situation, would then act as a means of directing this outflow of energy toward appropriate objects that cause these hindrances. See Dewey, *Psychology*, 267.

“temporarily stopped speculating freely on what human experience implied about ultimate reality and more closely examined the more mundane aspects of consciousness and action.”<sup>12</sup> Inspired in part by his reading of William James’s *Principles of Psychology* in 1890 and his hiring of social psychologist George Herbert Mead in 1891,<sup>13</sup> Dewey began to recognize the difficulty of actually applying in practice the assumptions behind his Hegelian psychology. In a letter written in 1893, Dewey documents his feelings during this dramatic shift from idealism to experimentalism:

The special problem I have set myself for it is to interpret the idea of self-realization in a working, practical sense, not in a metaphysical sense...I am going to try to show how all the ethical categories, ideal and real, obligation, law, virtue and vice &c spring from the self as activity, and that when the self is thus conceived, there is nothing more “transcendental” about such an ethic than there is about a hedonistic ethic. While I continue to get more and more out of Hegel, I get less and less out of the Hegelians so-called. They seem to be to be largely repeating phrases when they ought to be analyzing the subject matter. Metaphysics has had its day, and if the truths which Hegel saw cannot be stated as direct, practical truths, they are not true.<sup>14</sup>

Looking back with hindsight, we can see in this letter the seeds that would grow into Dewey’s instrumentalism. This chapter traces this growth between the years 1890 and 1925, showing how Dewey adapted the grand system of the *Psychology* to a naturalistic ontology that had no room for a “universal consciousness.” To do so, I focus explicitly on those people and

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<sup>12</sup> Westbrook, 33.

<sup>13</sup> “Intellectually, Dewey got more from G. H. Mead than from anyone, and he took over Mead’s account of the formation of the self and the nature of reflective thinking lock, stock, and barrel.” See Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 1995), 123.

<sup>14</sup> John Dewey to James Rowland Angell, May 10, 1893. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

events that altered the way in which Dewey consciously understood the function and scope of rhetoric and communication. First, I examine Dewey's relationship with two men who had an early impact on how Dewey understood rhetoric and communication: Fred Newton Scott, with whom Dewey taught a class in aesthetics at Michigan and who was a leader in the field of rhetoric and composition, and Franklin Ford, a newspaperman with whom Dewey collaborated on his abortive attempt at a newspaper, the *Thought News*. Second, I will explore the impact of William James and then follow Dewey's subsequent growth towards pragmatism during his years in Chicago. Third, I will review the rhetorical perspective of Max Eastman, whose book, *The Enjoyment of Poetry*, Dewey praised as a new "science" of rhetoric. Fourth, I will analyze Dewey's understanding of the relationship between communication, society, and democracy. Fifth, I will show how this understanding changed after the trauma of World War I and the rise of propaganda. Lastly, I will construct Dewey's interim vision of rhetoric as *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom, which emerged in response to all of these events and which lay the groundwork for his mature view of rhetoric as *technē*, or an art of productive *transformation*.

#### 4.1. FRED NEWTON SCOTT AND THE SCIENCE OF RHETORIC

Dewey's first professional connection with a rhetorical scholar occurred with his relationship with Fred Newton Scott, a former graduate student of Dewey's who soon became what Dykhuizen called the "newly appointed brilliant young instructor of English and Rhetoric"<sup>15</sup> at the University of Michigan in 1890, just a year after Dewey returned to replace Morris as the head of their philosophy department. Dewey and Scott quickly became close colleagues and

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<sup>15</sup> George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1973), 64.



collaborators. The year Scott arrived, Dewey arranged for the two of them to teach a course in aesthetics,<sup>16</sup> and later they acted as faculty advisers to the *Inlander*, a student literary monthly.<sup>17</sup> However, their mutual affection for each other was made most evident in the fact that each man wrote a complimentary biographical piece on the other, Scott publishing a biography on Dewey in the *Castalian*, and Dewey publishing a piece on Scott in the *Oracle*. The fact that Dewey made the effort to write a mini-biography of a fellow professor is interesting in its own right; but Dewey's piece is even more notable for its praise of Scott's perspective on rhetoric, which amounted to the most explicit and thoughtful reference to rhetoric in all of Dewey's writings. This brief reference, in fact, provides suitable evidence that Dewey did a sense that rhetoric is, or at least could be, an art worthy of serious academic study.

One of the characteristic features of Mr. Scott's work in theoretical as well as practical rhetoric, has been his sense—a sense which he has imparted to his classes—that writing is not a pyrotechnic exhibition of fine phrases, or an ornamental addition to the bare truth of things, but the direct, natural reporting of what one has one's self seen and thought. On the side of the theory of style and literature this original germ of practice is now evolving into a comprehensive theory of the social character of literary expression which 'livens up the dry bones of formal theories. A theory which sees in the style and matter of literature phases of the movement of intelligence toward complete social expression is significant as theory and inspiring and effective on the practical side.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dykhuizen, 64. Some of the titles of their course included "Bosanquet's translation of the Introduction to Hegel's Aesthetics—London, Kegan Paul Trench & Co—Kedney's Hegel's Aesthetics, in Griggs series, and Bryant's partial translation of the Aesthetics." See John Dewey to Thomas Davidson, March 14, 1891. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>17</sup> Rockefeller, 187.

<sup>18</sup> John Dewey, "Fred Newton Scott," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971; original work published 1894), 120-121.

That Dewey would find Scott's rhetorical theory "inspiring and effective" is not surprising. Scott had, after all, included Dewey's *Psychology* on his list of references in his 1890 *Principles of Style*,<sup>19</sup> and in most cases his rhetorical theory grew out of similar idealist principles. Although from a modern perspective his idealism might seem overly simplistic, in his own time, Scott's theories were controversial. As Stewart and Stewart observe, Scott was not only "active in seeking to make of rhetoric a legitimate field," but employed an "empirical approach to language issues was certainly unique in his time" for its use of conclusions from "anthropology, biology, linguistics, physiology, and anatomy to support his theory."<sup>20</sup> Thus, "Scott was ahead of his time. The new psychology, that offered so many opportunities for enriching rhetorical theory, was not widely enough understood for its bearing on rhetoric to be appreciated."<sup>21</sup> Consequently, in more conservative environments like Harvard, "Scott's ideas were smothered by the demands for correctness."<sup>22</sup> But in Michigan he thrived, creating the first college course in newspaper writing in the country, and actually establishing a separate Department of Rhetoric in 1903.<sup>23</sup> It was thus at Michigan, while working with Dewey, that Scott first began his quest to turn the *art* of rhetoric into the *science* of rhetoric. Scott narrates this progression of rhetoric into a science as follows:

Rhetoric, in spite of the attention which in every age of the world has been earnestly bestowed upon it, is probably today the most belated of the sciences. For this the textbooks must to some extent be held responsible. They all, good and bad, have a depressing air of fixity and finality. The principles of expression, we are told, were all discovered

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<sup>19</sup> Donald C. Stewart and Patricia L. Stewart, *The Life and Legacy of Fred Newton Scott* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart and Stewart 3.

<sup>21</sup> Albert R. Kitzhaber, *Rhetoric in American Colleges: 1850-1900* (Dallas: Southern Methodist UP, 1990), 223.

<sup>22</sup> Kitzhaber, 223.

<sup>23</sup> Stewart and Stewart, 3.

hundreds of years ago, they are rigid and unalterable, not to say sacred, and the student who lays violent hand upon them is liable to the charge of presumption and want of reverence. Teaching like this, in flat contradiction to the scientific spirit, has done much to check independence of inquiry and restrict the field of research. This state of affairs, however, cannot long endure. There are signs, such as the introduction of the study of literary criticism into the college curriculum, and the investigation of what are properly questions of rhetoric, in the psychological laboratories, which indicate that old prejudices are in the process of breaking down and must ultimately be swept away.<sup>24</sup>

Although Scott's argument seems to reinscribe the old dichotomy between art and science that Dewey called an "unnatural divorce of the spirit," the overall thrust of Scott's project actually serves to bring rhetoric closer to its original sense of *technē*. When Scott renamed his course in "Rhetoric" to "The *Science* of Rhetoric," he was not making rhetoric subservient to science; he was drawing on the *ethos* of science to move rhetoric away from overly Romantic notions of art as an intuitive and unteachable form of self-expression.<sup>25</sup> He was, in other words, intent upon giving rhetoric what Stewart and Stewart call "some intellectual substance and dignity."<sup>26</sup> Scott's strategy paralleled Dewey's own emphasis on the social, organic, and constitutive nature of communication. According to Scott, "composition is regarded as a social act, and the student is therefore constantly led to think of himself as writing or speaking for a specific audience. Thus not mere expression but communication as well is made the business of composition."<sup>27</sup> In contradistinction to rigid classroom exercises advocated by

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<sup>24</sup> Fred Newton Scott, *Thomas De Quincy: Essays on Style, Rhetoric, and Language* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1893), iii.

<sup>25</sup> Stewart and Stewart, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Stewart and Stewart, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Villiers Denney, *The New Composition-Rhetoric* (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1911; original work published 1897), iii.

Bain which emphasized superficial elements of style or clarity, Scott's teaching focused on the functional, contextual, and audience-directed nature of rhetoric.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in Scott's words, while others were busy with grammar and spelling, he concluded that "the main purpose of training in composition is free speech, direct and sincere communion with our fellows, that swift and untrammelled exchange of opinion, feeling, and experience, which is the working instrument of the social instinct and the motive power of civilization."<sup>29</sup>

Sentiments such as these were bound to inspire a young John Dewey, and they are why he credited Scott with articulating "a comprehensive theory of the social character of literary expression." Dewey recognized that Scott shared his view of language and communication as the primary means of bringing the social organism to true self-consciousness, which for both of them meant a Christian democracy. Although Scott, like Dewey, would eventually reject this idea, in 1891 Scott had as much evangelical passion as did Dewey. Thus, we find Scott that year giving a lecture titled "Christianity and the Newspaper" in which he argues that the role of the newspaper is to reveal the vital interconnectedness of the social organism and thereby reveal the latent meaning of liberal Christianity. According to Scott, "the newspaper is the most powerful ally that Christianity has ever had," and all that newspapers have to do to bring about a Christian democracy is to "band together into one great organism bent upon conveying the truth of life to the minds of men."<sup>30</sup> The newspaper would harness the constitutive power of rhetoric and apply it on a national scale to create the social bonds necessary for a Christian utopia on earth. For Dewey, the practical consequence of this shared belief was Dewey's involvement in *Thought*

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<sup>28</sup> One can see the difference between Scott and Bain by comparing their tables of contents. While Bain focused mostly on figures and tropes, Scott included such sections as "How Compositions Grow", "How to Group Facts", "Connecting New Ideas with Old", "Why We Fail to Understand", "Logical Definition", "Argumentation and Debate", "Didactic Poetry", and "Complex Narrative." All of these topics reveal Scott's emphasis on invention, creativity, and argument over style and delivery. See Scott and Denney, ix-xi.

<sup>29</sup> Fred Newton Scott, "What the West Wants in Preparatory English," *School Review* 17 (January 1909), 19.

<sup>30</sup> Fred Newton Scott, "Christianity and the Newspaper," in *Religious Thought at the University of Michigan*, 70-85.

*News*. This ill-fated venture, inspired by the ambitious ideas of the eccentric ex-newspaperman Franklin Ford, was to be Dewey's initial foray into the rough and tumble world of the newspaper, and would also signal the beginning of the end for his idealistic view of communication.

#### 4.2. FRANKLIN FORD AND THE *THOUGHT NEWS*

The story of Dewey's *Thought News* experiment is familiar to any student of the history of American mass communication,<sup>31</sup> for it embodies in many ways what Simonson calls a "communication hope," or that quintessentially American dream that "communication, especially mass communication, might overcome the distinct finitude of local civil society and bring about a far-flung, nationwide community."<sup>32</sup> As the story goes, the *Thought News* is one objective manifestation of this hope, but in a form that was naïve and unworkable in practice. The basic narrative runs as follows: Franklin Ford, "a sort of crackpot journalist-philosopher, left Bradstreet's in New York in the late 1880s to seek backing for his grandiose scheme of a revolutionary newspaper,"<sup>33</sup> which was to be "a giant, centralized intelligence triangle to coordinate the new ordering of intelligence"<sup>34</sup>; between the years 1888 and 1892, he found such backing from John Dewey, who saw in Ford's vision an opportunity to fulfill the promise of his philosophy by allowing him an opportunity to "serve as the encyclopedic oracle through which

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<sup>31</sup> See Carey, "Communications and the Progressives"; Peters, "Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought"; Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind from Morse to McLuhan*. In addition, all the major biographies of Dewey review this episode. Consequently, I will not spend much time reviewing the commonly accepted facts.

<sup>32</sup> Simonson, "Dreams of Democratic Togetherness: Communication Hope from Cooley to Katz," 339.

<sup>33</sup> Peters, "Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought," 253.

<sup>34</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind from Morse to McLuhan*, 105.

citizen readers could glimpse the big picture”<sup>35</sup>; thus, in 1892 they mutually announced the publication of a newspaper called *Thought News—A Journal of Inquiry and a Record of Fact*, which they claimed would “treat questions of science, letters, state, school and church as parts of the one moving life of man and hence of common interest”<sup>36</sup>; however, after receiving a bruising assault in the press (one reporter joking that “Mr. Dewey proposed to get out an ‘extra’ every time he has a new thought”<sup>37</sup>) and realizing the impossibility of the task he had set for himself, Dewey backed off, and no issue of *Thought News* ever appeared; the result was that Dewey “retreated from the thorny political problem of how to transform the physical machinery of transmission and circulation,” and “took refuge in a more comfortable identity: a philosopher of communication, absorbed in the metaphysical complexities of the communicative process”<sup>38</sup>; in other words, the *Thought News* affair simultaneously revealed Dewey naïveté and timidity concerning the realities of the communication process in modern industrial society.

Much of this narrative is true. First, Dewey clearly went into this project with idealistic blinders on, not fully realizing the practical impossibility of pursuing what he called the “inquiry business in a systematic, centralized fashion”<sup>39</sup> with a staff of two, one of which had no prior newspaper experience. He later acknowledged this, writing “it was an overenthusiastic project which we had not the means nor the time—and doubtless not the ability to carry through.”<sup>40</sup> Second, Dewey learned from this experience that his talent was as a philosopher, not a journalist. Although Dewey maintained what Carey calls “a lifelong interest in the relation of science,

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<sup>35</sup> Peters, “Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought,” 254.

<sup>36</sup> *Michigan Daily*, March 16, 1892. Quoted in Czitrom, 107.

<sup>37</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, April 10, 1892. Quoted in Westbrook, 56.

<sup>38</sup> Czitrom, 112.

<sup>39</sup> John Dewey to Henry Carter Adams, April 29, 1889. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>40</sup> John Dewey to Willinda Savage, May 30, 1949. Quoted in Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind from Morse to McLuhan*, 108.

communication, and the media,”<sup>41</sup> (and, I might add, art), he never again intervened in the business of the mass media as anything other than a writer or a critic. Thus, Czitrom is correct in observing that despite Dewey’s “rich and multilayered paradigm for communication” that he eventually articulated, “one looks vainly to Dewey for a plain sense, or even hints, as to just how we might transform privately owned media of communication into truly common carriers.”<sup>42</sup> The failure of the *Thought News* thus likely contributed to Dewey’s “lifelong ambivalence toward social planning.”<sup>43</sup> Dewey would continue throughout his life to try to make philosophy relevant to human affairs, but he was content to let others more capable than he was work out the specific ways in which philosophical ideals could be realized in concrete practice.

However, the narrative as it has come down to us tends to ignore the historical context in which the *Thought News* affair occurred. It tends to be written from a perspective of assumed maturity—that we have “grown up” since that time, and that the *Thought News* represents little more than an historical oddity. According to Czitrom, “Ford’s strange plan deserves to be classed with the scores of utopian cure-alls and eccentric remedies for America’s ills that cropped up in this era.”<sup>44</sup> This perspective is one-sided. As Rockefeller points out, although Ford’s plan was overly-ambitious and impractical, “some of his ideas had merit.”<sup>45</sup> Even Dewey maintained “the *idea* was advanced for those days,” even if “it was too advanced for the maturity of those who had the idea in mind.”<sup>46</sup> More specifically, Ford’s criticisms that American journalism was controlled by advertisers and special interests and that the result was a sensationalistic press that failed to situate isolated facts within a larger social context are virtually identical to most

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<sup>41</sup> Carey, “Communications and the Progressives,” 272.

<sup>42</sup> Czitrom, 112.

<sup>43</sup> Czitrom, 112.

<sup>44</sup> Czitrom, 106.

<sup>45</sup> Rockefeller, 173.

<sup>46</sup> John Dewey to Willinda Savage, May 30, 1949. Quoted in Czitrom, 108.

contemporary criticism of the corporate-owned mass media. Likewise, much of his vision of a newspaper that would, in Rockefeller's words, "genuinely serve the public interest" by "organizing and distributing the information essential to the successful functioning of the economic, political, and social life of the nation"<sup>47</sup> is reflected in the modern mission statement of National Public Radio.<sup>48</sup> That Dewey and Ford failed so miserably in their attempt to bring this vision to fruition simply shows that one needs more than hope to make it happen; that they made the effort at all, however, deserves some degree of respect.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, the criticism of Dewey's naïveté for following Ford is misleading, for it fails to understand the philosophical assumptions that made such a project seem reasonable and, in fact, necessary. For instance, Peters argues that Dewey was attracted to Ford's scheme to "set forth the facts themselves"<sup>50</sup> because "Dewey saw positivism as a natural extension of idealism in that it showed concretely how to make society a knowable totality."<sup>51</sup> Peters thus gives the impression (aided, no doubt, by Dewey's own statements) that Dewey believed that the facts

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<sup>47</sup> Rockefeller, 173.

<sup>48</sup> In 1970, Bill Siemering, one of the organizers of National Public Radio and later its first program director, put together the following "mission statement" for NPR: "National Public Radio will serve the individual: it will promote personal growth; it will regard the individual differences among men with respect and joy rather than derision and hate; it will celebrate the human experience as infinitely varied rather than vacuous and banal; it will encourage a sense of active constructive participation, rather than apathetic helplessness. National Public Radio, through live interconnection and other distribution systems, will be the primary national non-commercial program service...In its cultural mode, National Public Radio will preserve and transmit the cultural past...In its journalistic mode, National Public Radio will actively explore, investigate and interpret issues of national and international import. The programs will enable the individual to better understand himself, his government, his institutions and his natural and social environment so he can intelligently participate in effecting the process of change. The total service should be trustworthy, enhance intellectual development, expand knowledge, deepen aural esthetic enjoyment, increase the pleasure of living in a pluralistic society and result in a service to listeners which makes them more responsive, informed human beings and intelligent responsible citizens of their communities and the world." William H. Siemering, "National Public Radio Purposes," Public Broadcasting Policybase, <http://www.current.org/pbpb/documents/NPRpurposes.html> (accessed December 4, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> Carey offers what I think to be a fair account of the difference between the early progressive and many contemporary intellectuals. According to Carey, progressives like Dewey "maintained an unshakeable commitment to democracy and undertook social action on its behalf. Above all, they cultivated a benign, generous, and optimistic outlook, an outlook of energy and hope. It is the latter structure of feeling that most decisively differentiates them from modern intellectuals and that the self-pitying modern mind finds most abhorrent about them. But pessimism or irony is as much a pose as optimism, and a far less useful one, at least for those of us who are still hostage to the future." See Carey, "Communications and the Progressives," 271.

<sup>50</sup> *Michigan Daily*, March 16, 1892. Quoted in Czitrom, 107.

<sup>51</sup> Peters, "Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought," 254.



*themselves* could set us free by generating an accurate picture of the world, a belief later ridiculed by Walter Lippmann in *Public Opinion*. But Dewey was no positivist. In fact, he was quite the opposite. Positivism was a reaction *against* idealism, for it rejected metaphysics in favor of a Humean belief in the existence of atomic propositions that could be united into logical form via science. Dewey, while he did have faith in “facts,” saw all facts as organically bound together and inseparable from one another. Furthermore, he believed that what unified all these facts was the working out of the Christian spirit through human action. Thus, according to Dewey, “truth makes free, but it has been the work of history to free truth—to break down walls of isolation and of class interest, which hold it in and under.”<sup>52</sup> Consequently, Dewey did not see the newspaper as a source of factual truth in the logical sense of painting an accurate picture of the world; he saw it as the vehicle for the expression of the spiritual truth of mankind in the rhetorical sense of making facts relevant to the practical life of individuals. Dewey describes the spiritual and rhetorical aspects of this vision in a letter:

The idea is that the daily newspaper may become the organ of the social organism, reflecting its workings and by bringing them home to the individual give the latter support in the guidance of his life. The idea appeals to me as being in a large and dynamic way a reconciliation of science and religion; its purpose is to get science, not in its technical form, but as to its practical effects into movement, and thus into life, and by bringing the truth of the social movements and laws home to the individual furnish him that practical guidance, not furnished by science in its technical form, nor by theological religion in its dogmatic forms. Mr. Ford’s idea is a practical rather than a philosophic one, but it has an immense philosophical basis. He believes in the unity of the world of facts, & in the clarity of knowledge; and he further believes that through the locomotive

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<sup>52</sup> Dewey, “Christianity and Democracy,” 8.

and the telegraph, & the growth of commerce, the time has come when we may act upon this unity to the extent of having one centralized and organized newspaper—It is a practical Monism, that is, a Monism carried into action or practice.<sup>53</sup>

The “Monism” Dewey refers to is, of course, Absolute Idealism, which saw all dualisms and divisions in life as part of the working out of the universal consciousness through the actions of individual wills. Thus, the newspaper, like rhetoric, acted as an organ of the unfolding of the spirit by artistically presenting the results of inquiry in such a way as to make universal concepts relevant to the concrete lives of individuals. The newspaper only differed from rhetoric by being magnified on a greater scale. Unlike rhetoric, which utilized a particular language which adapted to suit each the situation, the newspaper sought to create what Dewey referred to in a letter to Joseph Villiers Denney (who co-wrote books on rhetoric and composition with Fred Newton Scott) as a “unified language.”<sup>54</sup> To Dewey, the unified language is the “breaking down of barriers & rigid separations” between the separate languages of philosophy, religion, science, and literature, and the subsequent synthesis of these languages into a single language, “the language of action,” which is “slang.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, “slang unifies with philosophy, theology & poetry” and culminates in “democracy—the appropriation of the store of intellectual [and] spiritual wealth in all directions by the whole & common people.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, Dewey envisioned the creation of a newspaper that was, in effect, the rhetorical expression of the contents of the universal consciousness—no small task for a professor of philosophy and his eccentric business partner.

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<sup>53</sup> John Dewey to Edward Carl Hegeler, January 12, 1891. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>54</sup> John Dewey to Joseph Villiers Denney, February 8, 1892. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>55</sup> John Dewey to Joseph Villiers Denney, February 8, 1892. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>56</sup> John Dewey to Joseph Villiers Denney, February 8, 1892. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Understanding the idealistic conception of rhetoric under which Dewey was operating does not make the idea of the *Thought News* seem any less silly; in fact, it probably does the opposite. However, it more accurately reflects the motivational force and philosophical reasoning behind Dewey's support of the project, which is important to consider when interpreting Dewey's later writings on communication and the mass media. In addition, recognizing what drove Dewey's involvement in the *Thought News* helps us understand his actions from an experimental standpoint in the sense that the *Thought News* is itself an experiment, an attempt to carry the banner of Monism into practice. Thus, we can understand the disillusionment that must have set in when Dewey returned home with that banner bloody and torn. Although Dewey left no record of his feelings during that time, I believe it is fair to say that the *Thought News* was in many senses the last gasp of Dewey's youthful idealism. In 1890, after reading James's *Principles of Psychology*, Dewey had already begun to question the integrity of the foundations on which he had built his elaborate system, and the failure of the *Thought News* only revealed to him more vividly the fissures that were growing under his feet. Within the decade leading up to the twentieth century, Dewey would excavate his philosophy and discard much of what he had formerly held dear, reworking what remained into a new and flexible structure.

#### **4.3. WILLIAM JAMES AND DEWEY'S BIOLOGICAL TURN**

The influence of William James on Dewey is universally acknowledged but frequently misunderstood. In what Shook calls the "traditional account," Dewey is a committed absolute idealist until the 1890s until reading James, at which point there is an "abrupt break with

idealism” and an almost “complete conversion” to pragmatism.<sup>57</sup> In addition, because of the idealism-to-pragmatism emphasis, there tends to be undo attention paid to James’s 1907 *Pragmatism* rather than his earlier 1890 *Principles of Psychology*. However, both of these assumptions are mistaken. In the first case, Dewey’s *Psychology* is continuous with his later thought, for it articulates early formulations of concepts that are further developed in his later thought, including the attention to action, growth, communication, experience, science, art, and the social nature of self.<sup>58</sup> In the second case, as his daughter and biographer Jane Dewey observes, “James’s influence on Dewey’s theory of knowledge was exercised not by the *Pragmatism*, which appeared after Dewey’s theory had been formed, but by a chapter in the *Principles of Psychology* dealing with conception, discrimination and comparison, and reasoning.”<sup>59</sup> In fact, Dewey shared so many common “pragmatic” notions as James that on first reading of the *Principles* he was able to absorb most of James’s insights into his ethical idealism.<sup>60</sup> However, as Dewey wrote in 1930, within a few years after the publication of the *Principles*, James’s “biological conception of the *psyche*...worked its way more and more into all my ideas and acted as a ferment to transform old beliefs.”<sup>61</sup> One of the most important of these “old beliefs” was the notion of the universal consciousness, and Dewey’s eventual replacement of that idealistic conception of the self with a naturalistic one would be the key to reconstructing his whole philosophy and theory of communication based on that philosophy.

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<sup>57</sup> John Shook, *Dewey’s Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2000), 12-13. Shook gives as an example the narrative of Elizabeth Flower, who writes that Dewey’s “reversal seems sharp and inexplicable, or explicable at best in terms of external influences.” See Elizabeth Flower, “Dewey: Battling against Dualisms,” in *A History of Philosophy in America*, Elizabeth Flower and Murray G. Murphey, eds. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1977).

<sup>58</sup> Rockefeller, 117.

<sup>59</sup> Jane Dewey, “Biography of John Dewey,” in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> There is no better example of this than what Dewey wrote to James in 1891. “Would it horrify you, if I stated that your theory of emotions (where you seem to me to have completely made out your case) is good Hegelianism? Although, of course, Hegel gets at it in a very different way. But according to Hegel a man can’t feel his own feelings unless they go around, as it were, through his body.” See John Dewey to William James, May 6, 1891. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>61</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 157.

In 1942, on the hundredth anniversary of William James's birth, Dewey wrote an address commemorating James's accomplishments. In that address, he praised the *Principles* as "the greatest among the great works of James."<sup>62</sup> The reason he gave for this praise was that that the *Principles* finally showed how "experience is intimately connected with nature instead of existing in a separate world."<sup>63</sup> Dewey, in his own way, had attempted to make this connection in his *Psychology*, but his solution had been in the spirit of Spinoza; he had not connected experience with nature so much as he had made both experience and nature manifestations of a universal consciousness. Thus, as Hodgson pointed out, his *Psychology* smacked of Transcendentalism in the sense that all human actions and thoughts were ultimately directed toward some transcendent reality apart from individual experience. With James, however, "reasoning, general ideas, definition and classification are treated as 'teleological weapons'; as means of attack upon the brute facts of existence."<sup>64</sup> According to Dewey, "James brought out the way in which discrimination and disassociation are directed by human interests, so that genuine distinctions in ideas and beliefs are what *make* a difference in behavior, in a literal sense of 'making.'"<sup>65</sup> Thus, for James, behavior is not necessary for the *realization* of a pre-given self; behavior *is* the self, and psychology is the study of the mental and emotional factors that influence and direct that behavior. This passage by James, also selected by Dewey, demonstrates the dramatic contrast between his biological conception of self-as-behavior with Dewey's idealistic conception of self-as-universal-consciousness:

The nuclear part of the Self...would be a collection of activities physiologically in no essential way different from the overt acts themselves. If we divide all possible

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<sup>62</sup> John Dewey, "William James as an Empiricist," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 15, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989; original work published 1942), 11.

<sup>63</sup> Dewey, "William James as an Empiricist," 11.

<sup>64</sup> Dewey, "William James as an Empiricist," 11.

<sup>65</sup> Dewey, "William James as an Empiricist," 11.

physiological acts into *adjustments* and *executions*, the nuclear self would be the adjustments collectively considered; and the less intimate, more shifting self, so far as it was active, would be the executions.<sup>66</sup>

Dewey's enthusiasm for the *Principles* was immediate. After reading it, he immediately struck up a correspondence with James, noting only on his "enjoyment of it," but of his "great indebtedness" to many portions of the book.<sup>67</sup> Of course, Dewey did not abandon his idealism outright, and even in the letter defended Hegel by explaining how "Hegel's agent (or Self) is simply the universe doing business on its own account."<sup>68</sup> However, it was not long before Dewey absorbed the spirit of James's biological conception of self and in fact became a critic of his own earlier idealism. Only a year after his letter to James, Dewey wrote a scathing critique of the ethical idealism of T.H. Green, whom Dewey had just a few years earlier praised for his "theological formula" in which "there really is in us, interrupted, imperfect, partial though it be, union with that death and resurrection which in Christ was eternal, perfect, and entire."<sup>69</sup> In 1892, however, Dewey had come to realize how "the ideal of Green is...the bare form of unity in conduct; the form devoid of all content."<sup>70</sup> The result of Green's ideal was a moral theory that gave no moral guidance and in fact condemned us to a life chasing after an unrealizable end. "Consider, then, how much worse off we are than animals; they can get at least the satisfaction of their particular wants, while the supervention of the self in us makes us conscious of an ideal which sets itself negatively over against every attempt to realize itself, thus condemning us to

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<sup>66</sup> William James, *Principles of Psychology: Volume 1*, quoted in John Dewey, "The Vanishing Subject of in the Psychology of James" in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988; original work published 1940), 165.

<sup>67</sup> John Dewey to William James, May 6, 1891. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>68</sup> John Dewey to William James, May 6, 1891. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>69</sup> Dewey, "The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green," 35.

<sup>70</sup> John Dewey, "Green's Theory of the Moral Motive," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969; original work published 1892), 163.

continued dissatisfaction.”<sup>71</sup> Dewey was arguing against Green’s theory in name, but he seemed to be condemning his own earlier ideas in spirit.

The most immediate product of Dewey’s drift from idealism was the 1894 publication of *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus* in which he first announced what he called his “theory of experimental idealism.”<sup>72</sup> Although Dewey still wanted to work within some form of an idealistic framework, it was no longer the framework of Absolute Idealism. Rather, experimental idealism showed “the absurdity of setting up a fixed will or self”<sup>73</sup> and favored instead the conception of a practical, working self. Thus, as Rockefeller explains, “in his new ethics Dewey tried to overcome every trace of dualism between the moral ideal and the everyday world of practical events” by adopting a more scientific form of “situation ethics.”<sup>74</sup> In contrast to a moral situation being defined as the gulf between the actual and the ideal self, the moral situation in the *Syllabus* “is nothing but the complete coordination of all his powers (abilities) and relations” toward conduct which is “the co-ordinating, or bringing to a unity of aim and interest, the different elements of a complex situation.”<sup>75</sup> This shift toward situational practice led Dewey to reinterpret *ideals* as working *ideas*, as means for action: “ideals are like the stars; we steer by them, not towards them.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, experimental idealism “does not attempt the impossible task of setting up for activity some end...outside itself. It is content to note that activity, moving according to its own law and principle, becomes objectively conscious of its value in the ends which its projects (ideals) and subjectively conscious of its value in the emotions which accompany the realizing of these ends.”<sup>77</sup> The ideal ends are no longer pre-existing universal

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<sup>71</sup> Dewey, “Green’s Theory of the Moral Motive,” 162.

<sup>72</sup> Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, 264.

<sup>73</sup> Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, 256.

<sup>74</sup> Rockefeller, 204.

<sup>75</sup> Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, 232.

<sup>76</sup> Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, 262.

<sup>77</sup> Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus*, 264.

entities awaiting embodiment in concrete form; ideal ends are experimental ideas that are used by individuals to resolve moral situations and thereby experience the aesthetic pleasure of realizing one's potential through action.

Dewey's turn to experimentalism had an immediate impact on how he defined the basic unit of behavior. In the *Psychology*, human behavior was a teleological manifestation of "will," or that a mode of action that sought to give some universal element concrete embodiment. After his experimental turn Dewey embraced the kind of functional account of behavior favored by James. The result was Dewey's landmark 1896 essay, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," written after Dewey had left the University of Michigan in 1894 to take a position at the University of Chicago as head of the Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy. Dewey had brought with him from Michigan George Herbert Mead, and while at Chicago the two men continued their collaboration by experimenting with how to apply his psychological theories within a classroom environment.<sup>78</sup> The "Reflex Arc" essay was the first significant result of their collaboration and Dewey's interest in behaviorist psychology.

The essay is actually a critique of the "reflex arc" concept, which posited a simple mechanism whereby organisms react to basic stimuli through habituated responses—a mechanism he characterized as "sensation-followed-by-idea-followed-by-movement."<sup>79</sup> As an example, Dewey uses the image of a child burning her hand in a candle flame and jerking back

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<sup>78</sup> Dewey described early "laboratory" work with Mead in a letter of 1893: "The laboratory is beginning to get in shape. Among other things next year, Mead and I are going to try to experiment on mental images, with a view to getting some results on attention and on rhythm. Mead is also trying to work out something on sensation on the biological side. All of us recognize, that in sensation, especially its qualitative features, have has been the sticking point to a successful statement of idealism. He is trying to see if one could get back of the present qualities and show the sensation as a condensation or precipitation of past organic activities, so that everything which is aesthetic now was once practical or teleological." The last sentence is particularly significant, as this idea later reemerges in Dewey aesthetic theory. See John Dewey to James Rowland Angell, May 10, 1893. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>79</sup> John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1972; original work published 1896), 97.



her arm. Dewey questioned the idea that one can separate act from stimulus, suggesting instead that “sound is not a mere stimulus, or mere sensation; it again is an act, that of hearing.”<sup>80</sup> To make sensation into an act is to give it an intention and a meaning. When a child burns her hand in a flame, she is not merely “receiving” an isolated stimulus of pain and reacting mindlessly to that stimulus. Rather, the pain acts as the culmination of a conscious act of reaching on the part of the child that contained within it some purpose.

Thus, the act is a complete circuit of activity in which actions are like miniature experiments and reactions their results. After being burned, for instance, the child’s experience with the candle becomes “seeing-of a light-that-means-pain-when-contact-occurs.”<sup>81</sup> Because the entire circuit of behavior is one in which “all forms of thought are the result of transactions between organism and its environment,”<sup>82</sup> the child does not merely react to her environment—she learns from it and thereby learns either to adapt to it or change it. In this way, the “Reflex Arc” essay represents a compromise between James’s biological account with Dewey’s own earlier teleological emphasis. Dewey retained the notion that “there can be no aspect of human behavior...which does not stand in some organic relation to willful activity”<sup>83</sup> while at the same time accepting that willful activity does not require some predetermined destination like the Ideal Will. Actions which are intelligent, satisfying, productive, or educational in their own right are good enough.

Consequences of Dewey’s new experimental and pedagogical emphasis on his view of communication were soon to follow. In the lecture notes from his course in the “Philosophy of Education” in 1899, Dewey makes an early attempt to seriously interrogate “communication” as

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<sup>80</sup> Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology,” 102.

<sup>81</sup> Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology,” 99.

<sup>82</sup> Sleeper, 57.

<sup>83</sup> Shook, 111.

a psychological concept rather than treating it in a tangential manner. Although not published in book form until 1966 after a stenographic report of Dewey's lecture notes were discovered in 1963,<sup>84</sup> these lectures show how Dewey's attitude toward communication during this period was heavily influenced by scientific and experimental notions in sharp contrast to the ethical, aesthetic, and emotional one that dominated his early writings on language. These lecture notes thus document an important transitional period in Dewey's thinking that would culminate in a view of rhetoric as a tool of *phronēsis*, or the practical wisdom to resolve problematic situations.

#### 4.4. COMMUNICATION AS A STIMULUS

The contrast in tone between Dewey's 1899 lectures and his 1886 *Psychology* is striking. In his earlier work, communication and rhetoric are always discussed in relation to the faculties of Feeling, Cognition, Imagination, and Will, while language is defined in terms of concrete universals. By 1899, Dewey had discarded this idealist vocabulary in favor of a behaviorist one. "Experience" is no longer the individual manifestation of the universal consciousness, but the "process of interaction between the individual and his environment."<sup>85</sup> "Communication," meanwhile, is no longer the vehicle for trading in universal concepts, but was the most advanced form of stimulus that can be used to enrich and guide experience. Thus, Dewey locates "communication" on a scale that includes four types of stimuli and response: (a) direct stimulation and response, (b) the process of imitation, (c) the process of suggestion, and (d) the process of communication. Each type of stimulus and response builds upon the implications of

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<sup>84</sup> John Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899* (New York: Random House 1966), vii.

<sup>85</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 44.

the previous one, leading from the physical stimuli of sensation to the highly social and symbolic stimuli of communication. Therefore, to understand the full significance of Dewey's view of communication during this period, we need to take each stimulus in order.

Dewey begins by defining "direct stimulation" simply as "the stimuli which the child gets of his various sense organs through contact with the environment about him and the reaction that he makes to these stimuli."<sup>86</sup> Such stimuli might be the touching of a hot stove and removing one's hand or squinting in response to a bright light. However, Dewey realizes that the same physical stimuli are not interpreted the same by everyone and that "concretely speaking there is next to no such thing as purely physical stimulation and response."<sup>87</sup> Rather, "the stimuli that play much part in our experience are already socialized."<sup>88</sup> Directed against Lockean-style empiricism, Dewey explains, "the child lives in a world where these things come to him clothed with the values that they are charged with in the social life of the people about ... through what he sees other people doing in relation to these stimuli, he gets a certain characteristic attitude all the time toward them, he puts in a certain meaning."<sup>89</sup>

The idea of the meaningful nature of stimuli harkens back to the argument Dewey first made in the "Reflex Arc" essay. What he adds in the educational lectures is the social element. In 1896, he was still speaking as if the child had formed her own ideas and values independently of her social environment and was acting as an individual agent. In 1899, Dewey suggests that stimuli are socially conditioned, not only through conscious attitudes, but also through the ongoing process of imitation, a concept Mead would develop as the basis for his social

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<sup>86</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 45.

<sup>87</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 45.

<sup>88</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 45.

<sup>89</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 46.

psychology during the two decades that followed.<sup>90</sup> Dewey defines imitation as “taking the same attitude practically and intellectually toward stimuli that other people do,”<sup>91</sup> which means that “imitation always starts from some natural impulse or mode of expression on the part of the child himself, and that the child imitates in any given direction only when he is naturally self-active in that direction.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, we do not just blindly mimic the behavior of others. We mimic their behavior as a result of our taking on the same attitudes toward certain stimuli and then acting in a manner that we learn to be an appropriate expression of that attitude.

Until this point, however, “direct stimulation” and “imitation” are primarily nonverbal experiences. Not until Dewey introduces “suggestion” does he observe the importance of linguistic communication as a form of stimulus. He defines suggestion as “a form of indirect stimulation which...provides for greater freedom and display of individuality on the part of the individual in the response that he makes.”<sup>93</sup> Such stimulations include “injunctions and prohibitions” of the kind that allow for “a certain leeway, a certain mental play on his own part in settling upon just how he will take the stimulus.”<sup>94</sup> In suggestion, a parent might say, “Don’t touch the stove,” and those words create a mental image of the child not touching the stove. At the same time, however, the suggestion does not clarify what would happen if the child does touch it, nor does it prohibit the child from doing other things to the stove.

What is implied in “suggestion” is carried further in “communication.” Communication is a “further extension of suggestion; it is suggestion made still more indirect.”<sup>95</sup> Communication is suggestion without the demand for a specific response. It is the difference between a parent

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<sup>90</sup> See George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

<sup>91</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 48.

<sup>93</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 51.

<sup>94</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 51.

<sup>95</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 55.

saying to a child, “Don’t touch the stove” and a parent saying, “My, what a beautiful old stove!” What Dewey means by communication, then, “is that we simply put a fact, a truth, a statement, objectively before another person, and leave it to him entirely to interpret that, to estimate its worth and value, and so to determine completely for himself what kind of a response he will make.”<sup>96</sup> Although “we do expect a certain amount of agreement” with another person when we communicate, “any communicated fact or truth is a stimulus so far as it is appropriated in any way by the mind of the person to whom the statement is made.”<sup>97</sup> We can never know how someone will react to the things we communicate, but that is the very reason why communication is important as a stimulus. It may generate uncertainty, but it also allows for imagination and creativity.

The potential of communication as a method of enhancing experience and inspiring creative thought is what allows Dewey to retain some of the rhetorical qualities of language that he had praised in the *Psychology*. For in making communication a “stimulus,” Dewey seemed to have had second thoughts for his admiration of the higher flights of oratory that lifted our souls towards the universal consciousness. However, the admiration was not dead; it was merely translated into an educational and behaviorist vocabulary. For example, Dewey concludes the section of communication by distinguishing between the “form” and the “reality” of communication. The “form” of communication is simply when “words may be uttered to an individual,” but this is indistinguishable from “talking to a deaf person.”<sup>98</sup> The “reality” of communication only happens when rhetorical considerations are taken in mind. The first of these considerations is the nature of the audience, for “the reality depends not simply upon what one says, but upon what the one to whom the language is addressed already has in his own

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<sup>96</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education*: 1899, 55.

<sup>97</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education*: 1899, 55.

<sup>98</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education*: 1899, 56.

experiences.”<sup>99</sup> Consequently, the second consideration is adapting one’s message so that the language “serves as an interpretation, as an extension, mediation, of the experience” of that audience.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the “reality” of communication is not, as Dewey previously wrote, just putting “a fact, a truth, a statement, objectively before another person” as one would throw money on table; the reality of communication is the rhetorical adaptation of one’s message to the experiences of an audience so as to “illuminate and broaden” their meaning.<sup>101</sup>

Thus, in an educational context, Dewey ends up placing upon language and communication a heavy burden. In his “Reflex Arc” essay, Dewey had recognized the educational importance of the circuit of purposeful actions and meaningful responses. In his 1899 lectures, however, Dewey recognizes that language dramatically expanded the educational potential of any stimuli. In fact, “speech, conversation, language, both oral and written, is the medium that removes practically all limitations in theory to the stimuli to which a given individual may be subject” and that permits “the child to travel mentally through all space and in all time, and to have forces and values brought to his attention which would of course utterly escape him on any other basis.”<sup>102</sup> Because of language, a child no longer is limited to the thoughts of burning her fingers when she sees a candle flame. After receiving the “stimulation” of language, the candle becomes a history lesson, a work of art, a source of energy, or a reminder of a story. Language, in other words, literally alters the meaning of her world.

Although there is an opening here for Dewey to turn into a discussion of the aesthetic qualities of language, he does not take it. Instead, he turns his attention to the cultivation of what the Greeks called *phronēsis*, which Dewey believes is the highest goal of democratic education.

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<sup>99</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 56.

<sup>100</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 56.

<sup>101</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 57.

<sup>102</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 56.

For Dewey, “in a changing and democratic society adjustment to the needs of civilization must mean training for direction, for leadership,” that will allow a student to “assume the responsibilities that come to him as a part ruler, direction, of the whole of that society.”<sup>103</sup> Consequently, “the primary problem of instruction from this psychological standpoint is how to convert the interest in communication into an interest in inquiry,”<sup>104</sup> which is interest in the “method, the form, the ways of doing things, the ways of arranging material, the ways of getting questions answered, or the ways of finding out answers to the questions.”<sup>105</sup> Language helps in this process because it is the primary way in which our environment acquires meaning and facilitates our ability to act with practical wisdom when confronted with problematic situations. Thus, in his 1899 lectures, the noble rhetorician who creates objects of universal beauty has been replaced with the good citizen who proposes and weighs plans of concrete action. This shift in emphasis was no doubt brought on by a maturing of Dewey’s philosophical views, but it was also brought on by something far more visceral—his exposure to the city of Chicago at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 4.5. INSTRUMENTALISM IN CHICAGO

When Dewey moved from Michigan in 1894, he suddenly found himself exposed to the “yellow mud of a raw and undigested and explosively growing Chicago,”<sup>106</sup> a city that was in the process of growing from a half million people in 1880 to 1.7 million people in 1900—three-fourths of

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<sup>103</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 92.

<sup>104</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 232.

<sup>105</sup> Dewey, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899*, 233.

<sup>106</sup> Ryan, 122.

them being immigrants.<sup>107</sup> Chicago challenged the 35 year-old Dewey who had grown up in Vermont and had developed in New England his deep love of community life and face-to-face interaction. In Westbrook's account, this meant Dewey was thrown into a city whose "cultural landscape...was shaped by class as well as ethnicity...and rapacious entrepreneurs and corrupt politicians struggled with visionary reformers for the control of the city's destiny."<sup>108</sup> Thus, according to Hook, it was a place in which "problems were newer, more urgent. Changes and chances were greater; rewards for intelligent adaptation higher."<sup>109</sup> Because of these challenges, Chicago was also a place in which "John Dewey abandoned all the old metaphysical lumber he had carried with him from the East and roughhewed the beams of a new philosophy."<sup>110</sup>

Dewey's first exposure to the politically and socially charged environment of Chicago was the very first train ride that took him to the city on July 1, 1894. This date happened to fall during the middle of the Pullman strike, which was the attempt by the employees of the Pullman Palace Car Company to protest severe cuts in their wages while still being obliged to pay the high rents of the company-owned housing.<sup>111</sup> Because many of the trains were not running during the strike, Dewey was forced to take one of the few trains run by Pullman's competition. In this train, he listened intently to the people around him and even engaged in a brief discussion with one of the strike organizers. Dewey wrote back to Alice about his encounter, saying, "when I got through my nerves were more thrilled than they had been for years; I felt as if I had better resign my job teaching & follow him round till I got into life."<sup>112</sup> Within a month, Dewey was

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<sup>107</sup> Westbrook, 83.

<sup>108</sup> Westbrook, 83.

<sup>109</sup> Sidney Hook, *John Dewey: An Intellectual Portrait* (New York: Prometheus, 1995), 7.

<sup>110</sup> Hook, 7.

<sup>111</sup> Stanley Buder, *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford UP, 1967), 161.

<sup>112</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, July 2, 1894. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.



writing of his fascination with the new challenges and potentials that the Chicago environment presented.

I don't really take a pessimistic view of the future life in Chicago...It's the contrary, things are rather too interesting...Every conceivable thing solicits you; the town seems filled with problems holding out their hands & asking somebody to please solve them—or else dump them in the Lake. I had no conception that things could be so much more phenomenal & objective than they are in a country village, & simply stick themselves at you, instead of leaving you to think about them. The first effect is pretty paralyzing, the after effect is stimulating...you can't really get rid feeling here that there is a “method” & if you could only straighten get hold of it, things could be so tremendously strengthened out; it's such a loose jointed quantitative chaos after all,—and not an Ann Arbor parterre. Think of all hell turned loose, & yet not hell any longer, but simply material for a new creation.<sup>113</sup>

Dewey's interest in helping form the chaos of raw Chicago soon found a practical outlet with his involvement in the work of Jane Addams. Addams was one of the founders of Hull House, which was a free, community-based educational institution located in a poor, immigrant neighborhood.<sup>114</sup> According to Addams, the professed goal of Hull House was “to add the social function to democracy.”<sup>115</sup> Practically, this meant caring for the new generation of immigrant citizens who needed to be taught English and the rudiments of civics.<sup>116</sup> Given his interest in promoting democratic practices, Dewey naturally gravitated toward Hull House, and even while

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<sup>113</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey & children, August 25-26, 1894. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>114</sup> Eleanor J. Stebner, *The Women of Hull House: A Study in Spirituality, Vocation, and Friendship* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), 50.

<sup>115</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York: Signet Classic, 1961), 59.

<sup>116</sup> Ryan, 150.

he had taught at the University of Michigan he had given a guest lecture there in 1892.<sup>117</sup> After arriving in Chicago, his involvement increased. He regularly participated in a Sunday afternoon discussion group called the Plato Club, frequently gave lectures on education and social psychology,<sup>118</sup> and was a long-serving member on Hull House's board of trustees.<sup>119</sup> Thus, through Hull House and his experience in Chicago, Dewey was learning the practical meaning of democracy in all its chaos and possibility.

What probably had the most dramatic impact on Dewey's actual philosophy, however, was his involvement in the progressive education movement, a movement which "argued in defense of more child-centered and active methods of teaching and gentler approaches to discipline."<sup>120</sup> Dewey had been brought to Chicago in part to develop a new independent Department of Pedagogy, and major component of that development was the creation of the Laboratory School in 1896 based on Dewey's vision of "a school where some actual & literal constructive activity shall be the centre & source of the whole thing."<sup>121</sup> Dewey believed deeply that traditional methods of teaching dulled the minds of students through an overemphasis on passivity and the absorption of facts divorced from any meaningful context. For Dewey, "it is through what we do in and with the world that we read its meaning and measure its value."<sup>122</sup> Although Dewey became known for his advocacy of teaching through physically constructive activities, such as sewing, farming, or building, he also valued the constructive activity of communication as well. In fact, one of his first positive experiences in a progressive classroom

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<sup>117</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 310.

<sup>118</sup> Stebner, 113.

<sup>119</sup> Ryan, 151.

<sup>120</sup> Rockefeller, 227.

<sup>121</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey & children, November 1, 1894. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>122</sup> John Dewey, *The School and Society*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1976; original work published 1900), 113.

was when he visited Colonel Francis Parker's Cook County Normal School in 1894 and saw the new way they were teaching students how to learn to write by learning words in context rather than through rote memorization.

The whole school is organized on the "nature study" principle; they learn to read mainly by writing...If he doesn't know a word, the teacher writes it on the board & rubs it right out again. The child is never taught a word except when he wants to use it & then always in its context...Col. Parker got his training class up & had them tell where they had made any specific use of any of the psychological principles which I had propounded—I guess I guess I learned more psychology from their illustrations than they did from my principles. I think I'm in a fair way to become an educational crank; I sometimes think I will drop teaching phil—directly, & teach it via pedagogy. When you think of the thousands & thousands of young 'uns who are practically being ruined negatively if not positively in the Chicago schools every year, it is enough to make you go out & howl on the street corners like the Salvation Army.<sup>123</sup>

Although Dewey had already recognized the constitutive function of language within his *Psychology*, this function had been tied to the belief in the existence of abstract universal concepts. With his experience at the progressive schools, Dewey quickly learned that a child's language was not a string of miniature concrete universals; it was the way in which a child learned to transact business with the world around her. Consequently, Dewey gave language a primary role in his educational vision. In Dewey's classroom, "a spirit of free communication, of interchange of ideas, suggestions, results, both successes and failures of previous experiences,

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<sup>123</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey & children, November 1, 1894. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

becomes the dominating note of the recitation.”<sup>124</sup> The reason for this emphasis was not a rhetorical one, but a practical and scientific one. Dewey believed the “spirit of free communication” was necessary for inquiry because “criticism, question, and suggestion bring [a student] to consciousness of what he has done, and what he needs to do.”<sup>125</sup> Thus, Dewey found a way to combine his growing interest in cultivating *phronēsis* with his earlier insights into language. The result was a view of communication that diminished the importance of rhetorical eloquence and amplified the importance of cooperative and sustained inquiry. This view was still in its formative stages in 1899, but it came to full fruition with the publication of *Studies in Logical Theory* in 1903 and his subsequent writings on logic, truth, and language.

#### 4.6. THE BIRTH OF THE “CHICAGO SCHOOL”

In 1903, *Studies in Logical Theory* was published as a joint effort by the Chicago philosophy department as a collection of essays, most of which belonged to Dewey. The *Studies* represented a definite break from any vestige of his earlier idealism, and was what Shook describes as “Dewey’s first opportunity to present his instrumentalist theory of inquiry to a wide philosophical audience.”<sup>126</sup> In the preface to the *Studies*, Dewey lay out what the principles of his new instrumentalism. According to Dewey, “judgment is the central function of knowing, and hence affords the central problem of logic.”<sup>127</sup> Judgment, however, was no longer simply the application of a universal concept to a particular event. Rather, “the act of knowing is intimately

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<sup>124</sup> Dewey, *The School and Society*, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Dewey, *The School and Society*, 28.

<sup>126</sup> Shook, 187.

<sup>127</sup> John Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1977; original work published 1903), 296.

and indissolubly connected with the like yet diverse functions of affection, appreciation, and practice.”<sup>128</sup> Judgment and knowing were now instrumental activities whose work was “distinctively reconstructive or transformatory.”<sup>129</sup> However, for knowing to be transformatory meant that “reality” as such must be capable of being transformed. Therefore, “since Reality must be defined in terms of experience, judgment appears accordingly as the medium through which the consciously effected evolution of Reality goes on.”<sup>130</sup> In contradistinction to Dewey’s earlier idealism, in which growth is an unfolding of a universal Spirit, in Dewey’s instrumentalism, growth is the literal transformation of reality through intelligent action. In effect, Dewey had traded the Absolute Spirit of Hegel for the pragmatic spirit of Protagoras.

Although the overall reception was mixed, its reception by William James was enthusiastic. In a letter to Sarah Whitman, he wrote that “the result is wonderful—a *real school*, and a *real Thought*. Important thought, too!...Here we have thought, but no school. At Yale a school, but no thought. Chicago has both.”<sup>131</sup> And in a letter to William M. Salter, he wrote that “I am reading all the Dewey literature I can lay my hands on...It’s great!”<sup>132</sup> Dewey was humbled by James’s praise, writing “I feel rather ashamed to have given you the impression that I was writing about a new school of thought...It is simply that upon the psychological side the articles all go back to certain ideas of life activity, of growth, and of adjustment, which involve teleological and dynamic conceptions rather than ontological and static ones.”<sup>133</sup> However, the replacement of static with dynamic conceptions was no small feat. Dewey, after all, took almost

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<sup>128</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 296.

<sup>129</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 296.

<sup>130</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 296.

<sup>131</sup> William James to Sarah Wyman Whitman, October 29, 1903. William James papers. bMsAm 1092.9 (3970) Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>132</sup> William James to William M. Salter, November 1, 1903. William James papers. bMsAm 1092.9 (3691) Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>133</sup> John Dewey to William James, March 27, 1903. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

four decades to arrive at this position, a position that shared many similarities with the Greek sophists and their admirers like Nietzsche and F.C.S. Schiller.

Yet the conclusions that Dewey drew from his embrace of instrumentalism at the turn of the century were much different than those of Nietzsche or sophists like Gorgias. Wary of drifting back into the ontological speculations which had dominated his idealistic writings, Dewey insisted that his instrumentalism was a purely logical and psychological theory without “any metaphysical applications.”<sup>134</sup> Indeed, despite his claims about “Reality” in his preface, Dewey wanted to show that we could do without metaphysics entirely by focusing on the instrumental character of our ideas instead of on the nature of existence to which we have no access outside of our experience. Nietzsche, by contrast, had taken the “dynamic” quality that Dewey wished to restrict to our ideas and extended them thoroughly into the ontological beings of things. Consequently, Nietzsche praised art for its ability to constitute existence, and he defined “art as the real task of life, art as life’s *metaphysical* activity.”<sup>135</sup> Nietzsche believed it was the great artist whom deserved our praise, because, for him, “to impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power.”<sup>136</sup> Like Gorgias before him, Nietzsche thus advances what Poulakos and Whitson call an “aesthetic” view of rhetoric in which “in and through their language, orators *summon* appearances that are *not* and can never be ‘complete’ descriptions of phenomenal being—their speech amounts to an imposition of aesthetic form on being.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> John Dewey to William James, March 27, 1903. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>135</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), §853.

<sup>136</sup> Nietzsche, §617.

<sup>137</sup> John Poulakos and Steve Whitson, “Nietzsche and the Aesthetics of Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 137.

At least until *Experience and Nature*, however, Dewey was not willing to take the aesthetic turn. Instead, he wished to advance an instrumentalism in which science, art, and language were tools for action, not forms of being. For Dewey, “we do not measure the worth or reality of the tool by its closeness to its natural prototype, but by its efficiency in doing its work—which connotes a great deal of intervening art.”<sup>138</sup> By “art,” however, Dewey really meant “science,” or the art of sustained inquiry into the natural world that came to us through experience. Inquiry, meanwhile, was primarily “a doubt-inquiry process,”<sup>139</sup> by which Dewey meant a process in which individuals encounter problematic situations which require the kind of sustained inquiry that “tends to a unified arrangement of things.”<sup>140</sup> Dewey did not deny the aesthetic quality that a successfully “unified” situation possessed, but he did not believe this quality to have any more ontological significance than the method of inquiry leading up to it. They were both simply instrumental aspects of experience, although instrumental in different ways.

Every reflective experience adds new shades of intrinsic qualifications. In other words, while reflective knowing is instrumental to gaining control in a troubled situation (and thus has a practical or utilitarian force), it is also instrumental to the enrichment of the immediate significance of subsequent experiences. And it may well be that this by-product, this gift of the gods, is incomparably more valuable for living a life than is the primary and intended result of control, essential as is that control to having a life to live.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 56.

<sup>139</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 218.

<sup>140</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 125.

<sup>141</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 17-18.

Dewey thus agrees with Nietzsche about the importance of aesthetic experience and freely acknowledges that “things are experienced by us practically & aesthetically as well as cognitively.”<sup>142</sup> However, he differs with Nietzsche by making aesthetic feeling a by-product (albeit a vital one) of scientific inquiry rather than making science subservient to art. Subsequently, Dewey during this period values language not primarily for its aesthetic qualities, but for its instrumental ones. Language within his system does not impose aesthetic form of being, but creates new *conceptual* (i.e. logical) objects that act as “surrogates” of real things that can be manipulated and rearranged for the sake of effective inference.<sup>143</sup> For Dewey, “words are the great instrument of translating a relation of inference existing between two things into a new kind of thing which can be operated with on its own account; the term of discourse or reflection is the solution of the requirement for greater flexibility and liberation.”<sup>144</sup> Thus, words neither “correspond” to reality nor “constitute” reality; they simply “stand in” for reality in such a way that gives us the freedom to develop new ways of thinking and acting.

It is reasonable to ask at this point whether, with the passing of the universal consciousness, Dewey has stripped language of its rhetorical qualities entirely. With art and aesthetic feeling pushed to the sidelines, Dewey seems to be drifting towards a communicative theory dominated by logic and instrumental reason. There are certainly indications that this is so. However, we must recognize that Dewey was attempting to make a clear break with idealism, and for him discussions of aesthetics ultimately led back to Hegel. Instead of risking being caught on that path, he preferred to stay within the bounds of experimental logic. Even within these constraints, however, Dewey retained a rhetorical emphasis on invention and novelty. For

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<sup>142</sup> John Dewey to Charles Augustus Strong, April 28, 1905. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>143</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 432.

<sup>144</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 432.



Dewey, all genuine thinking “aims at pushing out the frontiers of knowledge, not at marking those already attained with signposts...*Inventio* is more important than *judicium*, discovery more than ‘proof.’”<sup>145</sup> Although Dewey in the *Studies* aligned *inventio* with logic rather than rhetoric, he also did not deny the possibility or potential of rhetorical invention. Rhetoric simply wasn’t his concern. But this did not mean Dewey was unaware of its presence or significance. In fact, we get a sense of what Dewey might have said about rhetoric during this time by looking at what was said about it by one of his students, Max Eastman.

#### 4.7. MAX EASTMAN AND THE AESTHETICS OF RHETORIC

Soon after Dewey left the University of Chicago for Columbia University in 1904, he joined the dissertation committee of Max Eastman, who studied philosophy at Columbia between the years 1907 and 1911. Eastman was to become what Westbrook describes as a “brilliant young cultural critic” and “fair-haired Adonis of American radicalism.”<sup>146</sup> Not only would he help found the magazines *The Masses* and *The Liberator* and work with such controversial figures as John Reed, Emma Goldman, and Leon Trotsky, but he also would express his keen interest in aesthetics and literature in his books *Enjoyment of Poetry* (1913), *The Literary Mind* (1931), *Art and the Life of Action* (1934), and *Enjoyment of Laughter* (1936). Dewey’s influence on Eastman was not minor. Eastman writes in his autobiography that he dined with the Deweys every Sunday during his first two years at Columbia, often spending all afternoon in conversation with Dewey,

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<sup>145</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, 210.

<sup>146</sup> Westbrook, 190.

touching on “pretty nearly every subject that ever engaged the attention of a philosopher.”<sup>147</sup> Moreover, Eastman confesses that during this time he “swallowed down Dewey’s total mind and attitude in great gulps” and took into his “self the ways and habits of his thought.”<sup>148</sup> Although Eastman would later criticize Dewey’s thinking for being a “rationalization of his prevailing interest,”<sup>149</sup> in his early years, Eastman shared the same interest with Dewey. Consequently, when Eastman published *Enjoyment of Poetry* in 1913, he received this short but revealing bit of praise from his former mentor within the context of a book review.

I read with great pleasure and profit Max Eastman’s book on *The Enjoyment of Poetry*. I know of few books that contain so much good sense, wise philosophy, and correct psychology applied to the elucidation of aesthetics in general and literary appreciation in particular. As a scientific foundation for what is usually termed rhetoric it is much superior to anything with which I am acquainted.<sup>150</sup>

Despite the fact that this review represents only the second—and ultimately last—time that Dewey ever seriously referred to rhetoric as a discipline, when compared to his earlier praise of Scott’s work, it reveals something significant about Dewey’s view of what rhetoric was and how it should be studied and taught. Observe, for instance, how Dewey once again refers to putting rhetoric on a “scientific foundation,” indicating that he still held to Scott’s belief that rhetoric, to become a truly worthy discipline, must move beyond mere artifice to study how language, as an objective phenomena, interacted with and influenced natural events. Accordingly, Dewey praises Eastman not for a detailed account of the historical uses of figures and tropes, but for his insightful use of the principles of philosophy, psychology, and aesthetics

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<sup>147</sup> Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 284.

<sup>148</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living*, 284.

<sup>149</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living*, 286.

<sup>150</sup> John Dewey, “Statement on Max Eastman’s *The Enjoyment of Poetry*,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 7, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1979; original work published 1913), 149.

to understand how rhetoric functions. What this shows is that in spite of Dewey's fixation on logic and experimentalism during this period of his writing, he did not want to argue that these were the only subjects of importance. They were simply the ones he had chosen to explore. Thus, to get a sense of what Dewey might have said about rhetoric at this time, we should examine Eastman's book, *The Enjoyment of Poetry*. What this examination will show is that Eastman preceded much of what Dewey would later argue in *Art as Experience*, but what he was unprepared to talk about before 1925.

The most striking aspect of Eastman's book is that it is neither a public speaking textbook nor an exposition on poetic style and composition—it is a philosophical discussion about the relationships among language, human beings, and the environment. As a student of Dewey, it should thus not be surprising that Eastman's treatment is thoroughly naturalistic, in the sense that all three aspects are organically related as parts of the natural world. For Eastman, "poetry is an attitude of the body."<sup>151</sup> Consequently, there is no clear distinction between mental and physical phenomena: "The mind, in truth, does not impose itself upon a world of other things, but is itself a part of things so far as they engender experience."<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, language does not exist in a separate world, but transacts business with the world by creating new objects that incorporate both mental and physical attributes. "The realities that men experience, are in their nature very much determined by words; their names are a part of them...what we call 'things'...are all, as we perceive them, unions of an external impression with something that memory contributes."<sup>153</sup> Dewey had made this argument in respect to logical forms which become tangible parts of science and of common sense. Eastman simply applies this same argument to aesthetic form.

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<sup>151</sup> Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 20.

<sup>152</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, 36.

<sup>153</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, 20.

What makes aesthetic impulse different from science is that, in contrast to the practical thrust of the scientific impulse,

the poetic impulse is a love of that experience for its own sake. Poetic creation begins in us when we marry, with such love, the images of memory to the impressions of sense, and when to this union we set the seal of a vivid and communicable name we are poets in the full and divine sense. We are makers of a world.<sup>154</sup>

The last line signifies that Eastman was prepared to follow Nietzsche and Gorgias into the realm of the ontological when it came to discussions of aesthetic form, going so far as to make the Nietzschean assertion that “the gods must all perish and be lost to us, until we have grown old enough in science to return to them and know that they are poetry, the symbols of ideas and of a universal mystery.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, Eastman argued what Dewey would have found blasphemous in his youth—that God was merely a poetic creation made for human purposes. This assertion was not meant as a disparagement, however, because for Eastman, “a poem as a form is a new thing that language adds outright to what the world contained. Perhaps to create out of the materials of life, by recombining them with names, a feeling that life itself never offered, a quality of passion that is the poem’s own, is a still higher art.”<sup>156</sup> In other words, Eastman claimed that although poetry had prior ontological status over God, the poetic creation of God still possessed great inspirational capacity.

What this implied for rhetoric was that there was no singular art of rhetoric distinct from the art of poetry. The traditional scope of rhetoric, the study of figures, tropes, and arrangement, was merely a mechanical exercise. In fact, even the practical function typically assigned to rhetoric was also shared by poetry. Thus, “the poetry of words may be regarded as a means

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<sup>154</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, 36.

<sup>155</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, 153.

<sup>156</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, 166.

toward the poetry of life. It is to that end practical. It nourishes the waking spirit, nourishes the gift of vision, and the tendency to issue from the bondages of habit and receive the world.”<sup>157</sup> The poet was thus also a rhetorician, an artist who created new forms of language that broke the bonds of habit and charted new paths of vision and possibility. “The poet, the restorer, is the prophet of a greater thing than faith...He cries to our sleeping selves to come aloft, and when we are come he answers with a gesture only. In him we find no principle; we find ourselves re-born alive into the world.”<sup>158</sup> Echoing similar passages in Dewey’s writing on experimental logic concerning the method of invention, Eastman then sums up his view on how words create new meanings and how rhetoric is not a system of stylistic rules, but a form of poetic art.

Remember also that words, and groups of words, you work with, are not common names grown old in the conveyance of a meaning; they are surprising names, new-made by you, to choose fresh qualities and details in the things you speak of, and to join them in the mind with other things they never knew before, thus sending them alive and vivid into that stream of heightened consciousness the waves induce. You will need no laws of rhetoric. You will have the knowledge of the art of writing poetry, and the surest path to its enjoyment.<sup>159</sup>

The idea that one needs no “laws of rhetoric” was sure to resonate with Dewey’s antipathy to the kind of rhetorical education he received at Vermont. Dewey likely felt that Eastman had restored rhetoric by undermining its rickety medieval foundations and rebuilding it upon naturalistic and aesthetic ground. This strategy was almost identical to the one Dewey would later take when he recovered the sense of rhetoric as a *technē* in his later ontological writings. At this point in his professional life, however, Dewey was content to let others make

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<sup>157</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, 196-197.

<sup>158</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, 198.

<sup>159</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, 88.

that argument. Thus, his writing on the instrumental aspects language during the first two decades of the 20th century remained focused almost exclusively on their “practical” qualities in the sense of guiding inquiry and judgment and forming our capacities for *phronēsis*. However, in 1916, Dewey moved beyond discussions of experimental logic and returned to his earlier interest in exploring the relationship of language to society. His intention was to defend the idea that a progressive form of education based firmly in the communicative arts was necessary if we ever hoped to sustain a democratic form of life in which all citizens possessed the *phronēsis* necessary to participate effectively in political decision-making. Thus, in 1916 he published *Democracy and Education*, a book that looked almost nothing like *Enjoyment of Poetry*, but which nonetheless was an important step in broadening Dewey’s vision of communication as a concept worthy of our attention and, perhaps, admiration.

#### 4.8. SOCIETY IN COMMUNICATION

Virtually every student of communication is familiar with Dewey’s famous passage in the first chapter of *Democracy and Education* in which he states, “society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication.”<sup>160</sup> The spirit of this passage, in fact, forms the basis of what James W. Carey calls the “ritual view” of communication in which “communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.”<sup>161</sup> For Carey, the ritual view offers a more substantive view of communication than the more traditional “transmission

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<sup>160</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 7.

<sup>161</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 23.

view” in which “communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people.”<sup>162</sup> In the transmission view, communication is little more than a means of getting bits of information from one place to another, and it sees human beings as isolated cognitive machines whose task is to send and receive that information. In the ritual view, communication is organically related to our cultural environment and is constitutive of how we think, feel, and act within the milieu of community life. As Dewey explains, “there is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common.”<sup>163</sup> Therefore, from the ritual perspective based on Dewey’s insights, “to study communication is to examine the actual process wherein significant symbolic forms are created, apprehended, and used.”<sup>164</sup> Thus, Carey skillfully uses Dewey to counter popular assumptions about communication and advance a view in which communication operates “to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process.”<sup>165</sup> Instead of communication as transport, we have communication as culture.

The cultural view of communication Dewey puts forth in *Democracy and Education*<sup>166</sup> is the one most readily associated with his work. This view has three main characteristics. First, it ties communication to the concrete practices in which our communication acquires significance and meaning. As Peters explains, “communication for Dewey is thus not the process to which minds come into contact, one with another; it is a matter of discursive practices and

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<sup>162</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 15.

<sup>163</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 7.

<sup>164</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 30.

<sup>165</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 19.

<sup>166</sup> Of course, this view is itself largely a continuation of his earlier Hegelian writings on language and culture which were influenced by Coleridge and Marsh. Dewey has simply replaced the universal consciousness with the more fluid and situated concepts of community and communication.

communities—of cultural *forms* and *forums*.”<sup>167</sup> Second, it explains the power of communication through its ability to bring about shared experience. According to Belman, “the power of symbols to unite individuals through the sharing of experience is what makes human communication for Dewey the most wonderful of all affairs.”<sup>168</sup> Finally, these two aspects of communication—its relationship to practice and its capacity to create feelings of community—culminate in its third characteristic, which is its ability to bring about a free and democratic society. Thus, in Simonson’s account, Dewey was committed to “the hope that communication, especially mass communication, might bring about a new and perhaps unprecedented unity among people.”<sup>169</sup> Thus, the cultural interpretation of Dewey’s view of communication is continuous with the one he held during the *Thought News* experiment, only without the Hegelian accent. In other words, although Dewey no longer believed that communication was the expressive vehicle of the universal consciousness, he still defended the constitutive power of communication to liberate creative individuality while at the same time providing the sense of shared experience necessary to sustain democratic practices.

There is much to commend this “ritual” perspective of Dewey’s communicative theory, and it undoubtedly reflects recurrent themes in his writings dating back to the 1880s. The problem occurs when this perspective is taken for the whole of Dewey’s thinking on the subject, which inevitably leads to questions about whether Dewey was actually *theorizing* about communication or just *eulogizing* it. It is one thing to declare that society exists *in* communication; in is quite another to explain *how* it so exists and in what ways we can make it better. The key to understanding how Dewey tackles these problems is found in Carey’s

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<sup>167</sup> Peters, “Democracy and American Mass Communication Theory: Dewey, Lippmann, Lazarsfeld,” 206.

<sup>168</sup> Belman, 34.

<sup>169</sup> Simonson, “Dreams of Democratic Togetherness: Communication Hope from Cooley to Katz,” 333.



observation that Dewey used “communication in two quite different senses.”<sup>170</sup> Unfortunately, Carey implies that Dewey used communication in both the “transmission” and “ritual” senses, which makes very little sense considering their divergent ontological and epistemological assumptions. However, it makes more sense if we take Carey to mean that Dewey used communication in both the *rhetorical* and *sociological* senses, the former concerned with situated discourse addressed to a particular audience (such as an oration delivered from a pulpit) and the latter concerned with the broader patterns of discourse that occur and reoccur in various social contexts throughout broader expanses of time and place (such as the totality of the communicative acts and rituals in which one engages in order to be confirmed as a member of a church body). No conception of Dewey’s theory of communication is therefore complete until both senses of the term are understood. Take, for example, the following passage, which is one of the fullest expressions of Dewey’s thinking on the subject up until this point in his writing, but is incomprehensible without knowing how the meaning of the term “communication” shifts depending on the context of the sentence.

Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience. One shares in what another has thought and felt in so far, meagerly or amply, has his own attitude modified. Nor is the one who communicates left unaffected. Try the experiment of communicating, with fullness and accuracy, some experience to another, especially if it be somewhat complicated, and you will find your own attitude toward your experience changing; otherwise you resort to expletives and ejaculations. The experience has to be formulated in order to be communicated. To formulate requires getting outside of it, seeing it as another would see it, considering

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<sup>170</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 14.

what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form that he can appreciate its meaning. Except in dealing with commonplaces and catch phrases one has to assimilate, imaginatively, something of another's experience in order to tell him intelligently of one's own experience. All communication is like an art. It may fairly be said, therefore, that any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it.<sup>171</sup>

This passage reveals both the sophistication of Dewey's thinking as well as its obscurity. Dewey begins by equating social life with communication, implying a definition of communication as the sum total of our cultural habits, beliefs, and norms, yet in the very next sentence talks of being a *recipient* of a communication, as if communication is now an objective thing that acts as an external stimulus to an individual self. He then progresses to a discussion of the *process* of *communicating*, which appears to mean the rhetorical act of expressing with "fullness and accuracy" some experience for the purposes of affecting some emotional or intellectual change in one's audience. This process, he argues, is more than just the act of "transmission" (to use Carey's term), but actually alters both artist and audience and brings their experiences into closer contact and communion, a process similar to what Gadamer calls the "fusion of horizons."<sup>172</sup> As Dewey explains, because of our existing *in communication* as we do, "it is impossible to draw sharp lines, such as would enable us to say, 'Here my experience ends;

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<sup>171</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 8-9.

<sup>172</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 273. See also this quote from Gadamer, which mirrors Dewey's argument here. "Every conversation presupposes a common language, or, it creates a common language...This is not an external matter of simply adjusting our tools, nor is it even right to say that the partners adapt themselves to one another but rather, in the successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding with one's partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one's own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were." See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 341.

there yours begins’.”<sup>173</sup> Thus, Dewey posits a form of experience that extends beyond ourselves and implicates those with whom we interact in communicative situations. Finally, Dewey concludes by equating communication with art, or the creative construction of new aesthetic objects for social purposes, which returns him full circle to a discussion of the larger educative function of social intercourse, communication, and artistic production, all of which are organically related to the others. Thus, Dewey’s thought process proceeds in a modified form of the Hegelian dialectic, starting with a universal concept (social communication), applying it in a particular case (rhetorical expression), and then using the particular case to inform and expand the universal concept (the interrelatedness of social communication and rhetorical expression).

Understanding Dewey’s dialectical method of thinking not only helps clarify what might appear to be a contradictory account of communication, but is also illuminates his new understanding of “mind” that emerges during these writings. For Dewey, it is out of this tension between individual experience and social communication that “mind” emerges. Following along the lines of James’s behaviorism, Dewey argues that “mind” is not an *entity*, but a form of *practice*. We acquire a “mind” and the ability to “think” only by acquiring the ability to situate ourselves within, and then navigate our way through, a larger context of practices and discourses: “Through social intercourse, through sharing in the activities embodying beliefs, he [an individual] gradually acquires a mind of his own.”<sup>174</sup> In this way, “a socialized mind is the power to understand them [things] in terms of the use to which they are turned in joint or shared situations.”<sup>175</sup> By observing the importance of “activities” and “situations,” Dewey rejects the mere absorption of linguistic facts as a sufficient criterion for either “mind” or of “knowledge.” Instead, Dewey defines the functions and origins of both mind and knowledge in the context of

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<sup>173</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 194.

<sup>174</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 304.

<sup>175</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 38.

problematic situations in which the resources of social discourse must be used to guide and to warrant particular behaviors and beliefs. Consequently, Dewey championed a theory of knowledge that moves beyond Cartesian epistemology to include the relations of democracy and experience to communication:

Knowledge as an act is bringing some of our dispositions to consciousness with a view of straightening out a perplexity, by conceiving the connection between ourselves and the world in which we live...Since democracy stands in principle for free interchange, for social continuity, it must develop a theory of knowledge which sees in knowledge the method by which one experience is made available in giving direction and meaning to another.<sup>176</sup>

The importance of understanding the role of rhetoric and communication in Dewey's social thought is revealed in our interpretation of this fertile passage; for although Dewey does not use the terms, he seems to be calling for an inquiry into the rhetorical qualities of knowledge and of the communicative foundations of democracy. On the one hand, from his earlier observations, we know that "free interchange" and "social continuity" were effectively synonyms for communication, understood broadly as a social practice in which we were always already immersed. On the other hand, the more situated act of "giving direction and meaning to another," and thereby giving practical embodiment to new forms of knowledge, is more closely aligned with the *arts* of communication, such as rhetoric and poetry. In how I am distinguishing the two senses of how Dewey uses the single term, "communication," then, I align "rhetoric" with the more radical functions of challenging traditional beliefs and behaviors and instituting new forms of human practice, and I align "communication" with the sociological function of

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<sup>176</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 354-355.

sustaining different forms of community life through community rituals, traditions, and interpersonal interactions.

Both rhetoric and communication, however, play reciprocal roles in furthering democratic life. For Dewey, “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.”<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, the end of democracy is not simply to sustain traditional forms of associated living, but to enrich and improve them. Thus, Dewey believed that “the measure of the worth of any social institution, economic, domestic, political, legal, religious, is its effect in enlarging and improving experience.”<sup>178</sup> And since communication is necessary to bring about this effect, then “an undesirable society...is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience.”<sup>179</sup> However, in 1916, Dewey neither fully understood the forces that were massing in opposition to his democratic ideals, nor did he predict how those forces would effectively subvert those ideals in the service of the militaristic state. World War I would thus test Dewey and his theories in ways he could not anticipate, and as a result Dewey had to do some serious thinking about the darker side of rhetoric and communication that showed itself in the aftermath of Germany’s defeat.

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<sup>177</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 93.

<sup>178</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 9.

<sup>179</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 105.

#### 4.9. THE DISCREDITING OF IDEALISM AND THE RISE OF PROPAGANDA

The concrete test of Dewey's faith in the method of critical intelligence based on the fostering of free and open communication arrived in 1917 when Woodrow Wilson began advocating for American entry into World War I after the German resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. Just two years prior, in 1915, Dewey had authored *German Philosophy and Politics*, which explores the roots of German absolutism and places the blame squarely on the Kantian notion that there is a clear division between the world of fact and the world of value. For Dewey, this division leads to a society in which means and ends are completely severed and the tools of science and intelligence were made subservient to abstract moral ideals imposed by the state; and the danger is that "weapons forged in the smithy of the Absolute become brutal and cruel when confronted by merely human resistance."<sup>180</sup> The solution, according to Dewey, is to recover the humanist sense in which human beings within intercourse with one another create both their moral ends as well as the scientific means to achieve those ends. Thus, Dewey believed that "we have to recognize that furtherance of the depth and width of human intercourse is the measure of civilization"<sup>181</sup> and that we should strive toward "a future in which freedom and fullness of human companionship is the aim, and the intelligent cooperative experimentation the method."<sup>182</sup>

So when war waited on the doorstep of the United States just two years later, Dewey had to find a way to put his ideals into practice. One of his first steps was to sharpen the edges of his rather "soft" theory of communication put forth in *Democracy and Education*. In that work, one

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<sup>180</sup> Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 159.

<sup>181</sup> Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 203.

<sup>182</sup> Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 204.

might get the impression that Dewey believed all communication was truly educative and performed in the spirit of goodwill and cooperation. Yet the very same year he published *Democracy and Education* he also published the essay “Force and Coercion,” which was written partially as a clarification of his view of force as well as a critique of a somewhat simplified version of pacifism. For Dewey, pacifism was mistaken in its rejection of force as a legitimate political tool, for such a rejection rested on a confusion of force with mere violence. Violence happened when energy is expended in such a haphazard way so that it “defeats or frustrates purpose instead of executing or realizing it.”<sup>183</sup> Force, however, is simply energy harnessed and directed as a “means deployed in behalf of an end.”<sup>184</sup> For example, “to run amuck in the street is a case of violence. To use energy to make a man observe the rule of the road is a case of coercive force.”<sup>185</sup> This distinction between force and violence, in itself, is not terribly controversial, and had no immediate bearing on Dewey’s theory of communication. Yet Dewey then proceeds to make the following argument which reveals something new concerning his view of rhetoric and persuasion, a view vaguely reminiscent of Gorgias:<sup>186</sup>

Any political or legal theory which will have nothing to do with power on the ground that all power is force and all force brutal and non-moral is obviously condemned to a purely sentimental, dreamy morals. It is force by which we excavate subways and build bridges and travel and manufacture; it is force which is utilized in spoken argument or published

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<sup>183</sup> John Dewey, “Force and Coercion,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1980; original work published 1916), 246.

<sup>184</sup> Dewey, “Force and Coercion,” 246.

<sup>185</sup> Dewey, “Force and Coercion,” 246.

<sup>186</sup> See Gorgias in *Encomium of Helen*: “The power of the spoken word bear the same relation to the arrangement of the mind as that of drugs does to the constitution of bodies. For just as various drugs expel various humours from the body, and some put an end to illness while others put an end to life, so some words cause distress, others pleasure, and others fear, while some arouse courage in those who hear them, and other drug and bewitch the mind by some evil persuasion.” See Robin Waterfield, *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), fragment DK82B11 from the collection of Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz.

book. Not to depend upon and utilize force is simply to be without a foothold in the real world.<sup>187</sup>

The fact that Dewey includes a “spoken argument or published book” as examples of the use of force show how much his view of language had shifted from his early idealism. In his early work, the Will was sovereign and language could do no more than clear paths for its self-realization. In 1916, however, language in its rhetorical form could literally *force* people to think or act in certain ways. This subtle shift bears significant consequences, and it seems like those consequences should have alerted Dewey to the imminent dangers of propaganda that lingered behind the discourse of war that Wilson was slowly ramping up. However, Dewey was blind to such dangers for the very reason that he had begun to be taken in by the Wilsonian rhetoric about the upcoming “War for Democracy.” Dewey even admitted in 1916 that he had been “a thorough and complete sympathizer with the part played by this country in this war” and truly believed that “this is not merely a war of armies, this is a war of peoples.”<sup>188</sup> Then, as 1918 rolled around, Dewey went so far as to assert that “we need to recover something of the militant faith of our forefathers that America is a great idea, and add to it an ardent faith in our capacity to lead the world to see what this idea means as a model for its own future well-being.”<sup>189</sup> It was almost as if the war had allowed the resurgence and full expression of idealistic sentiments that had been suppressed as Dewey sought, apparently in vain, to disentangle himself from their hold. The once critic of German Absolutism was now advocating for a “militant faith” that America should impose its ideal upon a waiting world.

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<sup>187</sup> Dewey, “Force and Coercion,” 246.

<sup>188</sup> John Dewey, “Universal Service as Education,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1980; original work published 1916), 190.

<sup>189</sup> John Dewey, “Internal Social Reorganization after the War,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982; original work published 1918), 73.



Fortunately, it did not take long for Dewey to sober up after drinking long and hard at the Hegelian well. Not only did the failure of Wilson's "14 points" at Versailles signal that the end of the war would not herald in a new era of democracy in Europe, but the rapid rise in suppression of thought and speech at home signaled that the war mentality had also threatened the long-term prospects of democracy in America. Dewey quickly recognized that "it is the source of the present endeavor to use the war emotions to bring about a suppression of discussion and criticism, which would make objects of suspicion of all who still think and speak honestly even when their thoughts run counter to the immediate passion of the day."<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, Dewey saw that the attempt to inflame war emotions in an effort to suffocate any effort at intelligent forethought, criticism, and inquiry—and thereby create what he called the "Cult of Irrationality"—was systematically and intentionally pursued for the sake of narrow political and ideological ends. Thus, Dewey finally was confronted with the specter of organized propaganda he himself had alluded to in his essay on "Force and Coercion," and this confrontation forced himself to address what happened when communication became an oppressive tool of the powerful rather than the free expression of individuals within a community.

It is the business of deliberate thought to direct the play of emotion to an end... Not the irrational itself, but the systematic cult of it, is, let it be repeated, the sinister thing... One has only to observe the present cultivated propaganda of the irrational to discover that an insidious and skilled effort is being made to detach the volume of passionate energy from its original end and to turn the emotion itself from a means into an end... The leaders of the cult of the irrational then strive to alter the emotions into those of fear, suspicion and hatred, knowing well—even if they have never thought of it—that when these feelings

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<sup>190</sup> John Dewey, "The Cult of Irrationality," in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982; original work published 1918), 110.

are excited they will attach themselves to lower ends, ends which better serve the purposes of those who instigate the cult.<sup>191</sup>

The fact that Dewey does not condemn emotional appeals themselves, but rather the uses to which they are put, reveals the depths of Dewey's commitment—however unrecognized—to upholding the rhetorical integrity of language and communication. As in his early work, Dewey accepted the fact that experience, by its nature, always has both cognitive and emotional aspects, and that language, as an expression of that experience, cannot be stripped down to one or the other. Unlike the logical positivists who came after him, Dewey did not respond to the evils of propaganda by trying to create a purely factual language of atomic, factual propositions purged of “meaningless” value statements. Rather, he accepted the inherent rhetoricity of language, which meant that the ultimate function of language was to influence behavior. As he wrote in *How We Think* in 1910, “the primary motive for language is to influence (through the expression of desire, emotion and thought) the activity of others.”<sup>192</sup> That the forces of propaganda had revealed the darker side of language did not change that fact, even if it did make it more apparent that one could not leave the control of mass-mediated messages solely to the hands of the few and the powerful.

When the full force of this realization hit him, Dewey mounted an assault on the institutional structure of the mass media and began warning of the dangers to democracy when the task of forming public opinion was left primarily to propaganda mills. For Dewey, the war had revealed that “the world has come to a curious juncture of events. The development of political democracy has made necessary the semblance at least of consultation of public opinion.

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<sup>191</sup> Dewey, “The Cult of Irrationality,” 108-109.

<sup>192</sup> Dewey, *How We Think*, 321.

The beliefs of the masses cannot be openly ignored.”<sup>193</sup> However, this shift did not mean that the “beliefs of the masses” were now to be obeyed or left alone. Quite the opposite, it meant that power would shift from those who could impose their will upon others through brute force to those who could impose their will upon others through the more gentle means of mass persuasion and propaganda. Thus, “in the background unremittingly works the fact that democracies are controlled through their opinions, that opinions are formed by the material upon which they feed, and that propaganda disguised as the distribution of news is the cheapest and most effective way of developing the required tone of public sentiment.”<sup>194</sup> And what made this new situation all the more dangerous was that the fact that those producing and disseminating this propaganda genuinely believed they were furthering democratic ends through what Dewey called “intellectual paternalism.”<sup>195</sup> Thus, the masters of propoaganda would proclaim:

Let us make democracy safe for the world by a careful editing expurgation of the facts upon which it bases the opinions which in the end decide social action...Heresy is proverbially a contagious disease...Consequently men who sincerely wonder how, say, the Roman Emperors could have been so cruel and stupid as to try to prevent the spread of Christianity by oppressive means are sincerely anxious to prevent men’s minds and morals from being undermined today by the spread of knowledge of heretical social activities. And it must be admitted that the means formerly at command were clumsy and brutal in comparison with those now available.<sup>196</sup>

Even so, Dewey had enough rhetorical awareness to know that audiences were not merely passive receptacles waiting to be filled by mass produced messages. Any act of

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<sup>193</sup> John Dewey, “The New Paternalism,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982; original work published 1918), 119.

<sup>194</sup> Dewey, “The New Paternalism,” 119.

<sup>195</sup> Dewey, “The New Paternalism,” 117.

<sup>196</sup> Dewey, “The New Paternalism,” 122.

persuasion required some participation from an audience. Thus, in the final analysis, Dewey placed the final blame for the cult of irrationalism on the underlying ideals and beliefs inherent in the common sense of American culture. Consequently, speaking of Wilson, Dewey concluded that “history will probably record that his idealistic speeches corresponded to the spirit of the American people; and that the blame which belongs to him is not that of betraying the American spirit but of embodying its weaknesses too faithfully.”<sup>197</sup> These weaknesses included “our sentimentalism, our attachment to moral sentiments as efficacious powers, our pious optimism as to the inevitable victory of the ‘right,’ our childish belief that physical energy can do the work that only intelligence can do, our evangelical hypocrisy that morals and ‘ideals’ have a self-propelling and self-executing capacity.”<sup>198</sup> However, these weaknesses were also those with which Dewey was all too familiar, and it is hard not to read his essay on “The Discrediting of Idealism” as partially a condemnation of his early (and also uncomfortably recent) self.

Dewey was unusual for emerging from the experience of World War I and its aftermath more liberal and more committed to the experiment of democracy than before it had begun. Furthermore, his education in the power of propaganda had only increased his commitment to fostering a society in which free and open communication was a reality. In the years that would follow, Dewey would pen some of his most important writings on the relation between communication and democracy, including *Experience and Nature* in 1925, *The Public and Its Problems* in 1927, *Art as Experience* in 1934, and *Liberalism and Social Action* in 1935. Never, however, would he forget the hard lessons he learned in 1918 when he saw the remnants of his idealism co-opted by propaganda and made to serve the purposes of a crass militarism. For Dewey, rhetoric and communication were necessary for democracy to thrive, but they had to be

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<sup>197</sup> John Dewey, “The Discrediting of Idealism,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982; original work published 1919), 184.

<sup>198</sup> Dewey, “The Discrediting of Idealism,” 182.

expressions of the genuine experiences of individuals rather than the products of the specialized interests. Thus, his challenge was to articulate a philosophy that genuinely defended a form of democracy based on the communicative arts, and it was that reason he finally made the shift from a discourse of *phronēsis* to a discourse of *technē*.

#### 4.10. FROM PHRONĒSIS TO TECHNĒ

With the passing of his idealism at the turn of the century, Dewey had spent the next two decades developing an instrumentalist philosophy that he hoped would help constitute a society in which *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom, is the highest and most widely shared virtue of its citizenry. Although his initial effort focused on reconstructing logical theory to demonstrate its practical origins and show its relevance for situational ethics, he eventually returned to an Aristotelian emphasis on the connections between rhetoric, communication, and practical wisdom. For Aristotle, “practical wisdom...must be a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods.”<sup>199</sup> However, as Johnstone points out, this capacity was not inborn, but cultivated through discourse. Thus, “Aristotle views rhetoric both as an exercise of practical intelligence and as generative of practical wisdom.”<sup>200</sup> In other words, for Aristotle, one of rhetoric’s uses is to cultivate a capacity to arrive at practical solutions through being able to reason through all sides of a problem. As Aristotle explains, “we must be able to employ persuasion, just as strict reasoning can be employed, on opposite sides of a question...in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if another man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to confute

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<sup>199</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross and J.O. Urmson, in *A New Aristotle Reader*, 1140b20-21.

<sup>200</sup> Johnstone, 185.

him. No other of the arts draws opposite conclusions: dialectic and rhetoric alone do this.”<sup>201</sup> Dewey effectively adopted this view during the middle period of his writing, and not surprisingly, his example of the early spirit of deliberative democracy was drawn from Greek mythology in the character of Odysseus, the master dialectician and rhetorician.

With the Greeks...we find a continuous and marked departure from positive declaration of custom. We have assemblies meeting to discuss and dispute, and finally, upon the basis of the considerations thus brought to view, to decide. The man of counsel is set side by side with the man of deed. Odysseus was much experienced, not only because he knew the customs and ways of old, but even more because from the richness of his experience he could make the pregnant suggestion to meet the new crisis.<sup>202</sup>

Dewey’s choice of Odysseus to exemplify the character of the new democratic citizen skilled in practical logic reveals both the strengths and the weaknesses of his philosophical vision during this time. On the one hand, Odysseus is a clear example of how only a society in which vigorous discussion and communication were the norm can produce such a figure who possessed the practical wisdom and rhetorical skill to propose effective modes of action in response to problematic situations. Moreover, Odysseus shows the pragmatic dictum in action. Rather than obeying the dictates of some transcendental principles, Odysseus adapts his means to match his ends. Thus, he is the embodiment of Dewey’s pragmatic dictum that “that which guides us truly is true—demonstrated capacity for such guidance is precisely what is meant by truth.”<sup>203</sup> On the other hand, Odysseus also shows the great weakness in pragmatism when it is defined purely as a

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<sup>201</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1355a30-35.

<sup>202</sup> John Dewey, “Some Stages in Logical Thought,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1976; original work published 1900), 158.

<sup>203</sup> Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 169.

method. Odysseus is constantly referred to as a “cool tactician”<sup>204</sup> in *The Iliad*, but he is never praised for possessing moral clarity or a distinct political vision. Odysseus is primarily a military strategist and loyal general in Agamenon’s army. Consequently, it is Odysseus who becomes the target of scorn in Roman and Italian writings that take the side of Troy and blame Odysseus for devising the cruel strategy of the using the Trojan Horse to sack the city and rape its people. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Odysseus is called “that ringleader of atrocity,” and in Dante’s *Inferno*, he is portrayed as a figure being consumed with what Durling calls “the fire of intellect, of the malice that motivated his counsels, and of the power of his rhetoric.”<sup>205</sup> In other words, although they acknowledge Odysseus’s brilliance, they condemn him for being devoid of any moral sensibility and for allowing his brilliance to be used to serve the ends of naked power—a criticism that ultimately made its way back to Dewey. During the height of Dewey’s support for World War I, his former student, Randolph Bourne, made this stinging assault on Dewey’s failure of moral leadership during a time of national crisis.

To those of us who have taken Dewey’s philosophy almost as our American religion, it never occurred that values could be subordinated to technique...But there was always that unhappy ambiguity in his doctrine as to just how values were created...The American, in living out his philosophy, has habitually confused results with product, and been content with getting somewhere without asking too closely whether it was the desirable place to get. It is now becoming plain that unless you start with the vividest kind of poetic vision, your instrumentalism is likely to land you just where it has landed

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<sup>204</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1990), 10: 640.

<sup>205</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 408f.

this younger intelligentsia which is so happily and busily engaged in the national enterprise of war.<sup>206</sup>

Bourne's criticism anticipated the direction Dewey would take his philosophy in the years following the war, particularly the observation that pragmatism lacked a "poetic vision." For it was true that Dewey, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, not only lacked a poetic vision, but lacked almost any account of poetry or aesthetics at all. In contrast to his early Hegelian writings, in which aesthetics play an important role in the realization of the universal consciousness, Dewey's instrumentalist writings view aesthetics merely as a happy outcome of inquiry and relegate it to a psychological phenomena. In a letter to eccentric businessman, art critic, and long-time friend Albert C. Barnes in 1920, Dewey writes: "I have always eschewed esthetics, just why I don't know, but I think it is because I wanted to reserve one region from a somewhat devastating analysis, one part of experience where I didn't think more than I did anything else. And now I have a pretty fixed repulsion at all esthetic discussion."<sup>207</sup> In his instrumentalist vision in 1920, it was *phronēsis* he was after, and he saw that as primarily a result of critical discussion, free communication, and social inquiry, not of aesthetic feeling.

But Dewey was being disingenuous. After all, he had taught a course in aesthetics with Fred Newton Scott in 1891 and had enthusiastically absorbed Hegel's aesthetic philosophy in his youth. A better explanation is that aesthetics and Absolute idealism were so closely aligned in his mind that he simply wished to avoid both subjects after he had abandoned Hegel. Unfortunately, World War I showed that one could not pretend to put forth a comprehensive social philosophy without considering the aesthetic aspects of human experience. Ironically, avoiding the subject of

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<sup>206</sup> Randolph Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," in *The Radical Will* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 343.

<sup>207</sup> John Dewey to Albert C. Barnes, January 15, 1920. John Dewey papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.



aesthetics had not freed him from idealism, but had actually left him vulnerable to its seductions. Because Dewey had focused so exclusively on the logical and social origins of language, he was unprepared to deal with the tide of propaganda that almost exclusively used aesthetic techniques in the service of militaristic and idealistic values. Thus, the “fixed repulsion” to aesthetic discussion he referred to in his letter to Barnes indicates how much he had been stung by his experience with propaganda and how much he wanted to preserve what had once been a subject dear to his heart by keeping it safe from criticism and exploitation.

This “fixed repulsion” did not last long, if it ever really existed at all. In 1922, Walter Lippmann published *Public Opinion* and mounted what Dewey called “perhaps the most effective indictment of democracy...ever penned.”<sup>208</sup> In his book, Lippmann argued that public opinion was too fickle, uninformed, short-sided, and susceptible to propaganda to ever intelligently deal with contemporary problems, and as a solution he proposed that we give up on the dream of the “omnicompetent individual” informed by objective news sources and rely instead on elite, organized, intelligence bureaus to guide political decisions. In his review of *Public Opinion*, Dewey found himself forced to defend democracy on the basis of the subject to which he had claimed a “fixed repulsion” just two years prior—aesthetics. According to Dewey, “the union of social science, access to facts, and the art of literary presentation is not an easy thing to achieve. But its attainment seems to me the only genuine solution of the problem of an intelligent direction of social life.”<sup>209</sup> Thus, for Dewey, democracy did not rest on hope in *phronēsis* alone; it rested, ultimately, on the cultivation of a *technē* that could unify art and science in such a way that it could adapt our habits of mind and action to changing situations.

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<sup>208</sup> John Dewey, “Review of Walter Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 13, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983; original work published 1922), 337.

<sup>209</sup> Dewey, “Review of Walter Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*,” 343.

Although Dewey's appeal to *technē* first gained real prominence in his writing with his review of *Public Opinion*, he had already made overtures to *technē* many years earlier. In *Democracy and Education*, for instance, he notes that "it is suggestive that among the Greeks, till the rise of conscious philosophy, the same word, τέχνη, was used for art and science," for their art "involved an end, mastery of material or stuff worked upon, control of appliances, and a definite order of procedure, all of which had to be known in order that there be intelligent skill or art."<sup>210</sup> Thus, following the Greeks, Dewey concludes that "art is neither merely internal nor merely external; merely mental nor merely physical. Like every mode of action, it brings about changes in the world."<sup>211</sup> Such a view of art as *technē* had helped inspire young students like Max Eastman to explore the implications of this view in their philosophy, but Dewey himself had stopped short of exploring just what it meant to assert that art had ontological significance. He was content to say that art was important and then focus his attention on other things.

World War I and the subsequent challenge to democracy changed all of that. Dewey realized that technique alone was not enough to sustain democracy; for democracy to thrive as both means and end, it had to find a place for the constitutive functions of art and the inspirational qualities of aesthetic experience. Thus, Dewey needed to construct a "poetic vision" of social life that could effectively act as a bulwark against the social unrest that regularly threatened to wash away fragile democracies. A vital part of that process was to articulate a vision of communication that was both moral and instrumental, one which combined the resources of both art and science to support democratic processes of decision making and of social life. Thus, although Dewey did not realize it, his turn to *technē* in his review of *Public Opinion* had committed him to an inquiry into the function and scope of rhetoric.

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<sup>210</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 203.

<sup>211</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 147.

## 5. THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

On December 6, 1951, just a few weeks after Dewey's ninety-second birthday and six months before his death, he wrote to his friend Arthur F. Bentley that "If I ever get the needed strength, I want to write on *knowing* as the way of behaving in which linguistic artifacts transact business with physical artifacts, tools, implements, apparatus, both kinds of being planned for the purpose and rendering *inquiry* of necessity an *experimental transaction*."<sup>1</sup> Clearly, Dewey was an obscure writer to the end of his days, but this letter nonetheless reveals the great importance Dewey came to place on recovering the original sense of *technē* which saw "linguistic artifacts" as productive tools for transacting business with the natural world. As Dewey was fond of pointing out, "in the early history of Greek reflective thought, art, or *technē*, and science, were synonymous."<sup>2</sup> For Dewey, however, it was important to define art in the *productive* sense of *technē*— "art' as equivalent for a technology, not as a synonym for 'skill.'"<sup>3</sup> The problem with "skill" is that it equally referred to the "perceptual-manipulative skills of amoebae and the animals,"<sup>4</sup> and is thus too broad a term to account for uniquely human activities like "knowing." "Technology," however, more properly "signifies all the intelligent techniques by which the energies of nature and man are directed and used in satisfaction of human needs."<sup>5</sup> These techniques include not just mechanical or scientific arts, but the poetic arts like language and

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey to Arthur F. Bentley, December 6, 1951, in *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence 1932-1951*, 646.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 12, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1986; original work published 1938), 78.

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey to Arthur F. Bentley, March 25, 1944 in *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence 1932-1951*, 234.

<sup>4</sup> John Dewey to Arthur F. Bentley, March 25, 1944 in *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence 1932-1951*, 234.

<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, "What I Believe," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1930), 270.

rhetoric. Thus Dewey sought to tie *technē* to its sister-term, *poiesis*, so that “art itself an operation of doing and making—a *poiesis* expressed in the very word poetry.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, by his later work, Dewey came to believe that all knowing was a science, all science was an art, and all art was involved an act of creation which effected some transformation of the world.<sup>7</sup>

Dewey’s interpretation of *technē* is complex because although he makes an effort to connect it with its Greek origins, his resulting definition subverts the narrow one given to *technē* by its chief architect, Aristotle. For Aristotle, there are two basic types of knowledge—“one by which we contemplate the kinds of things whose principles cannot be otherwise, and one by which we contemplate variable things.”<sup>8</sup> The first of these types of knowledge is scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*) and is connected with the act of contemplation (*theoria*). The second type of knowledge is divided into two types—applied science (*technē*) which involve production of material things (*poiesis*), and practical science (*phronēsis*) which deals with human actions (*praxis*). For Aristotle, both *technē* and *phronēsis* are inferior arts because they deal only in the realm of what Kant later called *phaenomena*, the world of flux and Becoming, while *epistēmē* deals in the realm of Kantian *noūmena*, the world of permanence and Being. Aristotle’s classification of the arts thus rests on firm ontological ground, the same ground that Kant would survey and reclaim with his “two worlds” solution.

What Dewey realized in his embrace of *technē* was that if his ideas were to have any lasting impact on human thought and action, he would have to clear a new ontological space on which to reconstruct our common sense notions about the relationships between the arts and

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<sup>6</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 261.

<sup>7</sup> Again, as with many of Dewey’s terms, there is slippage in how he uses “science” and “art.” When he contrasts the two terms, he tends to revert to their practical connotations with the “sciences” (like physics, geography, history, mathematics) and the “arts” (like poetry, drama, literature, sculpture, painting). But when he speaks in general terms like this, he lumps them both under art as *technē* in a universal sense of any process of “doing and making.” This is important to keep in mind as I following him in alternating between the two uses.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1139a5.

sciences. In his middle works, he had attempted to avoid issues of ontology by concentrating on *phronēsis*, or the development of practical wisdom largely through training in the communicative arts as they relate to inquiry. However, he came to realize that almost all objections to his methods of inquiry and education rested on ontological assumptions about the nature of knowledge and of the arts. To teach students the skills to make changes in the world assumed the existence of a world in which change was not only possible, but necessary. It also assumed that the function of knowledge and of language was not to reflect eternal truths and verities, but to create new truths that human beings could use to transform their world for the better. In his youth, Dewey had accepted this challenge enthusiastically, and had replaced a dualistic ontology with the dynamic monism of Hegel. In his middle work, he had suggested that the best approach was to avoid the question entirely. Thus, it was only in his later work that he would take up the spirit of Protagoras and advance an ontology of Becoming that would justify the teaching of communication as an art of transformation.

This chapter will explore the ontological foundations of rhetoric based on Dewey's later writings. Specifically, I will construct a vision of how Dewey might have conceived of the "rhetorical situation" in terms of his naturalistic ontology. I will show that Dewey conceived of the rhetorical situation as an "indeterminate situation" that required the arts of language to both constitute the problem and to pose a solution that would transform the situation through a transaction with natural events in time. To frame Dewey's work in terms of 20<sup>th</sup> century rhetorical theory, however, I will begin by reviewing Lloyd Bitzer's conception as articulated in his seminal 1968 essay, "The Rhetorical Situation." Then, by using Bitzer's essay and the numerous responses and criticisms it inspired, I will set establish the problems that remain unresolved and show how Dewey's work provides a way of addressing them.

## 5.1. LLOYD BITZER'S "THE RHETORICAL SITUATION"

There is no argument that Bitzer's essay, "The Rhetorical Situation,"<sup>9</sup> has been very influential in how we discuss the nature of rhetoric. The argument is whether or not this influence has been a positive one. Thus, as Garret and Xiao observe, Bitzer's concept holds a unique position in contemporary rhetorical theory in that "the notion of the rhetorical situation is both widely accepted and deeply contested."<sup>10</sup> Critical responses to his essay are at least twelve and counting,<sup>11</sup> in addition to Bitzer's own revision in 1980.<sup>12</sup> However, the degree of Bitzer's influence is only of secondary concern to my purposes here. The importance of Bitzer's essay and the discourse surrounding it for understanding Dewey's work is that Bitzer's conception of the rhetorical situation both charts a Deweyan trajectory and was inspired, in part, by Dewey's own work. Bitzer had written his master's thesis on Dewey,<sup>13</sup> and in his 1980 revision of his concept he explicitly cites Dewey's *Theory of Valuation*, quoting the passage, "Valuation takes

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<sup>9</sup> Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1969): 1-14.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao, "The Rhetorical Situation Revisited," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 23 (1993): 30.

<sup>11</sup> William L. Benoit, "The Genesis of Rhetorical Action," *Southern Communication Journal*, 59 (1994): 342-355; Barbara A. Biesecker, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Difference," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 22 (1989):110-130; Alan Brinton, "Situation in the Theory of Rhetoric" *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 14 (1981): 234-248; Scott Consigny, "Rhetoric and Its Situations," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 7 (1974): 175-186; Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao, "The Rhetorical Situation Revisited," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 23 (1993): 30-40; David M. Hunsaker and Craig R. Smith, "The Nature of Issues: A Constructive Approach to Situational Rhetoric," *Western Speech Communication*, 40 (1976): 144-156; Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 6 (1968): 162-170; Richard L. Larson, "Lloyd Bitzer's 'Rhetorical Situation' and the Classification of Discourse: Problems and Implications," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 3 (1970): 165-168; John H. Patton, "Causation and Creativity in Rhetorical Situations: Distinctions and Implications," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65 (1979): 36-55; Craig R. Smith and Scott Lybarger, "Bitzer's Model Reconstructed," *Communication Quarterly*, 44 (1996): 197-213; Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 6 (1973): 154-161; K.E. Wilkerson, "On Evaluating Theories of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 3 (1970): 82-96.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd Bitzer, "Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective," in *Rhetoric in Transition: Studies in the Nature and Uses of Rhetoric*, ed. Eugene E. White (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 21-38.

<sup>13</sup> From a personal conversation with Dr. Bitzer. I am indebted to the insights of his work and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to speak with him about my project.

place only when there is something the matter; when there is some trouble to be done away with, some need, lack, or privation to be made good, some conflict of tendencies to be resolved by means of changing conditions.”<sup>14</sup> Bitzer’s intention was to defend his definition of rhetoric as “a mode of altering reality, not by direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, by analyzing Bitzer’s conception alongside its detractors, we are able to frame the questions to which a closer analysis of Dewey work can hopefully provide answers.

The “starting point” of Bitzer’s conception of the rhetorical situation is the naturalistic assumption that “human beings interaction functionally with their environment.”<sup>16</sup> It is on this premise that all of his claims are made. Thus, he defines a rhetorical situation “as a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance.”<sup>17</sup> This “utterance” must be in the form of rhetoric, which Bitzer later defines as “a functional, or pragmatic, communication and thus a critical mode of functional interaction in which the chief interacting grounds are persons on the one hand and the environment on the other.”<sup>18</sup> From these definitions, Bitzer arrives at his three preconditions for a rhetorical situation: the *exigence*, or “an imperfection marked by urgency,”<sup>19</sup> the *audience*, or “those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change,” and the *constraints*, or those “persons, events, objects, and relations which are part of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.”<sup>20</sup> Rhetorical theory, meanwhile, also has a unique role to play in this process. Rather

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Bitzer, “Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective,” 26.

<sup>15</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 4.

<sup>16</sup> Bitzer, “Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective,” 21.

<sup>17</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 5.

<sup>18</sup> Bitzer, “Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective,” 21.

<sup>19</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 6.

<sup>20</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 8.

than being a passive bystander, “rhetoric as a discipline is justified philosophically insofar as it provides principles, concepts, and procedures by which we effect valuable changes in reality.”<sup>21</sup> Extending Dewey, Bitzer not only claims that rhetoric is a pragmatic art, but he also makes the same assertion about rhetorical *theory*.

However, criticisms of Bitzer’s conception soon followed. Patton divided them up into three types. First, there are “objections to the definition of situational elements predominantly in objective terms,”<sup>22</sup> such as Bitzer’s statement that both the exigence and constraints “are objective and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience.”<sup>23</sup> Second, there are “objections to the presumed causal force of the situational elements,”<sup>24</sup> such as Bitzer’s claim that “the situation dictates the sorts of observations to be made; it dictates the significant physical and verbal responses.”<sup>25</sup> Thirdly, there are “objections to the supposedly minimized role of the agent, especially in terms of perception and creativity in rhetorical action,”<sup>26</sup> such as Bitzer’s insistence that the rhetor cannot just provide any response, but must provide a “fitting response”<sup>27</sup> that “meets the requirements established by the situation.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, the criticisms of Bitzer boil down to the charge that he makes language and human actors servants to objective conditions, and in doing so denies the unique capacity of rhetoric to *create* objects, *create* meanings, and thereby *create* situations instead of having to wait around for an objective situation to call out rhetoric, as a coach would send a player on the field.

The most extreme of these criticisms comes from Vatz in his essay, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” published only five years after Bitzer’s essay appeared. Although often

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<sup>21</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 14.

<sup>22</sup> Patton, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 11.

<sup>24</sup> Patton, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 5.

<sup>26</sup> Patton, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 10.

<sup>28</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 11.



attributed as the “successful counter-statement”<sup>29</sup> to Bitzer, it is more appropriately seen as a counter statement to the same straw-man “materialist” that Dewey had argued against in his first essay, “The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism.” In a short seven pages, Vatz manages to hoist the well-worn banner of Subjective Idealism, but instead of claiming that matter requires *mind* for its constitution, he argues that it requires *rhetoric*. Thus, we hear echoes of Berkeley and Kant in Vatz’s argument that the act of observation is merely “a fitting of a scene into a category or categories found in the head of the observer. No situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it.”<sup>30</sup> Consequently, like any good idealist, Vatz uses this principle to show that rhetoric (as the language of the mind) can create almost any reality it chooses.

In Vatz’s world, “symbols create the reality to which people react,”<sup>31</sup> “rhetoric controls the situational response,” and “situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them.”<sup>32</sup> As examples, Vatz uses the war in Vietnam (“there was no ‘reality’ of the situation’s being in or not being in our national interest,” for “the situation was primarily rhetorical”<sup>33</sup>) and Kennedy’s assassination (“Surely Bitzer cannot believe that there was an intrinsic urgency which compelled the rotunda speeches following the killing of President Kennedy...*But* since rhetoric *created* fears and threat perception, the rotunda speeches were needed to communicate reassurances”<sup>34</sup>). Thus, through the logic that because situations are made meaningful through rhetoric, that rhetoric is all there is to meaning, Vatz effortlessly blends idealism and rhetorical theory together in such a way as to establish “a disciplinary

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<sup>29</sup> Biesecker, 114.

<sup>30</sup> Vatz, 154.

<sup>31</sup> Vatz, 158.

<sup>32</sup> Vatz, 159.

<sup>33</sup> Vatz, 159.

<sup>34</sup> Vatz, 160.

hierarchy with rhetoric on top.”<sup>35</sup> Young John Dewey would have merely replaced “rhetoric” with “psychology.”

Vatz’s essay is worth mentioning not for its novelty or sophistication, but for the opposite. It is worth mentioning because it shows the seduction of idealistic arguments when they are clothed in more friendly terms like “meaning” and “rhetoric.” Despite Vatz’s pretense to be putting forward a radical new theory of language, his argument is in fact just another manifestation of the centuries-old seesaw battle between realism and idealism that both Dewey and Bitzer were trying to overcome in their turns to naturalism.<sup>36</sup> Bitzer, however, is not Dewey, and he wrote only two essays on the rhetorical situation, both of which included unfortunate passages that were rightly criticized and modified by many commentators who followed Vatz’s idealist polemic. It is not my intention here, however, to evaluate Bitzer or review the extensive literature on the rhetorical situation. My intention is to address the questions raised by Bitzer’s essay by constructing a vision of the rhetorical situation based on Dewey’s later writings. I will show that Dewey provides extensive philosophical resources answer the question of what it means to say “this is a rhetorical situation.”

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<sup>35</sup> Vatz, 158.

<sup>36</sup> Vatz’s implicit Kantianism is especially evident in his ethical argument that “to view rhetoric as a creation of reality or salience rather than a reflector of reality clearly increases the rhetor’s moral responsibility. We do not just have the academic exercise of determining whether the rhetoric understood the ‘situation’ correctly. Instead, he must assume responsibility for the salience he has *created*.” (See Vatz, 158.) The idea that one must possess complete freedom of will (in this case, to create situations using rhetoric) in order to bear moral responsibility derives from the Kantian notion that ethics is a *personal* matter of choosing between duty and pleasure. Kant, however, is explicit is his disregard for the consequences of that choice. Vatz operates under the pretense that consequences matter. But how can we judge consequences if causal determinations are themselves determined by rhetorical invention and if we each possess the freedom to invent whatever explanation that suits our fancy? In Vatz’s world, we *necessarily* each act within our own solipsistic moral universe created by rhetoric. Therefore, assignment of moral responsibility is impossible by any “objective” standard. The utter uselessness of Vatz’s conception is proven by the fact that his essay is never cited as anything more than a “counter-statement” to Bitzer, showing how subjective idealism, as a practical tool, is virtually worthless.

## 5.2. THE METAPHYSICS OF EXPERIENCE

Any inquiry into Dewey's mature thought must begin with an examination of Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics, which he formally inaugurated with the first edition of *Experience and Nature* in 1925. As the title implies, this metaphysics establishes continuity between nature and experience and thus advocates what Dewey calls a "naturalistic humanism"<sup>37</sup> that sees human experience as part of the natural world. For Dewey, naturalistic humanism stands in opposition to the long-standing beliefs that nature is something "complete apart from experience" and that our individual experience is something "casual and sporadic" that "forms a veil or screen which shuts us off from nature, unless in some way it can be 'transcended'."<sup>38</sup> Rather, Dewey wanted to show how experience and nature interpenetrate one another, how "experience is *of* as well as *in* nature" and how it "reaches down into nature; it has depth."<sup>39</sup> According to Rorty, "Dewey set out to show the harm which traditional philosophical dualisms were doing to our culture, and he thought he needed a metaphysics—a description of the generic traits of existences that would solve (or dissolve) the traditional problems of philosophy, as well as open up new avenues for cultural development."<sup>40</sup> Rorty ultimately disagrees that Dewey needed such a metaphysic,<sup>41</sup> but his account of Dewey's intentions is accurate. Dewey no longer felt he could overcome entrenched philosophical dualisms simply by dodging their questions; he wanted to beat the metaphysicians at their own game.

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<sup>37</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 10

<sup>39</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 85.

<sup>41</sup> "Dewey's mistake—and it was a trivial and unimportant mistake, even though I have devoted most of this essay to it—was the notion that criticism of culture had to take the form of a redescription of 'nature' or 'experience' or both." See Rorty, 85f.

Unfortunately, Dewey's metaphysics of experience is not a neatly tied up package like the idealist metaphysics of the *Psychology*. In Bernstein's words, "Dewey's theory of experience and nature is tangled and sprawling. One wishes he might have followed out his speculations with greater care, rigor, and consistency."<sup>42</sup> Thus, the task of this dissertation is to untangle his thought for him by presenting it in the form of a comprehensive and naturalistic rhetorical theory. In the sections that follow, different aspects of Dewey's naturalistic humanism will be examined individually, but each of these aspects are parts of a larger whole that are embodied by two of Dewey's most important principles—*continuity* and *transaction*. Therefore, I begin by showing how *continuity* and *transaction* apply to Dewey's conception of *experience*, the conception by which Alexander claims that "one obtains the Northwest Passage to Dewey's philosophy; failure to understand it inevitably leads to shipwreck."<sup>43</sup>

In Dewey's later work, the principle of "continuity" effectively replaces his youthful emphasis on "organism." In his early work, Dewey had followed the spirit of Hegel in believing that the entire universe (including human beings) is an organic whole, and that each seemingly isolated fact was intimately connected to all other facts through the process of the growth and unfolding of the universal consciousness. Experience, within this system, is merely a portion of that consciousness coming to self-consciousness through the reflective action of Will. In his mature writings, Dewey replaces Hegel with Darwin. Instead of grounding continuity upon the belief in a divine Spirit that pervades all things, he grounds continuity on the belief that human beings are just another part of the natural environment and therefore possess no *supernatural* qualities that separate us from other biological organisms. Experience, within this system, "is a matter of the interaction of organism with its environment, an environment that is human as well

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<sup>42</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, "Dewey's Naturalism," *Review of Metaphysics* 13 (1959): 352.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas M. Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling: John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1952), 57.

as physical, that includes the materials of tradition and institutions as well as local surroundings.”<sup>44</sup> Experience, in other words, is the way we come to know, adapt to, and transform the world around us (cultural and natural) for both our survival and our satisfaction.

Dewey explains this perspective as follows:

Can one deny that if we were to take our clue from the present empirical situation, including the scientific notion of evolution (biological continuity) and the existing arts of control of nature, subject and object would be treated as occupying the same natural world as unhesitatingly as we assume the natural conjunction of an animal with its food? Would it not follow that knowledge is one way in which natural energies cooperate?<sup>45</sup>

The analogy of the animal hunting its food is helpful in illustrating how the “continuity” of experience has two poles—continuity in *space*, and continuity in *time*. On the one hand, continuity in time means that experience is not a series of atomic moments, strung together like a series of snapshots. Experience is a process of growth and decline, rise and fall, ebb and flow that is embodied in any natural activity like the lion hunting its prey. How the lion learns to hunt is thus no different in kind than how human beings learn about their world. Both depend on having experiences that extend through time and are centered on some purpose that structures all elements in a situation. On the other hand, continuity in space means that we are not passive spectators of our environment, trapped on one side of the “veil” that separates us from nature. We are a part of our environment, operating within it, just as the hunter and the hunted. Thus, the categories of “subject” and “object” are not *prior* to experience, but are abstractions *from* experience that occur only after reflection. Furthermore, continuity in space means that mind and body are also continuous, and that within immediate experience there is no distinction between

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<sup>44</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 251.

<sup>45</sup> John Dewey, “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1980; original work published 1917), 24.

cognitive and emotional aspects. “For things are objects to be treated, used, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured, even more than things to be known. They are things had before they are things cognized.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, despite our unique capacities to reflect on the past and plan for the future, we still share with the lion the thrill of the hunt and the simple pleasure of *having* when we succeed.

The principle of *continuity* leads naturally to the principle of *transaction*. The term derives from its common sense definition as “a ‘deal’ that has been ‘put across’ by two or more actors”<sup>47</sup>—in this case, the actors being “what we term organism, on one side, and environment, on the other.”<sup>48</sup> For instance, “no one would be able successfully to speak of the hunter and the hunted as isolated with respect to hunting.”<sup>49</sup> The *transaction* is the entire sequence of events that affects all parties involved and “demands that statements be made as descriptions of events in terms of durations in time and areas of space.”<sup>50</sup> An adequate account of an experience of a “hunt,” therefore, will not be restricted only to descriptions of “subjective” states, but will be a full account of what transpired between the hunter and the hunted and what was lost, gained, or changed as a result. The transactional nature of experience means that experience is always a process of growth and transformation for both organism and environment as a *continuous whole*.

However, the radical nature of this perspective is only revealed in the context of human *knowing*. Dewey not only viewed knowledge as a form of transaction, but viewed it as a *communicative* form of transaction made possible by the arts of language. Thus, “the transactional is in fact that point of view...that knowing is cooperative and as such is integral

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<sup>46</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 28.

<sup>47</sup> John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 16, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989; original work published 1948), 101f.

<sup>48</sup> John Dewey, “Conduct and Experience,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1930), 220.

<sup>49</sup> Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 125.

<sup>50</sup> Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 4.

with communication,”<sup>51</sup> and that “systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action.”<sup>52</sup> A system of calls and signals between hunters is thus one form of such knowledge, but so is the system of logical marks and symbols that form the basis of physics or the system of metaphors and images that might embody some concept of God. All of these are transactional forms of knowledge that effect transformations in ourselves and the world around us—we feed our family, we launch a satellite, we pray at church.

Nothing Dewey subsequently wrote can be understood without taking into consideration how the principles of *continuity* and *transaction* apply to his theory of experience. However, to stop at this level is only to answer half the question. Dewey had talked of Experience, but what did he mean by Nature? Was experience all there was to nature? And if it was not, on what basis did Dewey claim to have special access to the super-experiential world typically reserved for metaphysical speculation? These were the questions immediately raised in Dewey’s effort to sketch a “metaphysics” that would outline the “the generic traits of existence,”<sup>53</sup> traits that included continuity, transaction, temporality, the precarious, the stable, the final, potentiality, actuality, time, process, individuality, community, relations, and history.<sup>54</sup> For many contemporary readers, such as Rorty, Dewey’s metaphysical turn meant he was still in the “shadow of Kant’s notion that something called a ‘metaphysics of experience’ is needed to provide the ‘philosophical basis’ for the criticism of culture”<sup>55</sup> and that Dewey had not yet embraced the (post)modern notion that the contributions of philosophers are no “more ‘fundamental,’ or more ‘deep,’ than those of labor leaders, literary critics, retired statesmen, or

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<sup>51</sup> Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 101.

<sup>53</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 50.

<sup>54</sup> Dewey never sketched a complete list of these traits. This list is taken from Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling: John Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, 89.

<sup>55</sup> Rorty, 87.

sculptors.”<sup>56</sup> Consequently, Rorty downplays the importance of Dewey’s metaphysics and focuses our attention on Dewey’s writing as a cultural critic that appeared “in much of his older (and best) work.”<sup>57</sup> This is a potentially devastating critique, for it has the possibility of undermining Dewey’s entire theory of situations on which most of his explicit cultural criticism is based. Therefore, before examining his theory of situations, we must clarify the relationship between Dewey’s “metaphysics of experience” and what has become known as his “metaphysics of existence.”

### 5.3. THE METAPHYSICS OF “EXISTENCE”

For anyone familiar with the writings of Plato, the controversy of Dewey’s metaphysics should sound familiar; it is simply a more recent manifestation of the clash between Socrates and Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. In that dialogue, Protagoras (absently represented by Socrates) defends his dictum that “man is the measure of all things” on ontological grounds. Rejecting the ontology of Being embodied in Parmenides’s belief that the world is changeless and experience is deceptive, Protagoras advances an ontology of Becoming according to which “all things are in motion”<sup>58</sup> and “what one is immediately experiencing is always true.”<sup>59</sup> For Protagoras, “the verb ‘to be’ must be totally abolished,” and he believed we should “speak according to nature and refer to things as ‘becoming’, ‘being produced’, ‘passing away’, ‘changing’; for if you speak in such a way as to make things stand still, you will easily be refuted.”<sup>60</sup> In addition, his ontology of

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<sup>56</sup> Rorty, 87.

<sup>57</sup> Rorty, 85.

<sup>58</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 168b.

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 167b.

<sup>60</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 167b.



Becoming leads Protagoras to advance a new form of wisdom that no longer defines it as the abstract ability to grasp the nature of transcendental forms, but the practical ability “to change a worse state into a better state...by the use of words.”<sup>61</sup> Socrates’s reaction to Protagoras assertions is swift and effective. Quickly seeing the apparent contradiction in what seems to be a metaphysical defense of relativism, Socrates concludes that “in conceding the truth of the opinion of those who think him wrong, he [Protagoras] is really admitting the falsity of his own opinion,” so that “this *Truth* which he wrote is true for no one.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, Socrates precedes Rorty by some two millennia in arguing that metaphysical speculation is reserved for transcendental philosophers only—pragmatists, naturalists, and relativists need not apply. The only difference is that Socrates supports metaphysics and Rorty does not.

The error in this logic is glaring but pervasive. In short, only by assuming the premises of transcendental philosophy can one reasonably criticize either Protagoras or Dewey for being failed transcendental philosophers. Once such premises are rejected, the so-called metaphysics of Protagoras and Dewey are seen for what they are—practical hypotheses about the natural world derived from the evidence of our experience with it.<sup>63</sup> Thus, I agree with Shook’s claim that “Dewey’s metaphysical inquiry into existence could not possibly be other than an inquiry in experienced existence and that he never intended to produce two metaphysics, one for existence as experienced and another for existence itself.”<sup>64</sup> Like that of Protagoras, Dewey’s metaphysics starts and ends with experience. The method of constructing a metaphysics was thus no different in kind (even if different in scope and subject matter) than the method of constructing a scientific theory. For Dewey, “experience presents itself as the method, and the only method, for getting at

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<sup>61</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 167a.

<sup>62</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 171-b.

<sup>63</sup> I make a similar argument in Nathan Crick, “Reconstructing Protagoras: Sophistic Humanism and the Legacy of Pre-Socratic Philosophy,” *ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΚΑ ΑΝΑΛΕΚΤΑ* 1 (2004): 5-26.

<sup>64</sup> Shook, 10.

nature, penetrating its secrets, and wherein nature empirically disclosed (by the use of empirical method in natural science) deepens, enriches and directs the further development of experience.”<sup>65</sup> The following passage should put to rest any lingering questions about just what Dewey meant by positing his “naturalistic metaphysics,” and should hopefully ease the concerns of those like Rorty who are wary of falling under the shadow of Kant.

The main features of human life (culture, experience, history—or whatever name may be preferred) are indicative of outstanding features of nature itself—of centres and perspectives, contingencies and fulfillments, crises and intervals, histories, uniformities, and particularizations. This is the extent and method of my “metaphysics”:—the large and constant features of human sufferings, enjoyments, trials, failures and successes together with the institutions of art, science, technology, politics, and religion which mark them, communicate genuine features of the world within which man lives. The method differs no whit from that of any investigator who, by making certain observations and experiments, and by utilizing the existing body of ideas available for calculation and interpretation, concludes that he really succeeds in finding out something about some limited aspect of nature. If there is any novelty in *Experience and Nature*, it is not, I should say, this “metaphysics” which is that of the common man, but lies in the use made of the method to understand a group of special problems which have troubled philosophy.<sup>66</sup>

One of those “special problems,” then, is the nature of existence. Although it is easy to dismiss such questions as idle and irrelevant to practical life, and thereby embrace Rorty’s stance

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<sup>65</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> John Dewey, “Half-Hearted Naturalism,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1927), 76.

that “philosophy’s mission, like that of therapy, was to make itself obsolete,”<sup>67</sup> Dewey realized that our “metaphysical” assumptions often have very important practical consequences. As Boisvert observes, for Dewey, “the real issue is, not that of metaphysics vs. no metaphysics, but that of alternative metaphysical positions.”<sup>68</sup> These alternatives typically takes one of two positions—either Plato or Protagoras, representing the worlds of Being or Becoming, of monism or pluralism. In the first case, all change is mere appearance, a flux that masks a deeper unity where all things are irreducibly *one*. From this view, Dewey says there is “neither comedy nor tragedy in life, nor need of the will to live...There is only a block universe, either something ended and admitting of no change, or else a predestined march of events. There is no such thing as fulfillment where there is no risk of failure, and no defeat where there is no promise of possible achievement.”<sup>69</sup> In the second case, our experiences of change and stability, comedy and tragedy, growth and decay are all real and are an actual part of a world that is continuous and yet constantly in motion. From this view we find a justification for the productive arts, for “the significance of morals and politics, of the arts both technical and fine, of religion and of science itself as inquiry and discovery, all have their source and meaning in the union in Nature of the settled and the unsettled, the stable and the hazardous. Apart from this union, there are no such things as ‘ends,’ either as consummations or as those ends-in-view we call purposes.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, because a block universe poses no real problems, it also has no need for rhetoric to solve

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<sup>67</sup> Rorty, 82.

<sup>68</sup> Boisvert, 5.

<sup>69</sup> John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1929), 195.

<sup>70</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 195.

them. Only in what William James called a “pluralistic universe” do productive arts like rhetoric take on more than a eulogistic function in human affairs.<sup>71</sup>

In effect, Dewey threw in his lot with Protagoras, James, and the pluralists. In fact, he even drew historical connection between his own ontology and that of the Greeks, noting that in the original Greek, “‘*Phusis*,’ the word translated as ‘nature’ is etymologically connected with a root meaning ‘to grow.’ Now growth is change; it is coming into Being and passing out of Being, altering between the two extremes of birth and death.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, Dewey rejects the meaning of the traditional distinction between *appearance* and *reality*. In Dewey’s ontology of Becoming, “the world is so constituted that things appear and disappear; the opposite to appearance is not reality but disappearance.”<sup>73</sup> A log was here but now there is ash; she used to be a girl but now she is a woman; the nation was once strong but now it is weak; the painting was beautiful but now it is ugly; I thought I saw a ghost but it is now just a shirt; the stick I thought was straight in air now looks bent in water. For Dewey, “the question of truth is not as to whether Being or Non-Being, Reality or mere Appearance, is experienced, but as to the *worth* of a certain correctly experienced thing.”<sup>74</sup> Or, to use Protagoras’s example, “To the sick man the things he eats both appear and are bitter, while to the healthy man they both appear and are the opposite. Now what

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<sup>71</sup> Dewey, of course, also borrows the term “block universe” from James. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, James sets out the following alternatives. It is interesting to note that Dewey, in his youth, effectively chose the first option. “Here, then, you have the plain alternative, and the full mystery of the difference between pluralism and monism, as clearly as I can set it forth on this occasion. It packs up into a nutshell:—Is the manyness in oneness that indubitably characterizes the world we inhabit, a property only of the absolute whole of things, so that you must postulate that one-enormous-whole indivisibly as the *prius* of there being any many at all—in other words, start with the rationalistic block-universe, entire, unmitigated, and complete?—or can the finite elements have their own aboriginal forms of manyness in oneness, and where they have no immediate oneness still be continued into one another by intermediary terms—each one of these terms being one with its next neighbors, and yet the total ‘oneness’ never getting absolutely complete?” In William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1909), 330.

<sup>72</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 88.

<sup>73</sup> John Dewey, “Appearing and Appearance,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1927), 56.

<sup>74</sup> John Dewey, “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1977; original work published 1905), 163.

we have to do is not to make the one of these two wiser than the other... What we have to do is to make a change from the one to the other, because the other state is better.”<sup>75</sup>

However, examples like the ghost, the painting, the bent stick, or the sick man raise two difficulties for Dewey’s ontology. First, on what grounds can we make a distinction between a merely “experienced” thing and a “correctly experienced thing”? If all experience is “true,” then is not the “thing” experienced by the sick man on equal ontological footing with that of the healthy man? Second, by what criteria do we judge both the *worth* of our experience and the *ends* toward which our experiences are directed? Why should we not allow the sick man to remain sick if it pleases him to do so (or, for that matter, even if it does not)? Socrates himself presents this problem, arguing that even if Protagoras is correct about the nature of experience, he still must assert that some ends are in-themselves “better” than others, just as some methods of achieving these ends that are in-themselves more effective.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the sophistical pragmatism of Protagoras relies upon an accurate knowledge of means and ends and must “admit that here, if anywhere, one counselor is better than another.”<sup>77</sup> Dewey addressed both of these questions, the first with his distinction between “events” and “objects,” and the second with his moral theory that was based on his theory of situations. Both of these answers, however, rely in part on his understanding of language, and from his answers we find the resources for constructing a working concept of the rhetorical situation.

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<sup>75</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 167a.

<sup>76</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 172b.

<sup>77</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 172a.

#### 5.4. EVENTS AND OBJECTS

In 1905, Dewey published “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” in which he attempted to make a final break between the assumptions of both classical Realism and Idealism. What Dewey recognized was that both philosophical schools shared a common premise—that the primary activity and goal of thought in relation to objects (regardless of whether that thought actively constructs objects or whether it merely *reconstructs* them) is *cognition*. Thus, both operated under the premise that “knowing is the sole and only genuine mode of experiencing,” and that “Reality is just and exclusively what it is or would be to an all-competent all-knower.”<sup>78</sup> From this perspective, our immediate experience with our environment (which includes all our emotional and “subjective” states) is always restricted to the realm of *appearances*, while *reality* is always some distant goal to be reached, typically through some rational activity of mind or will. In other words, both Idealists and Realists alike feel we are trapped in Plato’s cave, awaiting that day when we can break our chains and escape into the bright light of pure cognition. They merely differ on escape plans.

Dewey’s “Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” was his first effort to reveal this perspective as fallacious and replace it with a more practical and common-sense notion of experience. That notion was that “immediate empiricism postulates that things—anything, everything, in the ordinary or non-technical use of the term ‘thing’—are what they are experienced as. Hence, if one wishes to describe anything truly, his task is to tell what it is experienced as being.”<sup>79</sup> In characteristic Dewey form, his definition left a lot to be desired, for his solution appeared to do away with knowledge entirely and reduce it to the content of our

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<sup>78</sup> Dewey, “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” 159.

<sup>79</sup> Dewey, “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” 158.

immediate impressions. However, Dewey was attempting something more subtle. He wished to say that there were simply different ways of experiencing things, and that experiencing things cognitively is only *one* way. Moreover, he wished to argue that cognitive experience is not the act of grasping something's true Being, but is a practical activity of transforming our conception of something so we are able to have more *productive*, but equally *real*, experiences in the future. For example:

I start and am flustered by a noise heard. Empirically, that noise *is* fearsome; it *really* is, not merely phenomenally or subjectively so. That is what it is experienced as being. But, when I experience the noise as a *known* thing, I find it to be innocent of harm. It is the tapping of a shade against the window, owing to the movements of the wind. The experience has changed; that is, the thing experienced has changed...This is a change of experienced existence effected through the medium of cognition. The content of the latter experience cognitively regarded is doubtless *truer* than the content of the earlier, but it is in no sense more real...It is only in regard to contrasted content in a subsequent experience that the determination "truer" has force.<sup>80</sup>

Dewey retains this basic perspective into his later work, but he adds two components that fill out what is admittedly a rather vague "postulate." The first is the distinction between *events*, or the material of our immediate experience that is brutally "there," and *objects*, or that same material that has been transformed through some reflective process, whether intellectual or artistic, into conceptual form. In the previous example, we awake to the *event* of hearing a frightful noise, a bare *that* embodied in the exclamation "What is *that*?" However, after turning on the light and purposefully investigating our environment, we discover the cause of the noise and thereby transform the *that* into an *object*—the tapping of the shade against the window.

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<sup>80</sup> Dewey, "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism," 160.

However, Dewey also recognized that most objects are created not through mere *observation*, but through *communication*. For example, if a child had awoke to the noise and had quickly transformed the frightful noise into the *object* of a *ghost*, the resolution would occur only when the parent arrived to comfort the child and explain what had more “truly” occurred. Communication thus takes on a powerful role in Dewey’s “postulate,” for it has the potential to infinitely create and transform the “objects” of our environment. Evidence of the importance Dewey placed upon communication within his transactional ontology is exemplified in this fertile passage in *Experience and Nature*:

Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful. That things should be able to pass from the plane of external pushing and pulling to that of revealing themselves to man, and thereby to themselves; and that the fruit of communication should be participation, sharing, is a wonder by the side of which transubstantiation pales. When communication occurs, all natural events are subject to reconsideration and revision...Events turn into objects, things with a meaning...Events when once they are named lead an independent and double life. In addition to their original existence, they are subject to ideal experimentation: their meanings may be infinitely combined and re-arranged in imagination, and the outcome of this inner experimentation—which is thought—may issue forth in interaction with crude or raw events.<sup>81</sup>

This passage is merely eulogistic (and frequently used as such) until one understands the ontological underpinnings of the process by which communication operates as a transformational medium between events and objects. This ontology posits that “things” exists only in *transaction* with other “things.” Thus, there is no *thing-it-itself*. There is only the *thing-in-relationship-to-other-things*. Therefore, an “event” is a total qualitative situation that includes its human

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<sup>81</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 132.



participants as well as such ephemeral things such as “frightful noises.” All of these things are real in that they are actual experienced events. However, human beings are unique in their ability to communicate and thus make events lead a “double life.” They are able to take events from the realm of “pushing and pulling” and rework them in imagination and in discourse. By creating distinct “objects” that have specific properties (such as “tables, the milky way, chairs, stars, cats, dogs, electrons, ghosts, centaurs, historic epochs and all the infinitely multifarious subject-matter of discourse designable by common nouns, verbs and their qualifiers”<sup>82</sup>), we are then able to perform experiments that invest these objects with a truth value, defined instrumentally as the value they have for future experience. By positing, “that frightful noise is the tapping of the window shade,” we thus introduce an object in the form of a hypothesis that can be tested and confirmed. This experimentation, if successful, then transforms the character of the event and turns it from *frightful* into merely *irritating* (or, if unsuccessful, makes it even more frightful than before).

What Dewey is *not* saying is that communication is a form of transubstantiation that *literally* and *existentially* turns ghosts into window shades or vice versa. What he is saying is that communication invests “raw events” with meaning and thereby transforms these events into meaningful objects which can potentially be used to guide or enrich future experience. Thus, communicative objects are inherently *instrumental* while experienced events are inherently *final*. In Dewey’s words, “any quality as such is final; it is at once initial and terminal; just what it is as it exists. It may be referred to other things, it may be treated as an effect or as a sign. But this involves an extraneous extension and use. It takes us beyond quality in its immediate qualitiveness.”<sup>83</sup> What communication allows is the ability to turn qualities into signs, and

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<sup>82</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 241.

<sup>83</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 82.

signs into conceptual objects, objects that can then be shared with and understood by one's linguistic community. Thus, these "objects" are not rivals or replacements for events. They are communal instruments to be used to transform our experience of events by providing us new forms of understanding and control. The paradigm example of this process for Dewey is science:

For scientific inquiry always starts from things of the environment experienced in our everyday life, with things we see, handle, use, enjoy and suffer from. This is the ordinary qualitative world. But instead of accepting the qualities and values—the ends and forms—of this world as providing the objects of knowledge, subject to their being given a certain logical arrangement, experimental inquiry treats them as offering a challenge to thought. They are the materials of problems not of solutions. They are to be known, rather than objects of knowledge. The first step in knowing is to locate the problems which need solution.<sup>84</sup>

We see here the importance that the distinction between events and objects has for his situational perspective. For Dewey, our immediate experience with the world is made up of qualitative events, the "things we see, handle, use, enjoy and suffer from." These events are not "objects of knowledge" which carry with them cognitive truth value. The food we eat, the noises we hear, and the emotions we feel are not true or false. They simply *are*, and if we never encountered any problems, we likely would never pursue the issue further. Only when our environment does not satisfy our needs and presents challenges do we begin a critical inquiry and transform brute events into "things to be known." If the cafeteria food makes us sick, we send it to the lab to test for bacteria. Out of the event of *eating* emerges a cognitive object whose properties will be determined through scientific inquiry and which will have consequences for future behavior and experience. *The food was contaminated and the cafeteria should be closed.*

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<sup>84</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 83.

This basic cycle of thus forms the basis for Dewey's concept of the "indeterminate situation," which in turn establishes the ground for our concept of the "rhetorical situation."

## 5.5. THE INDETERMINATE SITUATION

Dewey's distinction between events and objects has immediate consequences for how we understand the nature of a "situation." For example, one of the most frequently cited criticisms of Bitzer's account of the rhetorical situation is its "determinism" and "strict realism."<sup>85</sup> For instance, Brinton interprets Bitzer as saying that, for rhetoric to truly occur, "the potential rhetor be correct in his evaluative assessment of the situation."<sup>86</sup> This criticism is pushed to the extreme by Vatz, who sees Bitzer's account of rhetoric as a mere "academic exercise of determining whether the rhetor understood the 'situation' correctly."<sup>87</sup> Despite the fact that these criticisms largely ignore Bitzer's pragmatism that defines and judges rhetoric as an art that seeks to "produce action or change in the world"<sup>88</sup> rather than merely reflect the world as it is, they are nonetheless enabled by Bitzer's failure to distinguish between situations as *events* and situations as *objects*. Once this distinction is made, situations can be seen both as "things to be known" as well as "objects of knowledge," depending on the stage of their development in time. Not all situations are rhetorical situations, however, so we will start by exploring how Dewey broadly defines the relevance and characteristics of the "indeterminate situation."

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<sup>85</sup> Smith and Lybarger, 200.

<sup>86</sup> Brinton, 243.

<sup>87</sup> Vatz, 158.

<sup>88</sup> Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 4.

What must be kept in mind when considering the nature of “indeterminate situations” is that Dewey’s entire pragmatic theory of knowledge stands or falls with their existence or non-existence. Put simply, without a situation that poses a problem to be solved, knowledge cannot be understood as an art of solving problems; and when knowledge is not seen as an art of solving problems, it inevitably regresses into a dualist epistemology. Dewey’s mature theory of knowledge, therefore, makes an explicit connection between inquiry and situations. For Dewey, “inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.”<sup>89</sup> The result of this inquiry is “knowledge” as embodied in the form of a “warranted assertion,”<sup>90</sup> such as “the noise is the tapping of a window shade” or “the fish went bad.” These assertions are results of inquiries performed to resolve and transform indeterminate situations, and they are warranted insofar as they contribute to that resolution. Therefore, eliminate the possibility of situations and you deny the major premise of Dewey’s naturalism—that knowledge and inquiry are instrumental forms of art that seek to transform reality through transaction with natural events.

What, then, are the characteristics of an “indeterminate situation”? First, an indeterminate situation has the outstanding question of being *problematic* in some way, which means there exists within it “something questionable, and hence provocative of investigation, examination, discussion—in short, inquiry.”<sup>91</sup> Being problematic “covers the features that are designated by such adjectives as confusing, perplexing, disturbed, unsettled, indecisive; and by such nouns as jars, hitches, breaks, blocks.”<sup>92</sup> Second, the indeterminate situation in its *eventness* is not made

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<sup>89</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 109.

<sup>90</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 145.

<sup>91</sup> Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 282.

<sup>92</sup> Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 282.

up of a series of atomic elements, each with their own unique qualities and identities. Echoing his earlier emphasis on the organic nature of experience, Dewey insists that “what is designated by the word ‘situation’ is not a single object or event or set of objects and events. We never experience nor form judgments about objects and events in isolation, but only in connection with a contextual whole.”<sup>93</sup> This “contextual whole” is simply the entire quality of our experience before being analyzed and abstracted. Third, the problematic aspects of a situation are *experienced* before they are *known*: “a problem must be felt before it can be stated.”<sup>94</sup> Only after a problematic situation is described in propositional form does it take on the properties of an *object* that then obtains truth value. For example, I feel sick after eating a meal and I experience an indeterminate situation as to what caused my sickness. The event of eating then becomes an object of inquiry. Then someone states, “I think the fish went bad,” and an inquiry is begun. Thus, situations in their initial form are like any other experienced event—they are things *had* before they are things *cognized*. This distinction also has important practical consequences. “If the unique quality of the situation is had immediately, then there is something that regulates the selection and the weighing of observed facts and their conceptual ordering.”<sup>95</sup> Otherwise, there would be no starting point, no clear purpose for inquiring or asking questions. We would simply wash our hands after eating and go back to what we were doing.

There is a temptation here to conclude that Dewey is putting forth an intuitive and somewhat mystical interpretation of how indeterminate situations arise, which would render this situational theory overly obscure and impractical. What saves Dewey’s theory from this fate is his naturalism. For Dewey, we are not simply “minds” trapped in “bodies” looking out passively onto the world as a sick child looks forlornly through a bedroom window. We are biological

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<sup>93</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 72.

<sup>94</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 76.

<sup>95</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 76.

beings *within* the world who interact with our environment to accomplish certain ends. Thus, the fourth characteristic of the indeterminate situation is that it only arises only in relation to some habit or activity. On the one hand, “as long as our activity glides smoothly along from one thing to another, or as long as we permit our imagination to entertain fancies at pleasure, there is no call for reflection,”<sup>96</sup> and, consequently, no indeterminate situation. We simply enjoy where we are and what we are doing, as I might lie on a beach simply to relax and enjoy the warmth of the sun. On the other hand, “thinking begins in what may be fairly enough be called a forked-road situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives.”<sup>97</sup> For instance, something blocks the sun and I grow cold, forcing me to open my eyes. At this point, a basic form of inquiry begins. “In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the fact stand related to one another.”<sup>98</sup> I see that dark clouds are approaching, and on turning on my radio, I find that there is a forecast for rain. I then make my decision to get dressed and go to the bar.

Difficulty with this concept typically occurs when critics inject dualist assumptions into their interpretations. These critics assume a mind/body dualism that separates acts of “mind” from practical activity and makes it a cognitive machine whose purpose is primarily to *perceive* or *observe* an external situation that is made up of materialistic facts. The prominent use of the term “perception” is often indicative of these types of interpretations, which emphasize that perceptions are internal to the “mind” and are different from external “reality.” Thus, in some commentaries on the rhetorical situation, we have observations like “the exigence *generates*

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<sup>96</sup> Dewey, *How We Think*, 189.

<sup>97</sup> Dewey, *How We Think*, 189.

<sup>98</sup> Dewey, *How We Think*, 189.

*perceptions* within the mind of each potential auditor *and* rhetor”<sup>99</sup> and that “the goal of rhetorical discourse is *consensus*, the transformation of issue perceptions, bringing about a realignment and reconciliation between perceptual disparities.”<sup>100</sup> From this view, language is the language of “perception” and can do no more than seek perceptual consensus among a group of solipsistic minds, a consensus that may have little or no connection with “real” situations. As an example, Smith and Lybarger argue that “Joseph McCarthy’s ‘list’ of subversives in the State Department created the perception of an exigence that required action, even though the exigence was exaggerated at best and completely contrived at worst.”<sup>101</sup> This example is supposed to reveal the “social construction of reality” and thereby disprove the idea that “there is uniformity of perception within the observers of a rhetorical situation due to the nature of the situation itself.”<sup>102</sup>

If any of these criticisms are simply intended to point out that culture and language are actual parts of “reality” that influence the character of our experience, then they are not only consistent with Dewey, but with Bitzer. However, if they rest on an ontological distinction between “the nature of the situation itself” as it exists in *reality* and the “social construction” of the situation as it is merely *perceived*, then it is just another futile attempt to import a dualist epistemology to resolve a practical problem.<sup>103</sup> For once the perception/reality distinction is made on epistemological grounds, neither is there a way to cross the boundary from perception to reality, nor is there a way to measure differing perceptions (except by a transcendental leap

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<sup>99</sup> Smith and Lybarger, 200.

<sup>100</sup> Hunsaker and Smith, 156.

<sup>101</sup> Smith and Lybarger, 201.

<sup>102</sup> Smith and Lybarger, 201.

<sup>103</sup> The fact that “actors” or “participants” have been replaced by “observers” is evidence enough of the absurdity of dualist conceptions of situations. This is because the dualist always assumes that the function of “mind” is to “observe” the world rather than act within it. Hence, the dualist becomes absorbed with circular problems dealing with the difference between *perception* and *reality* that can never be resolved in the abstract. But these are the self-made problems of traditional philosophy that keep the Scholastic enterprise in good standing, even in the supposedly “practical” discipline of rhetoric.

into Idealism).<sup>104</sup> The only thing we have is an assortment of constantly changing perceptions that never reach common ground. Consequently, on their own premises, one can argue that Smith's and Lybarger's assertions about the historical facts surrounding McCarthy's "list" are even more "highly subjective"<sup>105</sup> than the conclusions reached by those auditors hearing McCarthy for the first time. The auditors, at least, had the opportunity of actually *being in the* situation rather than simply basing their "perceptions" on second-hand accounts.

This kind of circular argumentation about "perception" can go on indefinitely and never result in any productive end.<sup>106</sup> It is for this reason that Dewey preferred the term "experience," which he believed escaped the dualist associations of "perception" and returned us to the biological conception of organism. This is not to say Dewey restricted experience to our physical environment. Quite the opposite, Dewey took it as a matter of course that "the environment in which human beings live, act and inquire, is not simply physical. It is cultural as well. Problems which induce inquiry grow out of the relations of fellow beings to one another, and the organs for dealing with these relations are not only the eye and ear, but the meanings which have developed in the course of living."<sup>107</sup> The biological emphasis simply meant that human beings, including the cultures we inhabit and the languages we use, are all parts of the natural environment, and that our primary activity within this environment is adaptive. Thus, to argue, as

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<sup>104</sup> It is one of the absurd (but frequently applied) conclusions of idealism that while it is somehow impossible to grasp the "reality" of the external world in which we live, it makes complete sense that we can see clearly what inside other people's heads and objectively compare respective "perceptions." This is what happens when the world as *experienced* is traded for the world as merely *thought*. We regress to a realm of disembodied ideas that take on the characteristics of slides projected on a white screen.

<sup>105</sup> Smith and Lybarger, 201.

<sup>106</sup> Typically, in fact, this argument ends up in the intellectual waste-bin known as the "problem of induction." This so-called problem centers on the question of how many confirmed observations of the same thing does it take until we can draw a general conclusion from them. I.e., How many white swans must we see until we can conclude "all swans are white"? This kind of bean counting which often goes by the name of "epistemology" is utterly useless unless discussed in the context of a practical situation. After all, one could easily simply say we must count all swans that exist and ever have existed. But then there is always another swan being born, isn't there?

<sup>107</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 48.



Smith and Lybarger do, that the presence of language and “deliberate deception”<sup>108</sup> somehow contaminate “the nature of the situation itself” is to place human beings so far outside of the natural environment as to make us strangers in our own homes.

McCarthy, no doubt, was being deceptive. But his deception was performed in response to a situation he believed was problematic (the infiltration of communists into the government) and was intended not to represent the situation accurately, but to bring about a resolution to the situation as he came to understand it (rooting out communists by creating a public furor). Furthermore, even if nobody but McCarthy had understood the situation in this way before his speech, his own performance was itself a part of the environment and soon created a problematic situation for those called in front of his committee. And so on. As *events*, the diverse situations people experienced during this time were real and had distinctive qualities in their particularity and immediacy, just as they also shared common qualities that made it appropriate to talk about the McCarthy *situation* as a national problem. However, the McCarthy situation did not seriously become an *object of knowledge* until it was subjected to inquiry by Edward R. Murrow and exposed in his famous episode of *See It Now*. Murrow’s inquiry, in turn, contributed to a resolution of the situation by helping put an end to the hearings. Dewey’s point is simply that none of this happened just inside people’s heads. It all occurred within a larger environment that people experienced as fearful, tragic, uncertain, intimidating—that is to say, problematic—and which demanded some form of coordinated action to resolve. As Dewey explains:

It is in the very nature of the indeterminate situation which evokes inquiry to be questionable...to be uncertain, unsettled, disturbed...It is the situation that has these traits. We are doubtful because the situation is inherently doubtful. Personal states of doubt that are not evoked by and are not relative to some existential situation are

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<sup>108</sup> Smith and Lybarger, 201

pathological...Consequently, situations that are disturbed and troubled, confused or obscure, cannot be straightened out, cleared up and put in order, by manipulation of our personal states of mind. The attempt to settle them by such manipulations involved what psychiatrists call ‘withdrawal from reality’...The habit of disposing of the doubtful as if it belonged only to us rather than to the existential situation in which we are caught and implicated is an inheritance from subjectivistic psychology.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps the best way to sum up Dewey’s concept of the “indeterminate situation” is to say that it is *not* an *epistemological* situation that requires us to determine, by some occult process, whether our “perceptions” match “reality,” but is rather a *practical* situation that requires us to interact with our environment to affect a resolution to a felt problem. The action of “knowing” is merely one way to resolve the situation by implementing a form of inquiry that produces warranted assertions useful in guiding intelligent action. However, one can also act blindly, irrationally, selfishly, dogmatically, forcefully, or, for that matter, rhetorically. Some of these methods might hit upon a temporary resolution, some might make the situation worse, and some might not affect it at all. But any failure or success cannot be judged from some transcendent standpoint of an “all-knower” who looks past “perceptions” to grasp the “reality.” It must be judged from the experiences of those involved in the situation. In other words, the situation must not only *begin* in experience, but must *end* in experience, for outside of human experience, there is no such thing as an indeterminate situation. There are just events that happen. Within experience, however, there are many different *kinds* of indeterminate situation that require different methods of resolution. Thus, our last step to defining the *rhetorical* situation is analyzing its close cousin—the *moral* situation.

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<sup>109</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 109-110.

## 5.6. THE MORAL SITUATION

Distinguishing between situations that are moral (or those that have the potential to be moral) and those that are not moral is vital for any understanding of the rhetorical situation. In most of the examples I have used, such as the beach, the food, or the frightening noise, there is no distinctly moral dilemma. These situations are indeterminate only because they require some form of inquiry to bring them to an effective resolution. Any one of these situations is “then a technical rather than a moral affair. It is a question of taste and of skill—of personal preference and of practical wisdom, or of economy, expediency.”<sup>110</sup> A moral situation is different in that it involves not only questions of means, but questions of both means *and* ends. Thus, “the essence of the moral situation is an internal and intrinsic conflict” in which one is “ignorant of the end and of good consequences.”<sup>111</sup> In a moral situation, “the practical meaning of the situation—that is to say the action needed to satisfy it—is not self-evident. It has to be searched for. There are conflicting desires and alternative apparent goods. What is needed is to find the right course of action, the right good.”<sup>112</sup> For example, I am called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and asked to reveal the names of known communists. I want to support my government and be a loyal citizen, but I also owe allegiance to my friends. This is a moral situation, a clash of opposing goods and desires that cannot be resolved by “technical” means. Similarly, Dewey offers the following example:

Take...the case of a citizen of a nation which has just declared war on another country.

He is deeply attached to his own State. He has formed habits of loyalty and of abiding by

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<sup>110</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1908), 191.

<sup>111</sup> John Dewey, “Three Independent Factors in Morals,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1930), 280.

<sup>112</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 173.

its laws, and now one of its decrees is that he shall support war...But he believes that this war is unjust, or perhaps he has a conviction that all war is a form of murder and hence wrong. One side of his nature, one set of convictions and habits, leads him to acquiesce in war; another deep part of his being protests. He is torn between two duties: he experiences a conflict between the incompatible values presented to him by his habits of citizenship and by his religious beliefs respectively. Up to this time, he has never experienced a struggle between the two; they have coincided and reenforced one another. Now he has to make a choice between competing moral loyalties and convictions.<sup>113</sup>

Dewey's conception of the moral situation might seem controversial in that he locates its origins in *experience* rather than in "the nature of the situation itself." In other words, our habit is to label actions "moral" or "immoral" according to how they measure against an objective set of prescriptions regardless of the experience of the actors. If a person steals a car, then he is "immoral" irregardless of whether he experiences doubt or regret. To argue otherwise is to invite accusations of moral relativism. However, Dewey neither rejects the need for moral codes nor denies that any act can carry with it moral implications that can be praised or condemned. In fact, Dewey recognizes that "every act has *potential* moral significance, because it is, through its consequences, part of a larger whole of behavior."<sup>114</sup> For instance, "a person starts to open a window because he feels the need of air...but he remembers that his associate is an invalid and sensitive to drafts...The potential moral import of a seemingly insignificant act has come home to him."<sup>115</sup> Or, to use the previous example, a teenager might steal his former boss's car to show

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<sup>113</sup> John Dewey and James Tufts, *Ethics*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 7, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1985; original work published 1932), 165. Dewey and Tufts wrote two versions of their *Ethics*. Dewey's contribution for the second volume, however, was not just a "revision," but an entirely new set of chapters.

<sup>114</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 169.

<sup>115</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 169.

off to his friends and not realize that in stealing the car he might be preventing a husband from being able to take his pregnant wife to the hospital. The act thus had moral significance even though the teenager might have not experienced it as a distinctively moral situation because he has convinced himself that his boss “deserved it.”

However, in this case of the car, one does not require moral theory to condemn the teenager’s action. The resources for labeling his action as immoral are already supplied by virtually any moral code of any society. Thus, Dewey’s purpose in putting forward the concept of the moral situation is not to define *morality* in the sense of a “table of commandments in a catechism.”<sup>116</sup> It is rather to describe the characteristics of those situations in which customary morality was not up to the task of providing clear guidance. For if all moral situations were as simple as the teenager stealing a car, moral judgment would be little more than a technical affair that required only minimal reflection. But moral situations are not always so clear-cut, and when those more complex situations arise they call for the resources of moral *theory* to help “render personal reflection more systematic and enlightened, suggesting alternatives that might otherwise be overlooked, and stimulating greater consistency in judgment.”<sup>117</sup> In the case of the open window, for instance, moral theory can help the person reason through the consequences and significance of his actions and see that the health of his companion outweighs the minor benefits the person would get from fresh air. The concept of the moral situation, therefore, does not provide the basis for *morality*, but describes those situations in which the resources of *moral theory* can help us arrive at moral decisions through a process of inquiry. However, because moral theory deals with the *process* of how to come to decision, “it cannot take the *place* of

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<sup>116</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 166.

<sup>117</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 166.

personal decision, which must be made in every case of moral perplexity.”<sup>118</sup> All it can do is “render personal choice more intelligent.”<sup>119</sup>

One way to promote the use of intelligent judgment is to clarify the different types of moral situations that are encompassed by *customary* versus *reflective* morality. In customary morality, one “places the standard and rules of conduct in ancestral habit”<sup>120</sup> and therefore emphasizes “conforming to prevailing modes of action.”<sup>121</sup> However, Dewey does not see customary morality as necessarily constraining or irrational. Customary morality simply consists of those habits and customs that sustain a particular way of life. According to Edel and Flower, particularly during the two years he spent in China in 1919 and 1920, Dewey recognized “the unparalleled contribution of customary ways in Chinese endurance over four thousand years” and began “to see the conservatism of the Chinese as more intellectual and deliberate rather than as merely clinging to custom.”<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, the moral situations to which customary morality applies are typically of very little interest to moral theory. These situations do not involve a clash of opposing, but equally “good,” values that require the resources of deliberation and reasoning to determine the appropriate moral course of action, but rather involve the kind of “conflict which takes places when an individual is tempted to do something which he is convinced is wrong” and is “merely permitting his desire to govern his beliefs.”<sup>123</sup> These situations merely require adherence to customary morality through the kinds of reward and punishment, praise and blame, license and prohibition that are traditionally associated with the practice of ethics.

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<sup>118</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 166 (emphasis added).

<sup>119</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 166.

<sup>120</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 162.

<sup>121</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 166.

<sup>122</sup> Abraham Edel and Elizabeth Flower, “Introduction,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 7, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1985), xxiii.

<sup>123</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 164.

Ethical problems arise when customary morality can no longer adequately resolve certain moral situations through adherence to custom. These situations are *reflective* moral situations which appeal not to duty or habit, but to “conscience, reason, or to some principle which includes thought.”<sup>124</sup> Sometimes, these situations arise on an individual level, such as Dewey’s example of the man torn between his patriotic values and his religious beliefs. Other times “there are periods in history when a whole community or a group in a community finds itself in the presence of new issues which its old customs do not adequately meet,” such as “the age in Greece following the time of Pericles.”<sup>125</sup> In such times, there arises “the necessity of criticizing existing customs and institutions from a new point of view,”<sup>126</sup> and hence the necessity of developing the kind of moral theory that acts as a guide to reasoning and judgment. Thus, in his formal definition of the “moral situation,” Dewey effectively means the *reflective* moral situation, or those situations that are beyond traditional custom, habit, or law to effectively resolve.

With respect to the rhetorical situation, the primary importance of Dewey’s concept of the moral situation lies in the relationship between *customary* and *reflective* morality, a relationship that mirrors the one between *communication* and *rhetoric*. Although Dewey used “communication” in ways that frequently overlapped with rhetoric, he often used the term (most notably in *Democracy and Education*) in a manner reminiscent of Carey’s “ritual view” of communication in which the purpose of communication is “not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process.”<sup>127</sup> This view is more of a *conservative* view of

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<sup>124</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 162.

<sup>125</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 165.

<sup>126</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 162.

<sup>127</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 19.

communication in the sense that it embodies and conserves the traditional rituals and norms of culture developed over time. Thus, ritualistic communication and customary morality are in many ways synonymous, as they both operate to sustain a shared sense of culture and resist dramatic shifts in habits and moral sensibility. Consequently, in customary moral situations, the resources of ritualistic communication (the church service, the classroom lecture, the parental advice, the children's book, the legal code) are typically adequate to the task.

*Reflective* moral situations, however, occur when the traditional resources of ritualistic forms of communication within customary morality fail to provide guidance and instead offer only a set of conflicting values. During these times, individuals require more than the familiar run-down of moral platitudes. They ask questions, demand answers, and actively seek out new avenues of thought and of action that might help them resolve their conflict in a novel way. It is during these times that the arts of communication, like rhetoric, often fill the void left by habit and tradition. The man torn by the upcoming war might be inspired by the patriotic vision of a war for democracy offered by his President, or he might be shamed by the sermon of his priest who condemns the resort to violence as a regression to the methods of Cain. Or, dissatisfied by these alternatives, he might seek out new voices, new visions, and new alternatives embodied in rhetoric he had never heard because he had never sought to listen. Thus, the most dramatic and powerful rhetorical situations often occur when entire communities or societies are caught up in the conflicts of reflective moral situations, for then individuals have no clear custom or tradition to fall back on. In the next section, I will draw on Dewey's insights to define the nature of these rhetorical situations and analyze their relationship to the arts of rhetoric.



## 5.7. THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

From Dewey's perspective, when I say "this is an indeterminate situation," I mean that the normal or anticipated course of events has been obstructed in a way that has no clear path of resolution. Something is wrong, confused, or problematic and requires inquiry to determine a new course of action to resolve the problem. When I say "this is a moral situation," I mean that the problem I face is one of conflicting moral values. I am torn between one path and another, and my inquiry must be not only concern means, but ends. However, it is not entirely clear how Dewey would interpret the statement that "this is a rhetorical situation." If I were Bitzer, my answer would describe "the nature of those contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse"<sup>128</sup> and would conclude that a rhetorical situation is "a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance."<sup>129</sup> Bitzer's answer would thus account for that kind of rhetorical discourse generated in a crisis, particularly the kind that emerges in times of war or political turmoil. For example, Bitzer's answer would sufficiently be able to account for this piece of rhetoric created by the sophist Thrasymachus of Chalcedon during the Peloponnesian War:

I wish I had been alive in the old days, when the younger generation could happily remain silent, since matters did not force them to make speeches and their elders were looking after the city. But since it is our fate to found ourselves alive now, at a time when we submit to others ruling the city, but endure its disasters ourselves, and since the

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<sup>128</sup> Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 1.

<sup>129</sup> Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 5.

greater of these disasters are due not to the gods or to fortune, but to those who are in charge, I have no choice but to speak.<sup>130</sup>

This passage from Thrasymachus appears to justify Bitzer's account and reveal how Dewey's concept of the moral situation can easily be transformed into a rhetorical situation by adding the element of speech. First, there is the breakdown of the customary morality that had effectively maintained the social order in the "old days" and had kept the younger generation happily silent. Second, there is the presence of a problem, an "exigence," that needs to be resolved concerning the oppressive rule of corrupt politicians. Third, there is a clear reflective moral situation in that the new generation must decide between traditional loyalty to the city's leaders and active resistance to those leaders in the name of free and wise governance. Each of these elements is consistent with Dewey's account of the kind of pervasive moral situation that envelops an entire community. What then makes it a *rhetorical* situation is that its resolution demands that rhetoric must be employed: "I have no choice but to speak." Thus, Thrasymachus responded to a problematic rhetorical situation by creating rhetorical discourse that addressed an audience of citizens and attempted to overcome constraints through the arts of language.

However, there is a problem. What if there *was* no exigence and Thrasymachus was merely being a rabble-rouser? In other words, what of those rhetoricians, like McCarthy, who merely play the role of Chicken Little and run about trying to persuade us that the sky is falling? This issue makes up the core of the many critical commentaries of Bitzer's conception of the rhetorical situation, as in Brinton's comment that "it seems to minimize the creative role of the rhetoric in defining the situation for his audience."<sup>131</sup> Moreover, if we define rhetoric as that which responds to rhetorical situations, we encounter the puzzling problem of language that

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<sup>130</sup> Fragment DK 85B1 quoted in Waterfield.

<sup>131</sup> Brinton, 242.

alters reality even if it may not have responded to any “objective” situation that existed outside of the rhetor’s language. One thinks, for instance, of the case of modern propaganda that can create an entire worldview that has little existential reference beyond our imaginations. As Walter Lippmann observed, “the manufacture of consent” has reached new heights in the age of the mass media.<sup>132</sup> Not only is the symbol “both a mechanism of solidarity, and a mechanism of exploitation,” but “the symbol is also an instrument by which a few can fatten on many, deflect criticism, and seduce men into facing agony for objects they do not understand.”<sup>133</sup> And Lippmann was not the first to point out the power of the symbol. The sophist Gorgias made a similar observation in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.:

The spoken word is a mighty lord, and for all that it is insubstantial and imperceptible it has superhuman effects. It can put an end to fear, do away with distress, generate happiness, and increase pity...So many people have persuaded or do persuade so many others about so many things by forging false speech! For if everyone could remember everything that had happened in the past, could understand everything that was happening in the present, and could foresee everything that would happen in the future, the spoken word would not have the power that it has. But as things are, it is not easy to remember the past or keep one’s mind on the present or divine the future, and so in most cases most people make their beliefs the counselors of their minds.<sup>134</sup>

How, then, can the concept of the rhetorical situation account for such a phenomena?  
And what good is rhetorical theory if it cannot?

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<sup>132</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1922), 158.

<sup>133</sup> Lippmann, 151.

<sup>134</sup> Fragment DK 82B11 quoted in Waterfield.

Our answer requires that we return to the Greek concept which has the clearest affinity with the modern concept of the rhetorical situation—that of *kairos*<sup>135</sup> which is variously interpreted as “opportune moment,” “due measure,” or “right occasion.”<sup>136</sup> The importance of *kairos* for rhetoric therefore “lies in the fact that the perception of an oration’s timeliness adds to its force and effectiveness. Conversely, an oration is thought to be forceful and effective on account of its timeliness.”<sup>137</sup> As Poulakos explains, most discussions of *kairos* locate “the meaning of the term outside the actual production of the oration” such that *kairos* “either precedes or succeeds the speech itself.”<sup>138</sup> Either an orator recognizes the opportune moment and speaks, or the audience hears a speech and then realizes, after the fact, that the oration was timely. However, both of these interpretations assume the same “objective” stance toward the situation that has caused such difficulty for Bitzer. They ignore how timeliness can work within a text and how an orator can “create an impression of timeliness in the audience.”<sup>139</sup> Therefore, as long as we assume that the *kairotic* “situation” is ontologically distinct from either the *experiences* of an audience or the *language* of that experience, we fall back into the same problems over objectivity and casual primacy.

A way out of this binary is pointed to by Poulakos’s interpretation of *kairos* that emerges from his analysis of Gorgias’s extant oration, *Encomium of Helen* (from which the above quotation is taken). In his essay, Poulakos shows how Gorgias’s oration sought to create a sense of timeliness in his speech as an *intentional rhetorical strategy* in order to overturn a generally

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<sup>135</sup> This relationship between the two concepts has already been observed by Mark Joseph Porrovecchio, “Rethinking the Constraints: Examination, Application, and Revision of ‘The Rhetorical Situation,’” *The Speech Communication Annual* 12 (1998): 43-65. Similarly, Brinton has pointed out the similarity to the Roman concept of *decorum* in “Situation in the Theory of Rhetoric.”

<sup>136</sup> John Poulakos, “*Kairos* in Gorgias’ Rhetorical Compositions,” in *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis*, ed. Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin, 89-96 (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 89.

<sup>137</sup> John Poulakos, “*Kairos* in Gorgias’ Rhetorical Compositions,” 89.

<sup>138</sup> John Poulakos, “*Kairos* in Gorgias’ Rhetorical Compositions,” 89.

<sup>139</sup> John Poulakos, “*Kairos* in Gorgias’ Rhetorical Compositions,” 90.

held traditional belief concerning Helen's blame for the Trojan War. Poulakos argues that by placing the responsibility for her actions on the power of Paris's seductive words rather than Helen's depravity, Gorgias "shows that traditional beliefs can be brought under the force of *kairos* in and through the creation of new arguments."<sup>140</sup> Gorgias employs *kairos* not by acting "appropriately," but by violating all norms of propriety;<sup>141</sup> for only through such a violation could Gorgias dislodge a commonly held view by using language to look at an "object" (the person of Helen) in an entirely new way. Thus, Poulakos's reading of Gorgias shows how rhetoric can create a sense of timeliness by using surprising arguments to transform our understanding of our environment in such a way that it might literally *create* the experience of a rhetorical situation in an audience.

Returning to Dewey, we see a clear example of the transformative nature of language in a seemingly mundane example—the teaching of morality to a child. Remember that for Dewey, "every act has *potential* moral significance, because it is, through its consequences, part of a larger whole of behavior."<sup>142</sup> The purpose of moral training is to reveal, through such language as parental praise or scolding, the potential significance of one's actions. For instance, "the hungry child snatches at food. To him the act is innocent and natural. But he brings down reproach upon himself...He is made aware that his act has other connections than the one he had assigned to it: the immediate satisfaction of hunger. He learns to look at single acts not as single but as related links in a chain."<sup>143</sup> Had the child's parents not used language to give his actions meaning (or, alternately, had they merely scolded him without explanation), then the child would not face any moral choice. There would only be an appetite satisfied or thwarted. However, by

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<sup>140</sup> John Poulakos, "Kairos in Gorgias' Rhetorical Compositions," 96.

<sup>141</sup> John Poulakos thus contrasts *kairos* with the Greek concept of *to prepon*, or "the appropriate." See John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, 60-64.

<sup>142</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 169.

<sup>143</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 169.

placing his isolated action within a larger moral sphere, the parents help transform what had been a merely an *event* into a moral *situation*—the child must now choose between satisfying immediate desires and sacrificing those desires for the larger good. Where there had been simply impulse, language has thrust upon him a *choice*.

In interpreting this example, however, one must not slip back into dualist assumptions about *perception* and *reality*. The child was not operating under false perceptions that were corrected and made “real” by the parent. Rather, the entire process must be interpreted through Dewey’s naturalism. First, the principle of *continuity* allows us to escape from the traps of atomism or solipsism. Not only are all events continuous in space and through time (thus allowing the parent to point to indirect consequences of immediate acts), but human beings are continuous with their environment (thus allowing the parent to recognize and then demonstrate how the child is a part of a larger world). Second, the *transactional* character of language shows how it can transform *events* into *objects* (or situations). The child, before being scolded, only experienced the *event* of reaching for food which was dominated by its immediate qualitiveness. However, after language had transformed the food and his act of grabbing into “objects” with definable properties and consequences, the child’s experience with those objects was altered. The event was turned into a moral situation. Lastly, the idea of transaction in general shows how these meanings and “objects” do not merely exist in the “mind,” but are parts of the experienced world that themselves have practical consequences, as when the child’s realization culminates in a new event—he withdraws his hand.

From these examples, it is clear the rhetoric has just as much capacity to create situations as it does to respond to them. Furthermore, it is clear that rhetoric is neither a mirror of the world nor the author of the world. Rhetoric, like all language, is simply one aspect of our environment

that functions to invest practical meaning into the world of qualitative events as we experience them. As Dewey explains, “language is a natural function of human association; and its consequences react upon other events, physical and human, giving them meaning or significance. Events that are objects or significant exist in a context where they acquire new ways of operation and new properties.”<sup>144</sup> However, nothing demands that the new meanings or objects created by language be meaningful or objective, just as nothing demands that moral situations be scientifically verifiable for them to exist *as experienced situations*. The moral situation faced by the child who wishes to be good for Santa Claus is still a situation even if Santa Claus does not exist. It is only when we define situations as *external* to human experience that such epistemological problems arise.

With this understanding, we can see that the major flaw in Bitzer’s conception was that he failed to properly distinguish between rhetoric and the rhetorical situation. His problem was therefore not so much the answer he gave, but the question he asked. Bitzer thought he had to define the situations in which rhetoric was *created*, so his answer implied that rhetoric was only that form of language that responded to rhetorical situations “in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question.”<sup>145</sup> This implicit definition seemed to rule out that kind of rhetorical discourse made by snake oil salesmen (and their many modern manifestations) whose strategy is to sell you a phony cure only after convincing you that you are sick with a phony disease. However, a rhetorical situation is not necessarily a situation in which rhetoric is *created* any more than a moral situation is a situation in which morals are created (although both are conceivably possibilities). In other words, we act morally any time we act based on judgments of what is for the Good. We do not require moral situations to arise for

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<sup>144</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 137.

<sup>145</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 5.

moral action to occur. Moral situations are simply problematic situations in which moral inquiry is required to guide belief and behavior. Likewise, we act rhetorically any time we create a “discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action.”<sup>146</sup> Sometimes rhetoric responds to situations, sometimes it creates them, and sometimes it occurs without any clear situation at all, as is the case with most modern forms of advertising and public relations.

What, then, *is* a rhetorical situation from a Deweyan perspective? The answer is this: *a rhetorical situation is a problematic situation characterized by tension, uncertainty, conflict, unease, or indecisiveness, which creates a sense of urgency which lends force and effectiveness to timely rhetorical discourse.* In other words, the rhetorical situation does not provide an origin story for rhetoric. Rather, it provides an explanation for its “force and effectiveness.” After all, problematic situations are not the only kind of situations in which rhetoric is created or applied. Sometimes, in fact, rhetoric occurs purely because it is the appropriate thing to happen, such as when the Best Man gives his wedding toast or when the President gives the State of the Union address. However, this kind of rhetoric is largely formal and has little “force and effectiveness” compared to the moment of the wedding proposal or the declaration of war. Without a feeling of *kairos* to give language its power, rhetoric retreats into the art of *belles lettres* and the manipulation of tropes and figures.

The key to understanding the significance of the rhetorical situation is thus by defining it *functionally*. Rather than talking about the correct “fit” between rhetoric and its situations from an epistemological perspective, we should talk about how the rhetorical situation functions from a pragmatic perspective. Once we do so, we can see that the rhetor’s job is threefold. First, the rhetor must recognize those situations which have the potential to be transformed into rhetorical situations; second, the rhetor must create a discourse that generates a sense of shared experience

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<sup>146</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 4.



in the audience that they are *in* a rhetorical situation in the immediate present; and third, the rhetor must articulate a clear path of action that the audience can follow to resolve that situation in a timely manner.<sup>147</sup> For the power of rhetoric does not lie in pretty words and phrases, although these are undeniably a factor. It lies in the ability to answer the question “Why should I act thus and not otherwise?”<sup>148</sup> But to answer this question requires that the question be asked, and this in turn requires the audience to feel they are in the presence of a rhetorical situation that presents some urgent conflict or problem to be solved. Therefore, in the end, the defining characteristic of a rhetorical situation is that it demands of us to make a real *choice, here and now*, one that we feel deep within ourselves that requires some commitment. Once again showing his rhetorical sensibility, Dewey defines choice the following way:

What then is choice? Simply hitting in imagination upon an object which furnishes an adequate stimulus to the recovery of overt action. Choice is made as soon as some habit, or some combination of elements of habits and impulse, finds a way fully open. Then energy is released. The mind is made up, composed, unified. As long as deliberation pictures shoals or rocks or troublesome gales as marking the route of a contemplated voyage. Deliberation goes on. But when the various factors in action fit harmoniously together, when imagination finds no annoying hindrance, when there is a picture of open seas, filled sails and favoring winds, the voyage is definitely entered upon.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> These steps are similar to Consigny’s vision of the rhetorical situation in which the rhetor “discloses a new ‘gestalt’ for interpreting and acting in the situation, and thereby offers the audience a new perspective to view the situation.” As Consigny also draws from Dewey, this should not be surprising, and much of Consigny’s view is consistent with my own. The addition I am making is in emphasizing the importance of *kairos* in a rhetorical situation, where Consigny tends to focus simply on the constructive character of rhetoric as an art of topics. See Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 179.

<sup>148</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 163.

<sup>149</sup> John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983; original work published 1922), 134.

Thus, it is the rhetor's job not just to paint a picture of open seas, but to first stir the waters of habit and belief that generally keep us traveling the same routes. McCarthy, for instance, could not prosecute communists until he created a situation in which communist infiltration was an immediate crisis. He thus used rhetoric to create a rhetorical situation to which he subsequently responded.<sup>150</sup> But the same also goes for Roosevelt after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The nation required him to take an indeterminate situation and make it a rhetorical situation, to conceptualize it in terms of a choice that the people could understand and rally behind. Following Dewey's transactional naturalism, there is no event, object, or situation whose meaning is there on its face. The meanings of things are always in the context of our experience, which is in turn influenced by the arts of language and rhetoric. The final judge of meaning, however, is not "mind" or "nature" or "language," but *practice*. As Dewey explains, "that which guides us truly is true—demonstrated capacity for such guidance is precisely what is meant by truth. The adverb 'truly' is more fundamental than either the adjective, *true*, or the noun, *truth*. An adverb expresses a way, a mode of acting. Now an idea or conception is a claim or injunction or plan to act in a certain way as the way to arrive at the clearing up of a specific situation."<sup>151</sup> A rhetorical situation is simply that kind of situation that is particularly suited to being "cleared up" using the arts of rhetoric, and a true rhetoric is that rhetoric which guides us truly. In the final section, I will explore how this guidance happens.

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<sup>150</sup> I might also add the long, sad, and ongoing history of religious oppression that relies on pervasive representations of what happens to sinners in the afterlife should they not obediently follow church dogma. Thus, they rely on a fictional situation to restrict practice and thought. It is a sad commentary on human nature that we still rely on threats of a depraved existence in the next life to maintain the state of depravity in this one. Dewey felt similarly: "Christianity has been committed to a separation of sheep and goats; the saved and the lost; the elect and the mass...I cannot understand how any realization of the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs is possible without surrender of the conception of the basic division to which supernatural Christianity is committed. Whether or no we are, save in some metaphorical sense, all brothers, we are at least all in the same boat traversing the same turbulent ocean." The power of rhetoric may have helped create this problem, but I do not see any other means of liberating ourselves from it except a better and "truer" rhetoric. See John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1986; original work published 1934), 56.

<sup>151</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 170.

## 6. RHETORIC AS *TECHNĒ*: JOHN DEWEY'S NATURALISTIC RHETORICAL THEORY

In his later work, John Dewey articulates a form of naturalism that allows us to see rhetoric as an art of productive transformation—as a *technē* in the naturalistic sense of transforming natural meanings and events. It is this naturalistic perspective that characterizes our final Deweyan theory of rhetoric. In his early works, rhetoric was equally productive, but it was less an art of productive *transformation* than an art of productive *realization* of the universal consciousness of Absolute Idealism. Thus, his idealist rhetoric is not a *technē* in the sense of an art that adds something new to a world capable of true growth of change. Nor is the instrumental rhetoric of his middle works fully a *technē* either, but is more of a “skill” directed toward the cultivation of *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom. Although this emphasis on *phronēsis* is carried over into his later works, his middle work deemphasizes ontological concerns and thus can not adequately account for rhetoric’s transformative power. Only in his later works does Dewey successfully piece together an ontology that can perform this task in the form of his naturalistic humanism, an ontology that provides enough resources for constructing a comprehensive rhetorical theory that can account for the qualities of language that Dewey praised in this poem:

Language, fourth dimension of the mind,  
Wherein to round square things are curled;  
Or turn unbroken inside out;  
Firm certitudes melt to doubt,  
And doubtful things, a fertile seed  
Tho not existent, pregnant breed  
Falsities of those who say sooth,

Lush growing i' the crops of truth—  
Simples to turn Men's minds about  
Peasant to prophet, philosopher to lout,  
Making wise the humble, and sage a fool,  
Stone to gods, and heaven t'earth's footstool.<sup>1</sup>

Once again, to avoid misinterpreting Dewey as a Kantian or an idealist, it is important to understand what he means in praising the power of language to turn “stone to gods, and heaven t'earth's footstool.” Dewey does not mean that simply by saying or thinking something we bring about existential change. As he points out, such a claim would mean that the power of language is “miraculous,”<sup>2</sup> and to say something is miraculous is also to say that it cannot be explained. In terms of *technē*, however, “it is not thought as idealism defines thought which exercises the reconstructive function. Only action, interaction, can change or remake objects. The analogy of the skilled artist still holds.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, applying the analogy, the power of rhetoric lies not in the useless idealist conception that language (or thought) is a supernatural power that creates the world; its power lies in the practical naturalistic conception that language is an art that transforms our understanding of the world in such a way that produces existential change by encouraging new forms of practice. The transformative ontology behind *technē* thus assumes that “inventions of new agencies and instruments create new ends; they create new consequences which stir men to form new purposes.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, language is responsible for transformation of stones to gods, peasants to prophets, philosophers to louts, and heavens to footstools not because

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<sup>1</sup> Ninety-five of Dewey's poems have survived. For the most part, Dewey discarded his poetry, but some were discovered in his office wastebasket and in his desk when he left Columbia University. Without Dewey's knowledge, the poems were collected by the librarian and preserved in the University's Columbian collection. They have been edited and published in Jo Ann Boydston, ed., *The Poems of John Dewey* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1977). This particular poem was the first half of #75 and appeared on pages 54-55 in Boydston's book.

<sup>2</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 126.

<sup>3</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 126.

<sup>4</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 83.

it is miraculous, but because it forms, sustains, and ultimately has the potential to alter the beliefs, institutions, practices, and habits that give all of these “objects” meaning and practical value within human communities. As an historical example, Dewey refers to the drawing of a new map of the world after Columbus’s voyage:

It was not simply states of consciousness or ideas inside the heads of men that were altered when America was actually discovered; the modification was one in the public meaning of the world in which men publicly act...Changing the meaning of the world effected an existential change. The map of the world is something more than a piece of linen hung on a wall. A new world does not appear without profound transformations in the old one...A potential object of further exploration and discoveries now existed in Europe itself; a source of gold; an opportunity for adventure; an outlet for crowded and depressed populations, an abode for exiles and the discounted, an appeal to energy and invention: in short, an agency of new events and fruitions, at home as well as abroad. In some degree, every genuine discovery creates some such transformation of both the meanings and the existences of nature.<sup>5</sup>

Although Dewey rarely uses rhetorical examples to make his points, his naturalistic perspective on language and *technē* provide rich resources for rhetorical theory. After all, the analogy of the “map” works both ways. Carey, for instance, uses the analogy of the map to explain the function of communication, observing that, as one symbolic form of communication, “the map stands as a representation of an environment capable of clarifying a problematic situation. It is capable of guiding behavior and simultaneously transforming undifferentiated space into configured—that is, known, apprehended, understood—space.”<sup>6</sup> Carey’s use of

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<sup>5</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 125.

<sup>6</sup> Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 27.

Dewey's language is unmistakable, and it shows how fruitfully Dewey's work can be applied to understanding the art of communication. Therefore, in this final chapter, I will construct a naturalistic rhetorical theory based on Dewey's later works that account for the scope and function of rhetoric as a *technē*, or an art of productive transformation. This rhetorical theory includes sections on the nature of habits and impulses, the relationship of language to thought, the naturalistic interpretation of emotion, intelligence, imagination and will, the characteristics of art and science, the quality of aesthetic experience, and the explanation of how rhetoric operates as a *technē* given these components. I will thus argue that Dewey's naturalism culminates in the view that *rhetoric is the art of transforming the meanings and existences of nature through the medium of persuasive discourse.*

## 6.1. "WILL," RECONSTRUCTED

Any rhetorical theory that accounts for the process of persuasion must begin by defining the nature of the "self" that is both capable of and subject to persuasion. Such an account is necessary to prevent falling back into what Goankar calls the "humanist paradigm" of rhetorical persuasion<sup>7</sup>, or the familiar "agency-centered model of intentional persuasion" which "marginalizes structures that govern human agency" and reduces rhetorical practice to "the contents of the rhetor's consciousness" (and, by analogy, the contents of the audience's consciousness that is being persuaded).<sup>8</sup> One manifestation of such a paradigm was Dewey's

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<sup>7</sup> Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science," in *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*, ed. Alan G. Gross and William M. Keith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Gaonkar, 52.

idealist rhetorical theory that grounded both rhetorical invention and rhetorical persuasion in the actions of a sovereign and transcendental Will. Thus, despite his many departures from Kant, Dewey's early work shared with Kant the assumption not only that we have the free will to decide whether to persuade or be persuaded, but also that moral character was derived from the comparison of our moral choices with a transcendental moral ideal. The problem, however, is that in such theories where the "self" and its activities are effectively outside the natural world and immune to empirical investigation, rhetorical persuasion is rendered mysterious and moral character becomes indefinable.

As I have noted in Chapter 3, Dewey finally realized the extent to which his own work embodied these flaws when he read James's *Principles of Psychology* in 1890. According to Dewey, James "used the biological connection as a means of breaking down divisions within experience that previous psychology had built up—the division into separate compartments of knowledge, emotion, and action or 'will.'"<sup>9</sup> It was James who helped Dewey break away from idealist conceptions of self and turn toward a more naturalistic account in which "'will,' like 'interests,' denotes a function, not an intrinsic force or structure."<sup>10</sup> In this latter definition, the method of identifying "will" is no different than the one we use to determine "courage" or "generosity" or "depravity"; we analyze the sum total of one's behaviors and extract from them a general quality and disposition. To possess "will" is simply to possess the "unity of impulse, desire, and thought which anticipates and plans,"<sup>11</sup> which means that "will or character means intelligent forethought of ends and resolute endeavor to achieve them. It cannot be conceived

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<sup>9</sup> John Dewey, "William James as Empiricist," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 15, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989; original work published 1942), 13.

<sup>10</sup> John Dewey, "Corporate Personality," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1925), 31.

<sup>11</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 176.

apart from ends purposed and desired.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, trees, insects, dogs, or babies do not possess “will” because their actions are not related to ends that have been constructed using forethought and intelligence. They simply act in response to immediate needs and impulses as filtered through instinct or unreflective habit.

However, the idea that “will” is a function of behavior only acquires its full significance when it is tied to the belief that the “self” is capable of growth or change. Otherwise, “will” would merely be a function of a static entity. We see the significance of this relationship by returning to the question of Plato’s *Protagoras*: “Can virtue be taught?” The answer to this question has immense rhetorical implications. On the one hand, if we side with Socrates and believe that virtue *cannot* be taught (based on the aristocratic assumption that our characters are predetermined from birth<sup>13</sup>) then the art of rhetoric is rendered impotent; without a self capable of being changed, then rhetoric loses its transformative potential.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, if we side with Protagoras that virtue *can* be taught (based on the democratic assumption that human beings are capable of transforming both themselves and their communities through the application of the arts) then rhetoric becomes one of the most important of those arts—it becomes the primary art of productive transformation. That Dewey once again sided with Protagoras is evident from Dewey’s account of “selfhood”:

Except as the outcome of arrested development, there is no such thing as a fixed, ready-made, finished self. Every living self causes acts and is itself caused in return by what it does. All voluntary action is a remaking of self, since it creates new desires, instigates to

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<sup>12</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1908), 246.

<sup>13</sup> In traditional Greek, “*arete*” when used without qualification denoted those qualities of human excellence which made a man a natural leader in his community, and hitherto it had been believed to depend on certain natural or even divine gifts which were the mark of good birth and breeding.” See Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> As Guthrie observes, if Protagoras “admitted that virtue (to use the common English translation of *arête*) is a natural endowment of the whole human race, rather than something acquired by training, he would argue himself out of his job.” See Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 65.



new modes of endeavor, brings to light new conditions which institute new ends. Our personal identity is found in the thread of continuous development which binds together these changes. In the strictest sense, it is impossible for the self to stand still; it is becoming, and becoming for the better or the worse. It is in the quality of becoming that virtue resides. We set up this and that end to be reached, but the end is growth itself.<sup>15</sup>

As with Protagoras, then, Dewey's concept of virtue, or *aretē*, is not defined by comparing one's inner "soul" to an ideal form, but is defined by comparing the sum of one's intentional actions (one's "will") by reference to the norms of one's community. In taking this position, Dewey aligns himself with Aristotle, noting that "as Aristotle said, the goodness of a good man shines through his deeds."<sup>16</sup> These deeds, however, are not to be judged in-themselves, but in reference to the customs and mores of a particular community. Thus, Dewey's concept of ethical character is reminiscent of the Greek conception of *ethos*. As Dewey observes, *ethos* had a dual meaning in Greek usage. "The terms 'ethics' and 'ethical' are derived from a Greek word *ethos* which originally meant customs, usages, especially those belonging to some group as distinguished from another, and later came to mean disposition, character."<sup>17</sup> A person established *ethos*, therefore, by developing a reputation for performing deeds that upheld the virtues of one's community. And as Aristotle points out in the *Rhetoric*, a speaker's *ethos* could then be constituted and applied within a speech as "the most effective means of persuasion,"<sup>18</sup> for "we believe good men for fully and readily than others."<sup>19</sup>

However, Aristotle tended to assume that the traditional customs, virtues, and habits of Athenian life were universal and fixed. Dewey parted with Aristotle on this point and sided with

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<sup>15</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 306.

<sup>16</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 287.

<sup>17</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a15.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a6.

Protagoras in acknowledging that sometimes ethical norms needed to be altered when needs arose. Protagoras, like Aristotle, accepted the fact that ethics and wisdom are defined within a human community, but Protagoras's ontology of Becoming led him to conclude that what was good and wise can also change. Thus, for Protagoras, "whatever in any city is regarded as just and admirable is just and admirable, in that city and for so long as that convention maintains itself; but the wise man replaces each pernicious convention by a wholesome one, making this both be and seem just."<sup>20</sup> Protagoras's view is echoed in Dewey's concept of the reflective moral situation that occurs when customary morality breaks down and requires the modern version of "wise men" to step forward and propose new ways of acting and thinking to adapt to changing situations. The fact that, historically, most of these wise men and women have employed rhetoric to achieve this task thus calls our attention to the importance of this art.

Thus, against his idealistic conceptions, Dewey's the naturalistic definitions of "will" and the social nature of moral character show how the development of the self is a matter of practice within a larger community that has the capacity to change over time. The individual "will" is neither ontologically separate from the social "will," nor is it merely a partial manifestation of a universal consciousness. Rather, the "individual" and the "social" are both parts of a larger natural environment that is constantly growing and changing. "Just as 'individual' is not one thing, but is a blanket term for the immense variety of specific reactions, habits, dispositions, and powers of human nature that are evoked, and confirmed under the influences of associated life, so with the term 'social.' Society is one word, but infinitely many things. It covers all the ways in which by associating together men share their experiences, and build up common interests and aims."<sup>21</sup> Rhetoric is therefore not something external which imposes itself upon (or derives from)

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<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 167c.

<sup>21</sup> Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 194.

internal states of consciousness, but is one form of practice within a common environment in which “interests and aims” are created, criticized, and maintained. However, we have not yet touched on the most important component of the “self” that Dewey describes, and which ultimately provides the naturalistic alternative to the sovereign consciousness of the agency-model of persuasion—that of *habit*.

## 6.2. HABIT AND IMPULSE

Although present in his early work, the concept of *habit* in Dewey’s later work takes on a much more prominent role and most fully embodies the principle of naturalism, particularly in his definitions of *character* and *will*. In Dewey’s early work, character and will are defined in terms of concrete actuality and abstract potentiality—character is actualized will, and will is potential character. Habits are the means by which will become character. Habits thus function as a sort of concrete universal, as a way of bridging the worlds of the real and the ideal. In his later work, however, there is no such ontological divide; there is only the natural environment as it changes over time. “All conduct is *interaction*<sup>22</sup> between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social.”<sup>23</sup> Habits are the simply the accumulated results of these interactions. “They are interactions of elements contributed by the make-up of an individual with elements supplied by the out-door world.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, habits are reservoirs of experience that come to represent the life history of an individual in relation to its environment, and there is no distinct

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<sup>22</sup> By “interaction,” Dewey means “transaction.” He did not properly distinguish between the terms until very late in his writing.

<sup>23</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 16.

character or will apart from habit. In fact, to the extent that we define the self in biological terms, habit *is* character and will.<sup>25</sup>

All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word will, they are will. They form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity.<sup>26</sup>

If, indeed, habits “rule our thoughts” as Dewey claims, then any command of rhetoric must necessitate a keen understanding of how habits function, how they originate, and most importantly, how they can be changed. I will take each of these questions in order. In terms of function, Dewey’s description of habit is continuous with his emphasis on *technē*. For Dewey, “habits are arts. They involve skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning or craft, and objective materials. They assimilate objective energies, and eventuate in command of environment.”<sup>27</sup> Habits are neither mere repetitions nor thoughtless actions. Rather, they are methodical ways of acting in response to certain problems or tasks that involve physical as well as mental processes. Thus, “habit does not preclude the use of thought, but it determines the channels within which it operates. Thinking is secreted in the interstices of habits.”<sup>28</sup> For instance, “the sailor, miner, fisherman and farmer think, but their thoughts fall within the framework of accustomed occupations and relationships.”<sup>29</sup> Likewise, one can also talk in terms of moral habits, political habits, religious habits, or artistic habits.

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<sup>25</sup> “Character is the interpenetration of habits, If each habit existed in an insulated compartment and operated without affecting or being affected by others, character would not exist.” See Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 29-30.

<sup>26</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 235.

<sup>29</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 235.

Most importantly for our understanding of rhetoric, however, is that one can also talk in term of habits of thought and opinion. Consistent with his rejection of mind/body dualism, Dewey sees thought and action inextricably bound together, for “thought which does not exist within ordinary habits of action lacks means of execution.”<sup>30</sup> However, once habits of thought become formalized as opinions and incorporated into habits of action, they become almost “second nature.”<sup>31</sup> Consequently, “habit is even more solidly entrenched in beliefs, in modes of thinking and understanding, than in outer actions.”<sup>32</sup> One of the reasons for this fact is that stability of habits of belief gives us a sense of peace and security by assuring us that the world not only makes sense, but makes sense in such a way as to justify our familiar practices. “The influence of habit is decisive because all distinctively human action has to be learned, and the very heart, blood and sinews of learning is creation of habitudes. Habits bind us to orderly and established ways of action because they generate ease, skill and interest in things to which we have grown used and because they instigate fear to walk in different ways, and because they leave us incapacitated for the trial of them.”<sup>33</sup> Habits of thought and habits of action thus positively reinforce one another; habits of thought envision the world in such a way as to enable habits of action that actualize or sustain that vision of the world.

The conservative tendency of habit tends to coalesce within a community and formalize into *custom*, or those traditional habits that any social group instills in its members through ritual and education. According to Dewey, “Habit is energy organized in certain channels. When interfered with, it swells as resentment and as an avenging force. To say that it will be obeyed,

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<sup>30</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 237.

<sup>32</sup> John Dewey, “Outlawing Peace by Discussing War,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1928), 173.

<sup>33</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 335.

that custom makes law, that *nomos* is lord of all, is after all only to say that habit is habit.”<sup>34</sup> In this way, Dewey is very close to Aristotle, who saw very clearly the significance of habit. As Randall observes, “a ‘habit’ or *hexis* for Aristotle is a kind of ‘second nature,’ an acquired power: like human ‘nature’ itself, a habit is a determinate power to act in a specific way.”<sup>35</sup> For Aristotle, then, habits literally “make” the man. Consequently, we find Aristotle sounding very much like Dewey in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he says that “moral excellence comes about as a result of habit,”<sup>36</sup> and that “it makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference.”<sup>37</sup> For habits not only make the man, they make the *polis*, and as a result it is the role of the legislator to form good habits in its citizens.<sup>38</sup>

Yet here we encounter the problem of rhetoric—if habit is so resilient, how can even a “wise man” like Protagoras hope to change them with only “the power of words”? The answer to this question lies in the relationship of habit to what Dewey called “impulse.” For Dewey, “the word impulse suggests something primitive, yet loose, undirected, initial.”<sup>39</sup> As an example, Dewey points to the case of a newborn baby whose experience has not yet been socialized and exists largely as a flux of “inchoate and scattered impulses.”<sup>40</sup> The baby does not know what it wants or how to get it, but only feels a mix of biological urges and unformed emotions that usually find their outlet in the baby’s one dominant form of expression—crying. Impulse thus acts as a dialectical partner to habit, which suggests something cultured, formal, and purposeful. Where habit is a well-worn path, impulse is a starting point. Consequently, as we grow older we

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<sup>34</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Randall, *Aristotle*, 254.

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a17.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b23-25.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b3.

<sup>39</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 75f.

<sup>40</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 68.

tend to prefer the security of the path over the uncertainty of starting a whole new journey. As starting points, however, impulses have one great advantage over habit—they have the freedom to move or be moved in any direction, and thus they provide the potential energy necessary to chart new paths of thought and action. “Impulses are the pivots upon which the re-organization of activities turn, they are agencies of deviation, for giving new directions to old habits and changing their quality.”<sup>41</sup>

Impulses, however, do not have “agency” of their own. As starting points, they are just that—*points*. They are moments of tension that build up energy that seeks release through some form of “linear” behavior that contains some purpose, either productive (like a nervous woman who goes for a run) or expressive (like a depressed man who writes in his diary). Without such a translation into some form of behavior, impulse merely festers or dissolves. Thus, “impulse is a source, an indispensable source, of liberation; but only as it is employed in giving habits pertinence and freshness does it liberate power.”<sup>42</sup> Dewey has us imagine, for instance, a person who feels the impulse of anger. Without some outlet, anger is merely “a physical spasm, a blind dispersive burst of wasteful energy.”<sup>43</sup> However, if this person is a poet who sits down to try to make sense of this feeling, anger then “gets quality, significance, when it becomes a smouldering sullenness, an annoying interruption, a peevish irritation, a murderous revenge, a blazing indignation.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, the bare impulse of “anger” is given purpose and significance by being translated into language and placed within the realm of socially accepted meanings that can be understood and acted upon. Another rhetorically rich example Dewey offers us comes in the form of “fear.”

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<sup>41</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 67.

<sup>42</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 65.

<sup>44</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 66.

Any impulse may become organized into almost any disposition according to the way it interacts with surroundings. Fear may become abject cowardice, prudent caution, reverence for superiors or respect for equals; an agency for credulous swallowing of absurd superstitions or for wary skepticism. A man may be chiefly afraid of the spirits of his ancestors, of officials, of arousing the disapproval of his associates, of being deceived, of fresh air, or of Bolshevism. The actual outcome depends upon how the impulse of fear is interwoven with other impulses.<sup>45</sup>

The rhetorical implications of this analysis are enormous. One thinks, for example, of McCarthy's ability to manipulate the impulse of fear to justify his witch-hunt for Communists or Martin Luther King's ability to transform the impulse of anger into an aggressive demand for social change. The example of King, however, also reveals another important characteristic of social habits—their conflicting character. The lasting power of King's "I Have a Dream" speech is its ability to place King's "dream" in the context of the *American* dream and thus reveal the hypocrisy of American culture by judging it by its own professed principles. King therefore contrasts the habits of freedom with the habits of racism and then channels our impulses through the path of the former. King thus provides proof of Dewey's assertion that "no adult environment is all of one piece. The more complex a culture is, the more certain it is to include habits formed on differing, even conflicting patterns. Each custom may be rigid, unintelligent in itself, and yet this rigidity may cause it to wear upon others. The resulting attrition may release impulse for new adventures."<sup>46</sup> In other words, if each impulse only had one habit through which it could be expressed, then there would be no possibility for change. Only because "any self is capable of

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<sup>45</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 90.



including within itself a number of inconsistent selves, of unharmonized dispositions”<sup>47</sup> do we have the ability to sometimes turn *this* way, and sometimes turn *that*, depending on which self, and which disposition, is being expressed or appealed to at the time.

In terms of rhetoric, the relationship of impulses to habits takes us full circle back to the importance of the rhetorical situation. Recall that *a rhetorical situation is a problematic situation characterized by tension, uncertainty, conflict, unease, or indecisiveness, which creates a sense of urgency which lends force and effectiveness to timely rhetorical discourse*. The analysis of impulse and habit reveal more about how these situations can come into being. As long as our habits operate without resistance, there is no demand for change and no impulse that would provide the energy for change. However, when habits “operate in a situation to which they are not accustomed, in an unusual situation, a new adjustment is required. Hence there is shock, and an accompanying perception of dissolving and reforming meaning...together with suspense as to what it will be.”<sup>48</sup> Rhetoric thus plays a dual function. On the one hand, rhetoric can create situations by transforming the meaning of one’s environment such that old habits no longer seem up to the task of fulfilling their old functions. This transformation then creates the impulse of “shock,” which opens the possibility for liberating new thoughts and actions. On the other hand, rhetoric can respond to situations (including the ones it may have just created) by redirecting impulses into new channels created in part by modifying or recombining already established habits. The result is *change with continuity*, or a new form of practice that nonetheless draws from the traditions of the past. In the sections that follow, I will explore the different ways in which rhetoric transacts with individuals to bring about such changes.

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<sup>47</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 96.

<sup>48</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 235.

### 6.3. MIND, THOUGHT, AND LANGUAGE

So far we have seen how Dewey interpreted the Greek terms of *ethos* and *nomos*, but we have yet to examine how he approached the most significant of Greek words related to rhetoric—*logos*. In the original Greek, *logos* had a diverse and expansive meaning. Not only did it mean (a) words, language, and discourse, but it also meant (b) thought, reasoning, and mental processes, and (c) natural laws, structures, and formulas.<sup>49</sup> Although these meanings might seem unrelated, one needs only to remember that most of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, like Parmenides and Heraclitus, were proto-idealists who believed that beneath the flux of experience there was a divine law of the universe (the *Logos*) that could be understood by philosophical reasoning (*logos*) and then explained by a rational account (a *logos*).<sup>50</sup> By the time of the Sophists, however, the idealist definition had dropped out and was largely defined in terms of what Billig calls “word-making in general, and so can be used as a synonym for discourse, speech or talk.”<sup>51</sup> However, this definition did not exclude its relationship to mind or thinking. As Plato observes in the *Sophist*, “what we call thought is speech that occurs without the voice, inside the soul in conversation with itself.”<sup>52</sup> Given Dewey’s fondness for the Greeks, it is not surprising that he wished, again, to recover this latter definition of *logos*. Speaking of a criticism he had received on his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* from a man named Balz, he writes to his friend Bentley that

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<sup>49</sup> Kerferd, 83.

<sup>50</sup> Interestingly enough, this conception of *Logos* was effectively the one adopted by young Dewey in his conception of the universal consciousness. The only difference was that he believed the divine *Logos* required *action* for its true realization and could not, as Parmenides had suggested, be understood by pure reasoning alone. In this sense, Dewey was closer to Heraclitus.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Billig, *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1991), 75. I quote Billig here because his book is an interesting effort to put forward a rhetorical theory based on a synthesis of sophistic with modern psychology. In particular, he focuses on Protagoras’s concept of “dissoi logoi” to argue for the ability of people to have competing arguments going on in their minds at the same time. This is similar to Dewey’s conception, although Dewey emphasizes competing *nomoi* as well as *logoi*.

<sup>52</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, trans. Nicholas P. White, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 263e.

somehow, the net effect of the Balz episode was to sort of sour me on the word “Logos.” There is one good thing about the word, though. The Greeks were as good as possible with science and politics in the shape they were in then; they had at least an “instinct” for the relation of thought, mind, and language...Hurrah for “Logos” and damn logic, or what has been made of it.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, the connection between thought and language was not a new idea for Dewey. He had been making similar connections as far back as his early *Psychology*. In his later works he simply made it more explicit. As he writes in *Experience and Nature*, “soliloquy is the product and reflex of converse with others; social communication not an effect of soliloquy. If we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves.”<sup>54</sup> For Dewey, to learn the *logos* of social discourse is to also learn the *logos* of thinking. Moreover, our thinking, once made possible through language, does not then become itself a solipsistic exercise. We think so that we might create new *logoi* that feed back into social discourse. Thus “even the composition conceived in the head and, therefore, physically private, is public in its significant content, since it is conceived with reference to execution in a product that is perceptible and hence belongs to the common world.”<sup>55</sup> For Dewey, then, the Greek sense of *logos* as both language and mind was consistent with the principles of his naturalistic humanism.

To avoid falling back into idealist conceptions of self, however, it is important to remember that Dewey is not equating “mind” or “thought” with the nature of the “self.” In Dewey’s naturalism, the “self” is primarily a product of *behavior* and incorporates all of the mental, physical, and emotional aspects of experience. “Thought,” therefore, “is not a property of

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<sup>53</sup> John Dewey to Arthur F. Bentley, July 7, 1949, in Ratner, Altman, and Wheeler, eds. *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence 1932-1951*, 603.

<sup>54</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 135.

<sup>55</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 57.

something termed intellect or reason apart from nature. It is a mode of directed overt action.”<sup>56</sup> Our mental life is just one part of a larger whole and is more properly thought of as an *activity* rather than an *entity*. For Dewey, “mind is primarily a verb,” just as “‘to mind’ denotes an activity that is intellectual, to note something.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, “thinking is a process of inquiry, of looking into things, of investigating” and “occurs when things are uncertain or doubtful or problematic.”<sup>58</sup> Language, then, does not create the mind which creates the self; language creates the possibility for thinking and functions as a tool of the self for resolving problematic situations. Language and thought are both means of altering reality through the mediating power of *symbols*, not by direct application of energy to objective things. As Dewey explains:

By means of symbols, whether gestures, words or more elaborate constructions, we act without acting. That is, we perform experiments by means of symbols which have results which are themselves only symbolized, and which do not therefore commit us to actual or existential consequences. If a man starts a fire or insults a rival, effects follow; the die is cast. But if he rehearses the act in symbols in privacy, he can anticipate and appreciate its result. Then he can act or not act overtly on the basis of what is anticipated and is not there in fact. The invention or discovery of symbols is doubtless by far the single greatest event in the history of man. Without them, no intellectual advance is possible; with them, there is no limit set to intellectual development except inherent stupidity.<sup>59</sup>

Dewey’s interpretation of *logos*, therefore, is best understood in terms of his experimental logic, which emphasized the importance of *phronēsis* even within the most abstract logical inquiry. The reason Dewey wanted to “damn logic” was that its modern definition severed it

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<sup>56</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 133.

<sup>57</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 268.

<sup>58</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 155.

<sup>59</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 121.

from practical life and made it a study of tautologies. By his cheer, “Hurrah for ‘Logos’,” Dewey championed a return of logic to its practical roots and hoped to show how logical “thinking” was a method of resolving problematic situations through the experimental manipulations of signs and symbols associated with language. This method did not entail some occult process by which ideas became reality simply by being uttered. Rather, “to say that language is necessary for thinking is to say that signs are necessary. Thought deals not with bare things but with their *meanings*, their suggestions.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, Dewey’s concept of *logos* was thoroughly experimental and encouraged the invention of new ideas that could be applied and tested in practice. To return to our earlier discussion, then, language and communication makes possible our ability to turn events into objects, things with a meaning that can then be used to control the course of future events. These objects need not be merely “logical” or intellectual, however. They can also be emotional, practical, or aesthetic, and it is to these aspects of experience that we will now turn.

#### 6.4. EMOTION

The importance of emotions for the power of rhetoric has long been recognized. Aristotle most famously observed that “persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs the emotions.”<sup>61</sup> In Aristotle’s tripartite classification of the means of persuasion, he ranked *pathos*, or emotional appeal, alongside *ethos*, the “speaker’s personal character,”<sup>62</sup> and *logos*, or the “proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.”<sup>63</sup> However, Aristotle is

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<sup>60</sup> Dewey, *How We Think*, 314.

<sup>61</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a14.

<sup>62</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a5.

<sup>63</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a3.

not necessarily an enthusiastic supporter of emotional appeals. Not only did he complain that that “present-day writers on rhetoric direct the whole of their efforts” towards “producing these effects,”<sup>64</sup> but he believed that, ideally at least, “we ought to fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts.”<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, he recognized the important role of emotions in guiding human behavior, observing that “emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure.”<sup>66</sup> Emotions, for Aristotle, have both intellectual and practical significance. As Nussbaum points out, “in Aristotle’s view, emotions are not blind forces, but intelligent and discriminating parts of the personality, closely related to beliefs of a certain sort, and therefore capable of cognitive modification.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, because emotions function as “forms of intentional awareness”<sup>68</sup> about the objects of our environment, Aristotle concludes that to move people to act one needs to stir their emotions and direct them toward some object that might turn their pain into pleasure.

Dewey’s theory of emotion in his later work effectively returns to Aristotle’s naturalistic account. In Dewey’s early work, emotion is defined in terms of a distinct faculty called “the Feeling” which connects some universal element of consciousness to our particular experience. After abandoning Hegelian idealism for Darwinian naturalism, however, Dewey saw emotion primarily as a form of adaptive behavior that makes us aware of and concerned about the relationship of ourselves to our natural and social environment. “For emotion in its ordinary sense is something called out by objects, physical and personal; it is response to an objective situation.”<sup>69</sup> Dewey thus rejected the notion that emotions are somehow “private” affairs buried

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<sup>64</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a16.

<sup>65</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 14045a.

<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1378a20-22.

<sup>67</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum, “Aristotle on Emotions and Rational Persuasion,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 303.

<sup>68</sup> Nussbaum, 303.

<sup>69</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 292.

deep inside a private consciousness. An emotion “is not something existing somewhere by itself which then employs material through which to express itself. Emotion is an indication of intimate participation...an attitude or disposition which is a function of objective things.”<sup>70</sup> We do not simply love, fear, envy, or hope in a void; we love some *body*, we fear some *thing*, we envy some *situation*, we hope for some *end*. Emotions are those feelings that intimately bind us to our environment. Thus,

to be emotionally stirred is to care, to be concerned. It is to be in a scene or subject not outside of it. A slight and passing emotional stir occurs when something at least touches us. A deep emotion is more than tangency; it is secancy.<sup>71</sup> The more anything, whether an object, scene, idea, fact, or study, cuts into and across our experience, the more it stirs and arouses. An emotion is the register of the extent and way in which we are personally implicated, involved, in anything, no matter how external it is to us physically.<sup>72</sup>

Of course, Dewey’s insight that emotions are stirred the most when we are personally implicated in some objective situation is simply a restatement of Aristotle’s rhetorical analysis of emotions. For example, Aristotle notes that “anger may be defined as an impulse, accompanied by a pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one’s friends.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, “the orator will have to speak as to bring his hearers into a frame of mind that will dispose them to anger, and to represent his adversaries as open to such charges and possessed of such qualities as do make people angry.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, to make an audience feel the emotion of anger, the orator cannot

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<sup>70</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 292.

<sup>71</sup> A “secant” is a straight line cutting a curve at two or more points. Dewey’s trigonometric analogy implies that emotions cut *through* our experience rather than just “touching” it.

<sup>72</sup> John Dewey, “Appreciation and Cultivation,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 6, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1978; original work published 1931), 113.

<sup>73</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 378a32-34.

<sup>74</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1380a1-4.

simply demand that the hearer's be angry or just paint an picture of "anger" as a poet or novelist might do. Rather, the orator will have to show how some person's actions has harmed the hearers or the hearers' friends. The orator will have to place the hearers in an actual situation.

What Dewey adds to Aristotle's analysis is the observation that "emotional reactions form the chief materials of our knowledge of ourselves and of others."<sup>75</sup> Aristotle fully recognized the practical, and even cognitive, character of the emotions, but he nonetheless stops short of making emotional reactions forms of "knowledge." For Aristotle, emotions undeniably have a rational component, but they still have little relevance to *epistēme*. Dewey's naturalism, however, saw *experience* as both the means and ends of knowledge, defined as the proven ability to resolve problematic situations. Our awareness of problematic situations comes through experience just as much as our knowledge that the situation has been adequately brought back into balance. Emotion, as part of that experience, provides raw materials *for* knowledge as well as refined products *of* knowledge. To return to our earlier example, our emotions of fear and curiosity make us conscious of a frightening sound at night, and our emotions of relief and satisfaction are indications that the situation has been properly resolved after discovering the sound was just the tapping of a window shade. Emotions are not the *only* indication, but they do play an important role in Dewey's naturalistic theory of inquiry, a role Dewey explains as follows:

The rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union not only persists in man but becomes conscious with him; its conditions are material out of which he forms purposes. Emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The

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<sup>75</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 269.



discord is the occasion that induces reflection. Desire for restoration of the union converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization of harmony.<sup>76</sup>

Given the fact that emotion is so intimately connected with the “rhythms” of our environment, emotion thus plays a primary role in the *creation* of rhetorical situations. Like impulse, emotion arises when there is a break in habits which causes us a disturbance and leads us to search for some way of returning to a state of balance. “Emotion is a perturbation from clash or failure of habit, and reflection, roughly speaking, is the painful effort of disturbed habits to readjust themselves.”<sup>77</sup> However, an emotion differs from a bare impulse in being “to or from or about something objective, whether in fact or in idea.”<sup>78</sup> Emotion makes us “aware” of our environment in ways in which impulse does not.<sup>79</sup> In the immediate moment, emotion tells us without hesitation what is threatening, what is discordant, what is troubling, just as much as it tells us what is desirable, what is helpful, what is trustworthy. Consequently, emotion gives rhetoric its unique capacity to create situations by altering the significance of one’s environment in such a way as to raise emotional feelings that enable the possibility for action. Likewise, it can then to resolve those situations by redirecting emotions towards those objects which represent the “realization of harmony.” However, Dewey is not advocating a rhetoric of *pathos* any more than Aristotle. Like his Greek predecessor, Dewey wanted to balance *pathos* with *logos*, a desire which in Dewey’s case was embodied in his appeal to *intelligence*.

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<sup>76</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 20-21.

<sup>77</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 54.

<sup>78</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 72.

<sup>79</sup> The distinction may be confusing because Dewey had used “anger” as an example of an impulse. The difference is clearly one of degree, refinement, and awareness. For example, children often feel angry without fully knowing the cause or having an outlet to express themselves. After talking to parents, however, the child’s impulse is given both a cause and an outlet, thereby refining a bare impulse into a more refined emotion that the child can understand and act upon.

## 6.5. INTELLIGENCE

If Dewey draws closer to Aristotle in his later work in his definition of the emotions, he distances himself from Aristotle in his definition of intelligence. In his early work, Dewey had made a clear distinction between the Cognition, or the faculty which grasped universal principles, and Judgment, or the practical ability to apply universal principles in particular cases. This distinction effectively mapped on to Aristotle's distinction between *nous*, or the highest activity of mind, and *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom. For Aristotle, *nous* is not simply "reasoning," as in the ability to construct a syllogism, but refers to a kind of god-like intuition of first principles, or what Guthrie calls that "sudden flashing glimpse of the whole truth which is attained by unadulterated *nous*."<sup>80</sup> Compared to *nous*, *phronēsis* was a poor cousin muddling in the realm of phenomena. As Aristotle explains, "that practical wisdom [*phronēsis*] is not knowledge is evident; for it is, as has been said, concerned with the ultimate particular fact...It is opposed, then, to comprehension [*nous*]; for comprehension is of the definitions, for which no reason can be given, while practical wisdom is concerned with the ultimate particular, which is the object not of knowledge but of perception."<sup>81</sup> Thus, Aristotle, like young Dewey, bases the distinction between comprehension and practical wisdom on the ontological distinction between the universal and the particular. Within this perspective, rhetoric takes on a split personality, unsure whether it is committed to conveying universal principles via *logos* or encouraging particular forms of action via *pathos*.

Dewey's naturalistic humanism resolved this tension by bridging the ontological divide between the universal and the particular and absorbing the Aristotelian concepts of *nous* and

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<sup>80</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers From Thales to Aristotle* (New York, Harper & Row, 1950), 139.

<sup>81</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a23-27.

*phronēsis* into his concept of *intelligence*. In Dewey's later work, there is no such thing as a separate faculty of "Cognition" or "Reason" or "Understanding." There was only the ability to act intelligently in response to problematic situations.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the concept of intelligence effectively combines reason, comprehension, and practical wisdom within a single term. "Intelligence, in its ordinary use, is a practical term; ability to size up matters with respect to the needs and possibilities of the various situations in which one is called to do something."<sup>83</sup> Like emotion, intelligence is not a private affair that goes on inside one's head; intelligence is a public event measurable by one's actions and their consequences. "No capacity to make adjustments means no intelligence; conduct evincing management of complex and novel conditions means a high degree of reason."<sup>84</sup> To borrow a well-worn phrase, in Dewey's later work, intelligence is as intelligence does.

Intelligence, however, is not "will." Human beings are not reasoning machines and do not always act intelligently. Intelligence is simply a proven capacity to act in such a way that employs reason as a means of resolving problematic situations. What, however, is "reason"? For Dewey, reason is the preparatory side of intelligence; it is what he calls "experimental intelligence"<sup>85</sup> or the ability to engage in symbolic thinking as a preparation for action. "We do not act from reasoning; but reasoning puts before us objects which are not directly or sensibly present, so that we then may react directly to these objects, with aversion, attraction, indifference or attachment, precisely as we would to the same objects if they were physically present."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Dewey's rejection of his early Aristotelian conceptions is evident in this passage: "A man is intelligent not in virtue of having reason which grasps first and indemonstrable truths about fixed principles, in order to reason deductively from them to the particulars which they govern, but in virtue of his capacity to estimate the possibilities of a situation and to act in accordance with his estimate." See Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 170.

<sup>83</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 130.

<sup>84</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 130.

<sup>85</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 135.

<sup>86</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 139.

Reasoning thus helps create those “hypotheses to be worked out in practice” that give “our present experience the guidance it requires,” while intelligence is a form of practical wisdom which “requires constant alertness in observing consequences, an open-minded will to learn and courage in re-adjustment.”<sup>87</sup> Intelligence, as another form of *technē*, is thus “conceived after the pattern of science, and used in the creation of social arts; it has something to do.”<sup>88</sup>

Dewey’s pragmatic definition of intelligence also has the important effect of bridging the concepts of *logos* and *pathos*. Because Dewey framed his definitions in naturalistic and holistic terms, he always makes it clear that our lived experience always necessarily embodies both cognitive and emotional elements. Thus, in terms of intelligence, “there is no opposition between it and emotion.”<sup>89</sup> In fact, Dewey proposed that “there is such a thing as passionate intelligence, as ardor in behalf of light shining into the murky places of social existence, and as zeal for its refreshing and purifying effect. The whole story of man shows that there are no objects that may not deeply stir engrossing emotion.”<sup>90</sup> For example, Dewey notes that “anyone who knows Mr. Einstein...would say that he had quite as genuine and esthetic an experience from his mathematical calculations...as he does from playing on his violin.”<sup>91</sup> There is, in other words, an emotional quality of intelligence, just as there is an intelligent quality to emotions, for both are aspects of the larger whole of experience and practice.

The implication for rhetoric is that *logos* and *pathos* are not opposed; they are complementary. The explanation for this relationship is found, once again, by returning to the concept of the rhetorical situation. In a rhetorical situation, impulses and emotions are at an

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<sup>87</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 135.

<sup>88</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 135.

<sup>89</sup> Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 53.

<sup>90</sup> Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 53.

<sup>91</sup> John Dewey, “The Philosophy of the Arts,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 13, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988; original work published 1939), 357.

elevated level due to a sense of conflict, tension, or uncertainty. In this situation, “impulse does not know what it is after; it cannot give order, not even if it wants to. It rushes blindly into any opening it chances to find.”<sup>92</sup> However, such openings might lead to dead ends, thereby making the situation worse and exacerbating already painful feelings. Thus, within this situation, “what intelligence has to do in the service of impulse is to act not as its obedient servant but as its clarifier and liberator.”<sup>93</sup> By harnessing the power of *logos*, or logical argument based on reasoning, intelligence guides impulse by translating it into emotion, or *pathos*, and then setting forth emotion on a clear path through which it can achieve its desired ends. Intelligence thus “clarifies and liberates” impulse, and in doing so generates the possibility for emotions of satisfaction, joy, harmony, and accomplishment. Neither intelligence nor emotion, however, can ever be fully effective without also harnessing the power of *imagination*, which is the last human capacity we will examine.

## 6.6. IMAGINATION

If one aspect of Dewey’s psychology remained almost unchanged between his early and later work, it was his conception of imagination. In his early work, Dewey had argued that imagination is important in the creation of new objects not only for the purposes of art, but for the purposes of science and knowledge. Thus, in his early work, imagination is a faculty that “makes its object new by setting it in a new light. It separates and combines” and “is only the

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<sup>92</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 175.

<sup>93</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 175.

free action of that idealizing activity which is involved in all knowledge whatever.”<sup>94</sup> Dewey effectively continues this definition into his early work, although with one exception. During his idealistic period, Dewey had added a Kantian spin to imagination by calling it “an organ of penetration into the hidden meaning of things.”<sup>95</sup> In his naturalistic period, Dewey has no such desire to posit a faculty that reaches beyond the veil of appearances and touches the spirit of God. Imagination, like intelligence, emotions, and will, is simply an activity in which an organism engages in for the purposes of adjusting to its environment. It is not an “organ of penetration,” but an act of invention for the purposes of adaptation. Dewey sums up his naturalistic account of imagination this way:

Imagination is the only gateway through which...meanings can find their way into a present interaction; or rather, as we have just seen, the conscious adjustment of the new and the old is imagination. Interaction of a living being with an environment is found in vegetative and animal life. But the experience enacted is human and conscious only as that which is given here and now is extended by meanings and values drawn from what is absent in fact and present only imaginatively.<sup>96</sup>

The best way to sum up this passage is by saying that imagination is the uniquely human ability to consciously experience our lives as continuous across expanses of time. Imagination allows us to draw meanings from the past, extend meanings in the future, and thereby recombine meanings in the present. Imagination operates in a fluid middle ground between the real and the ideal, the past and the future, and the objective and the illusory. Consequently, while “the aims and ideals that move us are generated through imagination...they are not made out of imaginary

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<sup>94</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 196.

<sup>95</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, 195.

<sup>96</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 276.

stuff. They are made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience.”<sup>97</sup> We envision plans to cure us of our present realities; we aspire to future goals based on our successes and failures in the past; we create ideas for mechanical inventions out of the objective materials of our everyday experience. Like the locomotive before Stevenson or the telegraph before the time of Morse, “imagination seized hold upon the idea of a rearrangement of existing things that would evolve new objects.”<sup>98</sup> But the same is true of “a painter, a musician, a poet, a philanthropist, a moral prophet. The new vision does not arise out of nothing, but emerges through seeing, in terms of possibilities, that is, of imagination, old things in new relations serving a new end which the new end aids in creating.”<sup>99</sup> Like almost all of Dewey’s processes, “the process of creation is experimental and continuous.”<sup>100</sup>

With respect to rhetoric, imagination operates as a synthetic term that brings together the functions of emotion, will, and intelligence. For as long as we define rhetoric as an art of productive transformation, then we also define rhetoric as the art of possibility; and for Dewey, “all possibilities reach us through the imagination. In a definite sense the only meaning that can be assigned the term ‘imagination’ is that things unrealized in fact come home to us and have power to stir us. The unification effected through imagination is not fanciful, for it is the reflex of the unification of practical and emotional attitudes.”<sup>101</sup> Imagination, however, not only unifies practical and emotional attitudes, but rational attitudes as well. For even “‘reason’ at its height cannot attain complete grasp and a self-contained assurance. It must fall back upon imagination—upon the embodiment of ideas in emotionally charged sense.”<sup>102</sup> There is a sense,

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<sup>97</sup> Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 33.

<sup>98</sup> Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 33.

<sup>99</sup> Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 33.

<sup>100</sup> Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 34.

<sup>101</sup> Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 30.

<sup>102</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 40.

then, that imagination is Dewey's *de facto* synonym for rhetoric, for they are both arts of using language to direct action by embodying emotional, practical, and intellectual aspects of experience in objective form. Observe, for instance, the rhetorical spirit of the following passage:

Imagination denotes that to which we are carried when the emotion is not so coarsely organic as to lead to direct overt action. A man in a rage may smash and tear about. If his emotion is refined and controlled by thought of objects, it leads to consequences in imagination. The resentful man may fancy his foe placed in all sorts of predicaments in which he suffers dire distress, or he may project himself, taking sweet revenge in some public humiliation of the object of his wrath. A more refined indignation may set to work to explore imaginatively the source of a public wrong and to construct measures of remedy.<sup>103</sup>

In Dewey's continuing example of the "angry man," we see the possibilities inherent in any rhetorical situation in which people feel a sense of "coarse" uncertainty, frustration, and conflict. Because people's "impulses" are unformed, rhetoric functions to refine impulses into emotions and then uses reason and intelligence to harness the energy of these emotions to propel people to action. However, the quality of this action depends largely on quality of the rhetoric. On the one hand, if the *pathos* of the rhetoric is vengeance and its *logos* presents a map for a short-term solution, then the result might be violent retribution against the object designated as the cause. On the other hand, if the *pathos* is one of "refined indignation" and the *logos* draws from the resources of some sustained inquiry, then the result might be a more long-term effort to address the broader social causes of a "public wrong." In either case, what happens is not determined solely by the rhetoric or by the audience, but by the complex and continuous *transaction* over time between human beings and their environment, an environment that

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<sup>103</sup> Dewey, *Appreciation and Cultivation*, 115-116.



includes rhetoric. Before laying out a complete vision of rhetoric as *technē*, however, we must first examine how Dewey defines those disciplines of science and art which originally makes up the definition of *technē*.

## 6.7. ART AND SCIENCE

I have been arguing that Dewey's later work provides resources for constructing a theory of rhetoric as a *technē*, as a productive art of transformation based on the union of art and science in language. This interpretation stems from Dewey's effort to recover the spirit of that "time when 'art' and 'science' were virtually equivalent terms," a spirit enshrined "in the phrase 'faculty of arts and sciences.'"<sup>104</sup> However, because Dewey never explicitly offers an account of rhetoric as a *technē*, we must first examine how he defines *technē* in terms of the relationship between art and science. Once we understand the nature of this relationship, it will then be a short step to constructing a theory of rhetoric by applying Dewey's insights into *technē* to the art of communication. What I will show is that rhetoric operates as a *technē* by embodying scientific insights within aesthetic form for the purpose of practical action in the context of a rhetorical situation. We must begin, however, with art and science.

To show how art and science are related, it is necessary to break down the divisions which have not only kept science and art separate, but which have even created divisions within their own separate disciplines. The root cause of these dualisms is a familiar one—the distinction between "contemplative" and "productive" forms of knowledge that correspond to the worlds of Being and Becoming. Within this dualist ontology, an ideal science is the contemplative

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<sup>104</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 60.

knowledge of Truth and an ideal art is the contemplative knowledge of Beauty. (And, to complete Plato's trivium, an ideal morality is the contemplative knowledge of the Good.) However, within both science and art there is a further dualism between those objects which are "instrumental," or have practical utility, and those objects which are "final," or are complete in themselves. In science this dualism manifests itself in the distinction between "pure" science, like mathematics or physics, and "applied" science, like engineering or architecture, while in art it was the distinction between "fine" art, like painting or poetry, and "industrial" art, like carpentry or journalism. Both distinctions, however, have the same root cause for Dewey, which is the formalization of class divisions within philosophy as it originated in Greece:

For the Greek community was marked by a sharp separation of servile workers and free men of leisure, which meant a division between acquaintance with matters of fact and contemplative appreciation, between intelligent practice and unpractical intelligence, between affairs of change and efficiency—or instrumentality—and of rest and enclosure—finality.<sup>105</sup>

The problem with this philosophical division between final and instrumental arts is not only that it provides institutional justification for a continuation of class divisions,<sup>106</sup> but also that it undermines the very integrity of art and science. In the case of the sciences, "honor of what is 'pure' and contempt for what is 'applied' has for its outcome a science which is remote and technical, communicable only to specialists, and a conduct of human affairs which is haphazard, biased, unfair in distribution of values."<sup>107</sup> When "knowledge" becomes the property

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<sup>105</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 80.

<sup>106</sup> It was one of Dewey's frequent complaints that dualism in philosophy represented dualisms in life. In this case, because the joy of contemplation "was conceived of as an end given spontaneously or 'naturally' to a few, not as a practical and reflective conclusion to be achieved, it was concluded that some men are servile by nature, having as sole function to supply the materials which made it possible for other men to indulge in pure theoretical activity." See Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 98

<sup>107</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 344.

of a specialized class while “practice” is relegated to second-class status, knowledge becomes narrow and imperial while practice becomes blind and servile. As a result, “applied science has been so largely made an equivalent of use for private and economic class purposes and privileges” that “the consequence is in so far disastrous both to science and to human life.”<sup>108</sup> One thinks, for instance, of the current regime of post-academic science that operates out of the public eye and dedicates itself to serving the interests of the connected and the powerful.<sup>109</sup>

The situation for art under a dualist conception is no less barren. In its broader context, “compartmentalization of occupations and interests brings about separation of that mode of activity commonly called ‘practice’ from insight, of imagination from executive doing, of significant purpose from work, of emotion from thought and doing.”<sup>110</sup> For evidence of the compartmentalization of art one need look no further than origins of the modern museum and the pervasive trends in modern art. In the first case, “most European museums are...memorials of the rise of nationalism and imperialism” dedicated not to enhancing aesthetic appreciation or experience, but to “exhibiting the loot gathered by its monarchs in conquest of other nations.”<sup>111</sup> As a result, great works of art get separated from their social context and locked behind glass to be peered at as curious oddities. However, the second case is really no better. Despite the fact that most modern artists wish to resist or criticize economic and historical forces, they nonetheless fall into the same assumption that their art must somehow “stand apart” from everyday life and be admired from a contemplative distance. Thus, “a peculiar esthetic ‘individualism’ results...In order not to cater to the trend of economic forces, they often feel

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<sup>108</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 130-131.

<sup>109</sup> I borrow the phrase “post-academic science” from John Ziman. “The problems that activate post-academic science...are typically ‘owned’ by well-established institutions, such as pharmaceutical companies, arms procurement agencies, associations of engineering and medical practitioners, environmental protection commissions, economic councils, and so on.” See John Ziman, *Real Science: What It Is, and What It Means* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000), 211.

<sup>110</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 26-27

<sup>111</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 14.

obliged to exaggerate their separateness to the point of eccentricity. Consequently artistic products take on to a point of still greater degree the air of something independent and esoteric.”<sup>112</sup> The combination of the two conditions culminate in a situation in which most modern museums are odd mixtures of historical booty and puzzling contemporary abstractions, neither of which have much relation to the experiences of those who shuffle through the silent halls to gaze upon such works of “genius.”

Dewey’s judgment of these trends is clear: “all rankings of higher and lower are, ultimately, out of place and stupid.”<sup>113</sup> Rejecting these rankings, however, requires more than an act of generosity; it requires us to reject the dualist assumptions on which these rankings are based and then to embrace the original spirit of *technē* as a way to reconnect art and science within the experiences of everyday life. The basic principle of *technē* is that “art denotes a process of doing or making,”<sup>114</sup> and “all art is a process of making the world a different place in which to live.”<sup>115</sup> Moreover, “this is as true of fine as of technological art,”<sup>116</sup> for “science with respect to both method and conclusions is an art.”<sup>117</sup> However, this does not mean Dewey simply dissolves science into art or complete blurs together the instrumental and final qualities of experience. He merely proposes that these are matters of emphasis derived from a larger organic whole. Dewey describes the nature of the “whole” in the following way:

Art is a process of production in which natural materials are re-shaped in a projection toward consummatory fulfillment through regulation of trains of events that occur in a less regulated way on lower levels of nature. Art is “fine” in the degree in which ends, the

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<sup>112</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 15.

<sup>113</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 231.

<sup>114</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 53.

<sup>115</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 273.

<sup>116</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 53.

<sup>117</sup> John Dewey, “By Nature and by Art,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 15, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983; original work published 1944), 88.

final termini, of natural processes are dominant and conspicuously enjoyed. All art is instrumental in its use of techniques and tools. It is shown that normal artistic experience involves bringing to a better balance than is found elsewhere in either nature or experience the consummatory and instrumental phases of events. Art thus represents the culminating event of nature as well as the climax of experience.<sup>118</sup>

The key, once again, to understanding Dewey's account of art and science is his principles of *transaction* and *continuity*. All *technai*, as arts of productive transformation, only operate through time and within a reciprocal relationship between an organism and its environment. On the one hand, science is that *technē* that deals more with the instrumental aspects of experience and thus has "of its peculiar essence that it must also submit to certain tests of application and control."<sup>119</sup> Science is a form of sustained experimental inquiry that constructs symbolic "maps" that can be used to control and predict further transactions with the environment. On the other hand, art concerns itself more with the consummatory, or "final," aspects of experience and "has been the means of keeping alive the sense of purposes that outrun evidence and of meanings that transcend indurated habit."<sup>120</sup> However, art does not accomplish this task by acting spontaneously or supernaturally, but rather continuously and transactionally. Thus, "the real work of an artist is to build up an experience that is coherent in perception while moving with constant change in its development."<sup>121</sup> In this sense, artists and scientists both operate in the continuous world of doing and making, but they utilize different means to achieve their ends. Dewey explains the difference this way:

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<sup>118</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 8.

<sup>119</sup> John Dewey, "Philosophy and Civilization," in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1977; original work published 1927), 5.

<sup>120</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 351.

<sup>121</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 57.

Science states meanings; art expresses them...The instance of a signboard may help. It directs one's course to a place, say a city. It does not in any way supply experience of that city even in a vicarious way. What it does do is to set forth some of the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to procure that experience... "Science" signifies just that mode of statement that is most helpful as direction...The poetic as distinct from the prosaic, esthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one. A traveler who follows the statement or direction of a signboard finds himself in the city that has been pointed towards. He then may have in his own experience some of the meaning which the city possesses. We may have it to such an extent that the city has expressed itself to him—as Tintern Abbey expressed itself to Wordsworth in and through his poem.<sup>122</sup>

From Dewey's example, it is not difficult to see how art and science, despite their difference, nonetheless are both *technai* which operate within a transactional relationship of their own. In terms of science, if Wordsworth was not given directions to Tintern Abbey, he would never have had the opportunity to have the experience that led to his writing of the poem. But in terms of art, without Wordsworth's poem, there might be no reason that one might want the directions in the first place. Examples of this sort can be multiplied indefinitely. Consider the photos of the Earth from space, the creation of the submarine from Jules Verne's imagination, the thought experiments of Einstein, Leonardo's drawing of the human figure, dramatic reconstructions of the age of dinosaurs, Plato's account of the universe in the *Timeaus*, or the glittering ceiling of a planetarium. Where does science end and art begin? Rather than seeking absolute distinctions, it seems more fruitful to agree with Dewey that "science is an art, that art is practice, and that the only distinction worth drawing is not between practice and theory, but

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<sup>122</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 90.

between those modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable, and those which are full of enjoyed meanings.”<sup>123</sup> We will then see that the culmination of both science and art are not objects we contemplate, but experiences we possess, the kind of experiences Dewey called *aesthetic*. It is to these experiences we make our final turn before arriving at our construction of rhetoric as a *technē*.

## 6.8. AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

In 1934, after having spent the lion’s share of his professional career promoting the growth of “intelligence” through his advocacy of instrumentalism in science and naturalism in philosophy, Dewey confounded both his supporters and his critics with the publication of *Art as Experience*. In contrast to almost all of his middle work, *Art as Experience* treats art and aesthetic experience as topics of deep philosophical concern rather than simply things to be enjoyed and appreciated. This shift in focus would have been enough to puzzle his readers, but Dewey created even more uncertainty with his bold claims that “art weds man and nature” and that “art also renders men aware of their union with one another in origin and destiny.”<sup>124</sup> Such grandiose statements seemed reminiscent of some of his earlier pronouncements concerning the universal consciousness, and as Westbrook observes inevitably led his contemporaries to “the conclusion that he had either returned to the idealist fold, or... had never really abandoned idealism.”<sup>125</sup> According to Alexander, the problem is that Dewey’s neglect of aesthetics during his middle work had produced the assumption that “after Dewey abandoned absolute idealism, he focused

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<sup>123</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 268-269.

<sup>124</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 275.

<sup>125</sup> Westbrook, 396.

on developing his instrumentalism without any further thought about the higher stages of Spirit...and so we are presented with the case of a philosopher of Dewey's acumen badly bungling when it came time for him to produce an aesthetics."<sup>126</sup> Dewey vigorously rejected this notion, but Westbrook notes that "if Dewey did not intend to render the world at large as a unity in *Art as Experience*, it could at least be said that this text was the best place to find him carrying the remnants of the Hegelian hoop through which he had jumped on his way to empirical naturalism."<sup>127</sup> It is my belief that determining the trajectory and significance of this "jump" is not only important for understanding Dewey's philosophical development, but also for rounding out a rhetorical theory based on that development. For if Alexander is correct that "the aesthetic is the Acropolis and Agora of Dewey's polis,"<sup>128</sup> then the aesthetic is also the basis for the art of rhetoric that constitutes that polis.<sup>129</sup>

Given the emphasis I have placed on *technē* as the unification of art and science in practical experience, Dewey's shift from a discourse of science to a discourse of art should be readily understood. The key is in realizing that Dewey's "instrumentalism" was never intended to be solely a philosophy of solving "practical" problems in the future, but was also a philosophy of developing a satisfying experience in the present. Dewey realized that his constant praise of science and scientific method might lead to misunderstanding, explaining: "I am aware that the emphasis I have placed upon scientific method may be misleading, for it may result only in calling up the special technique of laboratory research as that is conducted by specialists."<sup>130</sup>

However, Dewey equated this kind of insular science with the evils of "applied" science and

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<sup>126</sup> Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling: John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, xv.

<sup>127</sup> Westbrook, 397.

<sup>128</sup> Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling: John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, 60.

<sup>129</sup> I have argued this similar point with respect to the significance of Dewey's aesthetics for our understanding of *communication* in Nathan Crick, "John Dewey's Aesthetics of Communication." *Southern Communication Journal* 69 (2004): 303-319.

<sup>130</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 13, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988; original work published 1938), 59.



advocated instead his own unique a vision of “pure” science whose interests are “served only by broadening the idea of application to include all phases of liberation and enrichment of human experience.”<sup>131</sup> The ultimate goal of science was not subjugation of nature, but the enrichment of experience, leading Dewey to claim that “when this perception dawns it will be a commonplace that art—that mode of activity that is charged with meanings capable of immediately enjoyed possession—is the complete culmination of nature, and that ‘science’ is properly a handmaiden that conducts natural events to this happy issue.”<sup>132</sup> That Dewey did not come to this conclusion in his middle work was not because he did not feel art and aesthetics were important, but was likely due to a reaction against his early idealist aesthetics which led to a desire to keep these topics unmolested by the sharp tools of philosophical analysis, a desire which transformed only after long and productive discussions with his friend and art enthusiast Albert C. Barnes.<sup>133</sup> I thus agree with Alexander that “the search for an adequate aesthetics of experience is what drives the development of Dewey’s philosophy,”<sup>134</sup> adding only that this search is also what provides the resources for developing a Deweyan rhetorical theory.

The importance Dewey puts upon aesthetic experience can be best understood by placing it in contrast with its opposite—non-aesthetic experience. Dewey lists the qualities of non-aesthetic experience as “rigid abstinence, coerced submission, tightness on one side and dissipation, incoherence, and aimless indulgence on the other.”<sup>135</sup> Non-aesthetic experience thus sits at each end of dualism embodied in the class division between the aristocratic and the working class, the life of “aimless indulgence” and the life of “coerced submission.” Although one life is clearly easier than the other, neither life, for Dewey, can be considered “aesthetic” for

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<sup>131</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 131.

<sup>132</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 269.

<sup>133</sup> Rockefeller, 494.

<sup>134</sup> Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling: John Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, xvi.

<sup>135</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 47.

the reason that the experience of each one consists only of a “loose succession that does not begin at any particular place and that ends—in the sense of ceasing—at no particular place.”<sup>136</sup> Whether one’s experience is a meaningless succession of idle fancies or a meaningless succession of laborious duties, one’s experience is still *meaningless* in the sense that “we are not concerned with the connection of one incident with what went before and what comes after.”<sup>137</sup> And for anyone who has read Dewey’s work from its earliest inception, the problem of the meaningless life was always the one most forefront in his consciousness. Dewey defines this problem in the following way:

Compartmentalization of occupations and interests brings about separation of that mode of activity commonly called ‘practical’ from insight, of imagination from executive doing, of significant purpose from work, of emotion from thought and doing...Only occasionally in the lives of many are the senses fraught with the sentiment that comes from deep realization of intrinsic meanings. We undergo sensations as mechanical stimuli or as irritated stimulations, without having a sense of the reality that is in them and behind them: in much of our experience our different senses do not unite to tell a common and enlarged story. We see without feeling; we hear, but only in a second-hand report, second hand because not reinforced by vision...We use the senses to arouse passion but not to fulfill the interest of insight...Prestige goes to those who use their minds without participation of the body and who act vicariously through the control of the bodies and labor of others.<sup>138</sup>

For Dewey, the project of aesthetic experience carries with it enormous social and political implications. When Alexander calls the aesthetic “the Acropolis and Agora of Dewey’s

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<sup>136</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 47

<sup>137</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 46.

<sup>138</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 26-27.

polis,” he means that “the aesthetic comes to generate the enterprise of the democratic community itself. It represents the possibility of the fulfilling, shared life where human beings realize meaning and value in the creative process of intelligent growth.”<sup>139</sup> As long as a society remains constrained by the same dualisms Dewey often saw reflected in Greek thought, dualisms that separate mind from body, thought from emotion, labor from enjoyment, science from art, and art from life, the experience of all its citizens will be impoverished and constrained within narrow, confined boundaries. Democracy, therefore, is not so much a form of politics as it is a way of living well. In Dewey’s words, “democracy is belief in the ability of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness.”<sup>140</sup> Therefore, because rhetoric is one of the premier “arts” of democracy, we must first understand the nature of aesthetic experience before embarking on a final definition of rhetoric.

What, then, is aesthetic experience? Dewey answers:

In art as an experience, actuality and possibility or ideality, the new and the old, objective material and personal response, the individual and the universal, surface and depth, sense and meaning, are integrated in an experience in which they are all transfigured from the significance that belongs to them when isolated in reflection. “Nature,” said Goethe, “has neither kernel nor shell.” Only in esthetic experience is this statement completely true. Of art as experience it is also true that nature has neither subjective nor objective being; is neither individual nor universal, sensuous nor rational. The significance of art as experience is, therefore, incomparable for the adventure of philosophical thought.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling: John Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, 60.

<sup>140</sup> John Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988; original work published 1941), 229.

<sup>141</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 301.

Given the idealistic feel of this definition (complete with reference to Goethe), one can understand how critics like Stephen Pepper and Benedetto Croce believed that Dewey was reverting to his earlier Hegelianism in his treatment of aesthetics.<sup>142</sup> Simply replace the phrase “in art as an experience” with “in the union of the individual with the universal consciousness” and we have the Young John Dewey speaking through his elder (and Ideal?) self. However, Dewey did not replace that phrase, and his decision not to do so was based on the fact that *Art as Experience* was the culmination of a thoroughgoing naturalism. For Dewey, any discussion of aesthetics must begin from the naturalistic premise that human beings are “living creatures” in an environment,<sup>143</sup> not supernatural entities trapped in a material body. Thus, his aesthetic theory is based on the naturalistic assumption that “the moments when the creature is both most alive and most composed and concentrated are those of fullest intercourse with the environment, in which sensuous material and relations are most completely merged.”<sup>144</sup> In this way, our aesthetic experiences are not so different from those of the lion bathing in a kill, the crocodile warming in the sun, the horse nuzzling against its mate, or the bird gently gliding on a breeze. Like theirs, our experiences are “the reward of that interaction of organism and environment.”<sup>145</sup>

What makes possible truly *aesthetic* experience, however, is the uniquely human capacity for communication and the creation of shared meaning. It is this capacity that makes it possible for people “to carry to new and unprecedented heights that unity of sense and impulse, of brain and eye and ear, that is exemplified in animal life, saturating it with the conscious meanings derived from communication and deliberate expression.”<sup>146</sup> Thus, when Dewey says that “art

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<sup>142</sup> For a thorough analysis of the Pepper-Croce Thesis and Dewey’s response, see Chapter 1 in Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling: John Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*.

<sup>143</sup> Is it significant that Dewey titles his first chapter of *Art as Experience* “The Live Creature.” This fact is often conveniently missed by those who wish to read Dewey as an idealist.

<sup>144</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 109.

<sup>145</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 28.

<sup>146</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 28.

weds man and nature” and that “art also renders men aware of their union with one another in origin and destiny,”<sup>147</sup> he is not reinstating his organic idealism in which “man and nature” are simply partial aspects of an Absolute Spirit unfolding over time. Rather, he is saying that art, as “the most universal and freest form of communication,”<sup>148</sup> creates intimate bonds between human beings and their natural and social environment through the creation of shared meaning. Reminiscent of Carey’s “ritual view” of communication, Dewey states that “art is the extension of the power of rites and ceremonies to unite men, through a shared celebration, to all incidents and scenes of life.”<sup>149</sup> Consequently, “the sense of communion generated by a work of art may take on a definitely religious quality.”<sup>150</sup> Consider, for instance, the impact that Michelangelo’s frescos in the Sistine Chapel have had in promoting and sustaining the Christian mythology concerning the “origin and destiny” of “man.” That single image of the Birth of Adam has probably done more to spread the Genesis myth throughout the world than all the Scholastic treatises combined. However, art can equally take on a definitely *humanist* quality and act as “means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationship and participation than our own.”<sup>151</sup> For instance, “barriers are dissolved, limiting prejudices melt away, when we enter into the spirit of Negro or Polynesian art.”<sup>152</sup> Thus, art does not express a pre-existent metaphysical unity that resides in a supernatural ideal, but creates a practical and meaningful unity that is embodied in natural experience.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 275.

<sup>148</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 275.

<sup>149</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 275.

<sup>150</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 275.

<sup>151</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 336.

<sup>152</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 337.

<sup>153</sup> It should be pointed out that in *Art as Experience*, Dewey is promoting a positive vision of art. Thus, he tends to downplay or ignore the power of art as a form of propaganda that creates a sense of unity for the purposes of oppressing some other class, as in the classic example of Nazi art. This does not mean that Dewey is unaware of these human ills, noting that “what is distinctive in man makes it possible for him to sink below the level of the beasts.” He simply believes that the only way to prevent art from successfully being used for evil ends requires a

What are, then, the qualities of aesthetic experience? If we return to Dewey's idealist-sounding definition, we find that the dominant quality of aesthetic experience is one of *continuity*. By quoting Goethe that "nature has neither kernel nor shell," Dewey is trying to show that within aesthetic experience we feel *part* of an environment that is a continuous whole rather than a discontinuous layer of outer "appearance" and inner "reality." Once again, however, we must keep in mind Dewey's distinction between *events* and *objects* to prevent us from slipping into an idealist interpretation of experience. For Dewey, aesthetic experience is an *event*. It is something that happens in the context of a lived situation in time. What makes it different from other experienced events is that it is uniquely final and consummatory rather than overtly instrumental. Take, for example, the difference between the experience of inquiring into how to resolve some problematic situation and the actual experience of resolving it. In the inquiry phase, objects are "isolated in reflection" and used as a means, while in the resolution phase, the meaning of these disparate objects are "transfigured" and "integrated" within a single experience in which they all function together as a whole. In the inquiry phase, there is tension and uncertainty, while in the resolution phase, there is euphoria and satisfaction. This latter kind of experience that "runs its own full course" thus forms "the backbone and indeed the life-blood" of Dewey's aesthetic theory.<sup>154</sup> As Dewey explains:

An esthetic experience can be crowded into a moment only in the sense that a climax of prior long enduring processes may arrive in an outstanding movement which so sweeps everything else into it that all else is forgotten. That which distinguishes an experience as

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true liberation of the artist. In other words, the only way to confront the evils of art as a form of propaganda is to embrace art as an expression of civilization. See Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 28.

<sup>154</sup> John Dewey, "Aesthetic Experience as a Primary Phase and as an Artistic Development," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 16, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989; original work published 1950), 395.

esthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close.<sup>155</sup>

What separates a uniquely aesthetic experience from just the experience of satisfaction or accomplishment is a matter of degree. In uniquely aesthetic experience, many different continuities are established that create a wealth of meaning lacking in the simple resolution of some problem. The first of these continuities happens in *time*, as embodied in the couplets “the new and the old” and “actuality and possibility.” For Dewey, we all too often dwell in the past or the future and separate ourselves from our immediate experience. “Because of the frequency of this abandonment of the present to the past and future, the happy periods of an experience that is now complete because it absorbs into itself memories of the past and anticipations of the future, come to constitute an esthetic ideal.”<sup>156</sup> The second of these continuities happens in *space*, as embodied in the couplets “surface and depth”, “subjective and objective being”, and “objective material and personal response.” These couplets all suppose that human beings are *outside* rather than *inside* nature, a supposition that goes against every principle of Dewey’s naturalism. Thus, for Dewey, “the uniquely distinguishing feature of esthetic experience is exactly the fact that no such distinction of self and object exists in it, since it is esthetic in the degree in which organism and environment cooperate to institute an experience in which the two are so fully integrated that each disappears.”<sup>157</sup> The third of these continuities happen in *experience* as embodied in the couplets “sense and meaning”, “the individual and the universal”, and “sensuous and rational.” For Dewey, this is perhaps the most important continuity, because the “oppositions of mind and body, soul and matter, spirit and flesh all have their origin in fear of what life may bring forth.

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<sup>155</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 62.

<sup>156</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 24.

<sup>157</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 254.

They are marks of contraction and withdrawal.”<sup>158</sup> Consequently, for aesthetic experience to happen, this contraction and withdrawal must give way to expansion and engagement, and this requires us to unify all aspects of our experience. As Dewey explains:

It is not possible to divide in a vital experience the practical, emotional, and intellectual from one another and to set the properties of one over against the characteristics of the others. The emotional phase binds parts together into a single whole; “intellectual” simply names the fact that the experience has meaning; “practical” indicates that the organism is interacting with events and objects which surround it.<sup>159</sup>

The “aesthetic” thus signifies the unity of the emotional, intellectual, and practical aspects of human experience within a consummatory experience that establishes continuity in space and time. Art, then, consists of those expressive objects which are created for the purpose of bringing about aesthetic experience. The means by which they accomplish this transformation is through what Dewey called *form*, or “the art of making clear what is involved in the organization of space and time prefigured in every course of a developing life-existence.”<sup>160</sup> In contradistinction from his idealist aesthetics, which held that art was the sensuous embodiment of a universal form, a Platonic *eidos*, his naturalist aesthetics took both a Darwinian and an Aristotelian turn. Like Aristotle, Dewey saw form and matter as inseparable, “hence there can be no distinction drawn, save in reflection, between form and substance. The work itself is matter formed into esthetic substance.”<sup>161</sup> Like Darwin, however, Dewey defined form in terms of an evolutionary ontology of Becoming in which form is dynamic and represents only periods of stability and equilibrium in between periods of flux and change. Thus, as Boisvert observes, in

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<sup>158</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 28.

<sup>159</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 61.

<sup>160</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 30.

<sup>161</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 114.



terms of form, what Dewey said about *technē* can equally apply to *physis*.<sup>162</sup> Just as a works of art are produced, endure, and are destroyed, so are biological species, geographical objects, and even natural processes. Both have “form,” but aesthetic form differs by being explicitly created so as to provide meaning and value to the “course of a developing life-existence.”

In other words, form is a component of *technē*, for *technē* is the art of transforming experience by means of giving form to some expressive medium. For Dewey, “this is what it is to have form. It marks a way of envisaging, of feeling, and of presenting experienced matter so that it most readily and effectively becomes material for the construction of adequate experience on the part of those less gifted than the original creator.”<sup>163</sup> What separates artists from the general lot of humanity “is not the inceptive emotion, nor yet merely technical skill in execution. It is capacity to work a vague idea and emotion over into terms of some definite medium.”<sup>164</sup> Thus, artists give expressive form to ideas or emotions that for the rest of us might be simply vague notions or raw impulses. Their effect is therefore to give aesthetic form to the experiences of an audience that is prepared to embrace the meaning of the work and in doing so make a new meaning of their own. However, Dewey is keen to point out that

communicability has nothing to do with popularity...But if the time span be extended, it is true that no man is eloquent save when some one is moved as he listens. Those who are moved feel, as Tolstoi says, that what the work expresses is as if it were something one had oneself been longing to express. Meantime, the artist works to create an audience to which he does communicate. In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and

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<sup>162</sup> Boisvert, 161.

<sup>163</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 114.

<sup>164</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 82.

unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience.<sup>165</sup>

Dewey's remark that artists can "create an audience" by using art to change experiences over time points to the final and most important characteristic of aesthetic experience—its transformative potential in its capacity as a form of communication. This section has discussed aesthetic experience in terms of *continuity*, but continuity is only significant when placed in relationship to *transaction*, or the reciprocal and dynamic relationship between an organism and its environment. The principle of transaction helps us understand that art is that part of our environment that has the greatest power to change our beliefs and behaviors. As Dewey observes, "the organism is really made over, is reorganized in effecting an adequate perception of a work of art," for "by their means there are released old, deep-seated habits engrained organic 'memories,' yet these old habits are deployed in new ways, ways in which they are adapted to a more completely integrated world...Hence the liberating, expansive power of art."<sup>166</sup> The question that we must now answer is this: How do Dewey's aesthetics account for the liberating, expansive power of rhetoric?

## 6.9. RHETORIC AS *TECHNĒ*

We have been working toward constructing a theory of rhetoric as *technē* based on Dewey's later writings. This theory proposes that (a) *rhetoric is the art of transforming the meanings and existences of nature through the medium of persuasive discourse*, and that (b) *a rhetorical*

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<sup>165</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 110.

<sup>166</sup> John Dewey, "Affective Thought," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 2 ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1925), 108.

situation is a problematic situation characterized by tension, uncertainty, conflict, unease, or indecisiveness, which creates a sense of urgency which lends force and effectiveness to timely rhetorical discourse. The biggest obstacle to constructing such a theory, however, is that Dewey speaks even less about rhetoric in his later work than he does in his earlier work. For example, despite the rhetorical implications of Dewey's aesthetics, nowhere in *Art as Experience* is found any reference to rhetoric. Dewey offers examples from painting, sculpture, architecture, dance, music, poetry, and literature, but none from rhetoric and oratory. How, then, can we arrive at an hypothesis of how Dewey might have defined the distinctive nature of the art of rhetoric? Aristotle, for instance, stated with his characteristic precision that "rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art."<sup>167</sup> Dewey offers no such definition. Therefore, we must determine the distinctive character of rhetoric by drawing inferences from his observations of the other arts. The closest of these arts is literature, and from its definition we acquire a deeper insight into how Dewey understood the relationship between art and communication.

The expressions that constitute art are communication in its pure and undefiled form. Art breaks through barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable in ordinary association. This force of art, common to all the arts, is most fully manifested in literature. Its medium is already formed by communication, something that can hardly be asserted of any other art. There may be arguments ingeniously elaborated and plausibly couched about the moral and the humane function of other arts. There can be none about the art of letters.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1355b26-28.

<sup>168</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 250.

In this passage, we find the beginnings of a distinct definition of rhetoric. Here, we see Dewey establishing a category of art called the “art of communication” which is characterized by the twofold fact that its medium is *language* and that this medium unavoidably carries with it direct “moral and humane” implications that may be only indirect and subtle in more “plastic” arts. As examples, Dewey points to “the social effect of the novels of Dickens or of Sinclair Lewis.”<sup>169</sup> Although Dewey seems to restrict this art to literature, by any reasonable interpretation this art must also encompass those of poetry, drama, and rhetoric because all equally employ a medium “already formed by communication.” Why, then, is the type of medium so important for Dewey? Its importance lies in the unique ability of communication to directly invest deeper meaning in surroundings that before we may have experienced only on surface level. For example, even great paintings or sculptures might be passed over lightly if the art of communication had not made them into aesthetic *objects*, or events-with-a-meaning. Remove the history and author of the Mona Lisa and you might just have a rather innocuous, cracked portrait of a mildly amused woman. This fact does not take away from the intrinsic mastery of the painting as it is disclosed over time, but it does have serious implications in terms of how we *experience* the painting in the moment. Therefore, for Dewey, the art of communication is the “primary” art, for the possibility of the other arts to acquire deeper significance and value beyond their immediate perception is contingent on existence of the cultural well of meanings created through language and social communication. In terms of the “things” that make up our environment, then, Dewey says that

contacts with the latter would remain on a merely physical plane of shock were it not that things have absorbed into themselves meanings developed in the art of communication.

Intense and vivid realization of the meanings of the events and situations of the universe

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<sup>169</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 347.

can be achieved only through a medium already instinct with meaning. The architectural, pictorial, and sculptural are always unconsciously surrounded and enriched by values that proceed from speech.<sup>170</sup>

Within this perspective, rhetoric clearly shares with literature, poetry, and drama the same potential to use language to inspire “intense and vivid realization of the meanings of the events and situations of the universe.” What, however, makes rhetoric distinct from them? Traditionally, the answer is that rhetoric accomplishes *practical* ends whereas the “fine arts” of literature, poetry, and drama are primarily contemplative or “merely” aesthetic.<sup>171</sup> However, Dewey rejects this distinction by advancing his view that all sciences and arts are both forms of *technē*, or productive art. The productive nature of art is especially evident in the art of communication, for “language when it is produced meets old needs and opens new possibilities. It creates demands which take effect, and the effect is not confined to speech and literature, but extends to the common life in communication, counsel and instruction.”<sup>172</sup> Therefore, our answer to the distinctive quality of rhetoric as compared to the other arts of that employ language as a medium must be found not necessarily in its effects, but in its *method* and its *form*.

In terms of *form*, rhetoric is unique within the arts of communication in that it explicitly is structured so as to embody what Dewey calls an “end-in-view.” For Dewey, the practical difference between an “end” and an “end-in-view” is the difference between a “remote and final goal” and a “contemporaneously operative” plan.<sup>173</sup> For instance, we often acquire certain

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<sup>170</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 245.

<sup>171</sup> See, for instance, the distinction made by Herbert A. Wichelns, which rests on the implied distinction between contemplative and practical arts. “Poetry always is free to fulfill its own law, but the writer of rhetorical discourse is, in a sense, perpetually in bondage to the occasion and the audience; and in that fact we find the line of cleavage between rhetoric and poetic.” See Herbert A. Wichelns, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory,” in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt (State College, PA: Strata Publishing Co., 1995; original work published 1925), 24.

<sup>172</sup> Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 57.

<sup>173</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 280.

“goals” from the reading of books and poetry, such as forming our ideal society, finding our ideal lover, or creating our ideal life. However, these “goals” are often so remote and unattainable that they have little impact on our behaviors apart from our imaginations. They exist only in a distant and far off future. However, when these goals are brought together with the means to attain them, they turn into concrete *plans* are “operative in selecting and arranging materials” in the *present*.<sup>174</sup> What was once a remote goal becomes a working ideal that directs our actions and guides our thoughts—in the name of forming an ideal society, I protest in the streets; in the name of finding an ideal lover, I spend my money on a new suit; in the name of achieving ideal health, I quit smoking. In each case, the “end-in-view” is what gives purpose and meaning to our individual acts by placing them in the context of accomplishing a long-term goal.

An end-in-view arises when a particular consequence is foreseen and being foreseen is consciously adopted by desire and deliberately made the directive purpose of action. A purpose or aim represents a craving, an urge, translated into the idea of an object, as blind hunger is transformed into a purpose through the thought of a food which is wanted, say flour, which then develops into the thought of grain to be sown and land to be cultivated:—a whole series of activities to be intelligently carried on. An end-in-view thus differs on one side from a mere anticipation or prediction of an outcome, and on the other side from the propulsive force of mere habit and appetite.<sup>175</sup>

Dewey’s concept of the “end-in-view” is thus a pragmatic interpretation of Aristotle’s “formal cause.” Where Aristotle defines form as the actuality toward which the movement of potential matter was directed, Dewey defines form in terms of both a *plan* and a *result*. Dewey observes that “it is significant that the word ‘design’ has a double meaning. It signifies purpose

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<sup>174</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 280.

<sup>175</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 186.

and it signifies arrangement, mode of composition.”<sup>176</sup> The “end-in-view” is thus the formal purpose directed toward bringing the formal arrangement into being, just as the blueprint of a house is both the plan for the house as well as a representation of the house itself. By analogy, rhetoric embodies ends-in-view when it articulates an ideal to be achieved and then uses that ideal as a way to guide and motivate action. In this way, rhetoric differs from the other “fine arts” by combining means and ends within a single artistic work.

However, it is important to note that the ends-in-view of rhetorical discourse are not themselves static or fixed once they are articulated. Being concerned with *kairos*, the ends-in-view of any rhetorical discourse must continually adapt in response to a changing situation. Thus, just as an architect must modify her blueprint when faced with budgetary constraints, labor disputes, unseen physical obstacles, or simply the changing needs of her clients, a rhetor must also continually adapt and revise the ends-in-view of her rhetoric over time to meet new challenges. As Dewey makes clear, any “act of expression that constitutes a work of art is a construction in time.”<sup>177</sup> Although he is speaking here of a single work of art, like a painting or sculpture, the same principle applies to rhetoric when one looks at any persuasive discourse that adapts and changes over time. Similarly, what he says about the relationship between a “self” and a “work of art” also applies to a “rhetor” and her “rhetoric,” as when he observes that “the expression of the self in and through a medium, constituting the work of art, is *itself* a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions, a process in which both of them acquire a form and order they did not at first possess.”<sup>178</sup> In other words, if one includes the “audience” in the category of “objective conditions,” a rhetorician and her audience engage

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<sup>176</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 121.

<sup>177</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 71.

<sup>178</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 71.

in a prolonged transaction over time through the medium of a persuasive discourse whose ends-in-view acquire new form and order as the situation changes and evolves.

The *method* of rhetoric then follows from the *form*. Because rhetoric embodies ends-in-view that must both *guide* and *motivate* action, the method of rhetoric is to draw from the resources of both science and art in the creation of timely discourse that responds to rhetorical situations occurring in the immediate present. For instance, science may be used as instrument for guiding behavior in the practical world, but it lacks the eloquence on its own to motivate people to act *here* and *now*. By contrast, the arts of literature, drama, or poetry often use eloquence to heighten feelings of desire or tension, but these feelings are often directly towards the objects, people, or events *in the works themselves* rather than towards any aspect of a situation happening *outside* of those works. Rhetoric, however, accomplishes both effects by responding to rhetorical situations through the creation of timely discourse that stimulates emotion, intelligence, and imagination for the purposes of transforming impulses, redirecting habits, and finding practical outlet in actions of will.<sup>179</sup> Thus, from a Deweyan perspective, *rhetoric is distinct from literature, drama, and poetry in that it responds to rhetorical situations by drawing from the resources of both art and science in order to create a discourse that embodies an end-in-view that guides and motivates thought and action in the immediate present.* Thus, despite the fact that Dewey almost never mentions rhetoric, we can successfully construct a theory of rhetoric based on such passages as this one, which appears to describe the form and method of rhetoric in all but name:

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<sup>179</sup> These distinctions are, of course, only tools for analysis, not absolute distinctions. Take, for instance, the comedies of Aristophanes, which frequently incorporate rhetorical flourishes that advocate or criticize certain policies (most notably dealing with war and peace, as in the *Acharnians*) and refer to living people in his plays (like Cleon in the *Knights* or Socrates in the *Clouds*). Thus, Aristophanes not only created works that embody “universal” ideals of art, but also embody the “particular” spirit of rhetoric.



It is...said that intelligence is cold and that persons are moved to new ways of acting only by emotion...Of course, intelligence does not generate action except as it is enkindled by feeling. But the notion that there is some inherent opposition between emotion and intelligence is a relic of the notion of mind that grew up before the experimental method of science had emerged. For the latter method signifies the union of ideas with action, a union that is intimate; and action generates and supports emotion. Ideas that are framed to be put into operation for the sake of guiding action are imbued with all the emotional force that attaches to the ends proposed for action, and are accompanied with all the excitement and inspiration that attends the struggle to realize the ends.<sup>180</sup>

We thus find, in the concept of rhetoric as a *technē*, an art of communication that satisfies the great demands which Dewey placed upon art for the fulfillment of his democratic social ideal. In his response to Lippmann's criticism of the mass media in *Public Opinion*, Dewey wrote that "the union of social science, access to facts, and the art of literary presentation is not an easy thing to achieve. But its attainment seems to me the only genuine solution of the problem of an intelligent direction of social life."<sup>181</sup> However, when Dewey made the same argument in *The Public and Its Problems*, he points not to rhetoric as an example of the kind of "art" he had in mind, but to "poetry, the drama, the novel."<sup>182</sup> However, neither poetry, nor drama, nor the novel is explicitly dedicated to the project of uniting art and science, emotion and intelligence, means and ends, and ideas and action in such a way as to transform immediate situations through the power of the written or spoken word. Although they undoubtedly share some of these

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<sup>180</sup> John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982; original work published 1935), 38.

<sup>181</sup> Dewey, "Review of *Public Opinion* by Walter Lippmann," 343.

<sup>182</sup> Dewey, "Review of *Public Opinion* by Walter Lippmann," 350.

qualities, only rhetoric explicitly seeks to embody them in a single discourse. Thus, when Dewey claims that democracy will have its “consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication,”<sup>183</sup> that art is not poetry, the novel, or the drama, but *rhetoric*, the oldest and most democratic of the arts of communication.

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<sup>183</sup> Dewey, “Review of *Public Opinion* by Walter Lippmann,” 350.

## 7. CONCLUSION: RHETORIC AND DEMOCRACY

Words furnish a record of what has happened and give direction by request and command to particular future actions. Literature conveys the meaning of the past that is significant in present experience and is prophetic of the larger movement of the future. Only imaginative vision elicits the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual. The first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art.<sup>1</sup>

That Dewey believed communication was an art, and that art was necessary for the success of democracy, is beyond dispute. As it has often been observed, Dewey saw “communication as a mode of generating meaning, establishing social order, and creating human experience, including aesthetic experience,”<sup>2</sup> and he believed that “communication carried to its fullest development becomes art.”<sup>3</sup> Dewey places so much hope in the progressive power of art because he believed that “the function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness,”<sup>4</sup> and thus it is only through art, particularly the art of communication, that one can successfully change the habits of a culture to adapt to a changing world. The culmination of this hope was Dewey’s controversial pronouncement in *The Public and its Problems* that “if the Great Society is to become a Great Community...The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 348.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Simonson, “Varieties of Pragmatism and Communication: Visions and Revisions from Peirce to Peters,” in *American Pragmatism and Communication Research*, David K. Perry, ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas M. Alexander, “John Dewey and the Roots of Democratic Imagination,” in *Recovering Pragmatism’s Voice: The Classical Tradition, Rorty, and the Philosophy of Communication*, Lenore Langsdorf and Andrew R. Smith, eds., (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 152.

<sup>4</sup> Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 350.

must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it.”<sup>5</sup> Echoing his earlier defense of the *Thought News*, Dewey believed that democratic social life could only be successfully achieved when a national system of mass communication could be developed in which “reporters were permitted to work freely”<sup>6</sup> to embody the results of social inquiry within an artistic presentation for the purpose of enlightening public opinion. The primary difference between his earlier and later conceptions was that he no longer believed in the existence of the “social organism,” and thus he saw communication more as a process of pragmatic experimentation and adaptation rather than idealistic expression and realization.

However, the constructive solution Dewey proposed in *The Public and Its Problems* is far from coherent or persuasive. In fact, for many critics, his solution embodies a contradiction derived from the contradictory nature of his theory of communication. This contradiction lies in the fact that as much as Dewey praises art for its liberating potential, he always seems to place the origins of all real change in the ritualistic aspects of communication found in face-to-face interactions within a community. Czitrom describes this apparent contradiction in Dewey as the tension “between the process of communication as an intimate ritual and communication viewed in terms of technical, material advance.”<sup>7</sup> The result of this tension is that Dewey is split into competing caricatures. On the one hand, Peters has described Dewey as a “scientific social engineer who advocates the social control of human nature”<sup>8</sup>; while, on the other hand, Schudson sees him as one of the fathers of the “cult of ‘conversation’” for whom “talk was the central feature of democratic life.”<sup>9</sup> I have already explained why the former interpretation is overly

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<sup>5</sup> Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 350.

<sup>6</sup> Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 349.

<sup>7</sup> Czitrom, 108.

<sup>8</sup> Peters, “Democracy and American mass communication theory: Dewey, Lippmann, Lazarsfeld,” 202.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Schudson, “Why Conversation is Not the Soul of Democracy,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 14 (1997): 297.

narrow, but the latter interpretation raises an important issue with respect to rhetoric. If it is true that Dewey ultimately values face-to-face “conversation” over the spoken and written word as represented by classical oratory, how do we ultimately judge any rhetorical theory based on Dewey’s work? And how do we make sense of the following passage, which seems to place rhetoric in the service of dialectic?

Signs and symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternally shared experience is ushered in and sustained. But the winged words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech. Systematic and continuous inquiry into all the conditions which affect association and their dissemination in print is a precondition of the creation of a true public. But it and its results are but tools after all. Their final actuality is accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take. Logic in its fulfillment recurs to the primitive sense of the word: dialogue. Ideas which are not communicated, shared, and reborn in expression are but soliloquy, and soliloquy is but broken and imperfect thought.<sup>10</sup>

For Schudson, Dewey’s sentiments displayed here are noble but ultimately unworkable. According to Schudson, Dewey “tries to save the superiority of conversation over mass communication”<sup>11</sup> by putting forward what Schudson calls a “problem-solving understanding of conversation” which “sees conversation as a means to the end of good government.”<sup>12</sup> This model emphasizes the “equality of conversational partners” and champions an egalitarian form of “argument” in which conversational partners “formulate and respond to declarative views of

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<sup>10</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 371.

<sup>11</sup> Schudson, 305.

<sup>12</sup> Schudson, 300.

what the world is and what it should be like.”<sup>13</sup> As proof that Dewey believed in this model, Schudson points to Dewey’s passage that the essential need of democracy “is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public.”<sup>14</sup> The problem with this model, Schudson argues, is that democracy is not always so open, tolerant, and civil. Sometimes it is downright *uncivil* and *uncomfortable*.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Dewey is wrong to think that “what democratic conversations are *about* comes from public sources.”<sup>16</sup> Rather, face-to-face conversation *culminates*, rather than *originating*, in some written policy, law, opinion, or order.<sup>17</sup> Thus, if Schudson is right, Dewey’s vision of a communicative democracy is not only unrhetorical, but is unworkable as well.

My position is that the answers to these problems are found by filling in the rhetorical blind-spot in Dewey’s philosophical vision. From his praise of the work of Fred Newton Scott and Max Eastman, there is clear evidence that Dewey believed that rhetoric could be a “science” and that, as a science, rhetoric had a vital role to play in social life, but there is also evidence that he believed the study of rhetoric was best left to those more eloquent and artistic than he was. Unfortunately, Dewey’s decision to ignore the rhetorical aspects of communication left him without a coherent theory of persuasion that could account for the situated nature of discourse as it functions in practical life. Thus, his thoughts on “communication” appeared largely in isolated insights scattered over dozens of separate works. As a result, when Dewey came to make bold pronouncements about the importance of the art of communication for the survival of democratic life, he inevitably left himself open to criticism that he was being naïve, contradictory, confused, or all of them together at once. Take, for instance, Dewey’s obscure observation that “the

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<sup>13</sup> Schudson, 300.

<sup>14</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 365.

<sup>15</sup> Schudson, 304.

<sup>16</sup> Schudson, 305.

<sup>17</sup> Schudson, 305.

connections of the ear with vital and out-going thought and emotion are immensely closer and more varied than those of the eye. Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator.”<sup>18</sup> Out of context from his perspective on communication, such an observation seems absurd, and in a recent work leads to accusations that Dewey is engaging in “iconoclasm,” or “the active attempt to suppress or abolish images.”<sup>19</sup> Modern commentators never cease to find new caricatures of America’s greatest philosopher.<sup>20</sup>

I believe many of these criticisms can be answered when we interpret Dewey in relationship to the rhetorical theory based on his writings. In a Deweyan rhetorical theory, rhetoric is defined in terms of the naturalistic principles of *continuity* and *transaction*, which means that rhetorical persuasion is not a matter of changing “states of consciousness,” but of influenced our practical *habits* that transact with our environment through time. Habits, meanwhile, are the primary ground of all human behavior that act like channels that direct our courses of thought and action in response to a variety of situations. Moreover, habits are products of our social and natural environments, our “culture,” and are developed primarily through the face-to-face encounters we have with our family, our friends, and our communities in order to make us members of that culture. However, because culture exists largely “in communication,” it is communication defined sociologically that generates our habits and thus creates our “will.” It

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<sup>18</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 371.

<sup>19</sup> Cara A. Finnegan and Jiyeon Kang, “‘Sighting’ the Public: Iconoclasm and Public Sphere Theory,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004):381.

<sup>20</sup> Because this is a minor point, I will respond to it in a footnote. I believe Dewey’s observation about “vision” and “hearing” would have been better left unwritten. However, as it is, I believe Dewey’s overriding intention was neither to make a statement about the nature of our senses, nor to put down arts like photography or painting or film. He was trying to observe the difference between reading something in private (like reading a newspaper while in the bathroom) and discussing something with others (like discussing what you read in the paper with a group of friends). This distinction has less to do with “seeing” as a *sense* as it does with “seeing” as an act of absorbing information, much in the same way that Plato made the distinction between reading and speaking in the *Phaedrus*. Plato was not against “vision.” He was against language that was static and language that was alive. Thus, Dewey’s remark about “hearing” has less to do with *listening* and more to do with the give and take of conversation as a way of working through ideas and changing habits. Otherwise, Dewey could be accused of being biased against the deaf (although I’m not sure if that is better or worse than advocating “iconoclasm”).

is for this reason that Dewey places so much emphasis on “dialogue” and face-to-face interaction, for it is within these situations in which are ideas are given practical embodiment within our habits of everyday communication. As Dewey explains, “ideas are worthless except as they pass into actions which rearrange and reconstruct in some way, be it little or large, the world in which we live.”<sup>21</sup> But ideas do not simply reconstruct the world by decree. They do so only by being incorporated into our cultural habits of thought and action.

How, then, are habits changed? The answer from a Deweyan rhetorical theory is that habits change when we experience rhetorical situations that create impulses which have the potential to be transformed and redirected through the arts of language as a way of resolving that situation. As long as our habits are able to effectively guide us through everyday situations, there is no emotional tension, no intellectual doubt, and no spark of imagination significant enough to modify our behavior. When we find ourselves in a rhetorical situation, however, all of this changes. Our emotions become charged, our intelligence begins working, and our imaginations spring to life. Within these situations, we are most open to rhetorical persuasion because our habits are conflicted and we look for answers as to how we should act. Rhetoric fills this need by drawing on the resources of art and science to create an end-in-view that transforms the situation by giving new purpose and direction to our habits. Thus, the end of persuasion is not the mere change in “opinion,” as in a passive state of mind, but in “habit,” which is expressed on the level of “public opinion” within overt behavior and reinforced within the face-to-face interactions in community life. As Dewey explains, “public sentiment, to be permanently effective, must do more than protest. It must find expression in a permanent change of our habits.”<sup>22</sup> Rhetoric, therefore, does not change anything simply by being called into existence by a rhetor. As a form

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<sup>21</sup> Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, 111.

<sup>22</sup> John Dewey, “Imperialism Is Easy,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984; original work published 1927), 162.



of *transaction*, rhetoric only changes the meaning and existences of nature by being absorbed into the *continuous* habits of a person or a people, and these habits are meaningless if cooped up in a private consciousness.

Schudson's critique of Dewey thus fails because it implicitly slips back into a static model of society and rhetoric which assumes that the relationship between the "mass media" and "conversation," or between government and culture, are one-way streets that result in dead-ends. Schudson thus violates both the principles of continuity and transaction by dismissing the possibility that conversation develops over time and in relationship to an environment. According to Schudson, "face-to-face conversation leads up to something written rather than print culminating in something conversational."<sup>23</sup> This assertion not only renders conversation a static entity, but it stands in sharp contrast to our most normal dinner-table conversations that occur over something that was read in the newspaper. Then Schudson proceeds to flip to the other binary by claiming that "the consummation of democratic talk may be a signed petition, a posted notice, a written law, a written judicial opinion, a written executive order."<sup>24</sup> But this claim contradicts his earlier premise. If print cannot lead to conversation, of what use are these petitions, notices, laws, opinions, or orders? Rather than being "consummations" of democracy, they appear to be meaningless objects that have no relation to our daily habits of thought and action. Within Schudson's implicit dualism, conversation and law are two separate entities connected by a one-way road upward, leaving him to the dismal conclusion that "democracy has little to do with intimacy and little to do with community."<sup>25</sup>

For Dewey, however, democracy was synonymous with community. Democracy for him is not "a kind of political mechanism that will work as long as citizens were reasonably faithful

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<sup>23</sup> Schudson, 305.

<sup>24</sup> Schudson, 305.

<sup>25</sup> Schudson, 307.

in performing political duties”<sup>26</sup>; rather, “democracy is a way of life.”<sup>27</sup> Unlike Schudson’s characterization, the guiding ideal of this “way of life” was not one in which “equality, civility, and fairness reign.”<sup>28</sup> Undoubtedly, Dewey (no less than Schudson) hoped we could achieve such a “conversation,” but even in his idealistic writings he was under no illusions that practical democracy worked in such an ideal manner. He had, after all, grown up in the shadow of the Civil War. His goal was thus not to deal with social conflict by defining it away, but by finding an alternative means of resolution than the wasteful violence that always undermined whatever noble ideals justified it. Thus, as Caspary has argued, “Dewey’s philosophical Pragmatism and his democratic politics, alike, revolve around a central theme of conflict and conflict resolution.”<sup>29</sup> This theme is most visible in our definition of the rhetorical situation based on Dewey’s writings. As in Dewey’s example of the man torn between patriotism and religious faith, his is not a situation resolved by a peaceful and calm dialogue between differing views; it is a situation resolved through the often tense and dramatic clash of opposing rhetoric set within the uneven dynamics of the public sphere.

This much, however, is true—Dewey believed that the success of democracy was contingent on the continued existence of a community that valued “full and moving communication” as both a means and an end of social life and that had developed the habits of thought and action to sustain those values. In other words, Dewey defined democracy as the creation of a community of citizens who not only used communication as an instrumental *means* of resolving situations, but also who valued communication as a consummatory *end* in which their individuality found concrete expression. This fact did not mean that Dewey held to a naïve

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<sup>26</sup> Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” 225.

<sup>27</sup> Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” 226.

<sup>28</sup> Schudson, 300.

<sup>29</sup> William R. Caspary, *Dewey on Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2000), 3.

view of “conversation” or “discussion.” As Dewey explicitly makes clear, “the idea that the conflict of parties will, by means of public discussion, bring out necessary public truths is a kind of political watered-down version of the Hegelian dialectic, with its synthesis arrived at by a union of antithetical conceptions.”<sup>30</sup> What Dewey explicitly envisions is a critical form of social discourse in which scientific inquiry and “expert” planning both grow out of “the direct problems and methods of common sense” and then react in such a way as to help refine, expand, and liberate our habits of opinion and action.<sup>31</sup> This is by no means a rule by experts, but is rather a reciprocal affair. In Dewey’s words, “the man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied.”<sup>32</sup> In this way, Dewey was led to his recognition that a liberated mass media is necessary to provide a forum for such a discourse just as “the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion”<sup>33</sup> is necessary to provide an active and capable community of participants within that discourse.

The result is that Dewey’s vision of democratic social life comes down to a belief that democracy is synonymous with a community that values freedom of speech over all things. Louis Menand has argued that “the constitutional law of free speech is the most important benefit to come out of the way of thinking that emerged...in the decades after the Civil War.”<sup>34</sup> For Menand, this freedom of speech was not justified as an abstract “right” or by what Dewey called “a means of blowing-off steam,”<sup>35</sup> but “because we need the resources of the whole group to get us the ideas we need.”<sup>36</sup> For Dewey, the right to free speech embodied the ends and the

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<sup>30</sup> Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 263.

<sup>33</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 365.

<sup>34</sup> Menand, 431.

<sup>35</sup> Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Menand, 431.

means of a society guided by the ideals of passionate intelligence and intelligent passion. Free speech, for Dewey, is not “a merely individual right,”<sup>37</sup> but is thoroughly social and intrinsically practical. Thus, “toleration is thus not just an attitude of good-humored indifference. It is positive willingness to permit reflection and inquiry to go on in the faith that the truly right will be rendered more secure through questioning and discussion...without freedom of thought and expression of ideas, moral progress can occur only accidentally and by stealth.”<sup>38</sup> There is something Aristotelian about Dewey argument, reminiscent of Aristotle’s claim that “rhetoric is useful because things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites.”<sup>39</sup> Although Aristotle’s idea may have appealed to Dewey in his idealistic years, in his later work he did not believe that open discussion, on its own, was a sufficient condition for the emergence of truth. He did believe, however, that the liberation of rhetoric and communication were necessary conditions (along with the liberation of social inquiry and experimental intelligence) for the emergence of “true” ideas that could be proven true by successfully guiding and enriching human experience, just as he believed that democracy was synonymous with the maintenance of these conditions. Dewey puts the case this way in a speech delivered during the rise of fascism in Europe before the start of World War II:

Democracy means not only the ends which even dictatorships now assert are their ends, security for individuals and opportunity for their development as personalities. It signifies also primary emphasis upon the means by which these ends are to be fulfilled...The value of upholding the banner of liberalism in this country, no matter what it has come to mean in Europe, is its insistence upon freedom of belief, of inquiry, of discussion, of assembly,

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<sup>37</sup> Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1932), 271.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1355a22-23.

of education: upon the method of public intelligence in opposition to even a coercion that claims to be exercised in behalf of the ultimate freedom of all individuals.<sup>40</sup>

The core thesis of this dissertation is that Dewey's democratic vision is incomplete until it is supplemented with a working rhetorical theory in which rhetoric acts as an art of transformation that both creates and responds to rhetorical situations. Dewey had realized the necessity for such an art in his appeal to literature, drama, and the poetry, but his solution was unconvincing, for these arts lack the quality of *kairos* that characterizes the rhetoric of the public sphere. In other words, even given the long-term transformative potential of such arts, they pale in comparison to the *kairotic* power of rhetoric to act "as a spontaneous formulation of and a barely constituted response to a new situation unfolding in the immediate present."<sup>41</sup> For instance, after years of suppression of the arts in Hitler's Germany, no poem, novel, or play could appropriately respond to Hitler's rhetoric once it had transformed the impulses of his nation into the emotions of fear, hatred, and pride that were about to culminate in the terror and ferocity of the *Blitzkrieg*. The sense of urgency was too great and the consequences too dire. Only the opposing rhetoric of someone like a Churchill or a Roosevelt had the potential to respond to the situation unfolding in the immediate present by using rhetoric to harness the opposing forces of their nations, even if in the long term it is other forms of art, like the movie, the play, or the novel, that have the greatest power to keep such a situation from occurring again by keeping the lessons of the war alive in the public memory.

Dewey once wrote that "it is by creation of the intangibles of science and philosophy, and especially by those of the arts, that countries and communities have won immortality for

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<sup>40</sup> John Dewey, "Democracy is Radical," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987; original work published 1937), 298.

<sup>41</sup> John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, 61.

themselves after material wealth has crumbled into dust.”<sup>42</sup> It is common to think that these “arts” are isolated to “fine arts” like sculpture, painting, music, architecture, poetry, literature, and drama, but for Dewey this also included the art of communication. For Dewey, the art of communication is a precious and noble thing, but it includes more than just the dialogue between friends, the songs of a community, the literature of a culture, or the news of a nation; the art of communication includes the argument between adversaries, the town hall debate, the published editorial, or oratory of a passionate citizen. Thus, that Dewey never constructed an explicit account of rhetoric does not mean he did not value it as an art; it only means that he left the task of this construction up to others. Fortunately for us, the corpus of his work provides the resources for such a construction, and I believe the naturalistic rhetorical theory that emerges from his writings is vital not only for an enriched understanding Dewey’s social thought, but also is indispensable if we are to successfully carry Dewey’s progressive vision of a democratic society, a vision that follows the path first charted by Protagoras and the Greek sophists, down what Dewey called that “ever-present new road upon which we can walk together.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John Dewey, “Art as Our Heritage,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988; original work published 1940), 255.

<sup>43</sup> John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 13, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988; original work published 1938), 188.

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