

EMBODIMENT AND AGENCY: THE CONCEPT OF GROWTH IN JOHN DEWEY'S
PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This project takes up recent literature exploring intersections between embodiment theory and education research. I bring these literatures together around an interpretation of the concept of growth from John Dewey's work on education, as I argue that this widely debated idea represents a particularly rich concept with respect to this intersection of theory. I interpret his concept of growth as a concept regarding human agency, which I claim is a thoroughly embodied and felt phenomenon (as opposed to a purely rational capacity). In this interpretation, I follow Dewey in claiming that growth is a valuable educational goal, arguing that when read as embodied agency, the concept of growth can be a helpful focus for encouraging the cultivation of students' felt experiences of agency.

The project begins by taking up Dewey and his work in the philosophy of education, emphasizing his definition of education as the reconstruction of experience and the ideal of growth as it relates to this reconstruction. I outline Dewey's conceptions of experience as well as his ideas regarding the self, the body-mind, and the relationship between habit and self-constitution. While I claim that Dewey's work offers a rich framework in which to think about growth, agency, and education, I then look to two

alternate philosophical perspectives in supplementing his conception of the embodied self. First, I take up the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in describing how his phenomenological perspective articulates a method for careful, first-person testimony regarding embodied experience, as this supplements Dewey's view by focusing thematically on how embodied agency is felt and experienced. Second, I take up the work of Michel Foucault in describing how his postmodern perspective articulates a method for deconstructing the social conditions that create contemporary, disciplinary body-subjects, as well as how his later work emphasizes care of the self, projects of self-transformation, and practices of freedom. These thinkers, I argue, can further Dewey's emphasis on growth by providing resources regarding transformation as the unending process of self-creation, exploration, and the expansion of possibilities, which buttress Dewey's idea of growth when interpreted as embodied agency.

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CHAPTER I
GROWTH, AGENCY, AND EMBODIMENT IN JOHN DEWEY'S
PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

This project examines a particular connection between embodiment and education, focusing on a key idea from John Dewey's philosophy: the concept of growth as an educational aim. Specifically, I interpret Dewey's concept of growth, which is central to much of his philosophy but is particularly vital to his work on education, as an idea regarding human agency. More specifically, I emphasize that agency is not simply a rational faculty or cognitive ability, but is an embodied phenomenon relating to the ways in which individuals feel themselves to be active, capable agents in the midst of changing situations. That is, I am interpreting growth as the development and enrichment of ever-increasing potentials for exercising one's agency, which involves her ability to form intentions and carry out projects, but in addition, addresses her capacities for living her life with deliberate engagements in which she finds meaning, purpose, and a sense of possibility. This sense of possibility, I maintain throughout the project, is a felt, embodied phenomenon, an element of one's embodied participation in an environment, which draws on and works in conjunction with an awareness of her potentials. It is this sense of possibility that I find critical to a rich sense of embodied agency, and thus, this is a part of how I interpret growth as an educational ideal. As such, my project begins with Dewey's work on education and growth, continues through his accounts of the self and the body-mind, and augments these accounts with two others, those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault. I put these thinkers in dialogue to show how each

perspective on embodiment has something unique to offer a reading of embodied agency, with a view to how the process of education might cultivate students' agency through embodied learning practices. In short, I am marrying Dewey's conception of educational growth with accounts of the body that both highlight and contextualize human agency as embodied. My goal in employing these thinkers is to show the relevance of Dewey's idea when it comes to discussions of education and embodiment, arguing that this grouping of philosophers can provide rich resources for thinking about educational practice as the cultivation of embodied agency.

Dewey's views on education hold a central place with respect to his philosophy more broadly understood, as he believes education to be the sphere where philosophical commitments are truly tested and where their effects are most pointedly felt. His view of education's centrality can be seen in his definition of education as a reconstruction of experience, such that future experience might be enriched by the increase in connections and depth of meaning in present and future experience. While a broad and far reaching definition, I find this to be a compelling description of how education transforms experience, and thus, it forms the starting point for the current investigation. However, because we live our lives as embodied human beings, and thus educate ourselves and others as such, my inquiry moves to how experience is reconstructed insofar as our bodies are the conduits or vehicles of such experience, the pivots of such constructions and reconstructions.

Moreover, a large part of Dewey's focus on education is not about teaching students particular subjects, or on what kind of material educators should be incorporating into their classrooms. While much of his emphasis is on methodology

more specifically than content,¹ his work maintains a consistent emphasis on educating the whole person, educating students by way of harnessing the interests and impulses they express on their own and channeling these energies into organized, productive pursuits. He advocates using the method of inquiry in educational strategies, aiming to develop processes and subjects of learning that not only pique students' interest and allow them to engage in investigation in a "natural" way, but he also aims for educational methods that will strengthen their abilities for intelligent inquiry and action and for sensitive, thoughtful engagements with the world. In short, Dewey's educational vision does not simply seek to teach students about the world, but to generate environments in which students learn how to live well *in* the world, interacting with it and with others harmoniously, and cultivating habits of thoughtful, reflective, deliberate activity so that their lives might be characterized by direction, purpose, and meaning. To capture this sense of purpose and meaning, Dewey often describes fruitful educational pursuits as those which foster *growth*, and the aim of growth is to cultivate more growth and more meaningful growth. While over time, this definition has proven to be rather controversial, I believe it can offer helpful resources for thinking about the processes and the benefits of education, and as such, it is the idea from Dewey's work that inspires much of the following project.

While interpretations of growth have varied since the time of Dewey's writing, I will argue here that the concept of growth can be interpreted as a concept regarding

¹ His work addresses subject matter and content to some degree, but the larger thrust of his emphasis on education lies with a particular approach to teaching and learning. He leaves many specifics about material intentionally up to local educators and administrators, so that they might orient curricula and generate particular educational structures according to the needs of their communities.

human agency. I will characterize growth as an ideal related to the experienced, felt potential to actualize possibilities in one's life, in addition to being an ideal of intelligence in surveying and acting within situations and generating connections between experiences. In other words, I read growth as a concept signaling an increase in intelligence, perceptive capacities, and facility at making connections, but also signalling an increase in individuals' felt capacities for forming intentions, executing purposes, and operating with a sense of one's own potential. In other words, I understand growth to highlight the enhancement not only of intelligent action, but also of one's awareness and sense of purpose in being an intelligent and capable actor in the world. This takes me to the question of embodiment, in that increasing one's agency, or her felt capacities for deliberate action, is a markedly embodied phenomenon; it is a capacity that must be experienced in and through one's entire being, felt in one's sense of self in a holistic fashion, in order for its efficacy to be realized.² I will argue that a felt sense of agency is important for articulating one's intentions and executing one's purposes in the world, and thus, it is an important part of one's educative prospects, especially when thinking about growth as an educational aim. Moreover, I believe that the agency to formulate and execute one's intentions necessitates a sense of trust and confidence in one's entire being,

² While I am not engaging her work at length in this project, I acknowledge that my use of "capacities" and "capabilities" resonates with Martha Nussbaum's development of these ideas in her capabilities approach to a theory of justice. My use of these ideas bears some relation to hers, in that according to her approach, capabilities are networks of substantial, actual freedoms or sets of actual, living opportunities for individuals to make choices and execute actions effecting their lives. Moreover, she views education as one of these fundamental capabilities that all individuals deserve access to, as part of the capability of developing freedoms of imagination, thinking, and practical reason. However, Nussbaum's conception of the human self differs somewhat from the one I will develop, insofar as her discussion moves from, and is directed towards, the tradition of political liberalism. See *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

in her capacities of mind and body.³ In short, I am reading Dewey's concept of growth as an ideal of agency and I am reading agency as a thoroughly embodied phenomenon. I will conclude that embodied agency is a plausible way to interpret Dewey's idea of growth and thus, will think about what this conception of growth means for educational practice.

There are several motivating factors for making this claim and for emphasizing what it might entail for education. One factor regards the question of agency as an embodied phenomenon, and another, more pressing one, includes the current conditions shaping the lives (and agencies) of students.⁴ First, while agency might generally be considered the capacity of an individual or group to act in the world, or to consciously develop intentions and carry them out in activity, my reading of this idea will emphasize the felt experience of such a capacity, a brand of confidence or trust in one's sense of self and one's abilities. I am emphasizing this kind of confidence or trust in one's embodied self as a thoroughly *felt*, experiential quality, a component of encountering and engaging with situations that may not be consciously recognized or able to be rationally articulated. However, as a way of encountering situations, I stress that one's agency emerges largely

³ While using the language of "mind and body" as if they were separate things seems to lose something of the existential reality of human experience, I will use them distinctly at points to highlight the various shades of embodied experience, as well as describing ways mind and body have been historically interpreted as separate and separable entities. Like Dewey, who roundly rejects dualism of all varieties, I also believe that any separation of the two is a matter of linguistic convention for discussing these phenomena of human life in different ways. I do not believe they are fundamentally separate "things," though the language used to describe them might at times appear as such.

⁴ I focus primarily on students in the United States working within the public school system. While I do not always state explicitly, I tend to think primarily about the embodied conditions of middle and high school students (though I believe many of my claims would apply to elementary-aged students as well).

through her felt, embodied sense of being an active, capable participant in her world. This interpretation runs counter to some of the ways in which canonical philosophical traditions have characterized agency, casting it as a purely rational capacity and linking it with decision-making, identity, and autonomy. In her introduction to the volume *Embodiment and Agency*, Letitia Meynell describes how agency has been typically characterized as “distinguished from mere bodily activity and ... intimately tied to the mind,” and how it has historically emphasized “rationality and free will.”⁵ She claims that in the European tradition, the agent was basically identified with the mind, and thus, the mind became the focus for further philosophical inquiries into knowledge and ethics.⁶ While the focus of my energies will not be specifically on overturning this limited conception of agency and expounding on its flaws (acknowledging also that some important work along this line has been conducted), I will be emphasizing a reading of agency that underscores its experiential and embodied character. In doing so, I will be echoing some of the thinkers whose work is collected in this volume, who examine agency through a range of lenses, challenging the conception of the autonomous, rational individual by emphasizing the impacts of the embodied character of experience.⁷

⁵ Letitia Meynell, Introduction to *Embodiment and Agency*, eds. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The essays in this volume take up factors such as emotion, relationality, narrativity, memory, race, gender, and the effects of globalization into their accounts of embodied agency. While my approach does not focus specifically on these factors, I wish to acknowledge the important work done in articulating how these facets of existence can play a role in influencing one’s embodied experience of agency.

While not necessarily always using the same focus on agency, recent research on the phenomenon of stereotype threat touches on a similar aspect of how one's actions and performances can be influenced by factors outside of their control, particularly by factors that tend to operate outside the sphere of rational capacity and more on the level of felt, experiential qualities. Briefly, stereotype threat documents the phenomenon that being a part of a particular social group about whom stereotypes exist can negatively influence one's performance. In other words, if a stereotype exists for a certain group, a member of that group is susceptible to performing below her potential (or her performance in a different context) if the threat of fulfilling the stereotype is present. Initially researched and documented by Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson in the 1990s, their findings demonstrate that the presence of a stereotype can markedly hinder the performance of someone threatened by fulfilling that stereotype, and moreover, they find that the impact is heightened in situations where individuals are in some way "primed" to experience the stereotype before or while performing a task.⁸ Since their initial studies with African-

⁸ Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Performance of African-Americans," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 5 (1995): 797-811. This initial work was with African-American and White college students (at a prestigious university, where all students were fairly high achievers to begin with), assessing students' performance with respect to the stereotype that African-Americans have lesser intellectual capacities than Whites. Their experiments included difficult tests emphasizing verbal ability and problem solving, taken by students divided into several groups, each with the same number of White and African-American students. One group was told that the test was a measure of intellectual ability: this was the diagnostic group, the group primed for stereotype threat. Another group was told that the test was simply a laboratory experiment, not measuring their intellectual abilities (nondiagnostic). A third group was told that the test was a challenge and they should try their best (nondiagnostic, control). The results – of varying experiments with this model, controlling different variables in different experiments – consistently showed that the African-American students in the diagnostic group, the ones who were told the test was a measure of intellectual ability, underperformed compared to the other groups. Their results tended to be lower than the White students in the diagnostic group as well as all

American and White college students, more than 200 studies have been performed regarding various aspects of this phenomenon, generally confirming the result of their findings: that stereotype threat can significantly impact not only students' achievement, but also their perceptions of their abilities, and their expectations for achievement in the future.⁹

There are several hypotheses for how stereotype threat works, but the general consensus is that individuals experience pressure not to conform to an existing stereotype as an added cognitive burden while working on a given task, and this pressure can bring distraction and divided attention. Some hypotheses state that this added burden inhibits individuals' use of working memory, can trigger uncertainties regarding one's abilities, can heighten sensitivity to mistakes, can foster feelings of dissociation within one's identity by attempts to distance oneself from the stereotyped group, and can generally increase distraction and anxiety, all of which can inhibit performance.¹⁰ What this phenomenon goes to show is that the exercise of one's agency is far from a unilateral, uncomplicated, purely rational process. It is a particular demonstration that the *felt* characters of one's experience – often unconscious ones – can be significant in how one

the students in the nondiagnostic and control groups. Through variations in these and other experiments, Steele and Aronson concluded that the threat of conforming to a negative stereotype about one's group can significantly impact one's performance.

⁹ Debra Viadero, "Experiments Aim to Ease Effects of 'Stereotype Threat,'" *Education Week* 27, no. 9 (October 24, 2007), <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/10/24/09gap.h27.html>. Some variations on these studies have shown that the stereotype that girls are not as good at math as boys impact girls' performance on math tests, as well as stereotypes regarding the intellectual capacities of Latinos and other minority groups (including African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and elderly populations).

¹⁰ Toni Schmader, "Stereotype Threat Deconstructed," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19, no. 1 (2010): 14-18.

experiences her own possibilities and potentials in that situation. In other words, the presence of stereotype threat demonstrates that one's agency might be effected in ways not relating to her intellectual ability, but through the presence of pervasive attitudes and atmospheres with which she interacts. If agency is understood as an embodied phenomenon and not simply a rational faculty, as a facet of situations in their complete and felt totalities, the presence of stereotype threat can explain how one's felt, embodied agency can be incongruent with one's "believed" or "cognitive" agency, or how there might be disconnects between how one acts given oppressive circumstances and how one might act in their absence.

In this work, I will cast the embodied character of agency as a felt quality within human action, as a sort of trust that is not simply a rational capacity of decision-making or the intellectual exercise of one's reason, but also involves a felt, experienced sense that one is able to form intentions, carry out purposes, and develop a sense of her own presence as an actor in the midst of changing circumstances. I will claim that this feeling of faith in one's capacities is significant for developing one's agency, in that, lacking this experiential sense of trust poses difficulties in developing a strong sense of oneself as an efficacious actor in the world, as an individual both responsible for her actions and capable of creating her own life within certain constraints. The phenomenon of stereotype threat might be seen as one instance of this kind of inhibition, where students so threatened can experience their academic potential and future opportunities as circumscribed, and unwarrantedly so. Through the course of this project, I will argue that this kind of felt, experienced trust in oneself might be characterized as an embodied "belief" or felt sense that she is able to act intelligently and effectively in her world, and

that her possibilities for continued growth are real and actualizable (which entails the recognition from others that such possibilities are real and actualizable as well). By characterizing this element of agency as an embodied belief or sense, I am viewing agency as a felt, experiential phenomenon, one that is rooted in the embodied nature of human life and the pervasive qualities of feeling that emerge as part of lived experience. In highlighting the felt sense of experience, I am borrowing from Mark Johnson's analysis, presented most recently in *The Meaning of the Body*, of the embodied sense of experience that helps form the roots of our thinking and development of meaning.¹¹ His emphasis on the pervasive, qualitative sense of experience helps to characterize the significance of *feeling* when it comes to engaging in situations and the possibilities we discover therein. My approach similarly aims to stress the embodied character of agency, our sense of ourselves as capable and efficacious actors, and how it might be enriched through education. I believe educative growth might be well served by acknowledging the body's vulnerabilities and resiliencies, its obstacles and successes, its frailties and its wonders; and importantly, not least of such wonders is our capacity for near-continual change, renewal, and transformation, or in other words, growth.

The second, and perhaps more pressing motivation behind this project, concerns many of the conditions present in current educational systems and structures. Not only are residues of dualistic thought prevalent in much traditional educational practice (one can imagine a classroom where students sit quietly, relatively passively, at tidily organized rows of desks, while the teacher actively fills their brains with information, in

¹¹ Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

the style of Paulo Freire’s banking model of education¹²), but other contemporary factors are at play in schools as well. Predominant among these are increases in standardized testing as *the* measure of educational success, with subsequent pushes to decrease school time on subjects not related to testing results. This is compounded by drastic funding cuts for education, as federal, state, and local budgets get squeezed tighter and tighter in the current (early 21st century) economic climate. The result of these factors is often the dramatic reduction (or complete elimination) of classes and programs that are considered extracurricular, and a large share of this burden falls on arts and music classes as well as sports and physical education programs.¹³ As such, students across the country today are much less likely to participate in these classes and programs on a regular basis; moreover, as programs are cut, the costs often fall to participating students and their families, prohibiting some from (regular) participation.

This situation is made worse by the conditions surrounding food and nutrition for many students. Increases in the availability of highly processed foods and beverages, paired with a lack of fresh, locally available food and produce (especially in some urban areas), means that the food choices largely available (and marketed) to students leaves fewer options for many students to develop healthy, balanced eating habits.¹⁴ Paired with

¹² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1990).

¹³ Judith Davidson discusses this phenomenon, particularly with respect to arts education, as the increasing degree to which arts, music, and dance educators teach on borrowed time, in borrowed spaces, and with borrowed students/borrowed bodies. See “Embodied Knowledge: Possibilities and Constraints in Arts Education and Curriculum,” in *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds: Towards Embodied Teaching and Learning*, ed. Liora Bresler (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 197-212.

¹⁴ CDC, “The Obesity Epidemic and United States Students,” accessed August 19, 2012, http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/pdf/us_obesity_combo.pdf.

decreases in physical education and overall levels of physical activity, this leads to the dramatic increases in childhood obesity rates seen across the U.S.¹⁵ Moreover, contributing to this trend are students tending to spend more free time engaged with visual technology (computers and the Internet, video games, cell phones, televisions, etc.), further decreasing time that students spend engaged in physical activity, both in and out of school. The confluence of all these forces means that the conditions shaping students' embodiments have come to face many new and potentially harmful, disempowering influences. This also means that attending to the embodied experiences of students, particularly as to the ways they experience themselves as active agents with open possibilities, is a significant issue facing education today.

I should note the many thinkers who have explored connections between embodiment and education whose work has influenced this project (in addition to the principal figures already mentioned). Most notably, Marjorie O'Loughlin's work on education and embodiment takes up many interrelated issues of education, curricula, and pedagogical practice in connection with embodiment, emotion, empathy, aesthetics, and sociality.¹⁶ She also employs the work of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty (among others) in her treatments, advocating a view of the body that emphasizes its character as active,

¹⁵ Childhood and adolescent obesity rates have more than tripled over the last three decades, with research from 2008 showing that more than one-third of American children and adolescents are overweight or obese (CDC, "Adolescent and School Health," accessed August 14, 2012, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.htm>).

¹⁶ Marjorie O'Loughlin, "Paying Attention to Bodies in Education: Theoretical Resources and Practical Suggestions," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 30, no. 3 (1998): 275-298; "Overcoming the Problems of 'Difference' in Education: Empathy as 'Intercorporeality,'" *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 17 (1998): 283-294; "Recovering the Body for Aesthetics Education: A Brief Philosophical Exploration," *Forum of Education: A Journal of Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice* 50, no. 2 (2000): 11-18.

productive, and communicative. Her work aims to merge the discourses of education and philosophical accounts of embodiment, stressing that theories articulating the body as central to subjectivity, emotional consciousness, and sociality are vital to understanding the processes of learning and meaning-making. Her 2006 book, *Embodiment and Education: Exploring Creatural Existence*, explores several of these themes in depth: the ocularcentric ordering of the world and of knowledge; the embodied and “implaced” character of all “creatural” existence, including the meaning-making character of human life; the productive and reproductive character of working bodies; the emotional and social character of existence and their roles in education; and the embodied nature of citizenship and civic participation.¹⁷ O’Loughlin relates each of these discussions to questions of education, also examining ways in which the embodied characters of these experiences are often neglected or denigrated, resulting in a detriment to our collective understanding of life and our enactment of embodied relations within it. While her account of the “creatural,” her term for the unique type of animality human beings demonstrate, includes a brief account of creatural agency as embodied,¹⁸ a treatment of embodied agency more broadly speaking remains somewhat in the background of her analysis. However, her original work has been quite helpful for me in thinking about how attention to the body can enhance one’s connections to their environment and to others, linking educational practices to the embodied praxis of everyday life.

Similarly, Sherry Shapiro’s *Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body* represents another book-length treatment of this connection. Her work provides accounts of her

¹⁷ Marjorie O’Loughlin, *Embodiment and Education: Exploring Creatural Existence* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83-4.

experiments in teaching dance, including some suggestions for incorporating more attention to the body in the traditional classroom and curriculum. In engaging critical pedagogy in her teaching, she aims to provide a space where students' voices and bodies are highlighted as agential components of personal transformation and liberatory expression.¹⁹ As such, her work raises questions regarding the embodied nature of agency and the deliberate projects of self-transformation one can undergo via bodily practice, particularly through dance. In a similar vein, Peter McLaren's discussion of the postmodern body addresses the interwoven characters of desire, subjectivity, and modes of production within capitalist and media-driven culture. He stresses the need for critical pedagogy to develop a language that acknowledges the body/subject as both "inscribed upon" and agentially empowered.²⁰

The volume *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds* offers a collection in which thinkers from various disciplines, including many from teachers in non-traditional venues, offer their insights regarding the connection between education and embodiment. The collection takes up a wide range of questions regarding this connection: the essays within it tackle questions ranging from the "disappearance" of the body in education through emphases on rationality, control, and surveillance; reports on experiments with dance classes in Juvenile Hall; and the woeful conditions that many arts and music classes are forced to operate in, working with limited time, space, and support, often relegated to a

¹⁹ Sherry Shapiro, *Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body: A Critical Praxis* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999).

²⁰ Peter McLaren, "Schooling the Postmodern Body: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Enfleshment," in *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics*, ed. Henry Giroux (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 144-173.

marginal (if even present) position in curricula.²¹ Barbara Satina and Francine Hultgren emphasize the embodied character of education for women and girls specifically, advocating for educational exercises that foster students' "bodily competence" in empowering themselves and overcoming residues of mind/body dualism in education.²² Diana Gustafson's discussion of teaching and learning incorporates her experiences with medicine, sociology, and the practice of *qi gong* in exploring the body as an epistemological site, its role in the construction of self, and its potential as a political signifier.²³ Margaret Macintyre Latta and Gayle Buck's essay pairs case studies of middle-school science classes with insights from a particular children's game, looking at how the embodied trust present in the game might be linked to the development of familiarity and discovery of possibilities through awareness of one's own body amidst others in educational pursuits.²⁴ Richard Shusterman applies his theory of somaesthetics to humanities education, arguing that the cultivation of bodily awareness would aid

²¹ Michael Peters, "Education and the Philosophy of the Body: Bodies of Knowledge and Knowledges of the Body," in *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds*, 13-28; Joseph Tobin, "The Disappearance of the Body in Early Childhood Education," in *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds*, 111-126; Janice Ross, "The Instructable Body: Student Bodies from Classrooms to Prisons," in *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds*, 169-182; Judith Davidson, "Embodied Knowledge: Possibilities and Constraints in Arts Education and Curriculum," in *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds*, 197-212.

²² Barbara Satina & Francine Hultgren, "The Absent Body of Girls Made Visible: Embodiment as the Focus in Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 20 (2001): 521-534.

²³ Diana L. Gustafson, "Embodied Learning: The Body as an Epistemological Site," in *Meeting the Challenge: Innovative Feminist Pedagogies in Action*, eds. Maralee Mayberry and Ellen Cronan Rose (New York: Routledge, 1999), 249-274.

²⁴ Margaret Macintyre Latta & Gayle Buck, "Enfleshing Embodiment: 'Falling into Trust' with the Body's Role in Teaching and Learning," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 40, no. 2 (2008): 315-329.

students in developing closer attention to processes of perception and thought.²⁵ While embodied agency and Deweyan growth are only sometimes at the forefront of these discussions (and especially not together), these treatments demonstrate that the conversation surrounding the role of the body in education has become more robust in recent years.

While most the research discussed thus far stems from philosophers, particularly embodiment philosophers with interests in education, there are discourses surrounding the body within educational theory as well. One of these literatures takes up the relationship between physical education, physical fitness and health, and learning and academic performance. For example, a 2010 review of research, compiled and presented by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in conjunction with the CDC and other national health organizations, addresses these connections through evaluating the results of an array of independent research projects, conducted by educational theorists and health experts.²⁶ Their findings take into account a variety of types and sources of physical activity, and across the board, these studies suggest that regular physical activity

²⁵ Richard Shusterman, “Thinking through the Body, Educating for the Humanities: A Plea for Somaesthetics,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40 (2006): 1-21.

²⁶ CDC, “The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance,” (Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). The study provides a survey of studies performed in recent years on this relationship, addressing a variety of physical engagements (PE classes, physical activity in class, and recess) and assesses the effects these activities have on various elements of academic performance. They look at academic achievement (based on grades and standardized test scores), academic behaviors (attitudes and behaviors toward academic work, as self-reported by students and observed by teachers), and indicators of cognitive skills and attitudes (such as concentration, memory, self-esteem, and verbal skills). The study found that each type of physical activity studied had overall positive effects on these target factors; while some effects were deemed neutral, there were hardly any effects that were considered negative.

has either a positive or neutral relationship to students' academic performance, and that physical activity in schools, on the whole, has very few (if any) negative effects. Most notable in these findings is that increased time dedicated to physical activity in school does not appear to have a negative effect on academic achievement (grades and test scores), despite having less time devoted each day to preparing for material on standardized tests.²⁷ Also, the overwhelming majority of studies showed positive impacts on academic behaviors and cognitive attitudes, including factors such as self-esteem and social cooperation. The study also concludes that participating in extra-curricular sports programs is related to decreases in drop-out rates and increases in reported self-esteem and social connectedness.

However, despite these findings, the National Education Association (NEA) reports that students today rarely partake in recommended amounts of physical activity on a regular basis. Recommendations from the NEA suggest at least 150 minutes of physical activity for elementary students per week (an average of 30 minutes per school day), and 225 minutes a week for middle and high school students per week (an average of 45 minutes per school day).²⁸ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services puts this number higher: they recommend at least 60 minutes of physical activity per

²⁷ Another comprehensive study, conducted by Canadian researchers and assessing a large collection of research, came to very similar conclusions: that increased time engaged in physical activity has an overall positive effect on academic performance, despite having less formal instruction time. See François Trudeau and Roy J. Shephard, "Physical Education, School Physical Activity, School Sports and Academic Performance," *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 5, no. 10 (2008): 10-20.

²⁸ National Education Association, "Student Health – Physical Education," accessed August 13, 2012, www.educationvotes.nea.org/wp.../StudentHealth-PhysEdOnepager.pdf.

day.²⁹ The NEA reports also that only one state accords with this recommendation, and only five states require physical education in grades K-12. Most states (47) have their own standards for physical education, but only 33 of these states require local districts to comply with those standards. A CDC survey found that only 29% of high school students surveyed had gotten 60 minutes of activity per day in the week prior to the survey; 14% reported that they had not gotten this much activity in any day in the week prior. Only about half (52%) of students reported that they had attended physical education classes in any average week, and the number of students attending physical education classes daily drops to 31%.³⁰ These findings suggest that huge numbers of students are missing out on vital parts of a comprehensive education, particularly, elements emphasizing their embodied lives, which are key for many to helping them grow into healthy, flourishing, empowered agents.

In short, the main thrust of this research serves to support conclusions similar to ones I argue for – an increased level of energy and attention devoted to embodied practices – though their conclusions are drawn from a different vantage point. Not only does this research document the decrease in bodily activity in recent schooling trends, it documents also the positive impacts that reversing this trend can provide. However, the conclusions reached are largely due to justifications related to academic performance, fitness levels and overall health, whereas mine are based on a particular reading of an educational goal: growth as embodied agency. Of course, factors such as nutritional

²⁹ CDC, “The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance.”

³⁰ CDC, “Physical Activity Facts – Adolescent and School Health,” accessed August 13, 2012, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/facts.htm>.

health and physical fitness are important parts of an overall picture of embodied agency, but my focus is on the felt experience of such agency.³¹ As such, these recommendations address an important part of this issue, but increasing physical activity alone is not likely to be the sole or single most effective avenue for addressing students' embodied experiences of agency.

In addition to this literature, there is a discourse in education theory surrounding the variety of learning styles students demonstrate, including a bodily-kinesthetic learning style, stemming from Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. The theory states that individuals tend to operate through a particular profile of these intelligences; Gardner identifies Logical-Mathematical, Musical, Linguistic, Spatial, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligences as relatively independent modes of intellectual competence.³² The theory states that individuals show different profiles favoring and combining these intelligences in particular ways. With respect to bodily-kinesthetic learners, Gardner claims that the cores of bodily intelligence are "control of one's bodily motions and capacity to handle objects skillfully," using examples such as dancers and mimes as individuals demonstrating this type of intelligence in powerful ways.³³ Moreover, according to Galeet BenZion, a education

³¹ Moreover, some thinkers, particularly from dance education, claim that as physical education tends to emphasize physical fitness as its primary goal, other aspects of embodied knowledge and ways of "educating the body" tend to get sidelined (Susan W. Stinson, "My Body/Myself: Lessons from Dance Education," in *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds*, 127-152).

³² Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). His later work adds Naturalistic and Spiritual intelligences to this list.

³³ *Ibid.*, 206.

theorist studying kinesthetic learning, these learners feature “a cognitive potential realized by activities that allows one to use the body to express a thought or a goal directed action;”³⁴ and tend to favor “learning triggered by sensations that are generated by the body through motion, emotion, thoughts and ideas, and that is expressed through movement of the human body.”³⁵ As such, the theory continues that identifying students’ learning styles and teaching using methods that highlight these capacities and skills – known to some as the “meshing hypothesis”³⁶ – is the most effective way to maximize learning. In practice, this entails that educators distinguish which students tend to fall into the various learning styles, and design lessons specifically for the styles their students demonstrate.

Educators and researchers have found evidence that gearing lessons towards students’ particular learning styles has marked positive results. This seems to be particularly salient with kinesthetic learning, given that students identified as kinesthetic learners may be prone to struggling with elements of the traditional curriculum and traditional styles of teaching. Indeed, Gardner states that the typical modern, secular school puts a premium on logical-mathematical, linguistic, and to some extent, intrapersonal intelligences, while spatial, interpersonal, and kinesthetic intelligences

³⁴ Galeet BenZion Westreich, “An Analysis of Kinesthetic Learners’ Responses: Teaching Mathematics Through Dance” (PhD diss., American University, 1999), 10.

³⁵ Ibid. BenZion is paraphrasing the work of Margaret H’Doubler here, a dance educator and theorist.

³⁶ Harold Pasher, Mark McDaniel, Doug Rohrer, and Robert Bjork, “Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 9, no. 3 (2009): 105-119.

receive far less emphasis.³⁷ Students identified as kinesthetic learners may tend to have a hard time sitting still and concentrating for extended periods of time, and may have higher rates of behavioral issues for this reason. For example, a recent study conducted with fourth grade students identified as kinesthetic learners focused on a variety of dance and movement-related activities linked with mathematics learning objectives.³⁸ At the close of the study, the researchers found that not only the students' math scores improved, they also showed improvements with respect to social interactions, verbal abilities, and problem-solving skills.³⁹ Interestingly, many parents of the students involved in the study commented on their students' improvements in coping behaviors, self-control, self-confidence, and communication skills.⁴⁰ As such, some of this research suggests that the differences faced by kinesthetic learners in traditional schools may be meliorated through an increase in kinesthetic-oriented learning practices, recommending that teachers incorporate more full-body engagement exercises into the standard classroom.

However, there are also growing debates about the validity of learning styles approaches and the effectiveness they have in the classroom. Recent research has shown that students from different learning styles do not show significant differences responding

³⁷ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 353.

³⁸ BenZion's work documents this study. Kinesthetic-focused math activities include things such as asking students to create a certain shape with their bodies, working alone or with a partner; asking them to move according to a certain shape or type of image; or asking them to express what 4×2 is through bodily comportment or movement. Often such exercises are followed by asking students to describe their thought and movement processes, or to write down the results of their bodily experiment.

³⁹ BenZion, "Kinesthetic Learner's Responses," 138.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106-7.

to the teaching style intended to “mesh” with their particular learning style.⁴¹ This perspective claims that the scientific and statistical evidence demonstrating that students learn best when instructed in their own learning style, paired with evidence demonstrating that they also learn less effectively when instructed in different learning styles, is simply lacking. Such researchers conclude that the increased cost, time, training, and energy invested in such approaches are misguided and fail to produce consistent results.

Despite the controversy surrounding this issue, my research is likely to make some similar recommendations as those geared towards kinesthetic learners: that an increase in learning activities that engage the body are likely to produce positive effects. However, given the constraints that many educators and administrators are already under, I believe it may be beneficial for all students – including, but not limited to those identified as kinesthetic learners – to engage more regularly in body- and movement-oriented learning practices. While not an ideal solution, it may propose a partial measure for better addressing the needs of kinesthetic learners (or simply, more active, restless students) while simultaneously teaching all students about their own embodiments, their manners of movement and understanding, and some of their possibilities within a given environment.

While not always emphasizing kinesthetic learning styles, recent experimentations with embodied practices in schools have yielded interesting results. Several schools and college classrooms have begun incorporating meditation and/or yoga

⁴¹ Pasher et al., “Learning Styles.” This report is an analysis of a collection of independent research on learning styles methods and their effectiveness.

practice into their student's coursework, and one report shows reduced levels of stress for elementary students in impoverished areas of Baltimore.⁴² Moreover, as some schools take on project-based approaches to learning, many of these curricula emphasize the integration of embodied activity with class material that illuminates various facets of the topic at issue. For example, a San Francisco high school recently constructed an urban garden on their campus while learning about agriculture, ecological interdependence, cultural histories related to food and farming, and the philosophical implications of food production, community well-being, and agricultural sustainability.⁴³ Such studies and pedagogical experiments show that many educators and educational communities are beginning to take seriously the ways in which a more holistic approach to learning might benefit students in a huge variety of ways, and many are doing so by highlighting the role of the body in educational practice.

Other possibilities that educators might consider may involve working more embodied, active practices into the regular curriculum and classroom. In addition to maintaining or increasing the availability and variety of arts, music, dance, drama, and physical education programs available to students, teachers might experiment with

⁴² Kelly Brewington, "Yoga, Meditation Program Helps City Youths Cope with Stress," *The Baltimore Sun* (Feb. 23, 2011), http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-02-23/health/bs-hs-yoga-city-youth-20110223_1_yoga-chronic-stress-researchers. See also Mary Billard, "In Schools, Yoga Without the Spiritual," *New York Times* (Oct. 7, 2011), <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/09/nyregion/in-yoga-classes-at-schools-teachers-avoid-the-spiritual.html>; Ken Burak, "Help! My Philosophy Teacher Made Me Touch My Toes!" in *Yoga: Philosophy for Everyone*, ed. Liz Stillwaggon Swan (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 61-72; and Erin McCarthy, *Ethics Embodied: Rethinking Selfhood through Continental, Japanese, and Feminist Philosophies* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 96-104.

⁴³ Downtown High School, "EATS Project," accessed June 10, 2012. http://downtownhighschool.org/Downtown_High_School/Course_Offerings.html. This project is one focus among several project-based curricula.

incorporating movement and dance into traditional classes (such as math, language arts and writing, and foreign language courses). Exploring ways to add drama-related activities to classes, such as those in literature, foreign languages, and geography, might provide new perspectives on other cultures, as well as one's own.⁴⁴ Laboratory experiments, already common in some middle and high schools, could be expanded and taken up as the basis of course projects, and this model might be rethought in relation to its applications in writing and language classes. Variations on classroom layout could be explored, involving spaces designed for greater movement or including particular stimuli for activities. As already noted, project-based approaches to learning could adopt a more central place in the "standard" curriculum, offering students a greater variety of engagements and the potential for more socially directed and personally meaningful inquiries. Variations on physical and health education might include options beyond just emphasizing physical fitness and nutrition, but might engage a stronger emphasis on educating the body and exploring one's embodied sense of self. Such engagements might include practices such as yoga and meditation, a variety of dance styles, martial arts, self-defense classes, and perhaps even anatomy and physiology courses. Some of the more "traditional" home economics topics, such as cooking, sewing, woodworking, and gardening could be paired with courses exploring their various corollaries in science, history, and social positioning (particularly given the spread of globalization and the commercialization of culture). Perhaps a range of outdoor education programs could be adopted, teaching students skills related to camping, hiking, navigating, climbing, and wilderness knowledge. Last, while this issue extends beyond the purview of this project,

⁴⁴ Adding elements of movement and drama are suggestions frequently raised by O'Loughlin.

classes engaging students honestly about sexuality, particularly in its connections with physicality, identity, reproductive knowledge, safety, selfhood, and their individual rights would be invaluable to many students (who receive, depending largely on their location, abstinence-only or abstinence-focused education about sexuality). In short, this list aims to suggest some practices that modify the traditional model of education, where students sit relatively passively at desks for long periods of time, moving through corridors as signaled by a bell or alarm, and often feel little investment, sense of self, or sense of purposiveness in their activities. I argue that engaging their embodied selves more – in the classroom, in physical education courses, and in modifications of the standard classroom and curriculum – might offer substantial benefits to their developing senses of self and their experiences of embodied agency.⁴⁵

My interest with respect to the experiments described above and the list of suggestions just given is on how such practices might help students develop more and

⁴⁵ I make several caveats with respect to this “traditional” model and the range of suggestions given here. First, I do think there is a value to students learning how to retain focus and attention on a given subject, task, or idea for certain periods of time. Indeed, this is a key discipline that enables students to take up some of these subjects, tasks, or ideas on their own in the future, and indeed, provides them with skills they need to go forward. However, given the current structures of most schools, teachers do not often have resources to expand much beyond this model, and this model is not the most effective approach for many students, subjects, or teachers, nor to be the predominant physical mode of being for the bulk of the school day. Thus, I realize that my suggestions entail changes and modifications that are not likely to be feasible for many educators, schools, or districts, simply by virtue of current policies, standards, and expectations. This is compounded by the fact that many of the suggestions listed would require huge investments of time, energy, research, and financial support, requiring changes with respect to training, structure, staff, schedules, funding practices, and so forth. Given that current policies and financial circumstances hardly allow for the most basic resources for many schools, I am well aware that many of these ideas are something of a pipe dream. However, all of this goes to serve a greater call, for which many are already spending their lives fighting, that education become a top priority for public funding and social investment.

more effective resources for continuing to direct their own educations, to continue transforming their lives and their world. I would imagine that many such practices would encourage them to experience themselves as agents, and more specifically, as embodied agents with the potential to continue growing, continue expanding the possible experiences their lives might encounter. This is my interpretation of what Dewey means, at heart, when he emphasizes that the aim of education is growth, and the aim of growth is more growth: the embodied experience of agency, experienced as possibility.

This reading of Dewey's work, supplemented by Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, is what I hope to contribute to this growing body of literature on education and embodiment. My approach provides a defense of Dewey's idea of growth, articulating this concept as an idea regarding human agency and the cultivation of its expression, and claiming that this idea has unique benefits when it comes to the aims of education. Specifically, because growth aims toward more growth (a point critiqued by many for its vagueness, which I will discuss later) it offers a global perspective on what education is meant to achieve, felt pointedly once formal education has concluded. It captures the aim of living well and living fully, of realizing the potentials of intelligent, engaged human life and its potential to *keep* growing, to continue discovering, learning, and expanding one's possibilities throughout the course of one's life. I hope to capture this expansive sense of growth by likening it with a sense of agency, emphasizing agency as a felt, embodied quality of experience and not simply a rational or cognitive faculty. In doing so, I am marrying Dewey's conception about education with accounts of the body that both highlight and contextualize human agency as embodied. As such, I aim to expand the interpretation of Dewey's idea of growth by incorporating a dialogue of different

perspectives on embodiment, showing the centrality, flexibility, and vulnerability of the body as a site of agency, and thus a site of growth in Dewey's sense. Through this focus, I hope to contribute to the literature addressing the intersection of embodiment and education, advocating for a multifaceted perspective on the body that can articulate some of the complexities of embodied experience, maintaining emphasis throughout on how these perspectives can participate in a discussion on embodied agency as a vital part of educational growth.

Chapter Outline

Because I am focusing on an interpretation of Dewey's concept of growth through a lens of agency and I am reading agency with an emphasis on embodiment, it will be necessary, in starting the project, to take up the ways in which Dewey conceptualizes ideas related to this reading, to examine how he himself might formulate embodied agency in relation to growth. As such, chapter two will take up many of these ideas from Dewey's work, focusing primarily on his texts on education and most specifically on *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Education*. This chapter will take up his conceptualizations of education, experience, and growth, focusing on his definition of education as "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."⁴⁶ From there, this chapter will outline Dewey's conception of experience as a blend of doing and undergoing, highlighting how one manifestation of growth is the

⁴⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, vol. 9: 1916, *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1889-1924* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 82.

increase in connection between actions taken and results expected as a consequence of those actions, thus lending towards a greater facility in directing subsequent experience.

In shifting the discussion to growth, chapter two will outline some of the debates over Dewey's use of this term, leading to my characterization of growth as an aim related to agency. In this discussion, I will also take up the question of self-knowledge, how it might be generated within a Deweyan education, and how it might play a role in fostering agency. In outlining these concepts and their connections to one another, chapter two will begin to articulate what a Deweyan sense of embodied agency might entail in terms of educational growth.

Chapter three will move into some of Dewey's other works, drawing material from *Human Nature and Conduct*, *Experience and Nature*, and *Art as Experience* in order to give more flesh to his conception of the human being, the body, the self, and the phenomenon of habit, all of which help to articulate what his idea of reconstruction entails and how such phenomena are related to a sense of embodied agency. Briefly, this discussion outlines Dewey's naturalistic conception of the human being as an organism in an environment, addressing also his conception of the body-mind as an organic unit of human life. His view of the self emerges out of the workings of this organic body-mind in its contact with a natural and social world, centered on the habits it practices (learned both by "nature" and through social culture) and the ways in which those habits interact. In addition to accounts of habit, self, and the body, this chapter takes up Dewey's conceptions of will, intelligence, freedom, and his characterization of having an experience, in order to gather ideas relating to agency (as Dewey rarely uses this term). His use of these ideas, however, especially that of intelligence, is helpful for developing

an account of agency along Deweyan lines, as well as articulating more precisely those qualities of experience that education strives to achieve. In concluding this chapter, I will argue that a Deweyan account of agency includes an embodied sense of intelligence and the culminating experience of purposive action, but that his account might be taken further by the addition of other philosophical perspectives. I make this claim because despite the rich resources Dewey offers, I believe they are limited in several respects.

Briefly, I believe Dewey's account of the naturalistic body-mind-self, while an important touchstone for his account of education and for this project as a whole, offers a limited perspective about what it feels like, in the first person and in the flesh, to be an embodied agent. While his views provide a helpful account of the human being as an organic and habit-oriented self, I believe more could be articulated about the experiential and direct contact we have with the material and meaningful world. This impetus takes my focus, in chapter four, to a phenomenological perspective, here presented through some of the insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. However, because embodiment, like many phenomena discussed by philosophers, is the focus of many different traditions and perspectives, I believe there is more we ought to consider in looking at a conception of embodied agency. At this point, I will have outlined Dewey's naturalistic view and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological view, and yet one more seems to me to offer something wanting in these two: a postmodern perspective that examines the ways in which the body acts as a site for cultural meanings and social powers. As such, this impetus takes my focus, in chapter five, to some of the insights offered by Michel Foucault in his emphasis on the body-subject as largely constructed through social and historical phenomena. In this light, this discussion will also include some pointed ways

in which the body might be interpreted as a site for social empowerment and a vehicle for transforming its own place in the world.

To say a little more about these two additional perspectives, in turning to Merleau-Ponty in chapter four, I will focus on his descriptive account of the body as the center and “pivot” of human consciousness and perception.⁴⁷ As such, his account provides a kind of close, first-person testimony of how the body generates meanings (though many of them not entirely conscious), and how the integration of such meanings in the body carries us around the world. In short, Merleau-Ponty describes ways in which the “I” of consciousness is largely not constituted by a mind interpreting stimuli and orchestrating thoughts, but of a body interacting with its world in ways most often taken for granted. Because his account is rather broad in its scope, I will focus particularly on his discussions of habit, expression, and transcendence in relating his work to Dewey’s. His views of the body as expressive in itself and as transcending itself are helpful, I believe, in that they root the expressive potentials of existence firmly in the body, while also articulating how the potentials of human subjectivity consistently exceed and go beyond their own boundaries, thus giving voice to their transcendence. I will argue that incorporating insights from this philosophical perspective are helpful for articulating more thoroughly how agency is experienced at the level of embodied existence and activity.

From this perspective, I will take up the work of Foucault, offering a vantage point which one might loosely characterize as its “opposite.” Since we now have a richer sense of what some elements of embodied experience and agency are like “from the

⁴⁷ My emphasis will be primarily on Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*.

inside,” or from a first person description, it will be helpful to turn to an account of how embodied experience is influenced “from the outside.” As such, chapter five will take up the work of Michel Foucault and his constructivist perspective of the body.⁴⁸ Similar to Merleau-Ponty, Foucault argues that many of the body’s meanings operate below the level of consciousness, but the target of his inquiry is how bodily practices have come to take on certain social meanings and interpretations, and how bodies become disciplined into practicing and thus living out those meanings and interpretations. Much of Foucault’s work tackles the question of how we come to understand and relate to ourselves as subjects, and, in this investigation, he also explores how we come to relate to ourselves as embodied subjects, viewing our bodies and thus, ourselves, in different ways depending on the circumstances in which we “use” or “encounter” them. He argues that discipline is one of the primary ways we come to experience ourselves as a particular identity; for example, one experiences herself as a student by virtue of how she takes up and executes certain academic disciplines (which apply to the body’s operations as well as to intellectual tasks). Such a perspective will be helpful to articulate some of the ways in which our bodies are influenced by the social and cultural forces around us, as well as how we relate to ourselves via those forces. This perspective applies to social contexts of contemporary Western life, broadly speaking, but especially to the contexts of schools, and, while I will take up this context to some degree, my main emphasis in incorporating Foucault’s work is to highlight how deeply these social meanings impact our experiences

⁴⁸ I will be incorporating some material from what many refer to as his earlier or “genealogical” work, drawing from *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, vol. I*. I will, however, also be taking up material from what is often referred to as his later, “ethical” work, drawing from interviews and essays in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* and *The History of Sexuality, vol. 3*.

of our embodied selves. Not only do Foucault's investigations have entailments for our relationships to our bodies, they implicate our very conceptions of self, community, authority, purpose, and action, and thus, agency.

This chapter will also include some of Foucault's later work, focusing on the transformative potentials present in the disciplined practices of care for the self, in order to see how these elements of embodied practice (some of which Foucault explores from texts of antiquity) might benefit a conception of embodied agency. Foucault examines these self-forming practices as manners of relating to oneself. However, in Foucault's terms, the relevance of such practices extends beyond the self, in that, through developing a practice of caring for oneself, one also educates oneself about critical matters, in terms of developing ethical relationships to herself, her community, and her world. Moreover, such practices help the individual to cultivate an openness towards and readiness for self-transformation, which I will claim can be seen as a supplement to thinking about Deweyan growth. Foucault's emphasis on self-transformation takes on a kind of ethical imperative: one cares for oneself, but also maintains a vital contact with the world, through engaging in self-transformations that continually allow one's sense of self to be renewed. In short, I argue that this material can be helpful for expanding Dewey's sense of growth in terms of agency, because self-transformation lends itself to developing embodied habits of self-knowledge and practices of self-cultivation that aim toward the expansion of possibility. In taking on new experiences, new challenges, and new relationships with oneself and one's community, one might experience new ways to be an embodied subject, and thus, an embodied agent.

Chapter six will bring the dispersed insights from these chapters together into a reading of embodied agency helpful for my interpretation of Deweyan growth. Returning to Dewey's perspective on education as the reconstruction of experience and his focus on growth as movement towards more growth, as well as the deepening of one's capacities for enriching, meaningful experiences, I will now bring these other philosophical perspectives to bear on how such growth can be thought of as the development and expansion of embodied agency. With the help from Merleau-Ponty, we can see how agency is one of the many ways the body is active, is generative of a sense of self through its communion with the world. With the help of Foucault, we can see how the body is molded and shaped in various ways, through the operation of discipline as well as through practices of self-care. Moreover, these concepts prepare the way for a reading of self-transformation, which, when combined with Dewey's sense of growth as the expansion of possibility, can be seen as the development of agency in one's felt sense of capacity, possibility, and purpose. This sense of growth as agency is, I maintain, a plausible and rich interpretation of what a Deweyan education aims for in reconstructing experience.

However, I am well aware that in my selection of these particular traditions and thinkers, there is much discourse on the body and on education that is being left out of this treatment. In inquiring about embodiment and education, one can find resources in pragmatism, phenomenology, feminism, psychoanalysis, postmodernism, cognitive neuroscience, aesthetics, critical race theory, disability studies, gender theory, queer theory, critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and other traditions and approaches which take up ideas and themes related to this project; and this is just within philosophy and

educational theory. Research on art, music, dance, yoga, and other kinds of bodywork are also likely to have their own insights to add. It is not my intention here to imply that any of these approaches are lacking in what they might offer this study. However, due to constraints of time and space, I limit my selection to the treatments already discussed, and I leave many of these important works to future research.⁴⁹

While I take a great deal from the work of O'Loughlin, Shapiro, the other thinkers mentioned above, and many not yet introduced, I hope to further the discourse on embodiment and education by elaborating on the central idea of growth from Dewey's work, emphasizing its value as an educational ideal. I believe its value might best be appreciated when thought in terms of the living, felt, embodied agency that education might cultivate, and that this emphasis can add to the larger discussion in terms of highlighting the development of agency as a felt, experienced part of life. While many of the treatments mentioned above incorporate Dewey as one among several philosophers (and philosophers of education) that takes the body seriously, few read his idea of growth as an idea explicitly linked with agency. Moreover, my emphasis on *embodied* agency presents a unique perspective in developing the ways we can see this idea emerging from

⁴⁹ I also wish to include a particular stipulation regarding disability and the development of agency as an embodied phenomenon. In claiming that agency is embodied, I wish to extend current investigations of thought and consciousness as embodied to this facet of human experience and its relevance to the process of learning; however, I do not wish to imply that persons who are differently abled have intrinsic limitations to their agency. While I believe that individuals with disabilities may experience their physical selves and their qualities of movement as unique and possibly as different from those without disabilities, I do not believe that such differences necessarily entail a lack of embodied agency. Rather, the agency that all persons have is, I maintain, rooted in embodied experience. As such, while individuals with disabilities may experience different constraints on their physical engagement with the world, these offer different sets of contours for the emergence of particular possibilities, and thus, the developments of particular expressions of agency. However, developing this issue in more depth represents a particular interest of mine for future research.

Dewey's work and applying it to current educational circumstances. In bringing together a variety of philosophical approaches to embodiment, I hope to present an image of embodied agency that can enrich and enliven this key insight from Dewey's perspective in contributing to the discourse on education and embodiment.

CHAPTER II

DEWEYAN EDUCATION AND GROWTH: SELF-KNOWLEDGE, AGENCY, AND EMBODIMENT

Deweyan Education and the Concept of Growth

Despite John Dewey's immense corpus, one can argue that his ideas and commitments regarding education lie at the heart of his philosophy. Dewey himself even remarks that *Democracy and Education* serves as one of the most comprehensive expositions of his philosophy, as well as his favorite published work,⁵⁰ and it is clear that democratic social processes and the concern with creative inquiry that pervades Dewey's writings find comfortable homes in this book. As such, this text will be one of the primary ones of this study, along with several of Dewey's other writings on education, especially *Experience and Education*. As his interest in education extends from the practices and methods carried out in American schools to the tenets grounding collective moral life, the breadth of concerns addressed in his writings on education is vast. As such, the focus of my energies will revolve around several central concepts, the first articulations of which will emerge in this chapter. First, with respect to Dewey's educational philosophy, the concept of growth will form a touchstone for the variety of approaches I engage in this project. I choose to focus on this term due to its centrality in Dewey's educational approach, as well as its application with respect to educational and

⁵⁰ David T. Hansen, "Introduction: Reading *Democracy and Education*," in *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's Democracy and Education* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 2. (The remark about it being, at a certain point in his life, the single work most fully propounding his philosophy is cited in vol. 5, LW, 156.)

ethical aims of living well. Second, self-knowledge and agency in the process of growth – educational and ethical – are key concepts that my research on Dewey’s educational philosophy will emphasize. Briefly, I will argue that self-knowledge is a requisite element within an education practically oriented towards growth, especially insofar as such growth signifies an increase in the possibilities of concrete agency and self-actualization of students. Third, the theme of embodiment will come to play a large part in my selection of materials, both from Dewey and from other thinkers. I will claim that an education oriented towards agential growth and the cultivation of self-knowledge can benefit greatly from emphasizing attention to the body in educational practice. This chapter will begin to outline how these pieces fit together in my perspective, inspired by Dewey’s educational philosophy. Taken together, these elements of Dewey’s view suggest the importance of a felt, experiential, embodied agency, not the abstract agency or decision-making faculty of a purely rational knower. Moreover, emphasizing this felt agency as a central part of growth means that it may be read as a significant educational aim.

But to begin crafting this puzzle, I should begin with saying a little more about Dewey’s philosophy of education. As in his view of philosophy more broadly, Dewey’s conception of education departs from what some see as its primary or its traditional purpose; his approach takes heed of what some of those traditions seek but also provides his own challenges and ambitions for what education might accomplish. In this vein, he works against what he calls the “ordinary notion of education,” which is centered around the transmission of historically sanctioned cultural signs and patterns of knowledge, or

what he calls, “the acquisition of literacy.”⁵¹ Instead, Dewey emphasizes that what education provides is something far beyond this kind of receptive acquisition; for him, education is the capacity and impulse to organize experience such that more and more educative experiences are possible. Dewey lays out his own technical definition of education: “It is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience.”⁵² Thus, education is the engagement with the particular contents of life such that they may be continually informing the meaning and increasing the connections with others, with the effect of fostering the integrative capacity of using such knowledge to inform and shape future experiences. Moreover, such reconstructions of meaning take place *through* experience so that present experience undergoes transformation, also enabling future transformations of experience. In short, educational experience ought to serve to broaden and deepen the impact of every other experience one undergoes.

In this way, Dewey famously identifies education with the process of *growth* and with life itself, claiming that “education is not a means to living, but is identical with the operation of living a life which is fruitful and inherently significant,” entailing that the ultimate goal or value to which education can aspire is “the process of living itself.”⁵³ As such, what education is meant to do is to continuously increase our abilities and responsive intuitions as human beings, not just as students, teachers, philosophers, scientists, or what have you; it is rather to equip everyone with the fundamental tools of

⁵¹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 248.

living in the world. To separate the learning done in school from the learning done in the rest of life is to hamper the viability of both, on Dewey's terms. It is due to this focus that Dewey correlates education with morality in the close of *Democracy and Education*, claiming, "Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest."⁵⁴ It is with eyes, ears, and imaginations open and eager to engage that we best learn, and it is in this manner that we best live, especially insofar as we hope to embody socially democratic ideals.⁵⁵

Thus, as with many elements of Dewey's philosophy – the conception of the individual human being as an organism in an environment, the emphasis on social democracy and pursuing collective goals, the significance of the aesthetic in experience – their ultimate goals and values hang on the idea of growth. His philosophy of education clearly follows suit. He claims that, like the process of living itself, education is synonymous with growth. Because life has no aim beyond itself, its continued existence

⁵⁴ Ibid., 370.

⁵⁵ In "Democratic Education: A Deweyan Reminder," Randall S. Hewitt draws on Dewey's work to combat current trends in public education that link corporate and consumer life with educational environments and practices. He claims that Dewey's work can revitalize the investment needed for students to take on the task of community and political life of which they are already a part and will later be participating in on a broader scale ("Democratic Education: A Deweyan Reminder," *E&C/Education and Culture* 22, no. 2 (2006), 43-60). On a similar note, Leonard J. Waks' "Rereading *Democracy and Education* Today" fruitfully employs themes from Dewey's work to address issues of globalization and multiculturalism in contemporary American schools. While he may find issues of multi-ethnic communities more present in *Democracy and Education* than others, Waks provides helpful explanations of how the differences in perspective and background between groups of students may be engaged in the classroom as projects cultivating the ideals and practices of democratic schooling. Such Deweyan themes, Waks argues, can be regarded as helpful tools in preparing today's youth for the growing challenges posed by globalization ("Rereading *Democracy and Education* Today: John Dewey on Globalization, Multiculturalism, and Democratic Education," *E&C/Education and Culture* 23, no. 1 (2007), 27-37).

and enrichment is the ever-emerging end-in-view guiding its actions; he writes in *Experience and Education*, “Education as growth or maturity should be an ever-present process.”⁵⁶ As such, Dewey claims that education is the continual process of enriching the possibilities of its own practice; in other words, the end of education is more education, the goal of creating connections in experience is discovering and developing the capacity for more connections in future experience, and the means by which these possibilities emerge is through the continual growth – the continual education – of the individual. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey writes:

Since in reality there is nothing to which growth is subordinate save more growth, there is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education. It is a commonplace to say that education should not cease when one leaves school. The point of this commonplace is that the purpose of school education is to insure the continuance of education by organizing the powers that insure growth. The inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling.⁵⁷

It is precisely this “finest product of schooling” that my project is particularly interested in: that is, the ways in which education (and the philosophies grounding them) develops the capacity for intelligent, deliberate, transformative, agential practice, particularly in the lives of individuals after their period of formal schooling has ended, and which schooling has, ideally, helped to cultivate.

With the terms “agency” and “agential practice,” I refer to the felt qualities of capability and potential in making decisions and formulating purposes with respect to one’s life (and the life of her community), as well as having the concrete means of

⁵⁶ John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, vol. 13: 1938-1939, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 30.

⁵⁷ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 56.

actualizing those decisions and purposes in one's reality. In this sense, I wish for this conception of agency to take into consideration the ways in which agency exceeds (or is not accurately captured by) a strictly rational definition, insofar as embodied characteristics of life play a role in the ways agency is experienced and the ways agency is received in the social sphere. For example, in contrasting a view of agency based in the rational, autonomous individual, Kym Maclaren offers an interpersonal view of agency that highlights the role of emotions. She casts emotions as tensions within our existential situations that shape our interpretations of reality, thus shaping the character of our actions and decisions. As such, she conceives of agency as an embodied response to this entire network of conditions, stressing that what agency does is "to *make existential sense of the world and to find our place in reality.*"⁵⁸ While emotion is just one aspect of the embodied reality of experience, I am trying to think about agency along similar lines, as representing a kind of practical intelligence, a mode of responding to situations and developing intentions within them. However, I hope to characterize such agency as experienced through the embodied possibilities of one's being, which includes the felt sense of those possibilities, the ways that the agent experiences them *as* possibilities. It follows then, that when the felt sense of those possibilities is lacking, one's agency might not be experienced as richly as it might be. That is, if one does not feel or experience herself to be an agent, believing but also having a felt sense of herself as a capable and efficacious actor, then her ability to execute purposes is likely to be diminished. For example, one can envision a scenario in which an individual could recognize certain possibilities for action, but qualitatively experience those possibilities as divorced from or

⁵⁸ Kym Maclaren, "Emotional Metamorphoses: The Role of Others in Becoming a Subject" in *Embodiment and Agency*, 38, author's emphasis.

not related to her own action. As an illustration, one can imagine a timid young student. In a classroom full of people around whom she feels uncomfortable, she may be reticent to answer questions posed by a teacher, despite her knowledge of the answers. Perhaps her hesitance stems from a desire not to show off or appear pretentious, perhaps from a fear of others teasing or denigrating her in some way, or perhaps simply because she becomes nervous speaking in front of others. In any case, the fact that she recognizes possibilities of action – responding to a question to which she knows the answer – may not square with her *felt* possibilities of action; in this case, raising her hand and answering questions.⁵⁹ Because these responses may not always align with one another, I want to emphasize here the ways in which such felt, experienced qualities of agency are significant for one acting on and being able to expand her agency. They are constitutive elements of what it means for her to have agency, for her to be able to act according to it.

I wish to stress here, however, that many factors enter into one's experience of embodied agency. Many elements of one's embodied being might be experienced as obstacles or hindrances to her potentials, while others might be experienced as unique opportunities. And moreover, what one experiences as a unique gift or a hindrance may not be regarded or treated so by others. What I hope to articulate is the way in which one's felt sense of her own agency is a key part of how that agency is experienced, and the way agency is experienced is likely to play a significant role in the possibilities one acts upon, in addition to those possibilities one even conceives of as present for herself.

⁵⁹ This example could be read through the lens of stereotype threat: a young girl may feel her agency torn between acting on her knowledge and the fear of fulfilling a negative stereotype.

As such, if an individual does not feel herself to be an agent, her own perception of her possibilities and potentials is likely to be limited from the outset.

While I will go on to argue that developing this kind of practical agency requires attention to embodiment in outlining the aims of education, I will first outline more details of Dewey's own articulation of what these aims are. Specifically, in thinking about education as both preparation for and the enactment of an intelligent life engaged in the world, the concept of growth lies at the heart of Dewey's educational philosophy. Indeed, Dewey writes, "Education is ... a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating, process. All of these words mean that it implies attention to the conditions of growth."⁶⁰

Growth: Experience, Meaning, and Expansion

In contrasting his view with several others on education, including theories that identify education as the unfolding of latent powers, or as the imposition of external forces in preparing the young for the future, Dewey conceives of education as the process of growth as reconstruction:

the ideal of growth results in the conception that education is a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience. It has all the time an immediate end, and so far as activity is educative, it reaches that end – the direct transformation of the quality of experience.⁶¹

Here we see that reconstruction or reorganization of experience is not simply a building-up or collecting of experience; rather, education can enact a fundamental shift in the character of experience itself. If executed well, activities in schooling have the effect of connecting to other experiences in one's life and have the potential to foster more and

⁶⁰ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 14.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

deeper connections as the student continues to grow. All experience is educative, Dewey claims, but the point of (formal) education is to make experience educative in the most fruitful way: creating connections with other aspects of life, such that meaning of as many experiences as possible is deepened. This is an important element in Dewey's ideal of growth: because experience refers to and draws on itself and its past, the aim is for the present experience to best enable the richness and depth of experiences in the future. Moreover, part of what Dewey emphasizes in casting education as reconstruction is the fact that the capacities of future experience are transformed by exploring and engaging the possibilities within *present* experience; that is, the transformations enacted in education take place *through* present experience while also creating a preparation *for* further experience. Indeed, this continuity between present and future experience is key to the significance of felt agency as educative growth: the recognition of this continuity holds the possibility for transforming the intellectual comprehension of a situation into felt possibilities for action within it. All experience is educative, Dewey claims, in that all experiences have the potential to effect later experiences, for better or worse; they can lead towards growth as well as stunt such growth.

In claiming that all experience is educative, Dewey qualifies this idea by emphasizing its negative capacities, saying that "Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience."⁶² Thus, the kinds of experiences aimed for in schools are those promoting growth, and the ultimate aim is to provide for growth that leads towards more – and more meaningful – growth. While the often-given retort to this description calls out its vagueness and the lack of

⁶² Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 11.

specific direction in which growth should emerge, part of what this kind of growth entails is the felt sense that the present can impact the future; that future possibilities can emerge from present transformations. While the critique of vagueness is one I will discuss in more detail later, for the moment, I want to include Dewey's own clarification of growth as generating more growth.

Critics beginning in Dewey's day asked, "growth toward what?" calling attention to the utter lack of instruction this gives educators, but also to the fact that because all experience is educative, growth (in some fashion) will happen no matter what; students might grow in developing a profitable, but unsavory skill set, becoming for example, highly adept burglars or gangsters or corrupt politicians. Such objections prompt Dewey's response that growth, in any particular direction, should be assessed in terms of the present and future experiences it sets students up for, or for "the attitudes and habits" opened up along the course of a particular line of growth.⁶³

That a man may grow in efficiency as a burglar, as a gangster, or as a corrupt politician, cannot be doubted. But from the standpoint of growth as education and education as growth the question is whether growth in this direction promotes or retards growth in general. Does this form of growth create conditions for further growth, or does it set up conditions that shut off the person who has grown in this particular direction from the occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in new directions? What is the effect of growth in a special direction upon the attitudes and habits which alone open up avenues for development in other lines? I shall leave you to answer these questions, saying simply that when and *only* when development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth does it answer to the criterion of education as growing. For the conception is one that must find universal and not specialized limited application.⁶⁴

Thus, while a student might grow in a particular, specialized field with great aplomb, the question of growth is only answered satisfactorily if the field or line of growth in

⁶³ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁴ Ibid., author's emphasis.

question is amenable to continued growth in a number of different – and it is assumed, socially desirable – directions. So educational theorists are not meant to make the exact choices of where and how students will grow, as Dewey wants to leave this up to individual educators and administrators, giving them freedom to craft their own goals with respect to their community, the needs of their students, and other local situations. The job for educators is to help direct students along their own paths of growth, and such paths are best laid out when they offer a healthy set of possibilities for continued, and continually enlarging avenues of growth. Thus, growing into a smooth burglar or skilled swindler, in Dewey’s vision, is likely to end up closing off possibilities for growth in one’s future. Despite the possibility for developing a specialized skill set and opening up certain types of experiences (perhaps those involving adventure, thrill, monetary gain, etc.), the limiting forces of such a path of growth overwhelm the potential goods gained from it (confronting the law, losing trust of others, going to jail, etc.). Similarly, failing to offer students experiences that truly engage and interest them – experiences they find meaningful – is also likely to hamper the type of growth that Dewey envisions. If the experiences of schooling result in students feeling chronically bored, disconnected, or frustrated, then their participation and action within school activities is likely to be coerced, mechanical, or simply the result of rote training and “getting by”; in other words, the actual agency that education is intended to open up and enlarge is diminished instead of enhanced. Growing into a highly sensitive inquirer or a rigorous critical thinker are really the types of growth that Dewey has in mind, and these skills and dispositions require that courses of growth be open and expansive, but also that students be genuinely interested and actively find meaning in their engagements. Inquiry and

critical thinking are paradigmatic examples of growth in understanding, because these are skills that can be applied in a wide range of directions and can have the result of an increasing number and quality of connections between experiences; growth toward more growth.

But specification of what growth really means still requires more clarification. To do so, I will first outline Dewey's conception of experience, discuss his characterization of experience as doing-undergoing and discuss his principles of continuity and interaction, since understanding his conception of experience is important for understanding his conception of growth. Second, I will articulate my own reading of some characteristics significant for growth, that is, it can be viewed to involve increasing the degree of transparency in understanding the situations of one's life, self, and environment. More importantly, however, the ideal of growth is also about increasing the degree of agency one has within her environment, which involves an understanding of how she works within it, how it effects her, how she effects it, and how she might maximize possibilities of flourishing within given situations. It is this emphasis that will later take my focus to the role of embodiment in education.

Dewey on Experience: Doing-Undergoing, Continuity and Interaction

In most of his texts, including those on education, Dewey articulates some version of his conception of experience.⁶⁵ In *Democracy and Education*, he highlights the active-passive character of experience; in *Experience and Education*, he highlights the

⁶⁵ Along with numerous essays, some of Dewey's texts where the concept of experience is a major theme include *Experience and Nature*, *Art as Experience*, and *Experience and Education*.

principles of continuity and interaction as forming a basic means of assessing the educative value of an experience. I will briefly outline here some features of Dewey's concept of experience and its significance for his philosophy of education.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey explicates his conception of experience by focusing on its character as both active and passive. It is active in that it involves *trying*, doing, acting, or making some kind of change, which Dewey connects with "experiment." On the other hand, it is passive in that it involves *undergoing*, receiving, or being-done-to, often as the consequences of an activity. He describes, "We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination. The connection of these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of the experience."⁶⁶ The link between these two phases of experience is so important because for Dewey, it is the strength of this link that characterizes something as learned. He claims that to "learn from experience" is to establish a relationship between what is done and what occurs as a result of what is done. In this connection, "doing becomes a trying; an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes instruction – discovery of the connection of things."⁶⁷ In summarizing the import of these characteristics of experience for education, Dewey writes, "Two important conclusions for education follow. (1) Experience is primarily an active-passive affair; it is not primarily cognitive. But (2) the *measure of the value* of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 146.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, author's emphasis.

As such, Dewey claims that in not being primarily cognitive, experience is characterized *more* by the interplay of doing and being-done-to, or the interaction of actors and the responses from others and environments, than by purely rational or intellectual operations. Also, in highlighting the significance of perception of relationships and continuities, we see that of primary importance in making experiences valuable is the extent to which they offer discernable, meaningful connections. This is paramount in his philosophy of education, for experiential engagement and the development of increasing connections and depth of relationships are what enables and facilitates learning, development, and growth, in any kind of subject, sphere, or activity.

Interestingly, this discussion, in the chapter titled “Experience and Thinking,” then moves into an issue at the heart of this project: the connection between experience, growth, and embodiment, or the question of learning concerning the body as equally significant as the intellect. Dewey comments on the manner in which schools have a tendency to focus on the cognitive and acquisitive aspects of learning, often with the result of seeing the body’s “interference” as an obstacle and a nuisance. If the tasks of schooling frame instruction as imparting knowledge to students as spectators rather than participants or agents, it is possible for schools to assume “Something which is called mind or consciousness,” which “is severed from the physical organs of activity.”⁶⁹ This dualistic frame of mind, while certainly changed from the time of Dewey’s writing, is arguably still in existence today in different forms and degrees. (While beliefs about the mind and body as a fluid unit might be different today, many remnants of dualism are still seen in the basic structures of classrooms with students sitting passively, “absorbing”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

a teacher's lesson, and in curricular components that work with themes reflecting these ideas.) In any case, Dewey criticizes this separation, claiming that it also instigates a divorce between the active and passive characters of experience, thus breaking the connection that is the very stuff of meaningful connection: "The intimate union of activity and undergoing its consequences which leads to a recognition of meaning is broken; instead we have two fragments: mere bodily action on one side, and meaning directly grasped by 'spiritual' activity on the other."⁷⁰ This fragmentation of experience can produce the opposite effect for students than that typically intended by educators: experience becomes disengaging, fractured, and compartmentalized, instead of engaged, interconnected, and continuous. He goes on to devote a brief discussion to the significance of the body and its role in the process of learning and discovering meaning in experiences. Some of this material will bear on the next chapter focusing more exclusively on these questions. For now, I will summarize Dewey's point that the separation of body from mind in the practices of education lead to a separation in the elements of experience that subsequently hinder the development of meaning within experience. The result can be boisterous, uncontrolled eruptions of bodily activity at unproductive times and places, as well as the development of a mechanical, disengaged bodily disposition that fails to see the meaning of its own role/existence. I will take up some of this material in more depth later, however.

Returning to the question of experience, in *Experience and Education*, Dewey emphasizes the ways that experience involves two elements that are important for educators to understand – continuity and interaction – such that the organization of

⁷⁰ Ibid., 147.

experiences they design can follow productively along lines of experience in its “natural” progression. Throughout the book, Dewey underscores that all experience is educative. However, that experience can be educative, or for experience to have an impact in enriching the possibilities of itself (in the present and in the future), draws on the fact that experiences are not discrete, separate phenomena, nor are experiencers separated from them. He writes, “the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after.”⁷¹ It is this principle that also grounds the conception of growth – or rather, *growing* – as characterizing the process of education; continuity allows for educative growth to take place. Because experience takes up something from what has come before and modifies in some way experiences yet to come, it is continuous. And because of this continuity, the active and passive elements of experience can reveal connections that may have been previously unseen. Thus, for Dewey, the continuity of experience is part of the reasoning for why all experience is, or has the potential to be educative.

That experience is continuous is a rather commonplace claim, Dewey reminds us, but it is significant to account for attending to the *way* in which experiences connect with other experiences and *how* the connections they foster not only enable future experiences, but also enable future circumstances. He uses the examples of a child learning to speak or read, or an individual choosing to pursue a particular profession, say a doctor or a teacher. He notes that in each case, a new power is opened up – the ability to speak or read – and with it, new circumstances also open up – new desires, new challenges, and

⁷¹ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 19.

new conditions of subsequent learning. Moreover, new external situations arise as well, and with them, new adjustments of habits and new attitudes corresponding to needs in the stimuli of these conditions. A child who can read will respond differently to, say, being presented with a new book, or observing a parent read the newspaper, than a child who has not learned how to read. A doctor will certainly notice different elements of a given situation than will a teacher, and will respond to them in different ways. These are examples of how the continuity of experience is not just a principle stating the relatively obvious – that experiences are connected – but it underscores that the connection of experiences entails the need for attention to the *way* their continuity tends toward the development of certain attitudes, situations, and possibilities, and that these attitudes, situations, and possibilities are a large part of the “results” of education. These are (among) the very subtle elements that the educator must attend to in orienting her relationships with students such that their experiences foster growth.

This brings us to the second element of experience: the principle of interaction. He offers these two principles together as a part of the criteria for determining the educative value of experiences. The “external conditions” of any particular circumstance include everything from the materials with which individuals interact (in schools: things like books, toys, equipment, art supplies, buildings, etc.) to the teachers, classmates, assignments, activities, and so forth, or “the total *social* set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged.”⁷² These conditions are vital to organizing the “internal states” and conditions of students’ experiences. Basically, the principle of interaction asserts that the inner life of the student is directly related to – in interaction with – all of the external

⁷² Ibid., 26.

circumstances involved in a given experience. Together, the inner and outer elements of experience form what Dewey calls a *situation*. It is the principles of continuity and interaction – interacting with each other – that form a cursory basis for determining educative value.

Dewey elaborates on the meaning of “situation” in his later work. In his *Logic*, he defines situation as a contextual whole of enviroing experience, which is sensed or felt as a qualitative whole.⁷³ He characterizes the pervasiveness of a situation as qualitatively experienced or felt, as “the background and the control of *every* experience;”⁷⁴ which is to say that every experience functions with a unique, individual situation as its felt backdrop. This term becomes significant for developing Dewey’s definition of inquiry, which describes the transformation from an indeterminate situation into a determinate one, characterized by transforming the “constituent distinctions and relations” of the indeterminate situation “into a unified whole.”⁷⁵ As such, while a complete treatment of this concept goes beyond the purview of the present discussion, it is significant for characterizing the felt, qualitative element of experience, particularly in the union of “inner” and “outer” as raised in Dewey’s discussion of educational experience.

In his educational works, Dewey emphasizes the principles of continuity and interaction for several reasons. First, these principles acknowledge that any experience a student undergoes must provide some kind of helpful stimulus, that is, the objective conditions must interact with a students’ inner life in a provocative or engaging way,

⁷³ Dewey, *Logic*, vol. 12: 1938, LW, 72-3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

connecting with and building upon resources the student already has in operation. Moreover, these principles call on educators to give great care and attention to the objective conditions of a situation and to attend carefully to the ways these conditions impact the students on an intellectual (and emotional, psychological, etc.) level. Second, these principles ground the concept of experience that Dewey believes educators must understand if their efforts are to be most effective. This is significant because a misunderstanding of experience is likely to generate experiences that do not foster growth in the most fruitful ways. Specifically, a dominating concern with education as preparation for the future, without proper heed to the ways in which it is a reconstruction of the present, is more likely to foster the kinds of experiences, attitudes, and habituations that thwart further growth in the future.

Dewey notes that the concept of preparation in this regard can be a very “treacherous idea,” even though, in one sense, all experiences are and should be preparations for later experience, and ideally, for future experiences “of a deeper and more expansive quality.”⁷⁶ However, when preparation for the future is prized *over* the experiences of the present, concern can easily be lost for the attitudes and habits, the dispositions and beliefs (often about the experience of learning itself) generated in the course of schooling. When this concern is lost, the most important attitude to be gained from education – the “desire to go on learning”⁷⁷ – can be enervated instead of intensified. If students are not able to gain the most from present situations (finding both intellectual satisfaction or connection as well as curiosity to discover more), or find the

⁷⁶ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 28.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

practices in which they are engaged to be useless, irrelevant, or worse, fostering feelings of defeat, the attitudes developing in the process are not likely to be ones fueling a passion for continued learning, at least in the form of deliberate study. To this effect, Dewey describes the perils and the prospects of the ideal of preparation:

When preparation is made the controlling end, then the potentialities of the present are sacrificed to a suppositious future. When this happens, the actual preparation for the future is missed or distorted. The idea of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself. ... We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything.⁷⁸

What this means is that the quality of the engagement of students with their environment, *in and for the present*, is one of the biggest responsibilities that the educator must attend to.⁷⁹ If concern is devoted more to future results than present experiences, the principle of continuity is violated in neglecting the fact that the student is failing to getting the most out of a current, living situation. Thus, the role of the present moment, considered in connection with the past and the future, is diminished (and may even become negatively tinged and counterproductive), thus diminishing possibilities for the future. One might recall a claim often heard in middle and high schools: “when are we ever going to need to know this?” (when “this” might refer to trigonometry, the Russian Revolution, Australian geography, organic chemistry, Latin, or whatever item or subject is annoying a student at the time). This complaint signals several things: first, that the activity or lesson at hand is decidedly *not* one whose immediate relevance is felt; if

⁷⁸ Ibid., 29-30.

⁷⁹ Dewey links the relationship of education to experience with Lincoln’s pronouncement about democracy: “the philosophy in question is... one of education of, by, and for experience” (Ibid., 14).

questions are being asked about its usefulness in the future, it is clearly not doing much to augment the present. Moreover, this claim also signals the attitude pervasive in so many educational situations: that what is being learned is not being learned for the present, but for the future. This attitude is a relatively common one, and it is not an entirely negative one. It is true, of course, that many things learned in schools may not be the most exciting things at the time, and yet, their importance is clearly felt when one gets older, just as unpleasant experiences are also sometimes the most significant for learning. However, I use this example to highlight how consistently education is thought of (or perceived by students) as preparation for a later time, and less so as an enrichment of the present.

Dewey stresses that both of these characteristics of experience – continuity and interaction – form a starting point for assessing the ways in which and the extent to which certain experiences offer more possibilities for growth than others. With this basic outline of experience in place, I will turn to the issue of growth as one of the fundamental educational aims in Dewey’s perspective.

Growth: Critiques and Problems; Defenses and Boons

As we have seen, growth for Dewey is a term that signals the enrichment of experience, the development along certain lines, and an increasing understanding of the situations that shape one’s experience. However, it is an idea that has gained Dewey some notoriety, due to its often-noted ambiguity and conflicting possibilities of interpreting its meaning as an educational ideal. In what follows, I will briefly outline

some of the critiques this idea has encountered since Dewey's time, as well as some positive readings and some very fruitful possibilities that this idea presents.

The first of these issues concerns the generality of the concept of growth. Beginning during Dewey's day, many thinkers and educators decried this idea as vacuous and unhelpful for informing or orienting an approach to the classroom and curriculum, let alone in the execution of day-to-day workings of a school. I.L. Kandel, Richard Hofstadter, Eamonn Callan, and R.S. Peters are among these commentators, not only pointing out the vagueness of the idea, but leveling more serious critiques that come on the heels of this ambiguity.

One of Dewey's contemporaries, Kandel claims that the vague concept of growth has led to poor interpretations of Dewey's theory, emphasizing individual growth over the organization of content and the institution of subjects in school, resulting in "nihilism and anti-intellectualism."⁸⁰ His attack laments the many problems in education of the time that Dewey, he claims, fails to address, arguing that his work leads to a "cult of uncertainty" which fails to "accept any responsibility for a clear definition of values, for a clear statement of the purpose of education," and that the consequences of this neglect are being felt most pointedly as the country is involved in war.⁸¹

⁸⁰ I.L. Kandel, *The Cult of Uncertainty* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1943), 6.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 30. Kandel continues on, in a scathing critique that seems to ring with a mood of lost hope: "That failure can also be attributed to an educational theory which refuses to accept anything as 'fixed-in-advance,' and which, with its emphasis on change and the precariousness of life, can only result, as it has done, in rootlessness. The cult of uncertainty, of an education without any values other than an exaggerated premium placed on methods and techniques without well-defined content, leads inevitably to a negation of ideals and of faith and to a repudiation of the inherited forms of culture and of humanity without which the surface changes in the stream of life are mistaken for the waves of the future" (31). The text was written in 1943, as war was already pressing upon

Hofstadter describes some benefits of the ideal of growth, such as its anti-mechanistic focus, and its connotation that education is a process of enlarging and expanding one's power and a refinement of understanding and complexity, while also noting some of its problems. He addresses the seeming mis- or inadequate understanding of Dewey's theories, often as a result of their ambiguity and open-endedness, leading to widespread mis- or ineffective application of his methods, especially those concerning teacher authority.⁸²

Peters sharply criticizes Dewey's idea of growth, claiming that its vagueness masks Dewey's real intention, which, he claims was not growth in any direction, but growth in "practical critical thought," which translates most directly into opening up possibilities for "more control of the environment."⁸³ Peters fears that this emphasis can lead to unsavory results, such as a lack of arts and literature in the curriculum, and fostering the belief that the rise of "technological man" would reinforce a view of nature

many aspects of American life. Kandel explains that huge numbers of Americans failed to qualify for military service due to poor education, listing issues including functional illiteracy, ineptitudes at basic math, knowledge of world geography and history, and American civic history and responsibilities.

⁸² Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 374. He gives the example of teachers running classrooms with little to no organization or direction, giving students materials but refusing to guide their activity, interpreting any amount of teacher intervention as authoritarian imposition; thus, the conditions are set for creating educational settings that prove to be anything but educational. While he is clear to note that Dewey himself criticized those who mistook his ideas to mean that teachers cannot pose any imposition or intervention in the classroom, Hofstadter claims that much of this confusion rose somewhat organically from Dewey's open-ended accounts.

⁸³ R.S. Peters, "John Dewey's Philosophy of Education," in *John Dewey Reconsidered*, ed. R.S. Peters (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 106.

as intended for human use and control.⁸⁴ However, one can quickly respond that while what Peters gleans from Deweyan growth might be *part* of a full interpretation of growth, it is only a part. Moreover, familiarity with Dewey's manner of thinking (and more works from his corpus) demonstrates that Dewey would never condone reducing or eliminating the arts from education in favor of scientific method stealing the show, and Dewey's concern with intelligence, while lauding scientific method, would not employ it as the sole or exclusive strategy for problem-solving or appreciating one's world.

Callan also critiques the idea of growth for being too inclusive and hence, vague, as well as arguing, with Peters, that "growth" actually substitutes for another idea: that growth means democratic socialization and development in scientific intelligence.⁸⁵ His larger concern, however, is that Dewey hangs too many things on assumptions, including one that assumes children are already "naturally" inclined toward processes of inquiry and democratic socialization. Similarly, Dewey has been heavily critiqued for his work reflecting a relentless, near-naive sense of social optimism. Thinkers such as Allan Bloom, Raymond Boisvert, and Cornel West, in addition to nearly all of those already discussed, lay some form of this charge on Dewey. While Bloom claims his theories lead toward a bland relativism where openness is prized above any other intellectual qualities,⁸⁶ Boisvert critiques his optimistic viewpoint for its lack of accounting for the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁸⁵ Eamonn Callan, "Dewey's Conception of Education as Growth," *Educational Theory* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 22.

⁸⁶ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 29.

tragic elements of life, or as he calls it, “Necessity.”⁸⁷ Likewise, West argues that Dewey’s view can at times border on narrow provincialism, and that his reconstructionist approach fails to offer enough resources for confrontational efforts in the struggle to change broad-scale power dynamics.⁸⁸

Linked with the worry over Dewey’s incessant optimism arises the concern over “permissiveness” in the classroom. Because Dewey’s methods shift the teachers’ role from one of clear authority and director of instruction into a position more focused on guidance of interest, the design of environments, and an anti-authoritarian model of learning, many critics call out the ways that such lack of authority not only puts teachers in a confusing position, but encourages “bedlam” among schoolchildren. John Patrick Diggins describes this concern and the way it grew more and more vitriolic from Dewey’s time up until the fifties.⁸⁹ It is important to note, however, that while some of this criticism resulted from poorly understood applications of Dewey’s ideas, Dewey himself criticized educators who took the progressive model of schooling to mean that students are given no structure, discipline, or direct guidance from teachers at all.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Raymond Boisvert, “The Nemesis of Necessity: Tragedy’s Challenge to Deweyan Pragmatism,” in *Dewey Reconfigured: Essays on Deweyan Pragmatism*, ed. Casey Haskins and David I. Seiple (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 151-168.

⁸⁸ Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 100-103.

⁸⁹ John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 305.

⁹⁰ In *Experience and Education*, Dewey comments on this point: “Since freedom resides in the operations of intelligent observation and judgment by which a purpose is developed, guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupils’ intelligence is an *aid to freedom*, not a restriction upon it” (46, my emphasis).

Along with the question of authority and the schools' role in the broader social scheme, the very real question of ends arises as an issue in Dewey's educational philosophy, especially as concerns the ideal of growth. While Dewey claims that, like life, education has no end beyond itself and that the aim of learning is to continue being able and inspired to learn, the question of what students are actually moving toward is something of a different question on the ground. While some may accept the broader claim that education is an end in itself as a justification and guide for learning, others claim that the typical ways of identifying concrete goals and marking certain achievements seem to dissolve. Diggins raises the question of growth here in particular, describing its insufficiency in this respect hinging on the fact that the process of learning involves working to realize specific ends (such as executing projects, working toward certain achievements, meeting set benchmarks, etc.), and not just as the continuation of growth itself, for its own sake. He writes, "The desire to achieve meaning, purpose, and value does not arise from the biological givens of growth. A life that turns on nothing more than growth could be aimless and empty, lacking the tension and direction that comes only from the conscious choice of ends."⁹¹ Like others critiquing Dewey's theories for their lack of concrete direction, Diggins points out the difficulty of teaching toward an abstract ideal – which might, albeit, still be the long-view, overarching goal – but which does not lend itself immediately to showing how students identify and accomplish particular goals, reaching milestones (even of their own design), along the way.

⁹¹ Diggins, *Promise of Pragmatism*, 315.

One might see this concern as a particular version or subset of the question, “growth towards what?” This is a viable concern with Dewey’s emphasis on this idea, and to be frank, there may be no universal, straightforward answers to it. Some responses might include: growth towards more growth, growth toward increasing possibilities, growth toward individual and social flourishing, growth toward the practice of freedom, and so on. One problem with each of these answers is that the object toward which growth is tending can never be determined in advance, for part of the process of growing is determining its own path as it goes, which will be unique for each individual and according with the needs of her community. The student does not know in advance what kind of adult she or he will become, and neither does anyone else. There is no predetermined *telos* that the process of education will or even ought to yield; there is no preordained blueprint for what each individual “needs” in order to become the “best” adult one can be. There are pre-existing models and criteria, of course, and a variety of impulses and goals to choose from as well. But to say that growth aims at *x* is to put a label on something that Dewey believes should remain open, individual, interpretable.

R.W. Hildreth stresses this point, arguing that the lack of predetermined ends in Dewey’s educational framework is actually a strength instead of a liability, and indeed, Hildreth finds part of Dewey’s radicalism to be based on this point.⁹² In leaving many questions of educational ends open to individual communities and schools, Hildreth argues, Dewey not only places a faith in educational actors to make decisions regarding their own needs and interests, but also emphasizes the need for continual collective discussion and debate about how communities are to flourish. Dewey provides

⁹² R.W. Hildreth, “What Good is Growth? Reconsidering Dewey on the Ends of Education,” *E&C/Education and Culture* 27, no. 2 (2011): 28-47.

educational criteria, Hildreth claims, in the forms of growth, democratic control, and social interaction, and urges that educators and administrators use precisely those tools to maintain critical discussions about what educational goals and strategies are desired. As such, Hildreth sees Dewey's view as providing vital resources for educational communities to establish their own identities, but also to combat the overly "technocratic" standards and policies that increasingly govern American education policy (through for example, parts of the recent No Child Left Behind legislation and the increasing use of standardized tests).⁹³

Naoko Saito also defends Dewey's use of the concept of growth, pairing it with the Emersonian "gleam of light," or the possibility for "rebirth of the new" in the midst of being and becoming, especially in the difficulties of movement and growth without fixed ends.⁹⁴ She highlights the reconstructive character of growth and its ability to reawaken hope that might be lost through experience, stressing that this light can be seen as a touchstone for the possibilities present within experience and its evolution. As such, she describes the potential of Deweyan growth to conceive of "education as the continuous process of conversion, metamorphosis, and internal transformation, toward the rebirth of one's lost light."⁹⁵

Along with these defenses of growth, I think that an alternative way to frame the question of "growth towards what?" might be to ask, "growth *as* what?" Indeed, growth is always a moving-towards, but there is never a concrete, final end achieved as the result

⁹³ Ibid., 30.

⁹⁴ Naoko Saito, *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 11.

of such movement, and perhaps this is one reason why labeling a “towards what” is so difficult. Insofar as there are end-points reached, or ends-in-view accomplished, these, of course, become new springboards for activity, temporary points of rest only to become unseated again, stirred up by the interplay of doing-undergoing, or the stability-instability through which Dewey characterizes the human world of experience. Thus, with no univocal, universal end-in-view as the target towards which growth is moving, we might say that growth towards growth, or growth towards more possibilities of growth, or growth towards more possibilities of freedom and flourishing, or even growth towards life, is the best we can do, as long as we think of the need to define growth in terms of growth-toward. Indeed, insofar as Dewey strives to identify the process of education with result of education, we are left always working in a circle with respect to growth as growing towards something.⁹⁶ If we think about growth in terms of growth-as, this might offer more suggestions that answer the concern about what this idea means in the classroom, and how it might be something more helpful in actual educational settings, helping to set particular ends and goals.

It is in this light that I find it helpful to think of growth as agency, or as a felt experience of oneself as capable of activity and engagement, which I believe entails a sense of self-knowledge. Likewise, self-knowledge entails a working (and thus, always changing) understanding of one’s own situation, capacities, possibilities, attitudes, and habits, and how these operate within environments, encompassing social, natural, and

⁹⁶ He notes, in explaining his definition of education as reconstruction: “The essential contrast of the idea of education as continuous reconstruction with the other one-sided conceptions which have been criticized ... is that it identifies the end (the result) and the process” (*Democracy and Education*, 84).

institutional ones. In viewing growth as agency, including a felt sense of one's abilities for purposive action within situations, we can think of growth involving the expansion as well as refinement of understanding of one's self and one's surroundings. I say this because expanding and refining one's understanding of herself in relation to her surroundings thus leads to increased understanding of how she might act constructively within those surroundings, developing a part of the critical, flexible intelligence that a Deweyan education seeks to cultivate. While I will expand upon the relation between agency and Dewey's use of "intelligence," I believe that an understanding of growth as agency takes seriously the manner in which the development and use of one's intelligence is felt and experienced by students, especially insofar as one experiences herself as a capable agent with the potential of making purposive change. Further, an individual who experiences herself as able to engage her capacities and her surroundings to make positive, purposive change is more likely to develop the potential to act upon and increase her sense of freedom. Increasing one's sense of freedom and possibility can thus involve the possibility of novelty, the possibility for continued expansion of one's engagements, and the pursuit of applying one's intelligence in an infinite number of ways. Indeed, Dewey writes, "The great reward of exercising the power of thinking is that there are no limits to the possibility of carrying over into objects and events of life, meanings originally acquired by thoughtful examination, and hence no limit to the continual growth of meaning in human life."⁹⁷ While growth is characterized here by a limitless potential for meaning and infinite possibilities of connection in human life, I believe that such growth can only be actualized and become a conscious project for

⁹⁷ Dewey, *How We Think, revised edition*, vol. 8: 1933, LW, 128.

oneself when she has the agency – the felt sense of herself as capable of developing and actualizing her intentions – to envision her possibilities as ever-growing, or to experience her possibilities of discovering meaning as endlessly expansive. This is, for me, what Deweyan growth might ideally symbolize; and while it does not lend itself neatly to an answer of *what* it is aiming toward (despite the fact that it is always moving, changing, in process), it can give us some guidance in terms of *how* growth might be experienced. And in addressing how growth as agency is experienced, I find it crucial to bring in the question of how one’s *embodied* agency is experienced.

Growth as Agency: Self-Knowledge, Control, and Embodiment

One important manner of backing up this reading of growth as agency also comes in Dewey’s persistent emphasis that educative experiences involve an increase in the degree of control over one’s environment. If agency can be understood as a concrete, felt sense of one’s potentials for articulating intentions and acting upon them, then we might see a parallel between the development of agency and the element of learning that involves greater facility of action within one’s world.⁹⁸ This element of learning is a significant part of educational growth, for Dewey, and is used throughout his texts on education. As such, working with a few key places where this characterization occurs will help ground this reading.

In *Democracy and Education*, in fleshing out his “technical definition” of education as the reconstruction of experience, Dewey describes two principal features of

⁹⁸ In order for agency to be felt, of course, it must have the support of external conditions enabling it, such as freedom from certain physical, intellectual, emotional, and psychological constraints, the right to make decisions regarding important factors of one’s life, and so forth.

how this reconstruction is *educative*: the first has to do with increasing one's perception of new connections or continuities between elements of experience, thus increasing the meaning of these elements, and the second has to do with added powers of direction or control, based on these increases in meaning. Of the first condition, he writes, with reference to the examples of a child reaching for a bright light and burning himself (though Dewey also extends the principle to a scientist's work in a laboratory):

An activity which brings education or instruction with it makes one aware of some of the connections which had been imperceptible. ... [referring to the child and the light] ... By doing certain things, he makes perceptible certain connections of heat with other things, which had been previously ignored. Thus his acts in relation to these things get more meaning; he knows better what he is doing or 'is about' when he has to do with them;⁹⁹

Thus, as connections are discovered and developed between actions and consequences, or between an object and various aspects of its existence (e.g., the light is connected with heat, intense heat is connected with pain), the experience is educative. However, and importantly,

The other side of an educative experience is an added power of subsequent direction or control. To say that one knows what he is about, or can intend certain consequences, is to say, of course, that he can better anticipate what is going to happen; that he can, therefore, get ready or prepare in advance so as to secure beneficial consequences and avert undesirable ones.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the second side is the resulting gain in connecting the present with the future: through the perception of previously unforeseen connections and meanings, one adds to her powers of prediction and anticipation of consequences, or in other words, she adds to her abilities to work intelligently within her environments, better able to understand and manage her activities within them. As opposed to being simply routine, mechanical

⁹⁹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 83.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

activities or “capricious activities” not aimed at generating any particular connections and not adding to the predictive powers of experience, a genuinely educative experience offers both meaning in the form of connection, and an increase in control in the form of understanding probable consequences that can direct one’s actions accordingly.¹⁰¹

Dewey describes this similarly in *Experience in Education*: “Growth in judgment and understanding is essentially growth in ability to form purposes and to select and arrange means for their realization.”¹⁰²

This is also a way in which Dewey characterizes intelligence in activity: an activity not just carried out on “blind” impulse or the automatic working of habit, but executed as the result of informing oneself about the conditions and making a deliberate decision regarding a desired direction is one that demonstrates intelligence.¹⁰³ Thus, part of the task of education is to help develop this kind of informed, careful decision making, based in part on developing skills of inquiry, such that individuals develop the skills to approach a situation with unknown factors and discover how they might best work within it.

While there are too many references to this idea in Dewey’s work to include exhaustively at this point, I simply want to stress here that a key element characterizing the process of learning in Dewey’s view is this increased capacity for intelligent action, or the increased capacity for understanding how one’s actions will create certain effects

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 56.

¹⁰³ To this effect, Dewey writes in *Experience and Education*, “Intelligent activity is distinguished from aimless activity by the fact that it involves selection of means – analysis – out of the variety of conditions that are present, and their arrangement – synthesis – to reach an intended aim or purpose” (57).

and develop effective habits for realizing positive effects. While a more sustained discussion of the habit side of this equation will appear in the next chapter, I want to highlight here that this increased power of control in one's environment requires an increased understanding of "what one is about" when one interacts with other persons or other things in one's environment. After all, Dewey claims in *Experience and Education* that "The ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control."¹⁰⁴ As such, this leads into questions regarding how we know what we "are about" and how education works to increase our powers of self-control. In this light, then, with the help of several of Dewey's commentators, I turn to the question of self-knowledge as it concerns agency, especially insofar as it is a component part of intelligent, efficacious action. In other words, if education involves increasing our powers of self-control and control within the conditions of our surroundings, then, I argue, such powers entail that we understand something about *ourselves*.

Growth as Agency: Self-Knowledge and Self-Control

To achieve the kind of growth Dewey discusses, the growth that leads to actualizing possibilities inherent in a situation or developing a greater facility in responding to one's surroundings, several elements must be taken into consideration. As Cheryl Keall notes in her essay, "Deweyan Self-Knowledge and Genuine Education," individuals must be able to develop a secure and stable sense of self in the course of education if it is to be genuine, that is, if it is to truly help individuals have a sense of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 41.

“what they are about,” or what the probable consequences of their actions are to be.¹⁰⁵ Such knowledge is a vital component in a genuine education, she argues, because if one is to truly develop the kind of intelligence that Dewey envisions in his philosophy of education, one must have an understanding and awareness of oneself as a person in the midst of situations. This sense of self, she stipulates, is far from an atomistic individualism; part of the upshot of her argument is that the development of such self-knowledge requires support from and interaction with others. I agree with Keall’s claim that a genuine education requires that such knowledge of self must be attended to and developed in the course of a self-empowering, socially-grounded education.

Keall notes that despite the lack of technical language regarding self-knowledge in Dewey’s work, a conception of self-knowledge might be gleaned from it, and while she outlines several characteristics of Deweyan self-knowledge in her reading, she also looks to R.D. Laing for his idea of “ontological security” to flesh out this interpretation. She bases her reading of Dewey on his language from Chapter 8 of *Democracy and Education* that a person is “lacking in mind” (acting blindly or without intelligence) “just in the degree in which in any activity he does not know what he is about, namely, the probable consequences of his acts.” Dewey adds to this description that a person is “imperfectly intelligent” when taking chances with luck, basing decisions on “looser guesses” as to what their outcomes might be, or making plans without taking actual conditions into account, and such conditions include her own capacities.¹⁰⁶ Keall claims that knowing “what one is about,” in connection with knowing the “probable

¹⁰⁵ Cherilyn Keall, “Deweyan Self-Knowledge and Genuine Education,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of SAAP, Spokane, WA, March 2011).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 110.

consequences of one's acts," does not constitute a particularly high standard for self-knowledge. She notes that knowing the consequences of one's acts is, to some degree, unknowable (as some situations might have unforeseeable consequences), but on the other hand, to the extent they are knowable, knowing them is the result of a process; that is, knowing the consequences of one's acts is a part of development, and, we might hear in her words, growth.¹⁰⁷ She adds that a Deweyan conception of self-knowledge, emerging as a part of development, requires understanding the connections between past actions and past results – that is, knowing how one acted in the past and seeing how those actions had certain consequences, such that one might develop an understanding of probable consequences of action in the future.¹⁰⁸ Dewey's principle of continuity is at work in this element of self-knowledge. Since we can study the consequences of our past actions, due to the fact that all experience takes up something from its past and modifies somehow its future we can estimate how our actions in the future may result. Last, Keall adds that the kind of self-knowledge she is discussing is not the same as knowledge one might gain about oneself by surveying some aspect of oneself as an object. She cites the examples of finding out how tall one is or who one's biological parents are. According to Keall, these are pieces of information that might add to one's knowledge of self, but they are distinct from "the kind of self-knowledge that manifests itself as a background condition that is implicit in all of one's acts."¹⁰⁹ This distinction itself may be problematic, in that pieces of "objective" knowledge such as one's height and one's

¹⁰⁷ Keall, "Deweyan Self-Knowledge," 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

parents may very well be quite significant in one's operative background of self-knowledge.¹¹⁰ However, the main point of Keall's claim is that the self-knowledge that carries us through the world, even if somewhat inarticulately, is something that a genuine education should foster. She is calling attention to the need for education to encourage the development of a sense of self and sense of presence that undergirds one's activities and pursuits, seeing it as vital if one is to grow into a free, intelligent, and flourishing adult.

To flesh out Dewey's somewhat spare notion of self-knowledge, Keall draws on the ideas of "ontological security" and "ontological insecurity" from R.D. Laing. Experiences for a person suffering from ontological insecurity, Keall describes, are characterized by insubstantiality, unreality, discontinuity, a questionable autonomy, anxiety, and a separation between mind and body.¹¹¹ On the contrary, experiences of a person with a sense of ontological security are characterized by "life, reality, wholeness, and continuity,"¹¹² or in other words, a sense of existential stability and presence that the sufferer of ontological insecurity does not enjoy. As one might expect, these two "existential settings" create vastly different results regarding the gamut of experiences these persons engage in. Interestingly, Keall's summary does not include the embodied character of the ontologically secure person, while the ontologically insecure person

¹¹⁰ I thank Scott Pratt for this observation. It is interesting that the examples Keall chooses in making this distinction – height and biological parentage – are markedly embodied phenomena. The fact that such "objective" characteristics of one's being might easily be considered distinct from one's "background" knowledge of self may even be seen as further evidence of the pervasive tendency to dismiss the body's conditions as unimportant to knowledge and identity.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

might experience a split between mind and body. While this may be a result of Laing's characterizations and not Keall's, I note this because I will go on to argue that the body can play a significant role in this kind of security for some individuals. I read Keall's addition of these concepts to Dewey's as highlighting the way that knowing "what one is about" entails the kind of stability afforded the ontologically secure individual. She adds, moreover, that neither of these "settings" is given from birth; for children to grow into ontologically secure individuals, help and support from others in the process of development is essential. This brings her back to the link between self-knowledge and education, as she claims that developing this kind of security or knowledge of self is part of what a genuine education should accomplish. This is because there are no guarantees that this kind of security will emerge on its own, and moreover, for the reconstruction of experiences in which education consists to be empowering, the individuals' experiences of self must add to, or be a productive part within the experiences one engages in, rather than interfering with or creating added obstacles within them.¹¹³ I agree with Keall's argument that a strong sense of self, or as she sometimes describes, sense of being a person, is a vital part of educative growth. Also, we can see how this knowledge would be crucial for a person in developing powers of self-control and capacities of controlling one's surroundings.

In a similar vein, Daniel Pekarsky offers a compelling reading of growth in relation to agency in his essay, "Dewey's Conception of Growth Reconsidered." In addition to offering counter-readings to many criticisms of Dewey's idea of growth, Pekarsky outlines the way that for Dewey, we are organisms interacting with our

¹¹³ Ibid., 10-11.

environments, but in our unique capacity as *human* organisms, the beliefs we hold play a large role in the ways such interactions occur. As such, the manner of growth for human beings “consists in the expansion and refinement of the agent’s understanding, where ‘understanding’ signifies a grasp of the connections among events.”¹¹⁴ He claims further that understanding is not enough in all cases to constitute growth, because there are some cases in which understanding can inhibit active agency (such as knowledge which hinders confidence and self-esteem) and there are cases in which knowledge is gained without appreciation of what it might mean or what might result as a consequence of having it. Thus, Pekarsky argues, it is both knowledge and appreciation of its significance that are really necessary in educative growth, and it is the latter which can have a bigger impact on the agent’s ability to navigate, adapt to, and/or transform a situation. This is important for educators to grasp, he claims because, “what it means is that they cannot, as some are wont to do, facilely assume that if they contribute to their students’ understanding of the world, this will automatically give rise to growth in appreciation; they will, on the contrary, have to search out those ways of fostering their students’ intellectual growth that will also enrich their lives along the appreciative dimension.”¹¹⁵

As such, what Pekarsky emphasizes in his account is the role of agency in connection with growth, highlighting that both knowledge and appreciation, combined with an active sense of how to use and enrich those faculties of experience, is really at issue when it comes to growth. He writes,

¹¹⁴ Daniel Pekarsky, “Dewey’s Conception of Growth Reconsidered,” *Educational Theory* 40, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 286.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 289.

The connections ... established between growth and action suggest that *the ideal of growth is an ideal of human agency*. That is, it characterizes the life of human beings insofar as they are engaged in making sense of their situation, deliberating, acting, and then using the results of their actions to confirm, expand, or refine the understandings, dispositions, and skills that guide their intellectual and practical lives.¹¹⁶

This echoes an element of what Keall also claims: in arguing that growth is not just about the acquisition of knowledge, or that genuine education requires the opportunities and support necessary to develop knowledge of self, both thinkers highlight that for Dewey, education is about the actual, experienced abilities of agents to act with intelligence, deliberateness, and a degree of self-awareness when it comes to cultivating agency. This kind of agency, or intelligent efficacy, requires knowledge, understanding, and appreciation, but most importantly, requires that these elements come together in an active experience of one's own capacities, such that individuals experience themselves as self-aware agents able to take up the problems they discover in their environments, understand their nuances and appreciate their complexities, and thus translate such appreciative knowledge into capacities to transform the environment as they transform themselves. Indeed, this resonates with Dewey's views on knowledge and its purpose in education: "Knowledge is humanistic in quality not because it is *about* human products in the past, but because of what it *does* in liberating human intelligence and human sympathy. Any subject matter which accomplishes this result is humane, and any subject matter which does not accomplish it is not even educational."¹¹⁷ Taking this emphasis to heart, Pekarsky stresses that if learning is to constitute real growth, it must work with a "humanistic," appreciative approach, such that "the agent's ability to meet life head-on is

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 291.

¹¹⁷ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 238, author's emphasis.

enhanced.”¹¹⁸ To achieve this, the knowledge and appreciation students develop cannot be such to diminish self-esteem, impede curiosity, or degrade the effectiveness with which they relate to their worlds.

I should note here, following Keall, that Dewey does not often use language of self-knowledge or self-awareness, but this is not to say that his views do not accommodate such ideas. In *Democracy and Education*, he does stipulate that there is a brand of self-*consciousness* that impedes action and an easy engagement with tasks. In describing some of the desired attitudes to be fostered in engaging with subject matter, Dewey writes that “directness, open-mindedness, single-mindedness (or whole-heartedness), and responsibility” are among the most important features of methods and approaches to subject matter.¹¹⁹ He goes on to describe directness by laying out its opposites: “self-consciousness, embarrassment, and constraint,” which all suggest that “a person is not immediately concerned with subject matter,” but is distracted, in part due to thinking about both the matter at hand as well as what others think of his performance.¹²⁰ Directness, on the other hand, is a sense of confidence, straightforwardness with respect to a task at hand, and interestingly, “denotes not *conscious* trust in the efficacy of one’s powers but unconscious faith in the possibilities of the situation.”¹²¹ Thus, Dewey marks off self-consciousness as an impediment to directly investing in a situation or activity.

¹¹⁸ Pekarsky, “Dewey’s Conception of Growth,” 290.

¹¹⁹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 180.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Again, this could be a case where self-consciousness impedes action; this is another instance where factors such as stereotype threat can have an effect on students’ action.

¹²¹ Ibid., 181, author’s emphasis.

While this is certainly a legitimate concern, this self-consciousness is decidedly not the same kind of self-knowledge that I (with Keall) am discussing. Dewey's comments here refer to self-consciousness in the way still often meant: that when one is overly conscious of herself, she becomes less able to "throw herself" into an activity completely; she might feel ill-at-ease in performing a task, too aware of her own thoughts and movements such that they impede a fluid engagement in it; or her interest and attention become divided and fractured; and it is important to note here that such self-consciousness often refers to or concerns one's *bodily* engagement with an activity.

While it is true that this kind of self-consciousness is a potential result of concern with the body, it is not the same kind of self-knowledge that I am referring to (and on the flip side, some kinds of concern with the body in developing self-knowledge might distinctively *reduce* such bodily self-consciousness). I will take up this concern more in the next chapter, but I want to note here that developing the kind of "unconscious faith in the possibilities of the situation" that Dewey finds necessary entails developing a strong sense of self, and moreover, a strong sense of embodied self, so that the kind of inhibiting self-consciousness that can impede one's participation in actions is staved off, supplanted instead with an empowering sense of contact and connection with the possibilities of a situation.

In sum, I find Keall's and Pekarsky's claims about self-knowledge and agency to identify key elements in what a fully fleshed out Deweyan education would include, and thus their claims are significant for my own reading of growth. However, because I am concerned with growth as agency and the role of self-knowledge, it is necessary at this point to look for ways that Dewey provides a reading of the self, the "site" or the

individual that undergoes growth. It is my contention that a rich, agential self, as the subject of growth, is an embodied sense of self, who has capacities for and a degree of operative self-knowledge (in Keall's sense) and agency (in Pekarsky's sense). Dewey's conception of self, self-knowledge, and agency are all embodied notions; however, I also believe there may be more aspects to these phenomena than Dewey's theories easily lend themselves to. This is why I will take up thinkers from other traditions in later chapters; at the moment, however, I want to return to Dewey's work on education and see more about how the self – specifically, the self as knowing-itself and as having agency – or better, the self as the subject of growth, appears in these pages. I will take up some of Dewey's other works, especially *Human Nature and Conduct* and *Experience and Nature*, in the next chapter, to enrich the senses of self, human character, habit, and embodiment he articulates there.

Self and Self-Knowledge

One place to look for the kind of self-knowledge associated with agency in Dewey's educational work is in the emphasis on growth as gaining increased powers of control over or within one's environment; some of this has been fleshed out above. Another place is his discussion on the self as it emerges through engagement with interests, which occurs late in *Democracy and Education* in the chapter titled "Theories of Morals." In this chapter, he is juxtaposing two predominant views of moral engagement, those drawing from a kind of principle-based approach and those viewing self-interest as morality's prime motivator. In taking up this dichotomy and exposing its structure as flawed, Dewey critiques both sides in conceiving of the self as separate from

interests and principles. Instead, Dewey claims that one's self emerges in and through participation with one's interests, and this participation thus determines the kind of self that arises. He writes, "In fact, self and interest are two names for the same fact; the kind and amount of interest actively taken in a thing reveals and measures the quality of selfhood which exists."¹²² As such, "self" is not something divorced from activity, process, the particularities of an occupation, or the others with whom one interacts; rather, it is an element that emerges from the inter- or trans- action of individuals with others and with objects and ideas in their surroundings.¹²³ Since this discussion, however, is less about the ontological status of the self and more about moral frameworks, I will have more to address regarding the ontology of the self in the next chapter. However, I include this further characterization of "unselfishness" for the links it presents with growth; here Dewey describes two associated qualities that generally characterize "unselfishness":

(i) The generous self consciously identifies itself with the *full* range of relationships implied in its activity, instead of drawing a sharp line between itself and considerations which are excluded as alien or indifferent; (ii) it readjusts and expands its *past* ideas of itself to take in new consequences as they become perceptible. ... The wider or larger self which means inclusion instead of denial of relationships is identical with a self which enlarges in order to assume previously unforeseen ties.¹²⁴

¹²² Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 361-2.

¹²³ Whereas Dewey used the term "interaction" in his earlier work, his later work shows his preference for the term "transaction," as he finds it to remove the connotation of independently existing entities which come into relation with each other. He uses "transaction" to capture the mutual constitution and reciprocity in development between organisms and environments at a deeper level (*Knowing and the Known*, vol. 16: 1949-1952, LW, 119-120.)

¹²⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 362, author's emphasis.

As such, the self described as “generous” reveals some helpful traits of the Deweyan self: first, it identifies itself with “the *full* range of relationships implied in its activity,” which I interpret to mean that the generous self understands itself through its connections with others, and if generous, with as many others as might be included in an activity or environment. As such, Dewey emphasizes that the self emerges in concert with and through interactions with all its environing conditions; relationships with others are thus a primary means of developing a sense of self and knowing what this self is. Second, and more to the point of the present discussion, the generous self “readjusts and expands its *past* ideas of itself to take in new consequences as they become perceptible,” which I interpret to mean that the generous self identifies itself with its process of growing, and thus, holds itself open *and accountable* to new connections and relationships that develop as new circumstances emerge. This is not only one way in which we see Dewey’s characterization of growth as the process of discovering and deepening the connections perceptible in our worlds, but also a way in which we see Dewey’s concern with education as intimately linked with ethical life. Moreover, with growth as both educational and ethical aims, we see the self as the subject of both as in-the-making and whose potential for future expansion builds insofar as it spreads its identifications into as many and diverse interests as possible.

But one may pause and ask at this point: if the self is one with its interests and emerges insofar as it engages with occupations, what does this mean for self-knowledge in the educational process? Does this imply that knowledge of self – and especially of one’s embodied self – is illusory, or irrelevant, or so dispersed in action that to separate it out would stray from Dewey’s vision? My response at this point emphasizes several

things: simply because I am addressing self-knowledge and the presence of the body in self-knowledge does not imply that the self is closed off or separated from its surroundings or importantly, other selves in its world. Instead, to be true to a Deweyan perspective, a picture of self-knowledge would necessarily emphasize that anything characterized as “self” or “knowledge” emerges only in the context of social interaction. It is not simply alongside or in conjunction with others that “self” and “knowledge” emerge, but by virtue of transaction itself that anything identifiable as a self comes into being. In other words, it is through interacting with others that anything like a self has the possibility of existing. The development of the self is one manner of a human organism interacting with its world, and the kind of self that emerges is largely dependent on the character of its social environment. We can come to know who we are only through our relationships with others and the contexts of our social worlds; indeed, Dewey writes in *Experience and Nature*, “If we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves.”¹²⁵ To return to Keall’s starting point with self-knowledge, Dewey claims that knowing “what one is about” is largely about knowing the probable consequences of one’s actions. Having a sense of the probable consequences of one’s actions requires familiarity with one’s own capacities, proclivities, habits, and attitudes with respect to one’s social and physical environment. More broadly, this kind of self-knowledge thus entails having a sense of one’s place in the

¹²⁵ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, vol. 1:1925, LW, 135. Here Dewey is expressly talking about language and communication, but the point holds for knowledge of self as well. Communication with oneself can happen because of conditions created by communication with others; likewise, knowledge of self can emerge by virtue of knowledge of others and knowledge of oneself with others.

world, of one's demeanor of within situations, of the character of one's social self, and one's felt, actual possibilities within the situations of one's world.

Growth: Agency, Self-Knowledge, and Embodiment

In having familiarity with one's capacities, habits, attitudes, and so on – the many and varied ways one might know what she “is about” – brings me to this final, and vital, section of this chapter. I have already asserted that growth is, in my reading, an ideal of agency, and such agency requires not only a degree of self-knowledge, but also a felt sense of possibility in one's intelligence, in the capacities one has to deliberate thoughtfully and act efficaciously. It is the *felt sense* of this agency that my focus will now turn to. I argue that a strong sense of agency requires a stable and secure sense of one's *embodied self*. I do not believe I am straying from Dewey in this claim – I do hope, however, that through the course of this project, I might provide a richer, more complex conception of embodied self than Dewey does directly. This is in part because there are several different avenues one might take when discussing the embodied self and this is in part due to vast differences in intellectual and philosophical concerns at the time of Dewey's writing and writing in the early twenty-first century. However, while these various avenues will be addressed in more detail at this section's close, I wish to lay out some of the ways Dewey does address the body in the process of education. For purposes of space, I will focus my attention on the two main texts I have been drawing from thus far; discussions of embodiment in some of Dewey's other works will be taken up in the following chapter.

To begin, one place this comes up in *Democracy and Education* is in the chapter titled “Natural Development and Social Efficiency as Aims,” wherein Dewey discusses the educational aim of the body’s health and vigor. Dewey references Rousseau in thinking about natural development and how this concern can impart specific aims for education. He writes,

Natural development as an aim fixes attention upon the bodily organs and the need of health and vigor. The aim of natural development says to parents and teachers: Make health an aim; normal development cannot be had without regard to the vigor of the body – an obvious enough fact and *yet one whose due recognition in practice would almost automatically revolutionize many of our educational practices.*¹²⁶

I begin with this passage because Dewey acknowledges here how seriously this changes our picture of education. He claims that paying attention to the “obvious” fact of the body’s needs and vitality is something not typically done in the educational practice of his day. This suggests one way in which his methods – especially the focus on participation, on subject-matter arising organically from real life scenarios, his problem-solving approach in general – aim to recognize this reality and remedy the potential hindrance of bodily “neglect” in students’ experiences. Thus we find evidence here of Dewey’s concern with this issue; indeed, he states in this chapter that “The three factors of educative development are (a) the native structure of our bodily organs and their functional activities; (b) the uses to which the activities of these organs are put under the influence of other persons; (c) their direct interaction with the environment.”¹²⁷ As such, he sees the “native structure of our bodily organs,” their activities, uses, and interactions as the fundamental “tools” of educational development; one might even think of them as

¹²⁶ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 122, my emphasis.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

the “raw materials” which education and development “refine.” Indeed, thinking of the body in this way may not be too far a cry from Dewey’s conception of embodied experience and the organic nature of human life more generally.

Further commenting on Rousseau’s statement that “Nature’s intention is to strengthen the body before exercising the mind,” Dewey writes that Rousseau “hardly states the fact fairly. But if he had said that nature’s ‘intention’ ... is to develop the mind *by* exercise of the muscles of the body he would have stated a positive fact. In other words, the aim of following nature means, in the concrete, regard for the actual part played by use of the bodily organs in explorations, in handling of materials, in plays and games.”¹²⁸ As such, the emphasis again is on activity, engagement, and the natural development of bodily facility in conjunction with intellectual facility and environmental interaction. This, for Dewey, is to follow the path that comes most naturally to children, before they become accustomed to the classroom, the chair and desk, the tidy rows with the teacher up front, and so forth. Dewey’s (perhaps quaint or provincial) ideal of childhood learning is that of the youth engaged in the regular tasks of a community, “learning the ropes” as she or he is immersed in the workings of the world (including the adult world). This perspective often involves the reality of labor, the necessity of bodily tasks as tasks with meaning and purpose.

With this focus on participation and purpose in learning “naturally,” Dewey rails against the ways mind-body dualism is imparted in schools. In the chapter titled “Experience and Thinking,” he claims, “It would be impossible to state adequately the evil results which have flowed from this dualism of mind and body, much less to

¹²⁸ Ibid., 122, author’s emphasis.

exaggerate them.”¹²⁹ He breaks down these “evils” into three main issues: one, that bodily activity becomes “an intruder” in the disciplining of operations of mind; two, the fact that the body’s senses must be engaged for individuals to participate in and find meaning from scenarios is neglected; and three, that the separation of body from mind illusorily separates perception from judgment.

For the first issue, Dewey explains that the view separating mind from body thus separates mental from physical activity, and as education deals with intellectual matters, the body then becomes “a distraction, an evil to be contended with.”¹³⁰ The body as a source of energy becomes a problem for the order of the classroom, and suppressing the body’s desire to move, to express, to *do things* becomes another primary issue that the teacher and the classroom must deal with and regulate, instead of employing productively. In a somewhat cheeky description, Dewey points out: “the pupil has a body, and brings it to school along with his mind,” but notes that all too often, “A premium is put on physical quietude; on silence, on rigid uniformity of posture and movement; upon a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest.”¹³¹ The resulting effect of such “unnatural” quietude can be, Dewey claims, “nervous strain and fatigue” for both students and teachers, manifesting in oscillations between “callous indifference and explosions from strain.”

The neglected body, having no organized fruitful channels of activity, breaks forth, without knowing why or how, into meaningless boisterousness, or settles into equally meaningless fooling - ... Physically active children become restless and unruly; the more quiescent, so-called conscientious ones spend what energy

¹²⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 147.

¹³¹ Ibid., 148.

they have in the negative task of keeping their instincts and active tendencies suppressed, instead of in a positive one of constructive planning and execution; they are thus educated not into responsibility for the significant and graceful use of bodily powers, but into an enforced duty not to give them free play.¹³²

This description warrants attention, especially the final claim: that in suppressing the impulses to move and engage physically with their peers and their surroundings, students are educated into a “duty” not to give these desires free play; but also, in this neglect, they are *not* educated into “responsibility for the significant and graceful use of bodily powers.” It seems to me that if education is meant to aid in increasing powers of agency, self-control, and effective, appreciative relationships with their environments, helping them understand what such a responsibility might entail and what actualizing “significant and graceful use of bodily powers” might mean for them as individuals would be hugely valuable educative experiences. I believe that such experiences would be, for many students, substantial boons for their capacities of generating self-knowledge and helpful tools in developing individualized mechanisms of self-control, and thus, significant elements in the development of agency, of the felt sense of one’s capacities and possibilities.¹³³

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ I note that I believe this attention would be valuable for *many* students. I do not claim that this is a cure-all or that this kind of engagement would be valuable for *all* students. I make this stipulation for several reasons, some of which will be discussed at more length later. First, all individuals have different degrees of comfort, capacity, and confidence when it comes to paying attention to or using their bodies in particular ways. This is something that would, of course, need careful attention when engaging the body in the classroom or in educative activities. What may pose no challenge at all for one student may be devastatingly difficult, embarrassing, or even painful for another. This is something that educators would have to pay close and careful attention to, understanding their students well in advance and making accommodations for activities as needed. Second, I acknowledge that, like this first concern, students with special needs and disabilities are likely to experience bodily activities, especially if they are conducted in a

Of course, such possibilities do not emerge without corresponding constraints, because it is only within an enviroining context that action and movement take place. Such contexts include the reality of limitation when it comes to what actions are possible, desirable, socially condoned, and so forth. However, the constraints typically put on student bodies in classrooms, including sitting in chairs for extended periods of time, only allowing full bodily movement at proscribed times and places, etc., arguably create a quite limited set of possibilities for activity. I raise this point to clarify that while increased bodily engagement could produce increases in perceived bodily possibility, such possibilities always come about through bodily interaction with environments and the constraints imposed therein. Given different constraints, bodies might develop different (and potentially broader) possibilities for action, movement, and meaning as part and parcel of school learning.

The second issue Dewey discusses regards the relatively apparent fact that any experience whatever, no matter how intellectually rigorous, necessarily involves the senses; that anything experienced and thus anything learned requires the engagement of eyes and ears, hands, lips, vocal organs, and so forth. He writes, “[the student’s] senses are avenues of knowledge not because external facts are somehow ‘conveyed’ to the

group setting, as quite different from those experienced by students who do not have special needs or discernable disabilities. This presents issues that would have to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but I do believe that while certain activities might require modification, I do believe this kind of attention is likely to be helpful for many students with special needs as well. In any case, part of what I believe bodily attention and activity might provide for students is a deeper, more familiar, and more compassionate relationship with their own bodies. This is something I believe nearly all students might benefit from, though the mechanisms to attaining such benefits are bound to be very different from individual to individual.

brain, but because they are *used* in doing something with a purpose.”¹³⁴ However, if the body or the engagement of multiple sensory organs is neglected, as he describes with the first concern, then the result for the second issue is a tendency towards repetition, automatism, and a “mechanical use of the bodily activities.”¹³⁵ Over time, such mechanical use dulls the capacities for novelty and easy integration of all the senses, and can generally diminish bodily-intellectual engagement as a full, meaningful experience; one might say that such mechanism in activities represents experiences that prove mis-educative, in that they do not foster growth and interconnection but rather, can foster their opposites: isolated perceptions and a lack of curiosity. Dewey claims that such repetitive, mechanical activities have the destructive result of “narrow[ing] down the bodily activity so that a separation of body from mind – that is, from recognition of meaning – is set up.”¹³⁶ Significantly, Dewey here locates, at least in part, the recognition of meaning with a union of body and mind. Since we know that the recognition of meaning also entails a perception of connections and an understanding of how past actions relate to future actions, we can also see here a sense in which the use of the body as continuous with “mind” is an important element of agency.

The third concern Dewey raises here takes up the issue of perception in its connection with judgment. He writes, “the separation of ‘mind’ from direct occupation with things throws emphasis on *things* at the expense of *relations* or connections. It is

¹³⁴ Ibid., 149.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 150.

altogether too common to separate perceptions and even ideas from judgments.”¹³⁷ Arguing instead that “Judgment is employed in the perception,”¹³⁸ Dewey laments the fact that the separation of the physical and mental can carry over into believing that perceiving and thinking are two distinct moments. Moreover, this carries into his concern over students being told about things in classrooms and reading about things in textbooks, without truly *experiencing* the things being taught or the connections such things have with their own lives. It is this concern that leads him to quip, “An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory, simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance.”¹³⁹ As such, it is important to remember that experience, for Dewey, is characterized by the tension of doing-undergoing, and the ramifications of such doings-undergoings can result in increased possibilities of action (or direction of doing-undergoing) in the future, and hence, an increased sense of experiencing one’s agency.

There are several other moments where this issue of mind-body dualism arises in *Democracy and Education*, and their sentiment generally furthers the ideas set out already. However, there are also points at which Dewey explicitly links the body into discussions of activities and participation in learning exercises, including exploration in the sciences and arts, as well as at play. One point where we see this arise is in his

¹³⁷ Ibid., author’s emphasis.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 151. This also links up with his claim that “philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education,” in part because it is where philosophical thought meets its living significance (Ibid., 338).

chapter on “Educational Values,” in which he takes up the meaning and purpose of such activities. He writes,

The educative value of manual activities and of laboratory exercises, as well as of play, depends on the extent in which they aid in bringing about a sensing of the *meaning* of what is going on. In effect, if not in name, they are dramatizations. Their utilitarian value in forming habits of skill to be used for tangible results is important, but not when isolated from the appreciative side.¹⁴⁰

As such, Dewey is clear to note that such activities have an important place insofar as they bring about a concrete sense of the meaning of a certain thing; perhaps an idea, object, experiment, etc. Moreover, they can offer practical channels of directing attention and interest, fusing such attention with engagement of students’ physical being. As concerns aesthetic engagements, particularly involving literature, music, and plastic arts in the curriculum, Dewey notes (answering Peters’ concern) that “They are not luxuries of education, but emphatic expressions of that which makes any education worthwhile.”¹⁴¹ Such activities and expressions give students the ability to engage intellectually and physically/materially, giving them significance not only for this reason but also for their worth in adding to the appreciative element of education.

Last, Dewey makes mention of the union of mind and body in discussing the ways in which education prepares individuals for, but also partakes in, human enactments of freedom. While above we noted how Dewey acknowledges the need for appropriate channels of bodily activity to engage in educational pursuits – the result of this need being the unfortunate tension of suppression and eruption described earlier – he also notes the care educators must take in engaging physicality in the classroom. In

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 245.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 247.

Experience and Education, Dewey is meticulous in describing that freedom of movement is insufficient in itself to count as an educational aim. Dewey writes, “The only freedom that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgment exercised in behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worth while.”¹⁴² He goes on to discuss the common error of mistaking *this* freedom with freedom of movement, an interesting point with respect to his passionate claims about the evils of unduly restraining the body. While he states rather boldly that this mistake should be scrupulously avoided in the classroom, he does note that the “external or physical side of activity,” while inseparable from the freedom of “thought, desire, and purpose,” should not be indulged or taken as a goal for its own sake. He clarifies that “an increased measure of freedom of outer movement is a *means*, not an end”¹⁴³ to this “inner” movement of thinking, desiring, and purposing. He stipulates that strict conformity and an absence of movement is likewise inappropriate, saying, “Strait-jacket and chain-gang procedures had to be done away with if there was to be a chance for growth of individuals in the intellectual springs of freedom without which there is no assurance of genuine and continued normal growth.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, while Dewey is understandably wary to give the body a completely free reign in the classroom, he is careful to note its connection to intellectual engagement and the development of interests, as well as its connection to the freedom of thought. Finally, it is helpful to note that his focus on freedom of thought is tightly linked with the concept of growth: restraining

¹⁴² Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 39.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

students from experiencing their *embodied* selves must be eliminated for genuine intellectual freedom and “normal” growth. Returning to *Democracy and Education*, he claims, “When, however, education takes cognizance of the union of mind and body in acquiring knowledge, we are not obliged to insist upon the need of obvious, or external, freedom.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, while physical freedom alone is hardly sufficient, we can see how taking the body’s needs into consideration is an important element in helping students develop a rich sense of freedom, agency, and possibility that an education might facilitate.

Conclusion: Agency and Multiple Senses of the Body

In short, we can see that the engagement and development of the body is clearly an important concern for Dewey’s educational philosophy, and for several reasons. Not only does physical activity in learning constitute a more “natural” or “organic” method of education, for Dewey, but the fact that many methods of schooling have neglected the body’s significance is a problem that he calls out as demanding attention. Part of this concerns education in its earlier phases, where children’s powers of self-control are still very much in their formative stages. However, I believe attention to this concern would benefit students at various levels, and especially in secondary education, as issues relating to the body in adolescence can start to become even more complex and difficult, and as relationship to one’s embodiment can, for some, have an even more significant role in one’s felt sense of agency and possibility. It is with this in mind that I wish to explain why I begin with Dewey’s emphasis on the body in education, will move to his

¹⁴⁵ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 313.

conceptions of embodied self and embodied habit in the next chapter, and will take up different perspectives of embodiment in the chapters following.

While Dewey's educational philosophy clearly recognizes the connection of embodiment and education, calling attention to the way in which due attention to the body would nearly "revolutionize" many educational practices, I believe his view of embodiment can be complicated to address differing ways in which the body is experienced, thus creating a fuller picture of the body as it might be taken up in education. As noted in sketches so far, Dewey's conception of the body is a naturalistic one – human beings and human bodies are organisms in environments – and are thus in inextricable relationships with their surroundings, as formed by them as we are in forming them. While this presents a helpful perspective of embodiment to begin with, it does not present a terribly rich sense of what it *feels like* to live in and as a particular body. While Dewey is clear that meaning depends upon our perception of connections between ourselves, our experiences, and our environments, more might be offered in terms of *how* we experience these meanings, insofar as we are the body-subjects of such perceptions of meaning and insofar as our bodies act as the conduits or vehicles of experience through which we engage with the world. In seeking out more resources to flesh out this perspective, I will turn in chapter three to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who offers careful phenomenological descriptions of embodied subjectivity and the *felt sense* of experiencing embodied meaning. Help from this perspective will flesh out an account of how attention to the body can aid in developing a sense of embodied agency, which is a part of what I believe a Deweyan, growth-oriented education should offer.

From this point, however, I will take up another angle on embodiment, looking at the work of Michel Foucault in seeking to take Dewey's organism-in-environment further, with respect to the social, political, and institutional environments which schools constitute. This perspective will flesh out another angle with respect to the fact that while bodies are experienced "from the inside," they are also acted upon, influenced, and in many ways, cultivated, shaped, and disciplined "from the outside." These influences can, indeed, be immensely significant for how we carry, perceive, and understand our bodies, and seeing into the social structures and histories that gave rise to some of these perceptions offers a perspective giving added weight to the ways these "outside" influences can strongly impact the "inside" experiences.

It is because embodied life carries with it the reality of both these aspects of experience that I wish to supplement Dewey's perspective with these others, as I believe that each of them represents important insights with respect to how our bodies are both perceivers and creators of meaning while also being inheritors and conveyors of meaning; that is, that these perspectives each offer something vital in understanding how we operate as embodied agents with (varying degrees of) knowledge of ourselves and knowledge of how we interact with our environments. In the final chapter of this project, I will return to Dewey's philosophy of education and its emphasis on embodiment, situating these perspectives as additional resources for attending to the body, as Dewey believes we ought to.

CHAPTER III

DEWEYAN AGENCY: SELF, HABIT, AND RECONSTRUCTION

In order to flesh out some of the claims outlined in the first two chapters, we will need to take up some of Dewey's ideas in more depth. To recall, Dewey claims that education is a reconstruction of experience, insofar as attending to and modifying present experiences can have a positive impact on future experiences. Such reconstructions aim toward the ideal of growth, an idea that, I argue, is best understood as an ideal of agency, a concept articulating one's felt sense of capacity for intelligent, deliberate action. To enrich the ways one experiences her own agency, I claim that agency requires self-knowledge, which, while never complete, helps one to understand her being in the midst of situations and helps her to anticipate the consequences of her actions. Last, I am arguing that having a positive, stable sense of one's embodied being can be a beneficial element in cultivating one's self-knowledge and agency, and thus, is a worthy educational goal. In the last chapter, we looked at how this nexus of concepts has roots in Dewey's work on education. In this chapter, it will be helpful to look more closely at some of Dewey's other works, with an emphasis on his conceptions of the embodied self, the role of habit in constructing this self, and agency as an embodied possibility of this self. In short, based on the claims outlined thus far, it is necessary to look at the ways Dewey envisions the self as embodied and habit-oriented, such that we might develop a picture of how this self reconstructs her experience as well as how she experiences her own agency within such reconstructions.

In this chapter, I will take up some of Dewey's discussions of the human being and ways these contribute to a conception of the self. From there, I will focus specifically on the role of habit in his conception of the self, then turn to the role of the body in the operations of habit and the continuity of the self. With these discussions in place, I hope to offer a more thorough account of how Dewey envisions the reconstruction of experience, with reference to the lived experiences of embodied selves. From there, I articulate some ideas in Dewey's work that might be linked to a sense of agency, taking his characterizations of will, intelligence, freedom, and the feeling of culmination in the process of having *an* experience. Finally, I will close the chapter with a discussion of why more perspectives on embodiment are helpful for fleshing out the aims of this project.

The Re-Constructing Self: Organic Life and Emergent Mind

Since education is a process of reconstructing experience, according to Dewey's definition, it will be helpful at this point to look more precisely at how such reconstruction occurs by looking at Dewey's conceptions of the self and the habits by which the self operates. To set up this discussion, it will be helpful to look at Dewey's conceptions of the human being. Of particular interest here is his characterization of the human as an organism in an environment and as a union of body and mind, so that we can see what kind of being it is that operates by way of habits and thus, directs its course of action with the possibility of intelligence and agency.

Dewey conceives of the human being first and foremost as an organism in an environment, thereby casting the human in a continuous relationship with other natural

phenomena and processes, refusing to separate human life as distinct from other forms of life. In reading human life this way, several entailments follow, building his naturalistic point of view. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey takes up these issues in depth, and in the chapter titled “Nature, Life, and Body-Mind,” he gives an account of the human in its unique characteristics. He describes what has come to be called an “emergent” theory of mind, in that he sees the phenomenon typically known as “mind” emerging out of other characteristics and behaviors by which human beings interact with their surroundings. In his view, it is not the case that a mind or consciousness exists from the start in human life, in conjunction with something called body or matter. The separation of these two is the result of linguistic convention and historical interpretation, he argues, and not only do these terms fail to capture the existential reality of human life in his view, they do it further injustice by hemming in the ways we typically think and talk about life. In his account, “mind” signifies the development of patterns which discern and distinguish particular elements in experience as well as cultivating deliberately those habits which direct action. In describing the union of body and mind, however, and his preferred phrase linking the two, he writes,

body-mind simply designates what actually takes place when a living body is implicated in situations of discourse, communication, and participation. In the hyphenated phrase body-mind, ‘body’ designates the continued and conserved, the registered and cumulative operation of factors continuous with the rest of nature, inanimate as well as animate; while ‘mind’ designates the characters and consequences which are differential, indicative of features which emerge when ‘body’ is engaged in a wider, more complex and interdependent situation.¹⁴⁶

In other words, “body” refers to the way in which human life, continuous with all life, operates via interactions with the environment, taking up many of the same elements and

¹⁴⁶ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 217.

qualities of simpler forms of life and carrying them into new kinds of relations and networks. This occurs as the human organism gets involved in more complex environments and thus requires more sensitive and integrative needs of operation. In short, Dewey believes the problem of mind-body dualism is not a “real” metaphysical problem, but has come to be one due to the conventional ways we have come to characterize these phenomena: “the ‘solution’ of the problem of mind-body is to be found in a revision of the preliminary assumptions about existence which generate the problem.”¹⁴⁷ In reality, he claims, we experience the world as body-minds, with no divorce between the two (other than those we import due to residual operations of dualistic thinking in our culture), and such body-minds operate by virtue of complex interactions with environments. Such environments include the totality of ways “environment” can be connoted also: this includes ecological, physical, social, cultural, intellectual, and emotional environments as well. To clarify however, while these are ways the human intellect has “carved up” our experience into different spheres, these all “coexist” as varying elements within a single situation.

What is important to note about the variety of elements present within a single situation is the way in which such elements are *felt* qualities, and Mark Johnson’s work is particularly helpful in emphasizing this point. His work develops an account of embodied meaning drawing from pragmatism, phenomenology, cognitive science, philosophy of language, and aesthetics, basing his argument in the claim that all thought, cognition, language, and meaning, from the most “basic” through the most conceptually abstract, is rooted in the body’s structures, movements, and activities. As such, his

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 202.

account develops the ideas present in James and Dewey that a distinctly felt character, a qualitative product of our bodies interacting with an environment that pervades the feeling of a situation, is always a part of experience. Johnson characterizes feelings as “consciously experienced bodily processes,”¹⁴⁸ and highlights their significance when it comes to accounting for how humans understand themselves, their environments, and exercise capacities of thought at all levels. As such, when it comes to my own efforts to articulate how agency is a felt, embodied experience, I am, in part, moving from Johnson’s work and hoping to develop a particular facet of how embodied experience is critical in accounting for human meaning, self-understanding, and the felt possibilities for action. But I will return to this point about feeling later.

Coming back to Dewey on the mind and the self, since the phenomenon of “mind” is an emergent quality, manifesting in the more complex operations which humans enact, the concept of self might be seen as a similarly emergent phenomenon. Just as there is no preexisting mind calling the shots in human conduct, there is also no preexisting self that acts as a unifying nucleus of identity and activity. The following section will explain more about how such a sense of self emerges via habit. However, the point I would like to make with this characterization of human life is that for Dewey, the fact that many of the qualities that we often think of as distinguishing human life from the

¹⁴⁸ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 59. Johnson cites James’ (and Peirce’s) example of the experience of doubt in illustrating the role of feeling: “one’s experience of *doubt* is a fully embodied experience of hesitation, withholding of assent, felt bodily tension, and general bodily restriction. Such felt bodily experiences are not merely accompaniments of doubt; rather they *are* your doubt. ... Doubt retards or stops the harmonious flow of experience that preceded the doubt. You *feel* the restriction and tension in your diaphragm, your breathing, and perhaps in your gut. *The meaning of doubt is precisely this bodily experience of holding back assent and feeling a blockage of the free flow of experience toward new thoughts, feelings, and experiences*” (Ibid., 53-4, author’s emphasis).

rest of nature are, for him, continuous with the rest of nature and are a completely organic part of it. Moreover, the fact that he casts the construction of body-mind as emergent also entails that its emergent qualities can undergo changes, or that its constructed character entails its reconstructability. If mind and self are not static entities but phenomena emerging in the midst of situations, they are thus emerging by virtue of and in relation with the particular circumstances from which they emerge. This entails that their particular constructions contain a degree of contingency, in that there are few parts of a human life that are determined in advance or set in stone for the duration of one's existence (things such as the need to breath oxygen, for example, qualify as parts that do not change). Rather, most of the elements constituting a given life, as well as a given culture, are subject to change, to reconstruction, and thus also to the *deliberate* reconstruction of intentional, informed activity – the activity of education. The key to this reconstructive education is the reality that all things are in the making, in process, and this applies equally to the body-mind, the self, and the environments in which they develop.

Habit: Patterns of Conduct, Patterns of Life

Dewey's account of habit occupies an important place in his conception of the human being and of the individual self. Habits not only organize human behaviors and structure patterns of conduct for Dewey, they also provide stable patterns of perception and interpretation of surroundings. Thus, because of their central place in perception, thought, and action, Dewey locates phenomena such as will and intelligence within the province of habit. In short, habit, for Dewey, expresses a critical idea of how humans

come to operate in their worlds, unify their experiences, and act with efficacy. Moreover, because habits must work in concert with the many and changing impulses within human experience, these patterns of behavior are reconstructable, malleable, and have the potential for flexibility, adaptation, and transformation. In short, habit provides a vital component of Dewey's readings of human life, conduct, experience, and morality, and as such, understanding how habit works in his account of human experience will help us to see how habits constitute the "stuff" of ourselves and our agencies, as well as how they are reconstructed through experience and education.

Habit and Self

Due to the centrality of habit as a functional phenomenon in human life, Dewey makes the bold claim that habits are constitutive of the self. Indeed, he describes, "Character is the interpenetration of habits."¹⁴⁹ These claims are worth spending some time with. If one's character or self is constituted by a collection of habits, what does this entail for one's felt sense of herself, of the "I" that resides at back of her experiences? Though some have claimed that this leaves Dewey with a poor account of what the self is, I agree with Vincent Colapietro in his view that though it might not be at the foreground of his philosophy, there is a sense of self at work in Dewey's thought.¹⁵⁰ This sense of self comes from the unity and continuity of habits we develop over time and the ways in which they grant us a sense of consistency and stability; in other words, we experience this consistency and continuity as a sense of self, a felt sense of agency, and a

¹⁴⁹ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, vol, 14:1922, MW, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Vincent M. Colapietro, "Embodied, Enculturated Agents," in *Dewey Reconfigured: Essays on Deweyan Pragmatism*, 63-84.

sense of belonging to a community. Were it not for the continuity and interconnection of habits, our lives would be characterized more like a loosely gathered bundle of activities rather than selves having the potential for unity, consistency, and integrity. And indeed, human lives have the capacity for these characteristics, and indeed, are likely to be flourishing ones insofar as they can fruitfully combine such consistency and integrity with novelty and flexibility. But first, it is necessary to flesh out what Dewey means by claiming that habits are the constituents of a self or of one's character.

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey provides rich discussions of his views on social psychology and morality, built upon the premise that humans are, as the saying goes, creatures of habit. He claims that, being creatures of habit, “not of reason nor yet of instinct,”¹⁵¹ habits are what organize much of our experience into intelligible, manageable channels, offering us both recognizable ways of interpreting the world as well as utilizable avenues of acting within it. Habits represent patterns of all kinds within human behavior: they include patterns of thinking, of perceiving, of interpreting, of relating, of acting, and of responding to the felt senses of situations, which is to say that nearly all human conduct is governed, in some way, by the way our habits structure such activities for us. All activity, intellectual, physical, social, moral, and so forth, are affairs of habit according to Dewey.

But to get more specific about what habits actually are and do, let us look at a passage early in *Human Nature and Conduct* where this characterization is articulated. He begins by describing habits that are functions, such as breathing and digesting; things our bodies do without much, if any, of our conscious awareness. He elaborates in

¹⁵¹ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 88.

explaining that habits are also arts, such as writing or playing the piano; skills we develop that refine many of the functions and capacities of our body-mind's abilities. Inclusive of all such types of habits, Dewey characterizes habit as a manner of interacting with our environment; things such as walking, standing, sitting, and so on, all of which represent interactive relationships between our embodied selves and our surroundings. Interaction between ourselves and our environments thus occurs at all these "levels" of habit, from breathing to walking to playing the piano. He offers a brief survey of "bad" habits, those habits of behavior which we see as destructive and unnecessary and which we seek to change; in doing so, he notes the things that bad habits reveal to us about habits in general:

They teach us that all habits are affections, that all have projectile power, and that a predisposition formed by a number of specific acts is an immensely more intimate and fundamental part of ourselves than are vague, general, conscious choices. 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.¹⁵²

There is a lot to unpack in this characterization, so I will take these claims one by one. First, "habits are affections." I read this to signal the fact that habits have an intimate relationship with our emotions; indeed, many emotions we have are ones we experience out of habitual responses to stimuli, as well as those which our cultural and social environments cultivate. This might also signal that habits include the manners (and

¹⁵² Ibid., 21, first emphasis mine, second emphasis in original. Similarly, Dewey adds to this description further on, explaining why he has chosen the term "habit" to signify this phenomenon. He writes that "habit" expresses "that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity" (Ibid., 31).

mannerisms) by which we relate to things, carry ourselves, and express our emotions. Second, habits have “projectile power,” which means they can direct themselves toward the future. Thinking back to Dewey’s claim that all experiences carry something from the past into the present, and that all present experiences somehow modify the future, habits are phenomena through which we see this continuity occur. Habits take elements from the past, give aid in interpreting the present, and provide a structure for approaching the future; thus, they have the power to project elements of one’s behavior into new circumstances, including the patterns by which one perceives and relates to her surroundings.

Third, and quite importantly, habits signal “that a predisposition formed by a number of specific acts is an immensely more intimate and fundamental part of ourselves than are vague, general, conscious choices.” I interpret this to claim that the habits (including, perhaps especially those that work unconsciously) that individuals and groups carry out has a significantly larger impact on behavior than general, yet consciously made choices. If the continuity of habits creates a certain kind of disposition, it is this disposition which will not only frame our conduct, but will also provide avenues of activity in creating the person we become (which includes our conceptions of who this person is), being a more intimate and fundamental part of who we are than those things we choose consciously. An example might be helpful here: say that I decide to work on being an environmentally conscientious person. This decision is all well and good, but it is only one, and perhaps a relatively minor factor in my actually being an environmentally conscientious person. The things I do in my day to day life, which might include being sure to recycle and compost all possible materials instead of

throwing them away, walk or ride my bike instead of driving whenever possible, informing myself about and purchasing only locally sourced food, etc. are habits of conduct that all have a bigger impact on my being an environmentally conscientious person than the fact that I choose the general goal of being environmentally conscientious. In this example, of course, the decision I make leads the subsequent actions I take, but the point here is that the decision is a relatively small step in this process; the much more significant part is the extent to which these behaviors become an automatic or “unconscious” part of my life. Moreover, this particular example highlights the role of social and political structure in actualizing my intentions: making any of these behaviors into a routine requires that certain facilities (e.g., recycling plants) and information (e.g. food sources) are available to me. However, this demonstrates that the ways I relate to certain elements of my experience, especially insofar as they become relatively automatic behaviors, represents the degree to which I have made this conscious choice a part of my intimate daily existence, the degree to which it has actually impacted my disposition and way of perceiving the world. In short, I read this claim to underscore the fact that habits constitute a much more significant part of ourselves than we might often believe them to, and often, than we would *like* to believe they do. As such, Dewey believes it is a large responsibility of education to help individuals cultivate the habits that contribute most constructively to individual and social flourishing.

Continuing with the above quote: habits are “demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self.” In demanding certain kinds of activity, they signal needs that must be met, desires that want fulfilling, and requirements of action within a given situation. In claiming that habits *constitute the self*, Dewey is making a bold

statement about what the self actually is – it is not an immutable soul, an identity crafted by the mind alone, or a subject discovering herself in a variety of places in life. Rather, the self emerges out of the continuity of habits conducted and influences imparted in return; the self is constructed via the habits and individual practices, including her habits of receiving and interpreting things from outside herself. As such, the self is not an immediately given unity or a cogito asserting its existence, as if it could be stripped from its socio-cultural world or its past experience. The self is the collective, interweaving, and unifying force of myriad habits, both of thinking and of acting. Significantly, such habits are not isolated phenomena: they always take place within a social structure and community. Recalling that all habits are also interactions with environments, this means that habits – and thus, selves – cannot be conceived of apart from their context. The conditions of one’s interactions thus become integrated into one’s habits and one’s very self, on these terms, meaning that habits and selves are always social phenomena. However, highlighting the fact that habits are *acquired, learned* manners of doing and thinking also highlights the fact that they are susceptible to change.

Finally, habits “are will,” and this can be read as an important link with Dewey’s sense of agency. In forming desires and furnishing us with working capacities, habits not only create and perceive demands for certain kinds of activity, they also provide responses to those demands, in the shape of relatively stable channels of response to stimuli. It is through those channels of response that we know how to conduct ourselves in the world, that we are able to have a sense of who we are in the midst of situations, and thus, it is through habit that we are able to perceive things to be done as well as how to do them. Moreover, and importantly for my project, it is through the channels offered by

habit that we experience ourselves as *able* to do the things we perceive as needing done, that we can develop a sense of ourselves as having the potential, the know-how, and the wherewithal to accomplish the tasks we find demanding our attention. Insofar as habit provides us with structures of understanding our surroundings and critically, understanding our relations with other people, it also provides us with means of cultivating efficacious ways of conducting ourselves within such interactions and relations.

To break down the analysis of habit further, it is important to note that habits, as providing us with means of going about the world, relate to all action, including thinking. What this highlights is that the idea of habit addresses the physical contact and immersion in a certain situation, as well as the intellectual or psychological framework through which one engages it. While of course, these two spheres are separable only in linguistic description for Dewey, I find it helpful to make this distinction simply for the purposes of articulating habit's depth and breadth. In its broadest sense, Dewey writes, "Habit is energy organized in certain channels,"¹⁵³ and when it comes to patterns of thinking, he characterizes habits as "conditions of intellectual efficiency."¹⁵⁴ We go about our world as much by habits of perception and thought as by habits of movement and physical activity, because the function of habit can organize and distribute energies as needed, as ways of taking past experience into the future and furnishing us with familiar modes of encountering it. In this way, they create a kind of groundwork for how we approach thinking, as well as giving us resources for how to move into new directions. They are

¹⁵³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 121.

already-grooved pathways through which we travel in the world, enabling us to categorize and relate things to one another. Broadly, Dewey's rich sense of habit captures the way we rely on habits as a vital touchstone for how we make sense of things. He sums up, "Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done. 'Consciousness,' whether as a stream or as special sensations and images, expresses functions of habits, phenomena of their formation, operation, their interruption and reorganization."¹⁵⁵

Again, recalling the claim that habits are a more "intimate and fundamental" part of our constitution than those choices we make deliberately, this passage helps situate that idea with respect to patterns of thought: it is not that a consciousness or mind sits in the background and perceives, thinks, judges, and so on according to its will, but that a habit of perception is engaged when stimuli call for it; a certain mode of judgment is engaged when circumstances require it, and so forth. Dewey explains that habits become "the sole agents of observation, recollection, foresight and judgment: a mind or consciousness or soul in general which performs these operations is a myth."¹⁵⁶ This is not to say that there is absolutely no self or no sense of unity to these perceptions and judgments, as there *is* a continuity of self in such habits, but that the conscious decision to perceive or judge in a certain way is not done by a mind or consciousness separate from or existing prior to these habits. Further, such decisions have reality insofar as they take place through the habits one already has in place when perceiving and judging. Again, this is not to claim that changes cannot be made and that decisions about one's life and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 121.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 123.

outlook have no impact, as they certainly can and do. It is simply to stress that the habits and patterns one enacts in such engagements are the primary way individuals carry themselves and encounter things in the world, and it is thus by those habits that such decisions are made and have effects. Changing habits is certainly possible and often very beneficial; it is often, however, quite difficult. And it is important to note that when such decisions are made to change parts of one's life, the changes do not occur automatically because one has "willed" them; rather, they are willed into being insofar as they are made into new habits.

Because habits interact with one another, they build up and develop into a network of sorts, and when paired with the fact that they are continuous over time, it means that collectively, their interaction forms certain dispositions, what one might think of as attitudes, outlooks, approaches, or inclinations. Indeed, in developing such inclinations, Dewey explains, "Every habit creates an unconscious expectation. It forms a certain outlook."¹⁵⁷ In developing particular outlooks and expectations, it helps us direct energy into these already-grooved channels by giving stimuli an avenue into which we can make sense of them and through which we can direct our actions according to their need. If we were to approach new situations without such avenues of perception and understanding, making sense of any new experiences would be a taxing challenge, with so many new variables to account for. However, because we develop outlooks through the constant utilization of habits – again, largely unconsciously – we ready ourselves to meet experience head on. Moreover, in developing these dispositions, we get used to watching out for certain things; for example, given a walk in the woods, a

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 54.

painter might notice more nuances of color and texture in the landscape, while a chemist might have a keener sense for the compounds necessary for mushrooms to produce the particular smell emanating from them. The habits governing these individuals' lives operate differently with similar stimuli, but the sensitivities they have developed also emerge as a matter of habit. What this signals is the fact that the more habits we develop in harmonious interaction with each other, and the more flexibly they can interact with each other and to new circumstances, the more we are likely to approach situations with a sense of clarity and purpose; in other words, the more we might be able to enact our will.

Again, I emphasize that habit covers both thinking and acting in Dewey's account, but Dewey himself views such operations as fluid and continuous with one another; rather than characterizing such habits in their separation, he presents them in their interaction. He writes, "Thought which does not exist within ordinary habits of action lacks means of execution. In lacking application, it also lacks test, criterion."¹⁵⁸ This reinforces the sense in which habits are what give reality and weight to certain patterns of thinking: insofar as a pattern of thinking might be desired, it is not made into action until there are channels for it to become realized. Such channels are made available by habit. And moreover, habits have the potential to shift and change, to become more flexible and fluid, and it is in this capacity that habits are also a powerful means of self-direction, of will, of agency. It is because our selves are constituted by habits that they can change and transform, and since experience is continuous over time, the changes we make have the potential for changing the selves we become in the future.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 49.

This takes us to the question of how habits become flexible, as well as the question of why flexibility is a desirable trait of habits in general.

Reconstruction: Habit and Impulse

In giving an account of Dewey's sense of habit, it is also important to include an account of his conception of impulses, as these are at work both in developing certain habits but also in *changing* habits. A part of how habits tend to work in human life – on both individual and social levels – includes the fact that as new conditions arise, old habits need to change to fit them, or sometimes fall away completely. Such changes are not likely to occur of their own accord, because, as Dewey notes, once they are formed, habits have a tendency to perpetuate themselves. Thus, various stimuli can operate as instigators of habit change; while some might be more easily identified as external, coming from the instruction, support, or rebuke of others, while others might be described as internal, coming from the desires or needs of an individual herself; but in reality, all functioning of habit and thus all emergence of habit change comes by way of the interaction between an individual and her environment.

Nonetheless, Dewey names these instigations toward change or the surges through which needs are called out by the name of “impulse,” which he also sometimes calls “instinct.” Dewey describes, “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.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, they are active in experiences which call out a need for something different, something new to operate in engaging and orienting

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 67.

the individual in a situation. They might operate by inciting a feeling of need for a particular thing, or they might signal an energy that needs a particular manner of release that has yet to find one. In any case, they are largely responsible for helping habits remain flexible and relevant; they communicate to habits when they have become stale and stagnant. As noted above, habits do the perceiving, organizing, etc. that is done; impulses do the shaking up and keeping habits loose that is required for growth and adaptation. Because habits can become fixed and rigid, and thus incapable of adapting to new needs that arise, and impulses on their own can be too chaotic and directionless, both are needed in reconstruction: “Habit as such is too definitely adapted to an environment to survey or analyze it, and impulse is too indeterminately related to the environment to be capable of reporting anything about it. ... A certain delicate combination of habit and impulse is requisite for observation, memory, and judgment.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, a healthy, reciprocal relationship is needed between collections of habits and habits’ ability to assimilate and respond to impulses, especially as new or intensely felt ones arise. However, while habits and impulses function in relation to one another, this does not mean that they are opposite phenomena or that they are juxtaposed to one another. What impulses do is to alert the individual that something, a desire or motivation is developing, which needs a channel in order to express itself.¹⁶¹ In order to accommodate their

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 124.

¹⁶¹ I thank Scott Pratt for this reminder, and for the following image to portray this relationship: he has characterized the relationship between impulses and habits to be like the movement of water coursing through certain channels. While water (impulse) will exist and flow regardless, channels (habits) allow the water to flow in intelligible, organized, and productive directions. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey makes reference to this kind of phenomenon in discussing the meaning and order gained through communication: “Meanings having been deflected from the rapid and roaring stream of

presence and expression, habits must be amenable to the movement of impulse, as well as flexible enough to adapt to changing needs. This is why flexible habits are among the targets of education and can motivate processes of growth: flexible habits are habits that can respond to the demands of impulses and the changes in circumstance or environment. They are thus the habits that are most likely to help individuals and societies move towards growth.

Flexible habits are desirable because they are ones that can accommodate changing needs and the fluctuation of impulses that arise in the course of a habit's tenure. These habits are distinguished from inflexible ones by their sensitivity to new elements in varying conditions and they do not become hard and rigid in terms of their application. Examples of inflexible habits might be things like racist, sexist, or bigoted beliefs, in that they generalize far too much and refuse to take particularities of situations into account; they block off inquiry and openness of encounter in their refusal to adapt to new situations. A flexible habit, on the contrary, is able to meet every new situation on its own terms, refusing to hold all circumstances to the same standard of assessment. Habits can become more flexible over time, but there are also habits of flexibility – habits of thinking and responding with sensitivity and nuance – that are also a part of what makes habits more amenable to varying circumstances. The habit of attending to one's impulses is also a boon to allowing them to work flexibly and creatively, such that one is open to new stimuli and able to respond to its needs.¹⁶²

events into a calm and traversable canal, rejoin the main stream, and color, temper and compose its course" (*Experience and Nature*, 132).

¹⁶² The idea of flexible habits becomes somewhat unclear, if habits are thought of not just in terms of patterns of thinking, but in terms of neural pathways or connections.

In brief, impulse is a force of generating change, amending habits and circumstances to respond more readily to the needs and the novel elements of a situation. While impulses can be powerful, violent eruptions of feeling, or expressions of dissatisfaction with a current circumstance, they can indeed be unproductive if not treated well. The conditions under which they can be treated well is, again, through the way habits are developed to deal with them. When working productively with one another, habits benefit from impulses in keeping them relevant and progressive, and impulses benefit from habits in finding necessary means of expression. Dewey writes, describing how impulses, as pivots of adjustment, usher in the possibility of reorganizing habits to modify old patterns for new conditions: “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.”¹⁶³ As such, the relationship of impulses and habits can be destructive, if impulses are not channeled to give habits a new relevance – in such cases impulses might simply burst forth as expressions of discontent. But when impulses and habits communicate well, impulses can serve as this kind of liberatory source: they make it known that something needs an outlet and they seek a habit through which to express this need. In this way, impulses are also significant elements of experience insofar as they are an avenue of will: “They are agencies for transfer of existing social power into personal

However, as Mark Johnson notes, this perspective need not deny the possibility of flexibility. Rather, if patterns of neural connectivity can be parts of several potential neural pathways or assemblies, then the activation of a habit can open up the possibility of activating several possible patterns. This way, neural connections need not tend toward one single, fixed pattern, but might be linked with several options for activity and response. What this shows is that the richer the experience or habit, the greater the possibility of developing alternative patterns of action when the habit is activated (personal correspondence with Mark Johnson, August 6, 2012).

¹⁶³ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 75.

ability; they are means of reconstructive growth.”¹⁶⁴ They represent a means through which individuals relate to their social surroundings, seeking out meanings and significances; upon finding them, one can assimilate them into habitual manners of operation, into her cache of personal abilities, through modifying old habits or cultivating new ones. As such, impulses represent incitements toward reconstruction; they can be the sparks needed to generate new connections and reorganize experiences such that new conditions are created.

As one might anticipate, the centrality of habit in human life plays an important part in the process of education: insofar as education is a reconstruction or reorganization of experience, large parts of this reconstruction take place by way of new organizations of habits, new manners of relating them to one another, and developing new habits to meet new conditions. Indeed, this is present in Dewey’s work on education; in *Democracy and Education*, he writes, “the human being acquires a habit of learning. He learns to learn.”¹⁶⁵ Thus, in learning to learn, individuals learn how to translate patterns from one situation to another, and to engage in situations with an eye towards discovering the meanings inherent within them. Thus, we see a deeper justification behind Dewey’s claim from the previous chapter that a large part of educative experience occurs through the construction of and interaction with environments: if educators are to change the habits of their students, they must change the conditions in which they act: “We cannot change habit directly: that notion is magic. But we can change it indirectly by modifying conditions, by an intelligent selecting and weighing of the objects which engage attention

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 68.

¹⁶⁵ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 50.

and which influence the fulfillment of desires.”¹⁶⁶ As such, we see that modifying conditions can go far in helping to foster the development of certain habits, which then develop into certain dispositions, and this is a significant part of the task education aims to accomplish.

What is more, this striving aims to develop those habits within the youth that can best meet the challenges of their present and increase their capacities for crafting their own futures. Dewey writes, that for education to be most beneficial for the young, “What is necessary is that habits be formed which are more intelligent, more sensitively percipient, more informed with foresight, more aware of what they are about, more direct and sincere, more flexibly responsive than those now current. Then they will meet their own problems and propose their own improvements.”¹⁶⁷ In aiming for habits of intelligence, sensitive percipience, foresight, flexible response, directness and sincerity, and, again, *more aware of what they are about*, such habits are ones which both meet situations with generous attitudes and critical capacities, open-minded and open-hearted sensitivity, genuineness and straightforwardness, but also and importantly, a sense of what they themselves are about, what they are doing, how they are oriented, and how they work together. Such descriptions might fall under the category of reflectiveness or awareness, or perhaps, self-knowledge, and I argue that the more such habits have a sense of what they are about, the more they are able to enact their purposes. That is, the more self-knowing these habits are, the greater their agency and facility with practice they will be.

¹⁶⁶ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 18-19.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

Despite the fact that I have discussed habits of thinking and perception at some length here, as I noted above briefly, Dewey is clear that such intellectual habits are not in any way divorced from bodily and physical habits. Rather, they might be seen as different sides of the multifaceted phenomenon of habit. But their existence and their practice is continuous, or at least, they are ideally; and insofar as habits work together in forming a network or background condition for action, the more supportive of one another they are, the more efficacious all are likely to be. As such, I turn now to the body's role in the exercise of habits, the emergence of the self, and the reconstruction of both into ever-evolving phenomena.

Habit and the Body

It is notable that Dewey often references habits of the body to demonstrate their intractability and the ways in which changing habits can provide the means to realizing desired ends. In the chapter "Habits and Will," Dewey uses the example of someone with poor posture as a prime example of how habit works: "A man who does not stand properly forms a habit of standing improperly, a positive, forceful habit."¹⁶⁸ And insofar as the conditions supporting his "poor" posture remain consistent, not much will get him to alter his posture on his own. Dewey also notes that "a friend" helped him see this point, describing that the simple demand to stand upright and align one's posture is not

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 24. I wish to note here that while I engage this example as one that Dewey uses and one which highlights the body, there are certainly limitations to it. This is because the language of "poor," "incorrect," and "correct" posture carries connotations that there are right and wrong ways to carry one's body. While there are certainly more and less healthy ones, and postures more or less congenial to certain kinds of activity, I do not wish to imply that any kinds of bodies are "wrong" or "incorrect." I do not believe Dewey intends this implication either, but it is a possible criticism one could point out from the use of this example.

enough for this to happen in practice, especially with any consistency; an individual might temporarily stand with “proper” posture if commanded to, but without the continuity and practice of habit, the individual will not retain such posture into the future.¹⁶⁹ Thus, Dewey claims that “habits must intervene between wish and execution in the case of bodily acts,”¹⁷⁰ explaining also that intellectual and moral acts depend just as much upon habit’s operation, and thus, habit’s intervention if a desired change in behavior is sought.

Dewey discusses the vital relation between the bodily and intellectual elements of the working of habit, noting often how habit not only addresses these aspects of human behavior, but also that the fluidity with which habits are enacted requires that an interconnection exists between them. He writes, “Our ideas truly depend upon experience, but so do our sensations. And the experience upon which they both depend is the operation of habits ... Thus our purposes and commands regarding action (whether physical or moral) come to us through the refracting medium of bodily and moral habits.”¹⁷¹ In other words, the fact that ideas and sensations rely on experience means they also rely on the workings of habit within experience, and whatever kinds of habits we have developed also rely on the “refracting medium” of bodily habit, as one of the modes through which we must engage action. That Dewey includes moral habit here is significant for his overall purpose of the book, insofar as human morality and sociality are among its main targets. But what is interesting about his approach is that when

¹⁶⁹ This friend is most likely F.M. Alexander, founder of the Alexander technique.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

viewed as matters of habit and not as matters of immutable reality or eternal truth, questions of morality and psychology can be addressed with the same practical, progress-oriented approach as issues of bodily and intellectual habit; as phenomena with experiential reality, one might even say a tempered brand of necessity, but also with the potential for change and improvement.

But to return to the issue the body and its habits, I will return briefly to the example raised earlier: the person hoping to correct his posture. Dewey explains further that trying to correct one's posture requires that one find particular acts and movements to do so, and that thinking about correcting one's posture is not the most effective way to go about doing it. He claims even that thinking about it can backfire, insofar as thinking about it consciously can devote more attention to the incorrect posture than the correct one.¹⁷² Rather, this individual must develop ways of carrying his body, immediately, in the concrete, which can develop and build over time into the "correct" posture. The important thing is that actions be taken and incorporated piece by piece; thinking about it is on par with the "general, vague, conscious choices" we saw above, while making changes in posture or activity, even if slight, are what remains more "intimate and fundamental" a part of this particular habit. Blending this example with the moral habits at play in human conduct as well, Dewey explains,

Only the man who can maintain a correct posture has the stuff out of which to form that idea of standing erect which can be the starting point of a right act. Only the man whose habits are already good can know what the good is. Immediate, seemingly instinctive, feeling of the direction and end of various lines of behavior is in reality the feeling of habits working below direct consciousness.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Ibid., 27-28.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 26.

This passage drives home the point that while habits include habits of thinking, there is much that conscious thought does not accomplish when it comes to our conduct, even that conduct we desire to enact. The ideas formed out of desires, or as particular objects of intention, Dewey says, are the product of habits instead of the instigations for developing them. Dewey stresses that the much more powerful factor in behavior is habit – and therein lies the significance of developing positive and flexible habits as early as possible, as well as the importance of being able to modify those habits when necessary. Part of what strikes me about the passage above is its concluding line – that much of the direction and ends of behavior guided by the feeling of habits working below direct consciousness. Again, this does not mean that consciousness plays no role in how habits play out; but it stresses again that much of our conduct is guided by these below-conscious feelings, the often-inarticulate but definitely felt senses of how things work and how we ought best engage with them. These are matters of a body-mind’s habits, the ways that energy is channeled within and through them, and the felt sense of approaching situations. This is an important part of the ways in which habits are will, that habits are agencies. And it is through their interweavings that “individual” agencies might develop into a broader, more deeply felt and unified sense of agency; that is, the sense of experiencing oneself as able to enact purposes and intentions. This is intelligence, for Dewey, and here I hope to underscore how this is *embodied* intelligence.

In working to change a certain habit or develop a new one, say, again, the correcting of one’s posture, the conscious intention to do so is merely one (minor) step in the process. In developing ends of activity, Dewey claims, the way to enact them is really to focus on the means (or sometimes, the ends-in-view), which become ends in

their own right as they are achieved. But in this emphasis he stresses that what must be focused on is the *next* action, the one closest to us and closest to being executed, in changing the *what* of an end or goal into a *how*; and the action closest to us, “the means within our power, is a habit.”¹⁷⁴ As such, change that is desired, or impulses that are seeking release, find satisfaction not in the completion of a goal – say, the accomplishment of correct posture, as if this were something static or stationary – but in the ways in which habits can take them up and work with the desires or impulses in cultivating a means of expression. So in the habit of correcting one’s posture, the next action to be taken is not standing up straight and refusing to budge, declaring oneself “cured,” but it is to work on feeling out how one’s habit of standing might be less than ideal in terms of health or in terms of executing certain tasks, and to begin making small, gradual changes addressing such felt sensations.

Dewey’s emphasis on the body’s role in habit, in my reading, emphasizes three things. First, it highlights the fact that any changes to be made in one’s habits, which as we have seen, can be as dramatic as making changes in one’s self, take place gradually. Overhauls of repeated, learned patterns of conduct do not change themselves overnight, but take time to truly “take root” (a nice embodied metaphor) in order to become effective. In a way, this is a manner of respecting the principle of continuity – that experiences of the present can modify the future, but that there can be no complete cutting off of experiences of the past. Change surely happens, but it requires time and adaptation. Second, and related to the first, all habit involves a degree of mechanization. Dewey writes, “Habit is impossible without setting up a mechanism of action,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 29.

physiologically engrained, which operates ‘spontaneously,’ automatically, whenever the cue is given.”¹⁷⁵ While habit goes far beyond mechanization, of course, in that it can be flexible and reflective as well as modifiable, this is to highlight that insofar as some habits can take on the operation of a function – a relatively automatic action or response – that is the degree to which that habit has become effective. There are, of course, mechanized habits that are not always ideal and need shifting at some point in time, but their mechanization ensures that they will do their work in some respect. Third, and perhaps this is simply to reiterate previous claims, but habits require a level of bodily relevance or incorporation in order for them to take root and become operative in the course of daily life. This is simply to say that if a habit of thought – say, intentions of kindness or generosity – has no expression in one’s bodily comportment, activities, and relations with others, then such an intention really has very little, if any, efficacy in one’s conduct. Just as the conceived intention to stand up straight can do little more than incite a string of related actions – and sometimes it will not even do this – the intention of being kind or generous is relatively inert unless it has bodily performance behind it. This is why habits are such a significant part of agency: for intentions to be realized, they need the mechanisms to do so. Agency might thus be seen also in the interconnected mechanisms of effecting one’s intentions; the felt sense of possibility as the product of such interlocking habits.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 50.

Agency: Embodied Self, Embodied Growth

With these outlines of Dewey's conceptions of the human being, the human body, and the role of habit set out, it is necessary now to turn to what these concepts mean when it comes to a Deweyan sense of agency, since I am interpreting Dewey's idea of growth as an idea of agency. I described briefly in the previous chapter what I imagine a sense of agency to mean, roughly characterizing it as a felt sense of one's capacities for deliberate action and for executing intentions, allowing one to experience herself as an effective actor in the world, as well as having the sense of expanding her possibilities further. Such a felt sense requires that one have some degree of self-knowledge, insofar as she must have an awareness of "what she is about" in the midst of varying circumstances, and I am arguing that such knowledge also requires an embodied sense of such capacities and possibilities. While Dewey rarely uses the language of agency as this kind of phenomenon, there are certainly other concepts he employs along this line, which together might help us approximate what a Deweyan sense of agency would look like. The key terms I will examine in this regard are will, intelligence, and freedom, as well as the way Dewey describes the culmination of having *an* experience and the associated feeling of satisfaction and rest that this can bring. The previous material in this section will help to situate how our experiences of will, intelligence, freedom, and achieving ends-in-view all relate to issues of habit construction, reconstruction, and embodied agency.

Will

While some material on will has been discussed previously in relation to habit, it will be helpful to recall it here. In describing character as the interpenetration of habits, Dewey characterizes will in a similar way; insofar as habits collectively develop into dispositions or “modes of response” to situations, habit accustoms us to operating with a particular bearing, with particular inclinations and perceptive qualities. He writes, “Habit means a special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrences of specific acts. It means will.”¹⁷⁶ This description connotes that will is marked by the general manner of engagement we adopt when interacting with the world, as well as the ways such dispositions generate certain kinds of actions. In any case, will is not, for Dewey, a metaphysical concept or a quality of human life transcendently present; it is a practical term for the ability to respond to stimuli in desired and efficacious ways. Such responses are not generated piecemeal either; they emerge out of our habitual modes of engagement and the efficacy with which those modes interact with one another.

Dewey also discusses the will with direct reference to its use in moral theories, juxtaposing his conception of the will with theories abstracting it from action and habit. As opposed to something like a Kantian “good will” that may or may not be evidenced in actions, Dewey claims that the more everyday conception of the will, which he advocates, signals “something practical and moving. It understands the body of habits, of active dispositions which makes a man do what he does.”¹⁷⁷ This is a part of why Dewey

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 32.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 33.

rejects moral theories which separate out the functioning of the will from the consequences resulting from it, but it also highlights that his conception of will is, unsurprisingly, about action and doing, and about the relation between the dispositions generated by habit and the effects such dispositions create. Thus we see a link with will and the felt sense of agency insofar as will is a matter of crafting and then being able to rely on habits that produce well-functioning dispositions; in other words, habits that enable efficacious activity.¹⁷⁸

Intelligence

One of the most powerful expressions of what might be thought of as Deweyan agency comes through in his use of the term “intelligence.” A prominent idea throughout nearly all of his work, he employs the term in a relatively particular way. In a nutshell, intelligence is the deliberate use of the human powers of inquiry, observation, and judgment for the improvement of the conditions of life, individual and social, such that desired consequences might be sought out and brought into being through directed activity. Intelligence is the exercise of deliberate observation and reflective thought, such

¹⁷⁸ Dewey also briefly discusses the idea he finds in vogue at the time of the book’s writing: the concept of the will to power. Interestingly, while Dewey ultimately finds the idea rather unconvincing, this idea comes from a discussion of the self as an ongoing process, an idea which he describes as currently out of fashion. With the influences of romanticism and the industrial revolution, the more fashionable name for the unifying action of the self’s continuity is referenced by the will to power (Ibid., 98). While his characterization of this manifestation of will has resonances with the felt sense of rest he describes in the accomplishment of tasks (which will be taken up later in this section), in the end, his discussion of this idea is somewhat disparaging. He links it with the thwarted energy of impulses with no proper avenues of expression, and individuals seeking self-aggrandizement. However, the impulse it calls out, he says, emanates less from a demand for power and more as search for the right ways to use already existing powers (Ibid., 99).

that one can link experiences from the past with present circumstances, paying attention to the ways in which past actions and their results played out such that present actions might have a sense of direction. It is deployed when a confusing situation presents itself, in that part of its function is to organize and utilize certain habits that help to “clear up” and make sense of it, so that action becomes structured, directed, and manageable. However, it is deployed also as a habit, in that habits of intelligent response – that is, thoughtful, careful, and reflective approaches – can be cultivated as part of one’s overall demeanor. Basically, intelligence is the direction of activities towards particular desired goals or circumstances, knowing that the environment in which one operates is always the flip side of such actions.

In *The Quest for Certainty*, the chapter titled “The Naturalization of Intelligence” outlines Dewey’s conception of what intelligence is, here juxtaposed with the concept of “reason,” so historically prominent in the philosophical tradition. Dewey claims that reason is typically understood as a phenomenon separated from the “natural” world as an immutable, “superempirical” force of order. Typically aligned with the purity of the human mind, reason hovers above the world of experience, in a sense, only allowing humans access to it in particular ways.¹⁷⁹ Intelligence on the other hand, is a “domesticated” kind of operation, in that it exists in a “natural” way in human life, continuous throughout human activity. Dewey explains the basics of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, emphasizing how the process of observation inevitably plays a part in constructing the reality of what it observes, thereby highlighting how the attainment of knowledge is a *participatory* process; that we are continuous with and influencing the

¹⁷⁹ Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, vol. 4: 1929, LW, 170.

world when we make judgments upon it. Such conclusions remove the absolute certainty that science might wish for, but they have much farther-reaching entailments in what it means to have knowledge and to use it in the world. One of these conclusions that Dewey outlines is the fact that the belief in an immutable, transcendent reason no longer makes much sense; rather, intelligence in action – directed, deliberate choices made about desired outcomes and the likely actions to achieve them – is a much more efficient and practical way to think about the exercise of human powers. Describing the opposition between reason’s fixed, universal character and intelligence’s flexible here-and-now-ness, Dewey writes,

Intelligence ... is associated with *judgment*; that is, with selection and arrangement of means to effect consequences and with choice of what we take as our ends. 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. In the large sense of the term, intelligence is as practical as reason is theoretical.¹⁸⁰

As such, intelligence is one of the names Dewey gives to the kind of directed operation that aims to evaluate past and present circumstances such that present and future circumstances might be ordered and meaningful in ways we desire. Indeed, “science” is related to this term also, in that science, for Dewey, is “a knowledge that accrues when methods are employed which deal competently with problems that present themselves;” as such, “the physician, engineer, artist, craftsman, lay claim to scientific knowing.”¹⁸¹ Insofar as it refers to directed action, the concept of intelligence can be aligned also with “method” in Dewey’s work, but the key is that intelligence is within the natural sphere of

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 159.

human capacities, and its power is demonstrated when human beings observe phenomena in experience, take record of its results and relationships, and adjust their actions accordingly, such that the best chance of desirable consequences comes about. One of its distinguishing features, for Dewey, and also separating it from “reason,” is that it demands a connection between knowing and doing, and thus, it can make a difference in the world, it can impact the course of change.

Because intelligence has this rather broad scope, seen generally as the intervention and direction of actions in order to modify conditions, its uses extend far into various elements of life, and thus, into just as many elements of Dewey’s work. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, many of Dewey’s discussions of intelligence focus on the continuity between intelligence in habits and intelligence in moral conduct, seeing these spheres as continuous with one another. He claims that a similar kind of intelligence employed in intellectual pursuits or everyday life is employed in moral thinking. This means that developing thoughtful, reflective, and flexible habits are that much more significant, in that they are they primary conduits of human behavior, and thus, all have a moral impact. Discussing the function of deliberation, an important part of cultivating intelligence, Dewey writes,

The moral is to develop conscientiousness, ability to judge the significance of what we are doing and to use that judgment in directing what we do, not by means of direct cultivation of something called conscience, or reason, or a faculty of moral knowledge, but by fostering those impulses and habits which experience has shown to make us sensitive, generous, imaginative...¹⁸²

Thus, while we hear the ethical overtones in this description, all parts of it apply generally to his conception of intelligence more broadly speaking. A significant part of

¹⁸² Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 144.

what intelligence cultivates is the facility (the habit) of judging the impact of what we do and using that (habit of) judgment to direct what we continue to do.

This conception of intelligence can be linked with agency in that intelligence is one way to think about the ability to decide upon and direct one's habits and actions in ways that best effect one's purposes. This capacity might entail the experience of trust in one's intelligence, or the confidence of intelligence in general that conditions might be moving toward the better – or at least, are *able* to do so. Since intelligence “converts desire into plans, systematic plans based on assembling facts,”¹⁸³ part of what this conversion requires is the belief (and the felt possibility of acting on it) that such plans are possible, that the work involved in developing plans might come to fruition in the world. The feeling of security in this belief might also be thought of a component of agency. Indeed, for Dewey, “the highest task of intelligence is to grasp and realize genuine opportunity, possibility.”¹⁸⁴ Such realizations, especially when it comes to expanding the opportunities and possibilities available in the world, are both manifestations of, and prerequisites for, agency.

Freedom

Similar to Dewey's conception of the will, his idea of freedom has much more to do with the ability to exercise intelligence in action than it does with a metaphysical concept of freedom as a condition. There is a kind of natural freedom that exists, he says, but this is only the condition for the kind of freedom in choice, purpose, and activity that

¹⁸³ Ibid., 175.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 161.

truly characterizes the exercise of freedom in human life, as well as those conditions which help to secure it and encourage its flourishing.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, he stresses, “Intelligence is the key to freedom in act.”¹⁸⁶

There are three key elements characterizing freedom, or liberty, in Dewey’s account. He describes the practice of freedom as such: “(i) It includes efficiency in action, ability to carry out plans, the absence of cramping and thwarting obstacles. (ii) It also includes capacity to vary plans, to change the course of action, to experience novelties. And again (iii) it signifies the power of desire and choice to be factors in events.”¹⁸⁷ These three characteristics are helpful for outlining some conditions of agency: the ability to effectively make and carry out plans, the ability to change such plans as needed and to experience new things, and the ability of making desire and feeling important elements in making choices. How these conditions of agency are experienced by individuals is an issue I will take up in subsequent chapters.

Similar to some of the characteristics of intelligence Dewey describes, a part of freedom is using the knowledge of observation and prediction to outline future consequences in a desirable fashion. Anticipating particular ends-in-view and making plans for their execution, Dewey links the human abilities to foresee and plan as a part of our freedom: “To foresee future objective alternatives and to be able by deliberation to

¹⁸⁵ To this effect, Dewey writes, “A certain natural freedom is possessed by man. That is to say, in some respects harmony exists between a man’s energies and his surroundings such that the latter support and execute his purposes. In so far he is free; without such a basic natural support, conscious contrivances of legislation, administration and deliberate human institution of social arrangements cannot take place” (Ibid., 211).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 210.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 209.

choose one of them and thereby weight its changes in the struggle for future existence, measures our freedom.”¹⁸⁸ Such measures are, of course, not absolute; there are always elements of situations that remain out of our control, and even when ends-in-view are reached, conditions become destabilized again, calling out the need for new ends.

Acknowledging this and mitigating the feeling that freedom might aim past its boundaries, Dewey stipulates, “We do not use the present to control the future. We use the foresight of the future to refine and expand present activity. In this use of desire, deliberation and choice, freedom is actualized.”¹⁸⁹ In actualizing freedom, we make use of our ability to design purposes and execute them, carrying intentions and wishes into the future. In doing so, we must have the sense that such executions are possible and plausible, and such a sense requires agency.

Having *An Experience*

Again, linked with the freedom to articulate and carry out actions towards ends-in-view, there is a sense of satisfaction that achieving such ends imparts. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey outlines the ways that experience, as a constant interplay of doing and undergoing, contains a necessary tension between our activities as reaching toward a particular goal and the rest experienced when such a goal is reached. Now, the attainment of such ends almost immediately shifts into a new springboard, a new starting

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 214.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 215. In somewhat dramatic fiction, Dewey asks about the effect of deliberation and choice in human life: “What do they do that is distinctive? The answer is that they give us all the control of future possibilities which is open to us. And this control is the crux of our freedom. Without it, we are pushed from behind. With it we walk in the light” (Ibid., 214).

point of activity. But there are distinctions to be made in the felt experiences that characterize these moments of engagement.

Dewey characterizes having *an* experience as the complete course of a doing and undergoing, experiencing tension and conflict and moving towards resolution, and experiencing a culminating moment wherein the experience's contents come together in a kind of harmony.¹⁹⁰ This harmony is a kind of equilibrium, a point of stability, a moment of rest in the midst of movement. These moments of harmony, like those of tension, are distinguished so pointedly due to the felt qualities suffusing them, characterizing them as tense or harmonious. We move through these stable moments only to initiate the beginnings of new experiences, but such culminations can contain significant lessons for how we continue to go about our world, as well as how we experience our own participatory self within it. Indeed, Dewey aligns the function of intelligence with the perception of meanings which emerge through the ebb and flow of doing and undergoing.

It is such fluctuations that characterize human life, for Dewey, in that they are what allow for dynamism, novelty, change, and growth. Without the potential for such changes, life would appear either totally fixed and static, or totally disorderly and chaotic. Instead, Dewey describes, our life is somewhere in between these two poles. But it is the interconnection between them that gives experiences meaning, that allows us to find relative stability, and such stability is where we develop means of moving forward to new projects. He writes, "Contrast of lack and fullness, of struggle and achievement, of

¹⁹⁰ I emphasize the *an* here because this definition differs slightly from Dewey's "ordinary" concept of experience. Having *an* experience refers to the continuity and buildup involved in a single, focused experience; such an experience might be visiting an art museum, taking an English class, or mourning the loss of a loved one. Its duration is less its defining characteristic as the way in which separate experiences unify into one, relatively bounded collection of experiences, which then gets the label *an* experience.

adjustment after consummated irregularity, form the drama in which action, feeling, and meaning are one. The outcome is balance and counterbalance. These are not static nor mechanical. They express power that is intense because measured through overcoming resistance.”¹⁹¹ Thus, such points of rest are significant not only for allowing us a temporary respite from the flux of life; they are moments in which we experience the power of overcoming challenges, of establishing a peace in the midst of flux.

Highlighting how significant these accomplishments can be, Dewey writes, “The moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intensest life.”¹⁹²

Indeed, such moments of intensest life, representing the culminating and uniting elements of an experience, are so meaningful in that they help us to build a sense of stability within the ever-changing flux of experience as it continues on, and such stability, again, is a distinctly *felt* quality. Dewey claims that any consummatory moment is indeed the one in which a new beginning emerges, and thus, the harmony we feel does not last long as its own, singular phenomenon. However, the feeling of such points of rest can help us to generate a strength in the sense that such possibilities exist, that even painful experiences can have meaning, and that life, constituted of ebbs and flows, is likely to ebb or flow again soon, providing solace depending on whatever one needs at the moment. He explains, “through the phases of perturbation and conflict, there abides the deep-seated memory of an underlying harmony, the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock.”¹⁹³ As such, he is positing that in the midst of life’s

¹⁹¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, vol. 10: 1934, LW, 22.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

movements, a sense of steady harmony is possible within the flux of activity. This sense of harmony or stability is, in part, crafted out of the singular harmonies of consummations of experience, and might be likened to a sense of self that operates as a relatively stable element within experience, a self that is able to act with intelligence and direction, that can perceive the changing dynamics of life as inevitable and organize one's purposes within them. In any case, such a harmony signifies the felt sense of stability with life's changes, the rest and recognition that accompanies achieving a projected goal, or that one has felt the connections between the various contents of an experience. Indeed, this sense is also linked to growth: "Time as organization in change is growth, and growth signifies that a varied series of change enters upon intervals of pause and rest; of completions that become the initial points of new processes of development."¹⁹⁴

As such, we can discern more about what a sense of Deweyan agency might look like or what it might contain, and his descriptions of the felt, satisfying quality of such culminations are a helpful piece of this puzzle. This is because, in part at least, the totality of the body-mind is implicated in such experiences – insofar as the *sense* of these experiences is consistently highlighted in Dewey's accounts. Indeed, he explains that such experiences offer a feeling of satisfaction, of achievement, of order and progress: "the experience itself has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement."¹⁹⁵ In this way we see that such culminations are not simply the accumulated moments of a given

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

timeframe or the conclusion of a certain phase; they are significant as culminations in the *felt sense* of achievement and completion that they offer. They demonstrate the value and meaning of integrated and organized movement, and in return provide a satisfying feeling of unification.

So at this point we might take a survey of these ideas and their relation to agency: will, intelligence, freedom, the culmination of an experience. Will provides a sense in which habits combine to form avenues of efficient action, insofar as will is demonstrated through the way habits interact to develop flexible and open-thinking dispositions. Intelligence provides a rich sense of how foresight and judgment are key components of efficient action for Dewey, insofar as it encompasses a broad range of types of action. Freedom represents both the conditions in which we act toward our own purposes as well as how significant the reality of choice is in our experiences. Interestingly, it is also part of how Keall characterizes the need for self-knowledge in education, in that self-knowledge is requisite for achieving the kind of freedom Dewey envisions as necessary for living a flourishing, fulfilling life. And the felt sense of culminating experience provides us with evidence that Dewey acknowledges the importance of the *feeling* and the *embodied reality* of achieving goals and cultivating meaning in the unifying of experiences. This shows us a way in which agency is felt, is experienced, is realized as a part of our engagements with the world.

Thus, in the collection of these terms, we can recognize ways that Dewey addresses the question of agency, insofar as agency is a question of intelligent action, effective manners of executing such action, and the potential for consequent satisfaction felt upon concluding an experience. And as Dewey is clear to never separate the body

from the mind in his conceptualizations, we can assert with confidence that any sense of agency for Dewey is thus an embodied sense. However, we might still seek out more when it comes to ways of characterizing how such agency is experienced, how such felt capacities and possibilities are lived through the entirety of one's embodied habits, and not just in moments of culmination or completion of a goal.

Body, Reconsidered: Body as Mine and Not Mine

At this point, we can affirm that Dewey finds the role of the body to be significant, and that his intentions in articulating phenomena of human life are to do so as holistically as possible. What such a holistic approach might find wanting however, are more particularities and details of how such experiences do indeed include multiple sides, multiple vantage points from which experience can be viewed and articulated. The question of embodied life is certainly no exception, insofar as I experience my body in a certain way as I live it, while others perceive my body in a very different way as they encounter me, and this encounter certainly cycles back into the way I experience my body in the first person.¹⁹⁶ The potentials of this split in perspectives is what leads me into the following two chapters, with the incorporation of a variety of philosophical perspectives.

There is a sense in which the body I inhabit is always mine – it *is* me in a significant way; it is my vehicle of going about the world, my possibility of making meaning in the world, my unique opportunity of being. The force of this first person

¹⁹⁶ O'Loughlin also notes that this tension “between the body which is mine (that which I am?) and that which I am for others” is a key motivation for her own study on the place of the body in education (*Embodiment and Education*, 3).

perspective, while potentially operating with a different point of view on experience than Dewey, has important things to offer when it comes to developing an embodied account of agency. If I am to act intelligently as an agent in the world, understanding and having a living, active sense of my potentials, I must experience myself, in or as my body, in such a way also. Believing my body to make me inferior or experiencing my body as inhibiting for my activities are, I argue, inhibitions on my agency, on my ability to carry out my intentions in the world and in some cases, my ability to generate certain kinds of meaning. Despite his emphasis on the body-mind as a unit, Dewey's focus on will, intelligence, and freedom could be taken further in terms of how such qualities of experience are *lived* and felt, "from the inside" as it were, or what the lack of such qualities might entail in terms of one's conception of self and perceived sense of her capacities. As such, I will turn to some insights from the phenomenological perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the next chapter, looking to see how we might flesh out a perspective of the body *as mine* and as the source of my agential powers in the world. Such a first-person, descriptive account will, I argue, supplement the account of embodied agency that a conception of growth might aim for.

There is also a sense in which the body I inhabit is also not mine – I live it, but it is also the object of others' perceptions, as well as a means of monitoring and controlling my behavior, my interactions, and thus, my possibilities. This is not to say that such monitoring and controlling are of necessity a negative or dangerous thing, but they are elements of living in a social world and a complex culture, in which institutions shape many (if not all) of the day-to-day engagements in which I participate. As such, my activities within such larger networks entail that there is an extent to which my

experience is not entirely mine, and my embodied self is a part of many overlapping networks of history, culture, and discourse. Now, Dewey's views are thoroughly social, in that habits, intelligence, experience, freedom, and so forth all take place within and through the support of a social history and a present community. However, when it comes to the ways in which such supports might bear down on my embodied being in "invisible" ways, while Dewey is not dismissive of this reality, his account might be expanded and taken further, both to account for developments in contemporary culture as well as to deepen the reading of how such forces influence our existence. I will thus turn to the work of Michel Foucault for assistance in how this perspective might be enlarged and enriched, insofar as his work highlights the extent to which social and cultural meanings come to be and continue to operate by means of their effects on the body, and the way that bodies carry out meanings even without consciousness of them. Moreover, Foucault's later work (as I read it) contains some insightful corollaries to Deweyan growth. His emphasis on care for the self and self-transformation in this work carries a more positive program for articulating mechanisms of change in one's life, which can be read along lines similar to Deweyan growth. I thus take up some ideas from this part of Foucault's corpus as well, aiming to highlight his concept of transformation as a particularly socially-embedded, constructivist approach to expanding the possibilities of one's life and engaging in a particular kind of ethics. The account of transformation offered emphasizes the bodily character of practice as enabling transformation and change, as well as stressing the imperative for deliberately engaging in practices of self-transformation. I claim that his account therefore supplements Dewey's in presenting the theme of growth as the continual development and practice of one's embodied agency.

I will turn my focus to these thinkers for the following two chapters, discussing how they add helpful additions to a picture of embodiment, which I find a critical part of what is at stake in human agency. From there, I will return to the work of Dewey as well as these thinkers, articulating how such perspectives on the body add to a conception of agency, and thus how this emphasis on the body can be beneficial for educational discourses of growth.

CHAPTER IV

AGENCY AND THE BODY IN MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGY: HABIT, EXPRESSION, AND TRANSCENDENCE

Why Phenomenology?

We left the last chapter with a discussion of how multiple perspectives of the body are possible, and indeed, might have much to offer a reading of the body when it comes to education, growth, and agency. In short, this discussion presents the reality that bodies are experienced and thus, addressed philosophically in different ways, according to the different vantage points from which bodies are “examined” or described. Dewey offers us what we might call, generally, a third-person perspective, insofar as his account of the body-mind and of embodied habit gives a naturalistic description of body-minds as complex organisms transacting with their environments. While I find much compelling about this view, and indeed, it corresponds with his conceptions of growth, the reconstruction of experience, and education more broadly construed, I believe there might be more to explore when it comes to thinking about embodied agency. It can be argued that Dewey’s naturalized, habit-oriented approach to the body might limit the scope of thinking about the body as it is experienced by the self or subject, and more might be addressed in terms of how human beings live their bodies, in the first person, as sources of agency. Specifically, I believe some insights of phenomenology can be helpful here, insofar as phenomenology seeks to *describe* embodied experience, providing a careful and in-depth perspective on how perception and consciousness – our primary mechanisms of contact with the world – occur through our bodies. As such, I

posit that elements of a phenomenological standpoint can bring added exposition to some of the phenomena Dewey describes, but it can also bring an increased awareness of the significance of the body in one's conceptions of self and conceptions of possibility. In this way, I believe that there are important ideas regarding embodied agency to be found in phenomenological literature.

However, this literature is quite broad in its reach, so narrowing the scope of discussion is necessary here. Thus, I will focus my energy in this analysis on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as his work is known as one of the most extensive and penetrating presentations of embodiment within the phenomenological tradition. Given that his corpus alone is rather extensive, this chapter will focus mostly on *Phenomenology of Perception* and insights raised there which relate to the body as a source or site of agency. To do so, I will begin by briefly characterizing Merleau-Ponty's perspective on the body, its relation to subjectivity, and its embeddedness in the world, linking these views with Dewey's to help situate them with respect to this project. The next section will take up his discussions of embodied habit as a means of relating to the world, which will take me into a section on the body as a means of expression. The final section of this chapter will take up the body in its relation to the transcendent character of human subjectivity, highlighting how it is a condition for experiencing oneself as an agent. Throughout each of these sections, I hope to show how Merleau-Ponty's analyses provide helpful dimensions for understanding agency as an embodied phenomenon.

Merleau-Ponty, the Body, and Being in the World

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is known in the continental tradition for being a philosopher of the body: his phenomenological work emphasizes the role of embodiment in consciousness, perception, and being in the world most broadly speaking. Inspired by Descartes, Husserl, Heidegger, Bergson, and many psychologists of his day, Merleau-Ponty explores the centrality of the body in the operations of human consciousness, describing how the body interacts with the world in a huge variety of ways. His most famous work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, conducts painstakingly close analyses of both mundane and extraordinary bodily events (referencing both everyday activities of perception as well as studies of “pathological” cases of brain damage, bodily injury, and atypical psychophysical conditions), drawing conclusions about the character of embodied being from the range of experiences he describes. While many of his conclusions come by way of descriptive assertions, his work on the body and its place in human perception and consciousness stands as a classic, in-depth philosophical treatment of the body.

Recent theorists from both pragmatist and phenomenological traditions have explored valuable comparisons between Dewey and Merleau-Ponty. To list some notable treatments, Richard Shusterman takes up the ideas of both thinkers (among others) in developing his somaesthetics, an approach to the study of bodily experience and as a way of using the body reflectively to enhance aesthetic appreciation and self-cultivation.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Shusterman critiques Merleau-Ponty’s vision of the body for emphasizing the unreflective and passive elements of bodily existence, finding Dewey’s work to remedy some of those problems. I find his reading of Dewey and his emphasis on habit and reconstruction helpful, but I

Shannon Sullivan develops her pragmatist-feminist account of transactional embodiment, inspired by Dewey's work and incorporating insights from Merleau-Ponty on the body as meaning-creating and communicative.¹⁹⁸ Joseph Margolis claims that Merleau-Ponty serves as a touchstone in thinking about comparisons between Dewey and continental thought, ultimately arguing that phenomenology and pragmatism need the insights of the other in moving forward philosophically into the twenty-first century.¹⁹⁹ Mark Johnson's work, as discussed in the previous chapter, incorporates insights from Merleau-Ponty while building on a Deweyan conception of the body, emphasizing the role of embodiment in human thought and meaning-making.²⁰⁰ Marjorie O'Loughlin, one of the primary thinkers of embodiment and education referenced in the introduction, also culls insights from both Dewey and Merleau-Ponty in arguing for increased attention to the body in educational practice.²⁰¹

believe his reading of Merleau-Ponty overlooks many ways the active body is present in his work, as well as ways that his work can be read to encourage engagement in somatic reflection.

¹⁹⁸ Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). Sullivan's account particularly critiques Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the body's anonymity, claiming that this negatively complicates the intersubjectivity and communicativity at the heart of his work.

¹⁹⁹ Joseph Margolis, "Dewey in Dialogue with Continental Philosophy," in *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation*, ed. Larry Hickman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 231-256. Margolis contends that Rorty's early comparison with Dewey and Heidegger is misguided and concludes that Dewey's affinities with Merleau-Ponty's work not only run much deeper but have much to offer coming philosophical work; he claims that "naturalism without phenomenology is blind and phenomenology without naturalism is empty; and their 'relationship' is neither additive nor hierarchical in any way" (249).

²⁰⁰ Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*.

What Merleau-Ponty demonstrates through his extensive descriptions, and which so many later thinkers draw insight from, is the way in which the body is the source of our existence: it is the condition for allowing me to experience anything at all, let alone to experience the richness of the intersubjective and cultural world. He does not assert outright that the body ought to be recognized as the source of our agency in the world, and in a sense, embodied *agency* is not the primary focus of his work; however, his examinations of how we move about the world, understand others, and create meanings via the body are all dealing with the body as our location of possibility in the world. While agency as such is not the forefront of his study, he asserts repeatedly that the body is the center and source of *all* human experience, and that all of our experience is rooted in our mechanisms and habits of perception. Indeed, he claims, “All consciousness is, in some measure, perceptual consciousness.”²⁰² As we might glean from Dewey as well as Merleau-Ponty, such mechanisms and habits of perception are thoroughly *embodied* phenomena: they occur not simply in or through our bodies, but in a sense *as* our bodies themselves, as our bodies are interwoven with the world and with other people. In this way, while Merleau-Ponty does not always reference the idea of agency in this work, one might claim that the reality of embodied agency lies at the heart of his approach: because all consciousness is in some way perceptual and all perception occurs by way of the body, the body is thus placed as the center of action and intention, the source of human experience and meaning.

²⁰¹ O’Loughlin, *Embodiment and Education*.

²⁰² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1958), 459.

In order to get a handle on how Merleau-Ponty develops his perspective on the body, however, it will be helpful to look at several emphases in how he views embodied consciousness. One way to begin is to compare his approach with Dewey's naturalism. As there are certainly divergences in how they conceive of the subject, there are also similarities in their approaches, specifically regarding problematics of earlier traditions that they work to unravel.²⁰³ Both Dewey and Merleau-Ponty find serious problems with the way philosophical traditions of dualism have considered the body in relation to the mind and the world, and thus both aim to recast the question of what the body is and does, and both do so, in part, by examining the actual, living interweavings of human consciousness, embodiment, and habitual activity. With echoes of Dewey's emphasis on organisms in environments and mutually constitutive relations between them, Merleau-Ponty describes the body as the center and "pivot" of the world we experience:

The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with

²⁰³ One difference between the subject in Merleau-Ponty and the self in Dewey might be found in the degree of "givenness" of subjectivity in Merleau-Ponty versus the "construction" of the Deweyan self. There are similarities here, as can be seen in the former's statement that "everything is both manufactured and natural in man" (Ibid., 220). But while Merleau-Ponty does not assert that subjectivity exists prior to its manifested expressions, and he definitively claims that it exists in and through the body, he does grant an ontological reality or undeniability to subjectivity, which might stem from the fact that he works more squarely within the Cartesian legacy. Dewey, on the other hand, characterizes the existence and emergence of the self as constructed via action and transaction, in dialogue and co-creation with its environment. So while their views share many overlapping commitments, Merleau-Ponty might take subjectivity more as a given phenomenon than Dewey's view of the self would be. We can see that, like Dewey, Merleau-Ponty stresses the "holistic" character of experience, while his emphasis on embodiment may exceed Dewey's; in stressing that the subject's situated existence happens through the body, he writes, "In so far as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world" (Ibid., 475).

certain projects and be continually committed to them. ... for if it is true that I am conscious of my body *via* the world, that it is the unperceived term in the centre of the world towards which all objects turn their face, it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world ... I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body.²⁰⁴

Being the vehicle or pivot of my being in the world, Merleau-Ponty thus asserts that the body is the often unthematized center or source of human experience. We can hear resonances of Dewey here; in emphasizing the “involved” character of the body and the co-constitution that occurs between body and environment, or between my body and projects to which my environment commits me (as well as those I choose within it), we hear a likeness with Dewey’s emphasis on organisms and environments mutually creating one another. Merleau-Ponty might be said to take his analysis in a different direction from Dewey, however, in focusing on the ways in which the body develops its “silent” or unspoken operations with respect to its movements in its world, forming the basis that allows us to explore the world in the conscious ways that we do.²⁰⁵ This is not to say that Dewey neglects this reality *per se*, but it is to acknowledge that Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis takes on a different cast: the descriptive analysis of perceptual consciousness as experienced through the body.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 94-5.

²⁰⁵ Drew Leder’s book *The Absent Body* engages Merleau-Ponty’s work and method of phenomenological description in explaining how the body tends to operate “silently,” disappearing into the background of experience when it is working properly. He claims that typical bodily functioning tends to “eclipse” itself in perceptual experience precisely because the typically functioning body does not announce its operations or make itself felt while it is doing the work of perceiving, breathing, moving, and so on. He describes that this tendency to recede into the background helps to explain what makes Cartesian dualism a plausible hypothesis, though concluding that dualism does not stand up to lived experience. See *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Another way to approach an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's perspective on the body – again, in a vein not unlike Dewey – is to explore how he situates his analysis on a middle path between interpretive extremes. In setting up his analytical perspective in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that extremes of both empiricism and intellectualism miss the mark in terms of expressing human existence, with an emphasis on how each misses something significant about the role of *embodied* existence. He devotes several chapters to explaining how classical psychology over-intellectualizes our experience of the body and interprets our relation to it as almost “magical” in its mystery, while on the other hand, classical physiology over-mechanizes the body as object and divorces it from the way it interprets and enacts meanings.²⁰⁶ What he hopes to achieve with phenomenology is the creation of a middle ground between these perspectives, one which establishes its content by describing in careful detail the way that embodied consciousness experiences the world. Situating his view in this way, he writes,

Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence ... Psychological motives and bodily occasions may overlap because there is not a single impulse in a living body which is entirely fortuitous in relation to psychic intentions, not a single mental act which has not found at least its germ or its general outline in physiological tendencies. It is never a question of the incomprehensible meeting of two causalities, nor of a collision between the order of causes and that of ends.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Shusterman critiques the characterization of this relationship as “magical,” claiming that it encourages a passive perception of the body and disfavors the practice of reflective bodily cultivation (*Body Consciousness*, 59). I disagree on this point, finding the description of this “magical” relation to convey the depth and *wonder* that the phenomenon of body-mind presents. Further, instead of finding this to block reflective bodily awareness, I feel that recognizing and cultivating this “mystery” can be a distinctive and fruitful part of somaesthetic awareness.

²⁰⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 101.

In this way, he aims to set up a perspective that takes psychological and physical data as equally significant, showing also how their operations and expressions are always mutual and interlinked. In the course of his study, at times he emphasizes the place of the body more intensely than the mental; this is in part due to traditional philosophy's historical privileging of mind over matter, but also due to the fact that any psychological life that we wish to speak about and examine finds its very existence and its manifestations in the life of a living body. Indeed, he also claims, "the body expresses total existence, not because it is an external accompaniment to that existence, but because existence realizes itself in the body."²⁰⁸ In his view, then, because existence realizes itself, takes place through, or *happens* in the body, to separate "body" and "mind" into two ontological spheres is to abstract elements of the single "incarnate significance" which is human life and push them away from each other in interpretation; and again, we hear the resonance of Dewey's preference for "body-mind," asserting that the separation into two terms is a linguistic convention rather than an ontological reality.

To flesh this out more fully, in concluding the first part of the book, which sets out his perspective amid the prejudices of interpretive extremes, he writes,

I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a 'natural' subject, a provisional sketch of my total being. Thus experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.²⁰⁹

As such, his account is focused on articulating what the experience of the body actually contains and expresses, what the body in reality does, which he claims, is a different kind

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 192.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 231.

of account than those which take up the body as an abstracted part of reality. All of the descriptions he incorporates into this study, moving from sense experience, perceptual synthesis, motility, language, and sexuality, to our experience of spatiality, temporality, the *cogito*, and freedom, are all expositions detailing entailments and elaborations of the book's central idea, that "The body is our general medium for having a world."²¹⁰ In being this general medium, the body is thus the center and source of all our perceptions and meanings, and thus is the "pivot" of our consciousness, our actions, and our ability to move and enact intentions in the world; in other words, it is the vehicle of our agency.

Because nearly the entirety of this book might be examined as an articulation of embodied agency, working on different elements of our body's situatedness in the world and "natural" powers within it, it will be necessary to narrow the focus of this chapter into particular elements of bodily being. The first will be Merleau-Ponty's discussions of habit, insofar as these convey both a connection with Dewey's analysis of the human self as well as a picture of the extent to which habit is a necessary medium of interpretation and action in our lives. The second will focus on the body as expressive, insofar as its power of navigating and working within the world includes – or really, largely rests on – its potentials as an active, meaning-making and meaning-conveying phenomenon. Last, I will take up the idea of transcendence as it appears in this work, exploring this capacity of the body and subjectivity to move beyond itself as an important characteristic in describing the experience of agency. I believe that these analyses can help flesh out ways in which these elements of life are components of a view of embodied agency, especially

²¹⁰ Ibid., 169.

insofar as they further a picture of embodied agency through the first person, or embodied agency as experienced.

The Body and Habit

As noted above, one of Merleau-Ponty's primary inspirations is Descartes, and throughout *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty complicates the Cartesian cogito. Arguing that one must establish the phenomenon of thinking on the basis of existence rather than existence on the foundation of thought, Merleau-Ponty claims that "I think" already implies, "I am, I exist" and this, for him, always comes back to the body's existence. Indeed, in the chapter, "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility," he claims, in describing motility as a form of basic intentionality, "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'."²¹¹ As such, placing motility as one of our basic manners of being toward the world, Merleau-Ponty describes bodily motion not as the execution of a previously mapped out representation in one's mind, but as the exercise of intention itself. In this way, the role of habit comes into his account, insofar as habit is one of the body's ways of "reading" and responding to its environment. He thus describes the acquisition of habit as "a rearrangement and renewal of the corporeal schema," a new synthesis of the body's perceptions and responses, or a new "grasping" of a meaning.²¹² Juxtaposing the

²¹¹ Ibid., 159. Elaborating on this, he describes, "Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body. A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its 'world', and to move one's body is to aim at things through it: it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation" (Ibid., 159-161).

conception of learning habits as a kind of intellectual synthesis, he writes, “the subject does not weld together individual movements and individual stimuli but acquires the power to respond with a certain type of solution to situations of a certain general form.”²¹³ In other words, habit represents something much “deeper” than fusing certain stimuli with certain responses, or even the taking up of a new practice; it represents one of the body’s *powers* of responding to situations. Like Dewey’s conception, habit is not simply about the fact that we employ routinized behaviors in our daily lives; it is emblematic of one of the ways the body takes up and takes on meanings, as one of its unique (and often overlooked) capacities for going about the world. Indeed, in his language of “rearrangement and renewal,” we can also hear echoes of Dewey’s emphasis on reconstruction. Such reconstructions or renewals represent the body’s potentials to continuously “revise” itself through the medium of habit.

Merleau-Ponty continues on to illustrate his claim that acquiring a habit is not an intellectual synthesis, but a bodily one. Using the example of dancing, Merleau-Ponty describes the way in which developing a habit of dancing is not a matter of interpreting a certain path of motion, using what one knows from other types of movements (like walking or running), and applying them to the particular motion of a dance. He explains, instead, how the body forms this habit by “understanding” the motion itself, and “understanding” must then take on a different meaning than the one philosophy has

²¹² Merleau-Ponty describes the idea of corporeal or body schema (translated also as body image) as “a total awareness of my posture in the intersensory world, a ‘form’ in the sense used by Gestalt psychology” (Ibid., 114), and insofar as it enables me to have a sense of bodily spatiality and positioning, it is “a way of stating that my body is in-the-world” (Ibid., p.115). Body or corporeal schema is thus a kind of bodily knowledge of situation, spatiality, and capacity, orienting the body’s way of being in the world.

²¹³ Ibid., 165.

traditionally given it: “it is the body which ‘catches’ (*kapiert*) and ‘comprehends’ movement. The acquisition of a habit is indeed the grasping of a significance, but it is the motor grasping of a motor significance.”²¹⁴ But, he asks, what does it mean to grasp a motor significance?

He gives a few examples to illustrate: he describes a woman who adjusts her movements so that a feather in her hat does not run into objects as she moves, and a person driving a car who can judge accurately whether or not the car can fit through a narrow passage.²¹⁵ While these examples might seem a bit particular, what they show is the extent to which the body can take on new meanings and carry itself accordingly, without the intermediary of conscious thought working to articulate those meanings, without making calculations to determine needed margins of space, and so forth. More importantly, what they show, in having grasped a motor significance, is the way bodily habit can seamlessly incorporate new elements into its operation, which take place because the body is the center of the potentials for all such motor significances.

Likewise, this highlights that, in grasping a new motor significance or a new bodily meaning, some element of navigating the world effectively is gained as a power, as an

²¹⁴ Ibid., 165.

²¹⁵ This is one of few places in which Merleau-Ponty employs a female body as an example, and generally, these tend to portray a rather limited scope of feminine bodily movement. Judith Butler claims that Merleau-Ponty’s general neglect of sexual difference in his treatment belies a body-subject that is male and not gender-neutral. See “Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*,” in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 85-100. Carol Bigwood responds to this claim by drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s fusion of the nature/culture dichotomy in conceptualizing the body, arguing that Butler’s view goes too far in de-materializing the body through emphasizing cultural inscription. See “Renaturalizing the Body (with the help of Merleau-Ponty),” *Hypatia* 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 54-73.

adjustment or renewal of the body's contact with the world, such that it can move within the world more smoothly, more effectively. Such adjustments, taken on as habits, might be thought of as individual bodily agencies, insofar as they represent potentials of activity, despite the fact that the subject herself will often not be consciously aware of them. In short, Merleau-Ponty writes, "Habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments."²¹⁶ And here, instead of thinking of these "fresh instruments" simply as a feather in a hat or a car one is driving, one can think of such new instruments as new ways of seeing, new engagements of the body, or new potentials discovered through it. In "dilating" our being-in-the-world, habit allows us to adjust our bodily patterns in order to best accommodate our needs, as well as work with bodily potentials to take on new practices. Moreover, this "dilation" of being-in-the-world also helps to clarify the execution of purposes: bodily adjustments work in conjunction with formulating intentions, allowing the needed "collaboration" of action and intention to manifest. For example, in deciding one wants to learn how to dance, she begins taking up the necessary adjustments and actions that collectively culminate in the practice and skill of dancing. In doing so, her body adjusts to these practices, taking up dancing as a new habit, a new form of expressing its life.

Another prime example of how habit works is found in musicians. In looking at the ways musicians incorporate the habit of playing an instrument into their bodily networks, we can see how it is not the synthesis of intellectual meanings, nor a purely physiological set of responses. Merleau-Ponty writes, "The example of instrumentalists shows even better how habit has its abode neither in thought nor in the objective body,

²¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 166.

but in the body as mediator of a world.”²¹⁷ Here we find again the dichotomy between “thought” and the “objective body,” as prejudices from classical psychological or physiological approaches might characterize this phenomenon. Rather, Merleau-Ponty claims, in mediating the world, the body “knows” its instrument and its music, beyond understanding it cognitively and beyond working with a set of “bare” physical reflexes. Describing an organist approaching a new instrument, finding his way about it and learning its particulars, the distances between pedals, the number of stops, and so forth, Merleau-Ponty says that the musician “settles into the organ as one settles into a house.”²¹⁸ Summing up, he claims, “our body is not an object for an ‘I think’, it is a grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium.”²¹⁹ As such, the body as a grouping of lived-through meanings constitutes an experiential “I can,” and this “I can” has the power of continuously modifying and renewing itself.

Indeed, another way that Merleau-Ponty describes the acquisition of habit is the body’s “absorption” of a new meaning, that it has “assimilated a fresh core of significance.”²²⁰ In taking up new “cores of significance,” or new networks of meaningful, embodied response, we are exercising our body’s abilities to continually discover more possibilities for meaning, expression, and exploration of its contacts with the world. As such, the feeling of taking up new cores of significance, of discovering

²¹⁷ Ibid., 167.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 168.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 177.

²²⁰ Ibid., 169.

new modes of exercising the “I can,” lends itself to thinking about bodily agency as the felt capacity of one’s ability to formulate and execute purposes.

Merleau-Ponty claims that the prevalence of habit in human life forces us to rethink what it means to “understand” something, as well as what it means to “understand” the body. Because the body can incorporate such motor meanings “on its own,” as it were, this means that “understanding” must go beyond the traditional conception of interpreting and categorizing, of subsuming phenomena under categorical concepts. He elaborates, “To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance – and the body is our anchorage in a world.”²²¹ Because the body is our anchorage in the world, it is thus also our anchorage with respect to phenomena as “basic” as sensing, perceiving, and moving through space, but also to phenomena as “complex” as developing a sense of self and cultivating one’s own capacities. It is not that such phenomena are experienced as explicitly related or referred to the body in all instances (though it surely is in some, for better or worse, as we might think of Dewey’s concern with self-consciousness as an inhibitory factor of experience). But the body is our anchorage insofar as our purposes are carried out *through* our bodies, (often) without the reflective moment of thinking about how our body is going to do something. Insofar as the body is this anchorage, the pivot point that initiates all our experiences and that point to which all experiences return in moving toward the future, I wish to extend Merleau-Ponty’s readings to the claim that the body is thus the source also of our agency.

²²¹ Ibid., 167.

Habit is one of the significant phenomena that the body employs to incorporate potentials and expand its powers, representing a manner in which the body generates meanings through its contact with the world and their patterns of “folding” into one another. Moreover, it is in part due to the phenomenon of habit that the body can develop particular capacities for expression, which will be the focus of the next discussion.

The Body and Expression

When Merleau-Ponty describes the body exercising powers of expression, we should hear “expression” in a broad sense. It does not simply refer to expressing oneself through art, language, or even movement, though these forms are indeed included in the body’s powers of expression. It calls on the expressive capacity of the body as such, in its being and doing, as a power of the body for conveying meaning and moving past itself, simply by virtue of the fact that our bodies realize and carry our existence (and we can think of “ex-pressing” in its sense of pushing or moving outward). Merleau-Ponty describes the body as “a power of natural expression,”²²² suggesting that its very existence is an expressive “act” or series of acts, signifying a sense in which it communicates what we are as human subjectivities. He elaborates, “Now the body is essentially an expressive space. ... But our body is not merely one expressive space among the rest... It is the origin of the rest, expressive movement itself, that which causes them to begin to exist as things, under our hands and eyes.”²²³ As such, the body is not one expressive object among others, but is the source of all our expressive

²²² Ibid., 211.

²²³ Ibid., 169.

possibilities. In saying that the body is expressive movement itself, he is characterizing the body as both the origin as well as the execution of such expression: the body, as such, is both the wellspring of expression and the act of expressing. It is via the body that any further expressive acts – speaking, writing, dancing, etc. – find the condition of their possibility and the resources for their reality.

Let us take an example here to illustrate: again, let us think about the act of dancing. While the body is the impetus, the motivation of the expressive desire to be enacted through dance, the body is also the instrument of the expression, and its patterns and movements are the expression itself. The body is the origin of the expression – it harbors the expressive possibility within itself, felt perhaps as a desire or impetus to dance – as well as manifestation of expressive movement. We can also think about a gesture as simple as a smile: in taking on this physiological “shape,” we might say that the body is expressing a certain emotion, but for Merleau-Ponty, the emotion is not antecedent to the expression. Rather, in taking on this gesture, the body is experiencing – both “inwardly” and “outwardly” – a certain modality of feeling, one which is found in the context of our intersubjective world.

In this vein, it might be helpful to look at another claim Merleau-Ponty makes about the body’s expressive existence: its affinity to art. He writes,

The body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art. In a picture or a piece of music the idea is incommunicable by means other than the display of colours and sounds. ... A novel, poem, picture or musical work are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation. It is in this sense that our body is comparable to a work of art. It is a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms.²²⁴

²²⁴ Ibid., 174-5.

With this comparison, Merleau-Ponty is thus casting the body's expressive capacities, in a way, as inherent within the body's very existence, similar to the way a painting or poem expresses its "idea" or its "content" by virtue of its "material." That is, the words of the poem *are* the poem, they are the material which constitute its existence, and their collection into a whole gives them an expressive power beyond their ability of expression standing alone; indeed, their collection into a poem creates this unique, individual "thing," existing just as it is. The colors of a painting on a canvas are simply that – a collection of interrelated colors – but their material existence gathers together and conveys a meaning that far exceeds their bare existence as colors on canvas. As this particular painting, a new "nexus of meanings" is constituted, a center of significance emerges, and a certain possibility of seeing is opened up. Likewise, the body's interwoven parts and its interweaving with the world create a dynamic synthesis, which expresses its style by virtue of its being. The body itself expresses existence – each body a particular style or variety of existence – and its existence is inseparable from its expression.

Likewise, as my body is expressive, so is it also receptive and sensitive. Insofar as it is my body that perceives and to a large extent, organizes my interpretations of an environment, it is also through the body that I respond to my social world. Merleau-Ponty writes, "It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things.' The meaning of a gesture thus 'understood' is not behind it, it is intermingled with the structure of the world outlined by the gesture, and which I take up on my own account."²²⁵ As such, the interactions we have with other

²²⁵ Ibid., 216.

people are also, to a large extent, carried out by bodily understandings and interpretations. In giving the example of watching someone gesticulate violently while angry, he claims that understanding these gestures is not a matter of inference or deduction that this person is experiencing anger; rather, one realizes, viscerally and directly, that one is witnessing anger.²²⁶ To return to the earlier point about the body's understanding, this is a case in which the body's understanding matches the body's expression: insofar as one is expressing anger, an interlocutor reads this expression with the body as well.

The Body, Transcendence, and Agency

In the chapter titled, "The Body as Expression, and Speech," Merleau-Ponty devotes a good deal of explanation to describing how new meanings can enter our body's repertoire, which also signifies the body's ability to continually acquire new habits and patterns, to modify itself in new ways. Similar to the ways that learning new words or new bodily gestures can open up a new pattern of understanding for us, he claims that this capacity – while reliant on the existence of habit – is one of the ways our bodies transcend themselves, changing and evolving and moving beyond their own boundaries.

He writes, describing how acquired meanings must have at one time been novel:

We must therefore recognize as an ultimate fact this open and indefinite power of giving significance – that is, both of apprehending and conveying a meaning – by which man transcends himself towards a new form of behavior, or towards other people, or towards his own thought, through his body and his speech.²²⁷

²²⁶ Ibid., 214.

²²⁷ Ibid., 226.

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty is calling attention to several things: first, that the power of attributing significance to things (both understanding and expressing meanings) is open and indefinite; that is, that it presents a possibility that can always grow and evolve in our lives. Second, that this power of giving meaning is one of the ways in which human beings transcend themselves – that is, move beyond ourselves, toward others, toward our physical and social environments, towards our own modes of thinking, towards a new form of behavior or practice,. Transcendence signals that primordial capacity that allows us to be directed toward things outside ourselves; it is what enables our contact with and engagement in the world. Moreover, this kind of transcendence occurs through one’s body, in that it is our existence *as realized in the body* that allows us to extend ourselves *beyond* it. As such, it is largely through the mechanics of my body’s interaction with the world and with others that my ability to take on new meanings is presented to me, as well as how I am able to understand myself and my own capacities anew. Specifically, part of what characterizes this interaction is subjectivity’s ability to transcend itself, which it does via its embodied situation. What this highlights is that we are not trapped within our bodies and minds but move within the world and with other people, as part of our constitution.²²⁸ As such, this ability to transcend ourselves and

²²⁸ The phenomenon of transcendence, while expressing part of what Merleau-Ponty often refers to as “typical” or “normal” patterns of consciousness and behavior, is at times contrasted with individuals experiencing conditions of physical or psychological limitation or disability. Indeed, some of Merleau-Ponty’s critics have singled out this element of human life, in that its experience varies vastly between populations and individuals and can be seen to characterize how some groups of people experience oppression. Iris Marion Young’s “Throwing Like a Girl” is a case in point, as she deploys resources from Merleau-Ponty as well as Simone de Beauvoir in articulating how women in a patriarchal society often experienced their transcendence as “ambiguous.” See “Throwing Like a Girl,” in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 148-153.

make contact with our worlds is what allows us to experience our purposes as existing in the world, as being carried out through time and with others.

In the chapter titled, “Other Selves and the Human World,” Merleau-Ponty describes the communication between the body and the world:

*I have the world as an incomplete individual, through the agency of my body as the potentiality of this world, and I have the positing of objects through that of my body, or conversely the positing of my body through that of objects, not in any kind of logical implication, ... but in a real implication, and because my body is a movement towards the world, and the world my body's point of support.*²²⁹

As such, Merleau-Ponty articulates the agency of my body as the potentiality of this world, this world which I have as an incomplete individual and which I rely on as support. But what does it mean to experience the agency of my body as a potentiality of my world in my own incompleteness?

We might begin by recalling the fact that any and all possibilities we have or experience, Merleau-Ponty reminds us, are through the vehicles of our bodies. As such, we might begin by saying that the agency of my body is simply a manifestation of the potentials of my world. Moreover, it is the body's agency that situates a world around it, or situates itself within the world, insofar as he describes positing objects through my body's agency, or conversely, as my body's positing itself via the objects around it. In any case, he articulates the intimate interweaving between the body and world, insofar as my body moves toward it and the world is its support. In this way, we can articulate a better sense of the body's agency as potential in and of this world: the body, as the realization of our existence, as expressive space through and through, is thus also the bearer of our agency, as a part of its potentials of moving-toward or realizing itself in its

²²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 408, first emphasis in original, second emphasis mine.

world. Furthermore, in feeling one's embodied subjectivity as transcendent, that is, as able to reach into the world and act as an agent among others, she experiences and expresses her agency as a thoroughly embodied capacity.

Another way we see this kind of concept in Merleau-Ponty's work, while not often described as agency, may be in his use of the idea of transcendence. In "The Body as Expression, and Speech," Merleau-Ponty discusses how words and gestures have their meanings not in the phonetic utterance of a word, nor its written sign, nor in the bare physiological motion that might constitute a gesture. Rather, these things have meaning because of the place they occupy in a shared world of expression, a world with experiential meanings that have developed into cultural ones. He writes,

The meaning of the gesture is not contained in it like some physical or physiological phenomenon. The meaning of the word is not contained in the word as a sound. But the human body is defined in terms of its property of appropriating, in an indefinite series of discontinuous acts, significant cores which transcend and transfigure its natural powers. This act of transcendence is first encountered in the acquisition of a pattern of behavior, then in the mute communication of a gesture: it is through the same power that the body opens itself to some new kind of conduct and makes it understood to external witnesses.²³⁰

This passage shows more clearly how transcendence operates; if transcendence is seen in the acquisition of a pattern of behavior, or a habit, this is because the body's ability to appropriate cores of significance has taken up one of these such cores, such that this new set of meanings has transfigured – rearranged, renewed – the body's modulations of being. A new pattern of meaning has found a place for realization and expression; a habit is acquired in that something which transcends – goes beyond – my body's "natural" abilities has been incorporated into precisely those "natural" abilities; in a sense,

²³⁰ Ibid, 225.

awkward though it sounds, they have become natural. We can link this back to his claims about the body as expressive: insofar as the meaning of a painting or poem, while contained in its “material,” transcends that material existence, the body’s ability to convey meaning and incorporate new meaning exemplifies this transcendence. My body enacts transcendence not only in moving towards the world and towards others, but insofar as my body’s capacities include the possibility of modification and renewal according to new circumstances, it also transcends itself towards its own existence. In this way, we can cast transcendence as significant for experiencing embodied agency in that the intentions one forms call for a conduit of becoming actions, and we can characterize transcendence as one of the ways in which purposes become realized in the world, through the embodied subject’s ability to move beyond itself.

In concluding his book, we see Merleau-Ponty make another gesture in highlighting the body’s central role in human life, which we might extend to the experience of agency. In describing his life, as a psychological and historical structure, operating through a certain style, exercising freedom by means of these structures, he writes,

For this significant life, this certain significance of nature and history which I am, does not limit my access to the world, but on the contrary is my means of entering into communication with it. It is by being unrestrictedly and unreservedly what I am at present that I have a chance of moving forward; it is by living my time that I am able to understand other times, by plunging into the present and the world, by taking on deliberately what I am fortuitously, by willing what I will and doing what I do, that I can go further.²³¹

Here we see a more explicit statement about the conditions of our life and the way in which our actions might carry a profound sense of purpose, for ourselves and perhaps far

²³¹ Ibid., 529.

beyond ourselves. We must exist as we are such that we can move forward, we must take up ourselves and our time such that we might have a shot at understanding them, let alone changing them. While not mentioning the body explicitly in this passage, it should be evident that any of Merleau-Ponty's references of this sort include the existence of the body as a central phenomenon within this life we take up, this psychological and historical structure that we are, in understanding and best moving forward with ourselves; in taking on deliberately what we are fortuitously. In translating the contingencies of our lives into sources of action, we must recognize that, given to the world in our bodies and communicating with it through them, we can best take up our fortuitous existences in recognizing their real, actual characteristics. I am arguing here that a significant manner of taking up these characteristics is by understanding how the body is the "home" of our living potentials of agency, and as such, agency extends deeper into our experience than being a rational or purely intellectual faculty. Rather, it articulates a sense in which we experience the potentials our embodied lives present us with, and thus, I believe it constitutes a powerful wealth of resources for thinking about growth. If consciousness is not originally an "I think" but an "I can," we might do well to consider how the "I can" is experienced through felt, embodied being. And in order to understand how the "I can" is experienced through embodied being, not to mention how the "I cans" of individuals differ from one another, we might glean from phenomenology how to listen to the testimonies and the nuances of the "I can" such that we might help them develop into their richest potentials.

Moreover, listening to such testimonials in developing potentials of agency requires that we attend to the felt qualities of our and others' embodied experiences. This

draws on the fact that agency is an embodied capacity, but also on the fact that the experience of agency is part of the felt sense of any given experience, and such felt senses are experienced through our bodies' embeddedness in relationships with our worlds. As such, agency develops as a felt sense of capacity, of the feeling of ability in understanding oneself and one's situation such that one might be a capable actor within it. This does not arise from one's cognitive faculties alone, but through the embodied contact one has with a situation. What Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment helps us recognize, with respect to embodied agency as this kind of felt capacity, is not just the way in which it emerges out of situational contexts and is perceived through them, but also the way in which our bodies are the conduits or vehicles for that agency. They are the expressive spaces we inhabit and transcend, giving us the resources for enacting and cultivating our agency as living beings. In giving careful attention to this reality of human existence, Merleau-Ponty also gives us resources for listening more carefully to our bodies' expressive agencies and attending more carefully to those of others around us; and indeed, this might be seen as part of his goals with phenomenology, describing the nuances of embodied experience such that we might do the same, and in doing so, see our worlds anew.

CHAPTER V

FOUCAULT, DISCIPLINE, AND CARE OF THE SELF:

CONDITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF EMBODIED AGENCY

Why Foucault?

At this point, we have looked at the work of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty on embodiment, habit, and agency as part of a reading of Deweyan growth. In the last chapter, we saw that Merleau-Ponty's ideas about the body as expressive and subjectivity as transcendent articulated ways that agency is rooted in the body's movement and intentionality, but also how this entails ways that embodied subjectivity moves beyond itself and forward into the future. As such, we were looking at agency from a somewhat "interior" or first-person perspective, working with descriptions of how agency is *felt*, experienced as a certain quality of potential and possibility within lived experience. At this point, we will take up a perspective that might loosely be characterized as the opposite of the previous one: we will be looking at one manner of how conditions of agency are influenced from the "outside," so to speak.²³² In taking up the work of Michel Foucault, we will be looking at how his analyses develop accounts of embodied

²³² While I believe that language of interiority and exteriority is, at bottom, insufficient to characterize these modes of experience, as all experience is overlaid by multiple influences whose "sources" are not one or the other, and indeed, the separation of the two is spurious as well, I use these terms to put into relief the different approaches that these thinkers emphasize and ways that each contributes something meaningful to a picture of embodiment. Indeed, part of what Merleau-Ponty emphasizes is the extent to which humans are a combination of the "natural" and the "manufactured," and Foucault is clear that part of how "outside" forces work is through the degree to which they are experienced as "interior" ones. Nonetheless, while the distinction suffers from this ambiguity, I struggle at this point to find a clearer manner of characterizing the differences in approach that each perspective offers.

subjectivity through the genealogies of particular domains of human life. His genealogical method targets particular aspects of life – e.g., sexuality, psychiatric medicine, and state punishment – and performs a particular kind of history with respect to them. To take the example of punishment and the prison system, Foucault’s genealogies examine historical records and documents which detail the practices and policies of this kind of institution (with this example, he begins in seventeenth century Europe), following certain practices and what they entail about the subjectivity of those implicated in them. In tracing out the continuities and discontinuities in this history, he discovers themes which reveal something about the subject in this picture, and in particular, points at which a change in practice signals that something is shifting about the way this subject is conceptualized. I will take up this example in more detail, but here I simply want to set out a little regarding Foucault’s approach, and emphasize that what his method targets is the development of situated subjectivities over time. For each domain of life he takes up, a different kind of body-subject is revealed, and this body-subject, like the domains it arises within, reflects changes over the course of its existence, in relation to its context.

In terms of my project as a whole, what this perspective adds is a particular account of how subjectivities – and significantly, embodied subjectivities – are produced through the environments in which they live and act; it thus provides a sharper edge to the social side of Dewey’s emphasis on growth as an educational aim. In a way, Foucault can be read as taking Dewey’s naturalistic paradigm about the human being as an organism in an environment and pushing it to a certain extent, reading the role of “environment” in a thoroughly historical-cultural way. Foucault’s genealogies aim to reveal the extent to which our bodily habits and practices both construct and carry

forward historically-emergent cultural meanings, despite the fact that many of these practices or meanings may not be evident to us. That is, we may acknowledge that a particular practice means something, but we might not be aware of how such a practice *came to mean* the particular thing attributed to it, insofar as we “assume” that certain practices or meanings are a “natural” part of what human beings are or how they operate.²³³ Foucault, rather, aims to develop a story of the history of certain practices and meanings, showing how our modern subjectivities and enactments of bodily life are products of our cultural and historical present. Thereby, one can argue that Foucault’s work not only shows the contingencies of many cultural phenomena, but that doing so can be a first step in articulating how the oppressiveness of some cultural practices might be changed, since there are no cultural absolutes; according to his genealogies, no meanings about human life are etched in stone in a metaphysical sense, but are developments pertaining to the cultural and historical context in which they arise. Moreover, showing the historical contingencies behind a certain contemporary practice or meaning might open up possibilities for crafting a different social reality, for oneself, one’s community, and that community’s future.

But in order to show how Foucault’s work does this, it will be necessary to articulate several other elements of his perspective. First, his conception of subjectivity differs from the consciousness-based view of Merleau-Ponty, and while it has some comparable elements with Dewey’s notion of the body-mind, a discussion of what embodied subjectivity means for Foucault will form the first section of this chapter.

²³³ I put these terms in scare quotes because part of what Foucault highlights is that many of these assumptions may not even be realized as such; many are latently held, unarticulated or unformalized beliefs of a culture, which have become so normalized as to operate largely without notice.

Within this section too, I will outline some of Foucault's terminology, in particular his conception of power, as it is necessary for understanding his approach to genealogy and his perspective on embodied agency. Second, I will articulate what Foucault means by "discipline," as a phenomenon within human practice with some similarities to Deweyan habit, that characterizes repeated action as both a constraining and enabling capacity within embodied subjectivity. Third, I will take up Foucault's later work on care of the self, *askesis*, and practices of freedom, as these pose a distinctive approach to an articulation of agency within his work. Specifically, these elements are important for setting up his emphasis on self-transformation in this later work, which I will argue can be likened to Deweyan growth. The upshot of this perspective, I will claim, is that self-transformation poses a situated, self-aware, embodied, and practice-oriented approach to changing one's self and sometimes, one's relationship to her community, and as such, presents a helpful addition to thinking about educational growth as involving the development of a felt sense of agency.

What I hope to incorporate with the addition of Foucault's work is a perspective that acknowledges the situated, social character of the conditions of embodied agency, but also one that recognizes how such conditions might be modified. Such modifications might occur on relatively small scales, but his work, in my reading, performs steps that are necessary to uncovering the interconnected and often unarticulated character of embodied subjectivity in relation to complex social organizations. Specifically, his earlier work on discipline and the construction of subjectivity emphasizes the historical conditions by which subjectivity is characterized, and thus, this work highlights the social and cultural conditions that influence and inform many of our potentials for agency,

including our conceptions of it. His later work, while developing a conception of ethical subjectivity along a different line of emphasis, highlights ways individuals might relate to themselves and others in ways that foster possibilities of transforming oneself, thus emphasizing the expansion of agency possible within one's situated existence.

I would also like to stipulate here that the reading I offer of Foucault is a particular, though not unshared view. While some readers of Foucault view his work as articulating the vast extent to which contemporary life is thoroughly determined by social forces, nearly (or completely) eliminating the possibility of genuine agency, I read Foucault as offering a stark diagnosis for many aspects of life, which might then be taken up into the task of living our lives meaningfully.²³⁴ While these critical readings stem, understandably, from the fact that his work emphasizes the extent and depth of cultural influence on many of our most personal beliefs and intimate practices, I believe, following thinkers like Ladelle McWhorter, Margaret McLaren, and others, that his analyses offer such a penetrating picture of cultural influence in order to pose the question to the reader of how one is to act, knowing the extent of such influence.²³⁵

²³⁴ Michael Walzer's critique is an instance of attacking Foucault's political theory for its failure to provide a coherent constructive alternative vision of social life or values resulting from his critique of disciplinary society. See "The Politics of Michel Foucault," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 51-68. Nancy Fraser's critique is an analysis of Foucault's rejection of humanism, claiming that his neglect in promoting an ethical alternative for contemporary life leaves his rejection unjustified. See "Michel Foucault: A Young Conservative?" *Ethics* 96, no. 1 (1985): 165-184.

²³⁵ Ladelle McWhorter's book takes up critiques of Foucault's work, arguing that his critical project does create resources for others to craft their own projects of transformation and empowerment, based on an understanding of their social milieu. See *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). Margaret McLaren likewise finds positive resources in Foucault's work for feminist theory and empowering conceptions of embodied

Additionally, recent work by Vincent Colapietro, Colin Koopman, and C.G. Prado conducts fruitful comparisons between Dewey and Foucault, around the themes of improvisation and the cultivation of freedom, the constitution and development of the self, and critiques of modernity, respectively.²³⁶

Subjectivity and the Body

To begin, we might say that Foucault's conception of subjectivity is an historically and socially situated one. Subjectivity does not occur in a vacuum. Following this premise, one way to approach Foucault's conception of subjectivity is to follow his line of thinking with respect to one or another of his genealogical histories, as each of these unearths some form or facet of the subject and the patterns through which it constructs an identity. Because Foucault's analyses posit subjectivities as developing within and with reference to their cultural context, a context which contains huge numbers of diverse and sometimes overlapping domains of life, there is no singular, stable subject to simply describe or analyze. Subjectivities emerge through participation in various domains of life, and thus can convey several "types" of meanings at once, emerging in different ways according to differing circumstances.

subjectivity. See *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).

²³⁶ Vincent Colapietro, "Situation, Meaning, and Improvisation: An Aesthetics of Existence in Dewey and Foucault," *Foucault Studies* 11 (February 2011), 20-40; C.G. Prado, "Educating the Self: Dewey and Foucault," in *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Paul Fairfield (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 174-193; Colin Koopman, "The History and Critique of Modernity: Dewey with Foucault against Weber," in *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy*, 194-218.

In mapping out a Foucaultian notion of subjectivity, then, it will be helpful to think about some of the types of subjectivity that he studies: while he explores areas as diverse as sexual, religious, civic, medical, and psychiatric subjectivities, I will focus in this chapter on two facets of subjectivity that Foucault's work takes up, disciplinary and ethical subjectivity, in order to articulate some of the defining features of the modern self as described in his work. To be clear, it is not just that varying types of subjectivities emerge with respect to their cultural contexts, but the category of subjectivity itself emerges as a cultural-historical phenomenon. Thus, the various facets of subjectivity that emerge are illustrations of some ways it has emerged. However, before explaining the details of Foucault's conceptions of subjectivity, it will be helpful to clarify some of his terminology, as it is important for understanding both his method and the frames in which he analyzes his subject matter.

First, Foucault uses the term "power" in a particular way: he rejects the view that power is a one-dimensional and one-directional force, operating from an authority or institution that has control and exercising its mandate "downward" onto a populace. This image of power is too simplified and univocal to explain how power operates in contemporary cultural settings. He asserts that power is everywhere, in that it is a dynamic operating within relations of people, being exercised from multiple points onto multiple points within any given network, and that individual subjects, as well as authoritative bodies, are indeed "bearers" of power. He insists that power can *only* be exercised in relations; that power can only be manifested or used over another who also contains power and can offer resistance or mutually enforcing power, as otherwise, such

power would be ineffective and basically, false.²³⁷ Foucault also claims that power is productive – of certain modes of being, of certain collections of knowledge, for example – and is not simply repressive. He insists: “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.”²³⁸ In producing reality, domains of objects, and rituals of truth, power produces real effects that structure our world; it produces areas of knowledge that take certain phenomena as thematic for building a field of inquiry, and it produces practices and protocols that standardize and legitimize interpretations of such phenomena. Indeed, its workings constitute one of the mechanisms through which subjectivities are produced as components of these realities. One of the primary ways power is exercised within networks of individuals and collectives is, to work with another of his key terms, through exercises and practices of knowledge, hence his term, power-knowledge.

Power-knowledge signals the phenomenon occurring when operations of power function to develop particular, often highly specialized forms of knowledge, which then reinforce the power of the body who possesses this knowledge, effectively controlling or regulating the ways in which this knowledge is used. Foucault writes, “power produces knowledge... power and knowledge directly imply one another; ... there is no power

²³⁷ Foucault includes an exception here: in the case of what he calls “total domination,” there is an exercise of power towards a person or populace with absolutely no possibilities of resistance or counteraction. Such cases would be ones of abject slavery or certain forms of physical imprisonment, in which the oppressed person(s) literally has no option other than capitulation; that is, in cases of total domination, even choosing one’s own death is not a live option.

²³⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 194.

relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.”²³⁹ An example of this can be seen in the development of prisons and the increasing dimension of “inwardness” of punishment, as penal institutions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gradually developed practices aimed more at “correcting” the prisoner’s soul than brandishing and displaying the prisoner’s tortured body. As particular domains of life, such as state-run disciplinary measures, develop specialized knowledge around the efficacy of particular penal practices, the types of criminality they observe in their populace, the means of understanding and evaluating such types, the means of incarcerating, monitoring, and treating such types, etc., they can then exercise this knowledge via their positions of power by exercising certain practices within their institutions, aimed at achieving a specific result from their population.²⁴⁰ In short, the term power-knowledge does not claim that power and knowledge are the same thing, but that in contemporary society, power and knowledge are often tightly interwoven within specialized networks of meaning, operating in mutually reinforcing manners with respect to one another, and are often codified into domains of life – like medicine, punishment, etc. – such that their meanings come to be experienced as “natural” or normalized truths.

Last, the idea of “games of truth” is an important concept in Foucault’s analyses. He uses this term to refer to knowledge practices that purportedly reveal truths to us; they

²³⁹ Ibid., 27.

²⁴⁰ One of the clearest forms in which this kind of treatment emerges is seen in Foucault’s analysis of the Panopticon, the physical structure of a prison (and later, hospitals, barracks, and schools) which imbues the space of its subjects with possibilities of being monitored at all times. The result, via disciplinary practice, is that individuals “internalize” the implications of this space and, believing themselves always seeable, always monitorable, monitor and regulate themselves.

are interlocking networks of ideas that operate as truths within certain areas of knowledge. For example, in much of Greek antiquity, Foucault explains, truth was not available to every individual; rather, truth was withheld for an elite class who underwent certain practices of the self, which were part of the work of attaining knowledge and achieving truth. For example, such practices might include daily reflection or meditation, fasting, or renunciation of earthly attachments.²⁴¹ He claims that with Descartes and Enlightenment thinkers, truth is now “available” to all who endeavor to investigate with their own perceptions and abilities – truth is now operating under a different set of rules and with different contexts of access; the “game” has shifted to allow more participants, and as such, the meanings of the truths in the game likewise shift. The (ordinary) subject comes to be a prominent part of the network of truth, as the being who knows, with powers given to all such subjects by the “natural light,” who can conduct scientific inquiries on his or her own merits, who has access to knowledge and truth simply through occupying a different place in a different game of truth. In short, the sets of rules, contexts, modes of access, and modes of work required to attain truth signal the varying ways that knowledge can operate as truth in the context of a given “game,” or a given domain of experience with “truth-content;” that is, a domain in which truths have an impact on our understandings of ourselves and our environments.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New York Press, 1997), 288.

²⁴² Foucault’s choice of the term “games” for these networks of practices and truths is indeed a peculiar one. He clarifies that his use of this idea is not meant “in the sense of an amusement,” but “a set of rules by which truth is produced.” Importantly, these rules and productions lead to results that are considered “valid or invalid, winning or losing” (Ibid., 297). As such, his choice of this term highlights the fact that these games produce

Seeing ourselves as ethical individuals is another such example: the domain of ethics contains a vast number of such truths, operating in relation to each other such that we find ourselves occupying a place within it, understanding ourselves by virtue of our place within it. What these truths are, though, and the ways they relate to each other, show dramatic changes over time. The thrust of this idea is that, like subjectivities emerging with respect to the contexts governing different domains of life, truths emerge as similarly situated and contingent realities.

What these terms help to set up are the frames through which Foucault conducts his genealogies, the lenses through which he analyzes the emergence of particular characteristics of subjectivity. In claiming that there is no singular, static subject, that subjectivity is constructed via the various domains of life we find ourselves in, we thus come to be subjects because we are *subject to* the meanings, demands, proscriptions, and practices of these domains. For example, part of what Foucault's *History of Sexuality* volumes show is how we are "defined" as sexual subjects by the types of sexual practices we engage in, the partners we choose to engage in these practices with, the types of relationships we have with these partners, the identifications that are associated with these partners and practices, the meanings, spaces, and communities associated with these identifications, and so forth. Moreover, these definitions and identifications largely revolve around the modes of discourse that organize, interpret, and codify the related practices and interpretations. We come to experience ourselves as these particular subjects due to the way we occupy a position within (or outside) the ways these practices are schematized within the spectrum of possible sexual experiences, and we come to

winners and losers, those who are privileged and disenfranchised by the games' dictates, despite their contingency (which Foucault's earlier work is at pains to show).

know our position via the ways we confess or divulge our sexual practices and desires to a particular authority. These authorities, such as the church, medical, or pedagogical establishments, have particular systems of knowledge and discourse organized to comprehend and codify such behaviors, and thus such establishments, in understanding behaviors and individuals in codified ways, offer avenues of self-understanding based around these codifications. In this offering, we are given channels through which to “understand” and interpret our own behaviors, giving us – often without our knowing participation – manners in which to conceptualize our own subjectivities, venues through which we build relationships to ourselves. For example, the labels “heterosexual” and “homosexual” signify more or less stable identities associated with sexual practices and partnerships. The identities exist in the discourse, and so contemporary subjects work within it to identify themselves as sexual subjects (or be identified by others), including those who reject this binary and work to create practices and identifications that move beyond it. As such, these labels – and their rejection – provide avenues through which we come to understand and relate to ourselves, our desires and practices, and our communities and societies.

Similarly, the element of discipline in our society operates such that we can be understood as disciplinary subjects, insofar as we define our relations to ourselves by codes of behavior that operate in various cultural spheres and areas of knowledge, regulating our activities according to the interpretations of these knowledges. For example, institutions of schooling operate by the establishment of particular spaces, schedules, practices, and codes of conduct, and not only do these proscribe the behavior of its participants (administrators, teachers, students, parents or guardians), they impart

norms of understanding these individuals; as authorities might view individuals through the lens of the institution's codes, individuals are also "invited" to view themselves in the terms of the institution's practices and aims. Moreover, we regulate ourselves through the "gaze" these codified knowledges exercise on our activities, using the internalization of this gaze as a constant form of self-supervision and self-correction in order to conform to standards or comport ourselves in intelligible ways. I will take up the role of discipline in its construction of the embodied subject in more detail later, but I include this brief description here to signal an important facet of how subjectivity operates for Foucault. Because discipline is significant for constructing subjectivity as we know it today, it is an important part of understanding the motivations and compulsions behind other elements of subjectivity.

In Foucault's later work, his focus turns to another dimension of subjectivity, now looking at the ethical subject, the subject who constructs a relation to herself via the lens of moral life, in particular, the moral life of her culture and community. In other words, she is as an ethical subject insofar as she experiences her relation to herself as subject to the ethical mores, authorities, conventions, and practices of her culture, including the way those mores and practices influence her relationships with others. Foucault's view of ethics more broadly is concerned with this element of subjectivity in particular, in that one has or creates a relation to herself through the things she does (or does not do), vis a vis what her community and culture predominantly does (or does not do), in terms of what considered is right, wrong, appropriate, productive, etc. As such, Foucault views ethics – the relation to oneself – as one part working beneath a larger umbrella of moral life. Another important part of morals is the moral code operating in one's culture, which

addresses matters of behavior, norms of conduct, and so forth. In this way, there are several significant features of one's ethical identity (and these features are consistent with analyses of subjectivity generally speaking, for Foucault): one, it is always situated with respect to her environment and situation, her intersubjective existence and her relationships with others; two, it is always under revision, via the ways her conduct is subject to the scrutiny of others and herself, and is linked with her identity as a whole.

I should include a further clarificatory note here. While Foucault discusses characteristics of the ethical self that he finds in writings from antiquity, this does not mean he anachronistically imposes subjectivity onto these historical figures. This could be seen as problematic, given that the subjectivity he analyzes in his earlier genealogies is a distinctly modern development. Foucault's work on the concern with the ethical self in antiquity examines ways in which individuals related to and made sense of their own conduct and their own senses of self, soul, or personhood.²⁴³ For Foucault, this is also one element of a larger schematic, as he analyzes ethics through a four-fold structure. This includes: (1) an ethical substance, or the part of oneself that is subject to ethical demands (this could be soul, desire, will, intentions, etc.); (2) a mode of subjection, or the way in which individuals are incited to recognize moral obligations (demands of reason, divine law, etc.); (3) a manner of working on the self, or "self-forming activity," (reflection, meditation, ascetic practice, etc.); and (4) a *telos*, what individuals aspire to be via ethical practice (pure, immortal, self-mastered, etc.).²⁴⁴ Using this structure as a

²⁴³ I acknowledge that each of these terms might be problematic as well, but use them for lack of a better term at the time.

²⁴⁴ This four-fold ethical relation to self is outlined in "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, vol 1*, 263-267. However, I am grateful for Arnold

genealogical tool, Foucault examines the ethical practices of antiquity, claiming that while manifestations of each of these elements might vary across cultures and epochs, it functions as a means of analyzing the kind of ethical demands that individuals experienced themselves as beholden to and the practices they developed to achieve them. Most of my attention in taking up this work will focus on the third element, the ascetic practices of self-forming (and self-transforming) activity.

As such, Foucault's aim in these analyses is to see how individuals experience the relationships they have with themselves, via their contexts and the demands therein, and this project can be read as continuous with his earlier work; both show elements of how individuals develop relations to self through engaging in certain practices, forms of work, and forms of reflection. In my view, however, the later work is not trespassing on his earlier developments of subjectivity, but rather, examines a similar phenomenon – relation to self – in the recognition that the conditions of these relationships are structured by different conditions than those emerging in the modern era. Moreover, one might say that Foucault's looking to antiquity for clues about the relations to self established there constitutes a particular instance of postmodern subjectivity working on oneself: seeking the historical trajectory of one's culture to better understand the conditions of one's present self.

In interviews with Foucault late in his career, we see this picture of the ethical self in clearer terms. In a 1984 interview published under the title, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," while discussing practices that fall under the heading of "care of the self" in Greek antiquity (a significant element of ethical practice

Davidson's clarifying summary of this structure in "Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics" in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, 228-9.

of Greek culture), Foucault explains his rejection of positing a subject as the basis from which to begin philosophical inquiry:

What I rejected was the idea of starting out with a theory of the subject ... and, on the basis of this theory, asking how a given form of knowledge [*connaissance*] was possible. What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another, as a mad or a healthy subject, as a delinquent or nondelinquent subject, through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on. I had to reject a priori theories of the subject in order to analyze the relationships that may exist between the constitution of the subject or different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power, and so on.²⁴⁵

There are several telling descriptions in this paragraph, which are helpful for seeing Foucault's views of subjectivity. First, the subject is not a substance: it is not a thing, an unchanging essence or presence within the individual, it is not some kind of core or nucleus around which all other elements of individuality circulate. It is not something given prior to having knowledge; rather, it emerges in relation to varying contexts and the knowledges operative therein, which then shape its contours. It is not unified or acting as a centripetal force in the various dispersions of our engagements, it is not a ground from which our lives arise or a ghost hiding in the back of the machine, organizing its inputs, outputs, and actions. It is multiple in its very "existence" and it is not really an existing thing; it is a manner of relating to oneself that emerges through the relationships we experience in our social-cultural worlds. Foucault continues to describe the subject as a form, not a substance, and its form is shaped by the context in which one is acting and the character of the relationships that take place in that context. For example, while it is the same individual that might go to a political meeting and then go to a doctor's office, because these contexts are shaped by different purposes, different networks of power and

²⁴⁵ Foucault, "Ethics of Concern for Self," 290.

knowledge, different practices of conduct, and so forth, the relationship she experiences to herself in these instances is not the same and thus the subjectivity (or selfhood) she expresses in these contexts is not the same. This expresses Foucault's belief that subjectivity is a matter of context and relationship; that the operative meanings in a certain context are what determine the kind of relationship you cultivate with yourself, the dimension of subjectivity you experience at that time.²⁴⁶ And this is not some kind of inauthentic cow-towing to authority or simple conforming to convention either; this is a part of how we comport and conduct ourselves differently according to the demands and knowledges of varying domains.

Second, in refusing the idea that the subject is an unchanging inner self but is a flexible network of relations, Foucault also stresses the thoroughly historical character of any kind of subjectivity. Because the subject does not occur in a vacuum, any sense of subjectivity is inextricably constituted by the social and cultural norms and practices of one's existence. Importantly, however, this is not to say that the subject is stripped of all agency in being socially constituted through and through, or being merely a confluence of external forces, despite the fact that some of Foucault's critics read him this way. It is, however, to stress that the manifestations of my subjectivity, or the collective ways in which I live my life and reflect on myself, arise in response to my historical situation, my cultural context, and my immediate community. Foucault writes, "I would say that if I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the

²⁴⁶ This "fragmentation" of the subject occurs along bodily lines also, for Foucault. This is to say that because it is a different subjectivity (a different relation to self) that emerges in say, a political meeting and a doctor's office, there are different bodies that correspond with these subjectivities.

individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group.”²⁴⁷ Thus, the practices of my daily life, the manners in which I reflect on my conduct and identity, the ways in which I aim to fashion myself creatively, are responses to the models that exist in my world. This is also not to say that the subject is void of creativity or inventive power, but it is to say that such creative expressions and experimentations are situated within the cultural context of one’s historical present.²⁴⁸

Moreover, it is important to stress that the subject, constituted by its relations to various domains of life, is not done so in an abstract or purely theoretical way. The subject creates itself in and through the practices it undertakes and the ways these practices are viewed, used, and reflected upon within the domains they occupy. For example, in his analyses of ethical practices in Greek antiquity, Foucault finds writing as a recurring theme in reflecting on and documenting the self. There were, he claims, several methods of writing by which individuals took stock of their actions, thoughts, and intentions, often with the thread of ethical development and self-cultivation as their focus. This is one example of a practice of the self, demonstrating its construction in active realities, not just in a theoretical network of symbols or coded knowledges. He explains,

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 291.

²⁴⁸ Charles Scott clarifies this point also, here regarding the creation of the subject via desire: “We thus note at the beginning that the *subject* of desire, i.e., a specific way in which an individual relates to himself or herself, is not structured primarily by desire or a force of will, but by a circulation of powers that emerges as individuals are formed relative to desire within given cultural circumstances. The subject takes its form of movement from cultural problems that have to be faced because of the values and purposes that are found in the relations at hand” (“Foucault, Ethics, and the Fragmented Subject,” *Research in Phenomenology* 22 (1992), 113, author’s emphasis).

“It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real practices – historically analyzable practices.”²⁴⁹ Thus, it is not just in the dynamics of theory and interpretation that the subject is constituted, but in the exercises of living itself; these exercises, however, always take place within the bounds of a reality that is suffused with theories and interpretations, regardless of whether or not they are consciously present. Interacting with networks of abstracted meanings, the subject constitutes itself through the activities it undertakes, the results of these undertakings, and the spaces created by these results.²⁵⁰ This mutual construction, according to Foucault, takes place at a huge variety of levels in contemporary life. This is how we come to experience ourselves as mad or healthy, as delinquent or non-delinquent, as acting and

²⁴⁹ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 277.

²⁵⁰ Edward McGushin applies Foucault’s analyses of subjectivity to examine the subjectivities of philosophers, those individuals who perform these abstract deconstructions of the subject. He writes, of the situation in contemporary academia, including the daily rigors of study, teaching, writing, conferences, committees, publications, etc.: “The processes, practices, relations, and discourses that give rise to and maintain this situation *are what determine the modern philosophical subject* and they are the setting within which the critique of the subject takes place. The subject, then, is not something produced at the level of theory and it is not something that exists at the level of consciousness, rather it takes shape at the material level of bodies and practices. ... These practices create the experiential space within which we become available to ourselves and to each other as subjects of action and knowledge and as objects of knowledge and control. This space is not some sort of static, neutral container ... that we exist within and observe objectively, but rather it is a dynamic space shaped by the processes, activities, and relations that unfold through or in it – we *constitute* this space when we engage in the practices of philosophy by which we *are constituted* as philosophers” (“Foucault and the Problem of the Subject,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 31, no. 5/6 (2005), 642-3, author’s emphasis). In this way, the practice of philosophy as a particular domain of power-knowledge that “plays” a particular game of truth is constituted precisely by the practices of those who engage its rules: philosophers. On the reverse side, it is the space and the domain of philosophy as a professional practice that governs the conduct, activities, and comportment of philosophers, when conducting themselves deliberately and publicly *as* philosophers. The subjects create the space, and the space in turn creates the type of subjects that occupy it.

thinking ethically. We occupy these varieties of cultural space, creating ourselves as mad or healthy, delinquent or not, by virtue of *how* we occupy the spaces which determine these subjectivities, *how* we act within the games of truth that operate in these spheres.

In terms of these constructions occurring through practices, it is important to note that the way subjectivity is experienced is always bound up with the way the body is experienced, for Foucault. Because subjects develop in the context of their culture and the various domains of life they engage in, bodies can be seen as the “points of contact” by which the subject “ingests” or “in-corporates” the norms of the culture. In brief, whenever we consider subjectivity in Foucault’s work, the body is always also at issue, as subjects are always body-subjects; similar to how, for Dewey, “mind” or “body” always implies their union, body-mind. For Foucault, it is often the body and its practices, its doings and undergoings, its enablements and its constraints (including those it puts on itself) that are the most salient features of a given domain (its “analyzable practices”), and the body’s uses, controls, and relations to identity are thus also at issue in addressing facets of subjectivity.²⁵¹ Take disciplinary practice in the penitentiary, for example. Foucault’s genealogy of prison practice demonstrates how punishment

²⁵¹ Despite the fact that both Dewey and Foucault emphasize the active elements of self or subject construction, I add a cautionary note here that this does not entail that their conceptions of the body-mind and the body-subject are identical. Foucault’s conception of the body-subject is a far more fractured perspective on what constitutes a “self;” in emphasizing the contingencies surrounding each manifestation of subjectivity, one might say that a singular self and a singular body are fictions in his view. Dewey’s union of the body-mind, while stressing the relationship between these two elements of human existence, does not reflect the same ontological fragmentation that Foucault’s perspective does. While this difficulty may ultimately make their conceptions of the self or subject rest on differing (and potentially irreconcilable) metaphysical presumptions, a more thorough analysis of the issue would take the discussion away from my focus here. My emphasis in putting them in dialogue is to show the extent to which practices construct the kinds of “bodies” and “selves” we are; and as I read his later work, Foucault presents some powerful ways to think about agency within this construction.

transitioned from abusing and displaying the bodies of criminals in the public sphere to the “correction” of their souls through rigid, monitored practice, with punishment aimed less at the body and more at the offenders’ inner life. However, the mechanisms for this shift all concern bodily practice, though less overtly and publicly than the torture that preceded it. Instead, inmates operate by a regulated schedule, occupy small and regulated spaces, move according to the institution’s dictates, and so forth. Foucault explains, “even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use ‘lenient’ methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission.”²⁵² Thus, while the body is no longer the explicit target of punishment, it is nonetheless still at the center of the operation of treatment, and this theme is seen throughout Foucault’s genealogies.

Despite the fact that the body may not always be at the forefront of a particular practice, institution, or intended goal, such practices and goals can only take place through the body and its productivities, and many institutions are constructed in particular ways in order to maximize – or at least, regulate – the body and its productivities. This takes us to a particular character of embodied practice, at work in punishment, in schooling, and in myriad other forms of life: discipline. While this will be the focus of the next section, I would like to close here by emphasizing that for Foucault, just as subjectivities and truths have histories and complicated interrelations with the domains of life and networks of power-knowledge operating in them, the case of bodies is no different. Bodies are likewise historical, culturally-infused, and situated: as

²⁵² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 25.

McWhorter writes, “these bodies are not entities originating outside of power and outside of history. They are historically constructed tools and targets of normalizing power.”

But, she also stresses, with respect to her own body, that it has “‘a mind of its own,’ or at least ... a developmental course and power all its own. And that changes things.”²⁵³

Discipline and Agency

At this point, I will take up the issue of discipline in more depth, sketching out what this term means for Foucault as well as how it relates to embodied agency. Briefly, while some critics read Foucault’s claims regarding discipline solely as a mechanism for social control and an instrument of normalization, I hope to show that while these elements are a part of how discipline functions, its purview extends beyond this interpretation. Discipline, in my reading, also represents the mechanisms by which individuals and groups enact particular forms of agency, insofar as disciplinary practice presents avenues in which energy and intention can enable the execution of purposes.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault’s focus begins with a genealogy of penal practices in 17th and 18th century Europe, tracing the shift from public, brutal corporal punishment to a focus on the interiority of inmates and an emphasis on the correction or rehabilitation of the soul of the accused. Using this case of inmates in prisons, as well as soldiers and to a lesser extent, students, the book also traces movements outlining the growth of discipline as a mechanism that functions to create a certain kind of body, and in so doing, creates a certain kind of subject. His analyses reveal that in defining the relationship between bodies and spaces, and between bodies and objects of manipulation,

²⁵³ McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures*, 157.

a relationship between body and soul is also defined, resulting in an embodied subjectivity that uses discipline both as a means of relating to others and to one's environment as well as relating to oneself. As such, discipline emerges as a means of providing concrete avenues for crafting and refining relations to one's body, one's surroundings, one's tasks, and ultimately, one's sense of self and sense of purpose within this given environment, this particular domain of life. To situate this discussion, I would like to note here that while the disciplinary subject in a prison or the military is less to the point of my project, Foucault's analyses here are relevant for articulating what he means by discipline and how he characterizes disciplinary practice as part of modern subjectivity. No less to the point is the way in which the effects of discipline are experienced by the body, showing how bodily engagements in social institutions have a profound effect on the forms of subjectivity that accompany them.²⁵⁴

The analysis of prison construction and the body's presence and movement within it highlight one of Foucault's main aims with respect to this study: unraveling the ways in which the body is regarded, conceptualized, and infused with power through their relationships with these structures and the regulating practices which take place in them. In tracing the historical emergence of practices that target their effects on the soul of the prisoner instead of just his body, Foucault seeks to discover if this shift "is not the effect of a transformation of the way in which the body itself is invested by power relations."²⁵⁵ In articulating ways that the body might be "invested by power relations," Foucault is

²⁵⁴ In articulating the extent to which disciplinary power and the construction of spaces dominated by disciplinary practice follow similar patterns, Foucault asks: "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (*Discipline and Punish*, 228).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 23-4.

seeking to expose ways in which practices not even explicitly targeting the body are still mechanisms for monitoring and controlling it, for regulating the types of relationships that one might develop to one's embodiment. Even if the investment is thus more subtle (prisoners no longer enduring public bodily torture), this does not necessarily mean it is any less thoroughgoing, insofar as the continued existence of inmates (and similarly, soldiers and students) is sustained by the operations individuals and groups learn to practice in their daily lives. In other words, taking on routines of daily activity, exercise, movements, engagements, tasks, etc. provides a framework in which bodies and subjects become accustomed to a certain type of productivity, and they become accustomed to such productivity in a certain kind of space. They become disciplinary subjects insofar as their bodies and souls become objects of disciplinary practice: body-subjects that can be measured and evaluated with respect to the disciplinary procedures at play in that institution.

By way of example, I will explain this phenomenon with respect to military training, using Foucault's descriptions of documents detailing the training of European soldiers from the seventeenth century. These documents, under Foucault's analysis, describe how the soldier's movements, being regulated to the finest precision, transition one from being a "peasant," an ordinary (male) body, into having the stature and air of a soldier: "posture is gradually corrected; a calculated restraint runs through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit."²⁵⁶ Through exercise, structured life, and repetition of activity, he gains strength and refinement with respect to routinized movements (such as marching

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 135.

and handling a rifle); he controls his body and maintains a readiness to engage it in proscribed ways. He disciplines it, refines it, habituates it to these forms of practice: he develops the body of a soldier. But of course, these refinements and habituations are not according to his own definitions or proscriptions. The soldier adopts these practices insofar as they are prescribed by his military training – a socio-political entity that operates with certain sets of knowledge and practices of power. The soldier’s body, at once “docile” insofar as it is malleable, moldable according to these demands, as well as disciplined insofar as it is strong, capable, and refined according to these demands, thus provides a touchstone for how disciplinary practices get literally *incorporated* into our lives and how powers are manifested in our bodies’ workings.

Foucault describes bodies as “docile” in terms that are not terribly far from Dewey’s; Dewey describes the young as educable because their body-minds are characterized by both immaturity and plasticity, that is, the capacity to grow and the malleability to take on characteristics of training. Similarly, Foucault calls the “docile body” one “that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved,” also calling disciplines the “methods...which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility.”²⁵⁷ As such, bodies are docile because they are transformable, and bodies take up disciplines to regulate, refine, and channel that docility into particular avenues of use (ironically, often increasing its docility through discipline, insofar as increased discipline can make bodies increasingly able to transform anew). Thus,

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 136, 137.

docility is the condition for discipline, and discipline enables bodies and subjects to funnel the potential of a capacity into practiced powers of skill and art.

Thus, discipline has a dual characteristic, not unlike Dewey's characterization of habit. Discipline can be used in the service of social control and indeed, of oppression, and it can also be used in the service of social emancipation and positive transformation. Because it has both of these possibilities within its potential, it will be necessary to discuss each of these in turn, and particularly, why I wish to emphasize its transformative potential. Part of what is significant about discipline is the fact that it acts as a creative force, a productive force, in terms of fashioning bodies into having particular powers and skills. As such, bodies can be made to accord with a particular design, as we see with Foucault's soldier, and this design can be deployed to further the interests of a particular social or political power, again, as we see with the soldier. In terms of its capacity to dissociate power from individuals in this respect, Foucault writes,

Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.²⁵⁸

In this way, the disciplinary subject develops as a set of particular powers, through particular uses of his or her body, which are regarded as aptitudes and capacities by an outside party; in this regard, the capacities which inhere in the subject are used to function as terms of the relationship between the individual and the disciplining authority, and can be extrapolated from the individual and used only in terms approved

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 138.

by the outside party. For example, the soldier gains remarkable skill and precision with a rifle; and part of the way this disciplinary power works entails that such skill and precision must also only be deployed in ways that the military authorities prescribe. For Foucault, all of these skills and all of these relationships are matters of discipline. It is in this way that discipline takes on the character of being a “political anatomy” in his work;²⁵⁹ discipline is the mechanism by which we understand ourselves and structure our activities (thereby, giving structure to our selves) with reference to the larger social, cultural, and institutional powers operating in our worlds.

However, also like Deweyan habit, discipline is a mechanism by which we gain needed and empowering capacities in the course of our daily lives. While on one hand, it is the means by which the military crafts an ordinary individual into a soldier, largely to serve its own purposes; on the other hand, it is also at work when children learn to read and write, when students raise their hands in the classroom, when a pianist executes a delicately wrought sonata. All such practices are also matters of discipline, insofar as individuals and groups, through participating in some structured, repeated practice or another, gain capacities of bodily subjectivity. Thus, disciplinary practice cuts both ways: it trains and develops, gearing individuals toward specific kinds of productivity, and the direction and use of such productivity depends largely on the contexts in which the training and development occur. As such, discipline can and does manifest in oppressive, disempowering fashions (e.g., students in schools enduring the “straightjacket and chain-gang” procedures Dewey discusses in *Democracy and Education*), just as it can and does manifest in empowering, agential fashions as well (e.g., students taking up

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 139.

an inquiry or practice according to patterns they have learned in class). The thrust of this point is that discipline, like habit, is a part of growth; though like Dewey's critics worry, discipline can work in directions that decidedly do not empower persons. In sum, as Foucault claims, "[d]iscipline 'makes' individuals"²⁶⁰ and such making is very much a matter of context, of social organization and the authority regulating its practice, of political transparency and the (purported or actual) purpose of particular tasks and activities, and of the experiential application of the skills it imparts and the ways in which individuals have freedom in relating their powers to these broader factors.

To clarify, Foucault posits that bodies are suffused with disciplinary practices in many domains of life – penal systems, military systems, and school systems are just examples where the implementation and effects of discipline are relatively salient features of the institutions themselves. But part of what the effects of discipline entail are that bodies and subjects are always bound to different aspects of political life in one way or another, specifically, in that bodies relate to larger social spheres through processes of normalization. This is not to say that bodies become disciplined according to the dictates of a political sovereign, nor that their politicization means they are completely subservient to political forces. It is to say that discipline is one of the mechanisms through which individuals and groups are normalized with respect to one another, and especially with respect to the dominant parties within any power-knowledge network. However, what this means is that while people have the potential to re-inscribe and re-entrench existing political practices and cultural meanings, they also have the potential to resist and re-interpret such practices and meanings. Again, just as discipline imparts and

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 170.

develops powers and capacities, it can oppress or it can empower, depending on context, transparency, and the degree of freedom in the direction of its uses and expressions.²⁶¹

This description, sprinkled with comparisons to Deweyan habit, raises the question of how Foucault's conception of discipline differs from habit, especially in terms of what my emphasis on embodied agency gains from this perspective. There are certainly many points of comparison between Dewey and Foucault on these matters: habit and discipline both articulate patterns of repeated activity which lead to patterns of development, through which individuals and groups "become who they are" in a sense. Interlocking habits constitute character; discipline "makes" individuals. Both are acquired and subject to historical, cultural, and social determinations, and they share the structural similarity of providing channels for productive activity, relieving the actor from having to invent responses to situations every time a new circumstance emerges. Thus, both *can* also provide meaningful conduits of self-understanding; both are infused with the powers and knowledges of social historicity, and thus both habit and discipline are subject to oppressive patterns and empowering possibilities. Given the extent of this similarity, what makes Foucault's account distinctive, and helpful for my reading?

One differentiation, though a minor one, is simply the contemporaneousness of Foucault's account. More than half a century separates the two, meaning that certain elements of Foucault's reading are more relevant to contemporary circumstances of embodied subjectivity, agency, and education. However, the biggest benefit for this

²⁶¹ In my reading of Foucault, it is because the directions, uses and expressions of discipline depend so thoroughly on the transparency and freedom of its context that he takes the approach he does. While Foucault's work rarely includes a positive or explicit political agenda, I believe this is because his work tackles a part of the "making transparent" of social constructions, and the work of discerning how disciplinary power might then be taken up is a task for those following him.

project comes from merging his analyses of discipline with the forthcoming discussion on practices of freedom and self-transformation. His analysis of disciplinary power provides a lens through which individuals and groups might become more self-aware, more cognizant of social and political powers and oppressions, more conscious of how the current dynamics structuring their lives are the products of complex social histories. In this vein, when it comes to students and their experiences of embodied agency, I believe that Foucault's account of discipline can offer tools in terms of understanding the historical present and manners in which discipline, oppression, and agency are largely a matter of our culture's treatment of *embodied* life. This is one point on which I think Foucault's account adds a sharper edge than Dewey's, and thus, can be helpful in terms of understanding the conditions of one's agency and the myriad ways in which the body is implicated in it. For example, the question of students sitting at desks for large periods of the day, having their movements monitored and their bodies hemmed in by hallways and classrooms, moving place to place according to a strict timetable and a bell signaling the breakage of time, might be read through a disciplinary lens, revealing how students' bodies adapt and conform to those spaces and structures. Notwithstanding attitudes that dismiss the value or presence of their bodies conveyed through content, the regulating of embodiment through the physical and temporal structures alone might be seen as a diminishment of what kinds of movements, and thus, what kinds of meanings are possible in schools. Limiting possibility in this way separates the body and life one experiences in school from the body and life one experiences elsewhere; a separation of the kind Dewey would lament. A part of what this separation teaches students, however, is that while in school, you operate according to a certain disciplinary practice and adopt

a certain kind of (docile) embodiment: you sit at a desk, you raise your hand, you stroll through hallways, you take up tasks as they are assigned to you. In separating off this subjectivity from those experienced elsewhere, and particularly in experiencing one's school-subjectivity as inhibiting or restrictive, students can also develop and reify the separation between learning and being active, experiencing pleasure, and developing meaning. As such, the bodily subjectivity developed in schools is one which students may feel particularly divorced from, which they quickly disconnect with at the end of the school day, in favor of a subjectivity with more pleasure and possibility to offer them.

However, I believe the empowering effects of Foucault's analysis might be most powerfully felt when combined with his later work on care for the self, practices of freedom, and especially, self-transformation, as these present potentials for taking up disciplinary practices with the perspective of enacting and cultivating one's embodied agency through them. In this way, Foucault's account can add productively to Dewey's work on habit and a conception of growth as agency, insofar as self-transformation presents an approach and orientation to growth that acknowledges the disciplinary practices shaping one's present, as well as the embodied and agential character of taking up projects of growth as expressions of one's freedom, of one's agency.

Care of the Self, *Askeses*, and Self-Transformation

The theme of transformation in Foucault's work stems from his interest in the development of subjectivity in antiquity and some of the practices that were evident in how individuals related to themselves, understood themselves, and conceived of self-cultivation. His studies emphasize the theme of self-cultivation and transformation in

terms of the work one must do in order to attain to a transformed state of self, which his reading claims is also a requirement for subjects to prepare themselves in gaining access to the truth. However, in my view, his focus on these ideas extends beyond this historical interest alone. In what follows, I will take up some of Foucault's later work (often referred to as his ethical work) in outlining how he treats the themes of transformation from the texts of antiquity he analyzes. As such, material from the interviews and essays in *Ethics vol. I: Subjectivity and Truth* and *The History of Sexuality vol. 3: The Care of the Self* will form the primary basis for this discussion. In taking up these themes, I will address what Foucault means with the phrase "care of the self" and how he reads this idea through antiquity. I will then address how *askeses*, or practices of transformation, are seen to be a part of this care, as well as how what Foucault terms "practices of freedom" are a part of this conceptual network. Last, I will link these ideas to the overarching theme of self-transformation, showing how this theme can be seen to articulate an aspect of embodied agency that takes up the disciplinary character of practice discussed above. In short, this element of Foucault's work highlights the embodied and practice-oriented character of agency as a felt, experiential quality of existence that takes place within a historically situated social context, and as such, I believe it can provide helpful additions to accounting for the conditions of agency that operate as a part of growth. I read Dewey's growth and Foucault's transformation as sharing similar goals of conducting one's life so that continued growth, continued transformation, or expansion in the possibilities of knowledge, agential action, and fulfillment from experience are a central part of life's projects. In this way, I believe Foucault can provide a more concrete sense of how growth is experienced as a situated yet open set of possibilities than does

Dewey's account, and that his work on transformation shows how the body's practices – while imbued with meaning from without – can be empowering pivots of action and change. Thus, while I begin this section with a brief exposition of care of the self, I do so in order to situate the theme of self-transformation in Foucault's work, as my ultimate goal in incorporating this set of ideas is to articulate a sense in which self-transformation might be a supplement to thinking about embodied growth, particularly in the context of education.

In these later texts, Foucault draws on material beginning from Plato and his contemporaries and leading up to Christian spiritual texts from the 4th and 5th centuries of the Roman empire, thus taking up a large swath of literature covering Greco-Roman philosophical and spiritual practice.²⁶² Typical to his style of genealogy, he examines continuities and discontinuities in the progression of these texts, here with the focus on the kind of ethical subject at issue in these discourses. Foucault's study thus takes up ways in which the individual relates to himself and conceives of himself as concerned with ethical principles and practices. This emphasis on the self, however, is not to say that ethics in this period concerns the self as its only matter or as the sole locus of ethical sensibility. The emphasis on the self is a product of the documents as well as Foucault's investigation: because his focus is on the question of subjectivity – that is, the conceptions of the human self and types of self-understanding operative over time – much is made of the practices that articulate what the self is and articulate what kind of work the self must do in order to achieve its "highest" being. However, it is clear that

²⁶² Though the study includes a wide range of texts, ones noted often are Plato's *Apology* and *Alcibiades I* as early points of departure, followed by other thinkers of the Socratic tradition. Works by Epicurus and his followers, Seneca, the Stoics, and Gregory of Nyssa are among the texts he mentions frequently.

this subject is not creating itself in isolation; a certain kind of subjectivity is emerging in the context of a certain kind of intersubjectivity. Thus, while much is made of the focus on self-cultivation and self-transformation, these are significant emphases insofar as they attune and prepare individuals for life most broadly considered: relating to oneself, living in their communities, able to mind their affairs effectively, and so forth. Indeed, much is made of the relation one has to oneself insofar as that relation informs and impacts the relations one has with others, often emphasizing others in one's care.

In "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," an interview conducted in January of 1984, Foucault articulates the idea of care for the self (*epimeleia heautou*) as an ethical precept, saying, "in antiquity, ethics as the conscious practice of freedom has revolved around this fundamental imperative: 'Take care of yourself.'"²⁶³ He continues to explain this ethical precept (in this interview and elsewhere) as operating in conjunction with the more often-cited ethical mandate of Greek antiquity: "know thyself." However, while today, Foucault notes, we tend to construe "know thyself" as the fundamental demand for self-knowledge such that one can know her limits, avoiding impiety and hubris, Foucault claims that "know thyself" originally functioned as a correlate to caring for the self. It does not appear as a very emotionally-inflected care or concern, but as a mode of relating to oneself, such that one can understand oneself and understand how to best conduct oneself in his or her affairs; in a way, care leads to knowledge of self, but knowing oneself is not the primary injunction.

It is important to note that this care for the self is not specifically concerned with a singular type of attitude or an approach of tenderness toward oneself; it is not the same

²⁶³ Foucault, "Ethics of Concern for Self," 285.

kind of self-compassion one might think of today in terms of self-care. It was, to use Foucault's terms, a problematization of relating to oneself – identifying one's relation to oneself as a theme of analysis and concern – that emphasizes *practicing* and *exercising* a care for the self. As concerned with one's *ethos*, or the mode of one's being and behavior with respect to the modes of being and behavior of one's community, Foucault explains that “extensive work by the self on the self is required for this practice of freedom to take shape in an *ethos* that is good, beautiful, honorable, estimable, memorable, and exemplary.”²⁶⁴ Thus, concern with oneself, as concern with one's ethical bearing, including the character of her interactions with her community as a critical component of understanding one's life, requires extensive work: practices, disciplines, and processes of transforming oneself in order to continually craft this ideal *ethos*. Again, while the focus often centers around the relation one builds to oneself in this regard, this relation is informed by and reflected in the relations one has with others. As such, care for the self is a foundational practice of caring for and relating to others.

Foucault claims that for the Greeks, care for others should not be put before care for oneself, insofar as the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior to relationships with others.²⁶⁵ However, while this claim may be problematic, insofar as both ontologically and ethically the relationships we have with others may arguably have either an equal or more significant status than the relationship one has to oneself, the premise regarding care for oneself does not remove the question of relationships with others or see these relationships as insignificant. Moreover, insofar as the concept of an

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 286.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 287.

antecedent self, existing prior to its relations, came to be a part of how the self was conceptualized later, we can see roots of the ontology of the “autonomous” self in this claim. And if the relation to oneself exists prior to relations with others, then it follows that maintaining a level of care for this relationship ought to come first, and Foucault explains that caring for the self was seen as an ethical practice in itself. However, this care also “implies complex relationships with others insofar as this *ethos* of freedom is also a way of caring for others.”²⁶⁶ Claiming that this care for others extends through one’s household but also into the community and one’s friendships, Foucault highlights the fact that care for the self requires the assistance and support of relationships, especially with those one learns from, saying, “Thus, the problem of relationships with others is present throughout the development of the care of the self.”²⁶⁷ Foucault clarifies further that an entire community of individuals who care for themselves and others, but see their relation to themselves as a necessary foundation for taking care of life’s affairs, might be envisioned as a well-functioning, well-interconnected, flourishing *polis*.²⁶⁸

It is also somewhat unsurprising that the question of freedom and thus, also the question of care for the self, was not a universal question for the ancient Greeks and Romans. Foucault is candid about the fact that free individuals in this period were elite men with the means and access to such practices (i.e., they had time, money, status), and were concerned with their lives – their bodies and souls – as well as their public *ethos* and social standing. Thus, it is clear that freedom in this context implied, in addition to

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

ontological freedom, the conditions of not being a slave and not being a woman, and this may be a part of why such freedom was examined and made an object of concern: such freedom was not simply given to everyone, it was not a condition of all lives. As such, for those with access to it, it was problematized in that it was made an object of concern and a positive theme of one's life, so that it might be practiced at its fullest, or most ethically rich extent. Such an extent, in this period, however, still did not imply the inclusion of marginalized others into the sphere of freedom's possibilities. While this is an important issue to acknowledge with respect to the care for the self and *askeses* that were a part of this care under Greco-Roman antiquity, I wish to note that Foucault straightforwardly recognizes these facts in his analyses, acknowledging the limitations of who such freedom applied to and how this influenced its conceptualization; however, he proceeds to focus his course with respect to how such care and such practices were part of creating a certain kind of ethical subjectivity.²⁶⁹ Thus, with respect to my own project, I wish to acknowledge these serious drawbacks of using these ideas, and I am not certainly advocating that we take them up in order to recreate or mimic the same kind of ethical selfhood; this would be a rather absurd and impossible suggestion. Rather, I take up Foucault's analysis of these ideas in order to think about the theme of self-transformation, which he gleans from these texts and elaborates on in his perspective, especially emphasizing its embodied character. As such, I want to explore ways it might enhance a sense of embodied agency, and in order to show this, it is necessary to outline the ways in which Foucault arrives at this theme.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 286-7.

As such, in terms of the current discussion, the biggest upshot of the premise of caring for the self is what it entails: the work involved in executing this kind of care, the pursuits one undertakes in order to cultivate oneself. These pursuits range widely, including some extreme public measures, but many – and arguably, more – of these practices are everyday undertakings such as meditation, reflection, writing, fasting, etc., and sometimes the careful documentation of such dealings. However, the significant thing here is that work is involved in changing oneself, in transforming one’s state so that one might ready oneself for a higher goal; for perfection of the soul, attaining to a spiritual truth, training for the hardships of life, preparing oneself for public life, and so forth. Such practices are referred to in these texts as *askeses* (*askesis* as the singular, and in which we see the root of the word “ascetic”), which one practices with particular aims of self-transformation in mind. In “Technologies of the Self,” when referring to traditions inaugurated by Stoicism, Foucault explains, “*askesis* means not renunciation but the progressive consideration of self, or mastery over oneself, obtained not through the renunciation of reality but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth. It has as its final aim not preparation for another reality but access to the reality of this world.”²⁷¹ Thus, unlike a self-denying (often religiously motivated) asceticism that despises the body and the material world it inhabits, the asceticism that Foucault emphasizes from these texts focuses on practices of self-cultivation, on techniques of examining one’s state

²⁷⁰ The limitations on who was able to practice *askeses* of self-transformation in antiquity raises questions for how this idea might be applied in a postmodern context, particularly for those whose world is not characterized by Western culture. I recognize this as a potential limitation in the use of these ideas, and because I am wary about making cross-cultural comparisons with limited data to back them up, I leave the tackling of these questions to further research.

²⁷¹ Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Ethics*, 238-9.

of body and soul and aiming for transformation via developments in these states. He writes, of techniques of the self more broadly construed, another manner of describing meaningful, contextualized *askeses* in this network of ideas, that they “permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”²⁷² Thus, while the goals of these practices vary, the common theme among the ways these *askeses* appear is the fact that they stress the importance of deliberate attention to “bodies and souls” in their connection to “thoughts and conduct, and way of being,” while aiming for transformations of those ways of being. He describes further, in “The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” that ascetic practice in this approach, is “not ... a morality of renunciation but ... an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being.”²⁷³

Furthermore, while these *askeses* are generally targeted towards transforming one’s being or one’s soul, it is evident that concerns of the body play an important role in these practices. Not only are sexual practices a significant part of this care – and for

²⁷² Ibid., 225. He gives a similar account of “technologies of the self” in the essay “Sexuality and Solitude.” While discussing Habermas’ analysis of techniques of controlling individuals’ conduct (discussing techniques of production, signification or communication, and domination), he adds: “But I became more and more aware that in all societies there is another type of technique: techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this is a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power. Let us call these techniques ‘technologies of the self’” (“Sexuality and Solitude,” in *Ethics*, 177).

²⁷³ Foucault, “Ethics of Concern for Self,” 282.

Foucault, an important touchstone of historical continuity/discontinuity, making it significant genealogically – but the daily routines, activities, diet, and fluctuation of energies are also attended to and recorded in many of these exercises.²⁷⁴ While Foucault explains that some of them convey an “ambiguity” with respect to the body and its role in processes of self-cultivation, he also claims that in the records of these practices and techniques, “all the concerns of the body take on a considerable importance.”²⁷⁵ Thus, while we see the body emerge as a site of ascetic practice and self-care in these ancient texts, we see this concern emphasized further in Foucault’s own reading of these themes (which will be taken up in more detail in the following section).

Finally, these practices of the self, *askeses* aiming for self-transformation, being a significant part of ethical life and an important activity in attaining to the truth, are especially relevant when it comes to spiritual, intellectual, and often, educational matters. In Foucault’s tracing of this concept, he claims that it arises in earlier texts in connection with pedagogy (in Plato’s *Alcibiades* in particular) in that care of the self sometimes emerges out of need to due “the deficiencies of education;”²⁷⁶ care of the self is needed to correct the bad habits and false opinions learned from others (including “bad teachers”) and to “unlearn” such habits is an important task of self-cultivation.²⁷⁷ Foucault explains, however, that this connection between care of the self and pedagogy wanes over time,

²⁷⁴ Foucault notes in particular the writings and letters of Marcus Aurelius on this score: Foucault explains that many of his letters take account of minute experiences, feelings, and issues of the body throughout the day, including emotions and states of being brought up with them.

²⁷⁵ Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 234.

²⁷⁶ Foucault, “The Hermeneutic of the Subject,” in *Ethics*, 96.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

and that the later texts of his research display an ethical concern with oneself that stretches through one's entire lifetime, rather than one stressed more heavily in youth. In these texts, instead of emphasizing this care as simply a part of maturing, the care for oneself, practiced through *askesis*, becomes a constant preoccupation that one is never too young or too old to leave need of. In a description sounding nearly parallel with Dewey on education, Foucault describes the view that "Attending to oneself is therefore not just a momentary preparation for living; it is a form of living. ... it becomes a matter of attending to oneself, for oneself: one should be, for oneself and throughout one's existence, one's own object."²⁷⁸ Thus, as we hear echoes of Dewey in the background, claiming that education is not the preparation for a rich and fulfilling life, but is such a life, we can begin to outline resonances between the care for self and the aim of transformation with the projects and processes of Deweyan growth.

Moreover, another connection we might find here is through an idea that has already been evoked: the sense in which freedom is a practice, and that there are certain practices of freedom that take freedom itself up as an issue, with the aim of fostering and enhancing its own existence and its own expression. This is a concern that Foucault articulates in this work on antiquity, but it comes to be a part of his thinking about ethics and freedom more generally speaking. Though I concede that it was not a condition available to all persons in the history he examines, and in different ways, it is clearly still not available to all equally today. If we still wish to cast ourselves as free individuals, and especially, if we want our students to experience themselves as free individuals, how might we think about conducting this practice, in contemporary terms?

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 96.

Foucault responds to this set of concerns in an interview, asking, “what is ethics, if not the practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom?” He explains further, “Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection.”²⁷⁹ As such, ethics requires freedom, but freedom then takes shape as ethics when it is practiced in a conscientious, reflective, and one might add, agential way. And one of the important ways this ethics takes shape, for Foucault, is through the active transformation of self, the taking up of one’s freedom so that the experiences and expressions of one’s life might always be welcoming change, and so that the conditions and possibilities of one’s life, and the life of her community, might find moments of opening, of shifting towards new horizons. In this way, though the conditions of freedom are still not equally available to all today, processes and aims of education – as growth, as agency – might be thought of as a part of working toward more opportunities for students, especially those marginalized by current networks of power and knowledge. Incorporating insights gleaned from Foucault’s work on care for the self and projects of self-transformation might be factors in accomplishing these results.

At this point, it might be helpful to pause and take stock of what we have gained from this perspective. First, we can glean an account of agency from Foucault’s later work, one that is focused on seeing oneself as a project in the making, as a conduit of possible transformations. In articulating a sense of agency in this way, I am departing from Foucault in a way, but not, I believe, in a way that departs from the spirit of what his work develops. In seeing ourselves, on one hand, as individuals subject to a host of

²⁷⁹ Foucault, “Ethics of Concern for Self,” 284.

social-cultural norms, we also have the potential of seeing ourselves as flexible nodes of those norms; places where those norms might be assessed, challenged, transformed. And such transformations can take place because we can transform ourselves, transform the body-subjects that inhabit this particular socio-historical position. I interpret this element of Foucault's thought to lead us toward a sense of agency that resides in our potential – as embodied subjects – to develop our own responses to our cultural milieu. Leading into the next point, these responses take place, one might expect, through embodied practices.

Part of what we gain from Foucault's focus on *akseses* and self-transformation is the continued emphasis that transformation of self occurs through the concrete, lived practices we engage in. What we might stress further from such practices, particularly those considered practices of freedom, is the way in which they enact and enrich our freedom by letting us *feel* free when we engage in them, allowing us to experience freedom as a condition that is particularly "alive" in such moments. Without the cultivation of such a feeling of freedom or the felt sense of agency as a part of such practices, they are not likely to be very powerful or effective in having a transformative effect on our lives. Rather, with a reminder from Johnson that all experience has a felt quality, what we can underscore from Foucault's account is the way in which cultivating a relationship with oneself contains a felt quality as well. One might experience frustration, anger, or inadequacy as felt elements of self-work, or they might experience joy, expansion, exhilaration, or openness as felt experiences of self-transformation. As such, we might say that practices of freedom or projects of self-transformation may do

their “best work” when what they address is precisely this felt quality of self, and what they enrich is the feeling of agency in the conduct of one’s life.²⁸⁰

In this light, we might see practices of freedom as manners of taking up human freedom as a condition and enhancing it through engagement in certain kinds of activity. Such practices can take the shape of deliberately chosen undertakings, projects we design ourselves and take on as endeavors of enacting, and in many cases, increasing, the felt sense of freedom and possibility in our lives. As such, I find it helpful to think about such practices as expressions of agency, and as we have seen through each of the primary thinkers of this project, such agency is a felt, experiential part of embodied life. While such practices may be taken up in the context of a group or collective, they can be taken up as solo projects as well. Moreover, while they may not always be consciously thematized as such in everyday experience, these practices can also be thought of as projects of self-transformation – they are *akeses* in that they are projects that aim, in some way, at changing a habit, incorporating a new practice, or following up a certain desire. At one point, Foucault claims that the “problem” he has been chasing throughout his intellectual life is his own transformation, noting that transforming oneself through one’s pursuits of knowledge is something like an aesthetic experience, asking, “Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?”²⁸¹ In this way, we see that

²⁸⁰ I should note that a huge variety of activities might inspire such feelings, some of which may not have positive effects. Foucault himself documents experiments with drugs and extreme sexual behavior that may or may not be on the palate for all individuals. However, while I intend to neither condemn nor condone such experiments, what they demonstrate is the effort toward expanding the range of one’s possible bodily experiences and potential pleasures. Indeed, I do not read Foucault’s discussions about these experiences to imply any kind of prescription for others.

²⁸¹ Foucault, “Michel Foucault: An Interview by Stephen Riggins,” in *Ethics*, 130-31.

much of his intellectual motivation comes from pursuing such transformation, finding new ways of discovering how knowledge and engagement shape us, and how manners of relating to ourselves and our communities shift through such pursuits, through taking up new practices and disciplines. Thus, thinking about Foucault's perspective on transformation in this light, we can think about practices of freedom and projects of self-transformation as continual modes of educating the self; and with each mode encountered, new potentials for transformation open up in increasing measure.

A few good examples of such projects appear in Ladelle McWhorter's book, *Bodies and Pleasures*. McWhorter describes several such practices that she took up upon moving to a new city and starting a new job. She reports her first forays into gardening, country line dancing, and political activism, as each represents a new *askesis* in her life and each demonstrates different possibilities of expanding self-knowledge and embracing transformation. With respect to gardening, McWhorter describes the washed-out, overly firm tomatoes she consistently found in her local grocery stores, thus inspiring her desire for fresh, ripe, good tomatoes. Thus, cultivating this desire, she began planting seedlings in her yard, watching and waiting, patiently learning about what the plants "like" and "don't like," and over time, she learned a great deal about attending to the environment around her as well as about her own health. An entirely new body of information opened up for her, as she knelt into the dirt every day, tilled up the soil with her hands, and began discussing her endeavors with others. She describes the feeling of this transformation: "I could feel myself coalescing, becoming a part of a network of endeavor, spreading out, putting down roots. A world was opening toward me, and I was starting to belong."²⁸²

²⁸² McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures*, 164.

Her work – her bodily engagement with this project – thus lead to transformations not only in herself, but in her relation to her environment and community more broadly.

With respect to country line dancing, McWhorter was again urged on by a desire: meeting women after moving to a new city. She began attending weekly dance classes at a local gay bar, then attending the bar’s country night regularly, slowly becoming more acclimated to the scene and more comfortable in her own body within it. McWhorter describes the growing ease and joy she felt as she continued this project of dancing, discovering, again, a new bodily pleasure and a new type of satisfaction in engagement. This example also shows the way that this *askesis*, the taking up of a new bodily discipline, led her to participation in a new community as well as fostering the buoyant feeling of possibility in this aspect of her life. Though she describes herself at the start of the practice as somewhat clumsy, she captures with revelry the evening when her persistence and practice paid off: “The dance just flowed through me. I had it. I knew it. And it wasn’t a matter of knowing how the dance was supposed to look. I could feel the dance from the inside. What I knew was what it felt like to *be* that dance. It was absolutely exhilarating.”²⁸³ Again, we see her transformation as a particularly *felt*, thoroughly embodied experience, full of pleasure and possibility.

With respect to political activism, McWhorter describes her participation with a local group committed to challenging laws in her state that discriminate against gays and lesbians. She describes this experience with pointed, visceral detail: the physical anxiety of meeting with legislators, the strength with which she and her group had to literally *take a stand* against inequality, and the significance it held that these politicians were forced

²⁸³ Ibid., 171.

to *see* them, face to face, *body to body*, in acts of political recognition. While McWhorter describes this process as a kind of collective *askesis*, she marks the intense, bodily feeling of transformation as she and her co-activists pursue political change, developing a greater sense of agency in herself as a civic subject as well as fighting for transformation for her community. She describes,

The act, the exercise, the practice of behaving as if I, a queer person, am a full and equal citizen of this state and this country is the only way I will ever *feel* that I am a full and equal citizen of this state and this country. ... I had to stand in close proximity to a straight person in a position of authority and state my case before I began to believe it, to truly live it, myself. It's not a piece of abstraction. It's a bodily thing.²⁸⁴

Again, she details not only the bodily participation, but the way in which such bodily participation transformed her felt experience of her own rights.

I spend this time with McWhorter's projects of self-transformation because I think they show several important things about such undertakings: first, that each of the practices she takes up are markedly *bodily* activities. Digging in the dirt and tending plants, dancing in a bar, and gathering with others and meeting with politicians all show examples of projects with particular ends other than bodily transformation, but which *require* bodily engagement in their enaction, and thus can entail significant transformations in bodily agency as a result. Second, each of these projects involves a kind of continued education for McWhorter, especially insofar as education, on Dewey's terms, is the kind of engaged and flourishing life of continual growth. Gardening, dancing, and activism all provide sets of skills and sets of knowledge that allow her to expand her own experience of possibility, with respect to these endeavors and their results, but also, if it might be the case that one experience of "success" or flourishing

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 220, my emphasis.

encourages her to take on others, then her sense of possibility may have been enlarged beyond her engagement in these projects alone. Third, these practices are examples of *askeses* taken up both individually (gardening) and socially (dancing and activism), thus showing the breadth of what such projects might entail. In each case, moreover, the projects are historically-culturally situated: growing one's own tomatoes is a response to the imported, mass-produced agriculture that dominates the American food industry today; dancing is taken up with the intention of finding a community and, perhaps, romantic partners, and a bar with a local community is a predictable place for this to happen; activism is a collective response to the social-political climate that discriminates against gays and lesbians, and its forum is in a community-based group acting in concert to confront political actors. Thus, the care with which she describes these practices, taking up Foucault's rallying cry from *History of Sexuality, vol. I* of "bodies and pleasures" as the points of resistance and expansion of new political subjectivities, demonstrates how bodily *askeses* truly can prove transformative, both for one's life and potentially for one's community. Furthermore, in describing these practices, McWhorter attends to the depth of feeling in each of these experiences, emphasizing the transformative potentials opened up through these practices and the feelings of possibility and power they impart. She adds, "Caring for myself has led me almost always to risk myself, to explore, to attempt, to suffer, to expand, to grow."²⁸⁵ McWhorter's examples thus offer evidence of ways in which Foucault's work can lead to a sense of agency, but that they often lead to a particularly robust sense of embodied agency, cashed out in its felt experiences.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 224.

Practices of Freedom, Self-Transformation, and Embodied Agency

At this point, it will be helpful to tie together the main ideas from the foregoing discussions. If discipline is a part of the construction of embodied selves, and care for the self and *askesis* take us to practices of freedom and self-transformation, where do these ideas take us? In short, I find the most significant upshot of incorporating this work on Foucault to be thinking about transformation as a corollary to Deweyan growth. This is because Foucault's emphasis on transformation, in my view, is about enacting agency in one's life, as an orientation for taking up projects and articulating goals, and it acknowledges the disciplinary character of executing such projects. That is to say, it recognizes that projects and aims of transformation take place within particular contexts – and all the social conditioning and historical influence these contexts may involve – and it highlights the use of disciplinary measures that one engages deliberately in order to achieve those goals. It acknowledges the character of working, of engaging bodily with one's tasks, in enacting changes in one's life and in the life of one's community. Moreover, Foucault's characterization of transformation is about engaging one's life such that possibilities are always expanding, such that transformations continually allow the enrichment of experiencing novelty and meaning in human life. This runs parallel to Dewey's idea of growth, insofar as growth is geared towards more growth, towards the expansion of possibility and the increasing potential of intelligence and freedom to direct one's actions and pursuits. What transformation adds to this picture is a way to see such growth as the deliberate taking up of practices that can enhance one's agency, actualizing and enriching one's freedom. Such actualizations and enrichments, Foucault is always keen to stress, occur through the bodily practices people engage in. But to flesh this out

more, I will address ways in which I see Foucault's work on discipline as helpful here, then turn to his work on *askesis* and self-transformation, articulating what I believe they add to Dewey's concept of growth.

First, Foucault's earlier work on discipline contributes a concrete sense in which subjectivity is an embodied and situated phenomenon, and shows that body subjects are largely products of their treatment by social and cultural life and the responses subjects have to such treatment. Discipline is one of the primary ways that we engage in and participate with these cultural meanings and treatments, despite the fact that many disciplinary practices work "below the radar," so to speak. However, discipline, like habit, is a significant way in which we, as body-subjects, relate to the environing forces around us, and thus, is a significant way in which we relate to ourselves. Emphasizing that this factor is a large part of our relation to self is one of the significant aspects that Foucault's work highlights; it stresses not only that, like habit, such forces are large parts of our activity and direction of energy, but in addition, that such practices are very important for how we come to understand ourselves, insofar as we do so in the context of other institutions and powers making sense of our conduct. Thus, when it comes to the concept of growth and the embodied reality of agency, I think that discipline is helpful insofar as it shows both the confining and constricting forces that act in our various domains of life, but also, in seeing the contingency of such forces, we might begin to develop new relationships with such disciplinary practices, and as such, develop disciplinary practices that better suit our purposes. This is not to say that we can ever completely extricate ourselves from disciplinary powers, or from networks of power-knowledge in general. Insofar as these exist and have efficacy, we may not be able to

change them and often may not be aware of them. But insofar as we can identify them and situate ourselves with respect to them, we might be able to change our relationships to them and our relationships to ourselves vis a vis those networks. In this way, we can think about discipline as a potential mechanism for cultivating habits that promote freedom rather than oppression, and thus in turn can cultivate the feeling of agency within their practice. McWhorter's political activism is a good example of this: she was part of a movement that had to engage the disciplinary practices of the reigning policy structure in order to shift the very policies that structure implements. Though this activism does not change the policies or the practices that surround them immediately, the confrontation with political forces as they operate is a first step in engaging social change. Moreover, the fact that such changes are possible – and any landmark legislation regarding civil rights, women's rights, and LGBT rights are evidence of how activist work can lead to change in social policy – shows how disciplinary practice can help us to enact such shifts in our lives, our subjectivities, and our communities. This occurs in part due to individuals and groups acknowledging the social realities of their lives and developing *askeses* of transforming them, both enacting and enriching agential possibilities therein.

With respect to Foucault's later work, we might think of carrying the positive, empowering elements of disciplinary practice into a reading of *askesis*, insofar as such practices are also disciplinary ones, of working on the self to achieve particular goals. However, insofar as *askesis* also has ties to care of the self and practices of freedom, we can use these ideas to show how such practices might have more leverage when it comes to positive, deliberate self-transformations. Because these ideas refer to practices by

which one can come to know oneself better, care for oneself better, or change one's being in some way, they represent some of the positive elements of discipline. If we can take up deliberately chosen practices, in order to both express and enrich our freedom, it seems that these can be aligned with aims towards growth as the enrichment of a felt sense of agency. What these ideas, in total, contribute, is a way of thinking about growth that always takes into account the social conditions in which people act and make meaning, as well as the ways in which responding to such conditions can be exercises of agency. This is because taking them up as projects means, first, that we are agents in the midst of complex networks of power-knowledge, and second, that being agents in these networks means that we are bodily agents with the potential of transforming ourselves and our surroundings through the practices we take up. Moreover, the practices we take up and the ways they can transform our embodied selves are distinctly felt, thoroughly embodied elements of agency; transformations of self are not solely cognitive experiences, but are experienced as shifts in the embodied possibilities and felt capacities of our existences. They are not only practiced and actualized through embodied endeavors, but their results can be immensely influential with respect to the *feeling* we have of ourselves as embodied agents. Recalling McWhorter's words, learning to dance was not just knowing what to do in order to dance, it was feeling how to *be* the dance.

In taking up such practices of transformation, acknowledging that the aims of such practices might be sketchy or ambiguous at the outset, McWhorter writes,

The 'goal' is the expansion of behavioral options. That means that the 'goal' we aim at is simply that of being able to continue to change, to engage in new behaviors, to try new things, to let new things happen without our sovereign determination laid down in advance. The 'goal' of such practices is just the

continuation and proliferation of such practices. The ‘goal’ is freedom, and freedom only exists in and as events, practices, or exercises.²⁸⁶

As such, the goal of transformation is the continuation of possibilities of transformation, the expansion of freedom’s potential, and we see an important link here with Dewey and his idea that the goal of growth is more growth. I liken Foucault’s ideas to this concept, but I also think they add something valuable to it: not only the sense in which such growth always takes place in the midst of a complex social history, but also the sense in which such growth can be understood as the concrete development of agency in one’s life, the actual and felt sense of increased possibilities, the increased potential of actualizing possibilities. Such agency develops, as McWhorter stresses, through events, practices, and exercises, which is also to say that such agency occurs through the body, what it does, and what it aims toward.

With this in mind, we might return to some of the bodily practices of schools which I mentioned in the introduction. When it comes to the regular practice of sitting at a desk, raising one’s hand, and walking through hallways as signaled by bells, we can see that the typical range of movement comprising the majority of a school day (or at least, most in-class time and work) is rather limited. This range of movement does not offer many novel possibilities for exploring one’s bodily potential or expanding one’s embodied sense of agency, and it may indeed instill feelings of one’s body and movement being restricted, hemmed in, or stifled. Indeed, this is a part of the way our modern subjectivities operate via discipline – we learn that such feelings are part of the “greater good,” part of the process of learning, part of being in a monitored social space, and so on. The counterweight to this mode of bodily being is often the (also restricted)

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 182.

periods of time students have dedicated to physical activity: physical education classes, recess, and the in-class activities that might engage the body in some way. What expanding on this range of bodily movements and options might entail, I argue, are more opportunities for students to experience themselves as embodied agents. Moreover, in a Foucauldian line, these might bring opportunities in which students experience themselves more directly as embodied agents worth caring for, equipped with some mechanisms by which they can enact this care, and potentially expand their senses of freedom by exploring different practices of self-transformation.

For example, including practices such as yoga, meditation, dance, or martial arts into the options students have as part of their school day (as part of a physical education course, integrated into some class lessons, or perhaps as independent programs) might give students an opportunity to engage their bodies in a brand of meaningful, purposive activity that goes beyond performing work at a desk, also allowing them to engage their bodies in ways not (as heavily) prescribed by building structure or the temporality of their typical school day. Not only do many of these practices focus on bodily strength and certain patterns of movement, but they also involve an engagement of the body that can teach students about themselves as embodied actors.

I will take yoga as a specific example, as this is a practice being implemented in some schools (and it is one I have more personal experience with). Because yoga tends to focus on an integration of bodily movement and posture with a deep, mindful focus, students might develop ways of attending more carefully to their own patterns of concentration, ways of monitoring their own feelings and associated bodily reactions, and ways of finding calm in stressful situations. They might discover a certain avenue

through which to feel empowered, in finding their strength, flexibility, and focus increase as they practice more frequently. They might discover ways of challenging themselves, finding out where their personal boundaries lie and seeing how they might explore and experiment with them. In short, they may find new ways of relating to and caring for themselves, which can further impact ways of engaging with others and approaching tasks to be accomplished.

This list of some potential benefits of this practice goes to demonstrate that such qualities – attending to, empowering, and challenging oneself – are things many educators would like to see their students exercise. They are manifestations of growth, insofar as students’ abilities to encounter the world, others, and themselves are enriched with new and/or deeper connections. Providing a means through which students can pursue these kinds of growth – and yoga, dance, etc. are just a few among many rich possibilities – can offer students resources in how they might continue such transformations on their own terms. Recalling McWhorter’s description that efforts of caring for herself have nearly always lead her “to risk..., to explore, to attempt, to suffer, to expand, to grow,” it seems we might implement more avenues through which students have access to such practices of caring for themselves, giving them more opportunities to know themselves, to discover their possibilities, and to transform. I believe there are rich resources for doing so in bodily practices, particularly insofar as such practices might highlight how agency works in and through one’s embodied life.

CHAPTER VI
GROWTH, AGENCY, AND THE BODY:
A “THREE DIMENSIONAL” PERSPECTIVE

At this point, we have covered a lot of ground, so it will be helpful to look back over the course of this project to see how we might synthesize these discussions. The project began with an account of John Dewey’s educational philosophy, focusing particularly on his ideal of growth, acknowledging that this concept is a significant one for his approach to education and to a philosophical life, generally speaking. However, in articulating this concept, I stipulated that my interpretation casts it as an ideal of agency, insofar as it signifies an increase in intelligence, reflective capacities, understanding of one’s self and the potentials of one’s actions, and thus, signals an enrichment in one’s sense of being able to act deliberately and in accordance with the goals of increasing one’s freedom and possibilities. This articulation of growth then took us to an exploration of the body’s role in experiencing and cultivating this agency, as I argue that the experience of such agency is not a purely rational or intellectual one, but is a felt quality that is a vital part of one’s entire embodied experience. Thus, we first looked at this character of embodied experience within Dewey’s work itself, then through the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault. So where have we gotten with all this?

Before outlining the contents of this final chapter, I wish to provide a brief, informal summary to answer these questions. I take up embodied agency in this project because if we want to think about Deweyan growth, a central concept for his educational

philosophy, I think it is necessary to ask what this term means both conceptually as well as what it means in practice. As I interpret this ideal to be a concept about practical intelligence and agency, about an intelligence that has teeth and accomplishes things in the world – as I believe Dewey would say also – this sense of intelligence can be most beneficially thought of according to the way humans exist and operate, and we exist and operate as bodies in the world. Because we are bodies in the world and there are many ways of understanding what we are, the perspectives represented here are just a small slice of some of the most prominent ones available to Western academic philosophy. However, I believe each has something critical to offer a perspective of embodied agency as a way of interpreting Deweyan growth. Insofar as growth aims toward more growth, or education aims toward the increase in possibilities for more, more interconnected, and more richly meaningful encounters with experience, I believe attending to the body's role in achieving this growth is significant, insofar as it is always present within these encounters and sometimes is the explicit focus of such growth-oriented experiences. The possibility of expanding one's experience – the result of growth towards more growth – is one of the most valuable things I find in the practice of philosophy and the practice of education; enriching the possibility of seeing things anew, of experiencing the novel, of basking in a moment of wonder, or even catching it as a glimpse, as in Saito's focus of a gleam of light. To the extent that these experiences are possible, they are so within the body that I inhabit and which inhabits me, the body that makes my life possible, the body that holds all possibilities for my existence. My hope is to continue enriching such possibilities for the course of my life, and as many educators would note, one of the most

powerful ways to do this is to help others along such a path also: to help them grow, to help them discover possibility, to help them realize their agency.

I offer this answer to provide something of an explanation for what has driven much of the work in this project, and to offer a less technical answer to the questions of what we might hope to gain from a multi-perspective account of Deweyan growth as embodied agency. But at this point, a more technical answer is needed.

In this final chapter, I will return briefly to Dewey's account of growth and his characterization of the body, to bring our attention back to these ideas. In doing this, I will also raise the issue of why other perspectives are needed to flesh out the picture of embodied agency I am hoping to offer. From here, I will briefly work through the most significant additions that Merleau-Ponty and Foucault add to this perspective: specifically, a phenomenological account of how the body's agency is felt through its expressive potentials and its capacity of transcendence, and a social-political account of how disciplines, as well as the potential forms of transformation they can give rise to, are significant pieces of understanding how agency is concretely felt and experienced through bodily being. Last, by synthesizing these perspectives on embodiment, I hope to show how a multidimensional conception of the body is helpful for fleshing out a conception of embodied agency, linking this back to growth as a significant educational goal.

Deweyan Growth as an Educational Aim

To recall the main ideas covered in the first few chapters, I will begin with a few reminders from chapter two. We began this chapter with Dewey's definition of education

as a reconstruction of experience, taking up his definition of experience as a blend of activity-passivity, of doing-undergoing. From there, we looked at Dewey's description of growth as a primary aim of education, emphasizing education as occurring in the increase in and deepening of connections between experiences such that more meaning from them might be discerned, more meaningful interactions with future experience might be directed. The active-passive character of experience is significant for Dewey's concept of growth, in that understanding the connections between activity and how the consequences of activity are linked to it are important for the perception of connections, or markers of the achievement of growth. After a brief inventory of some critiques of growth, I discussed the element of self-knowledge in education stressed by Cherylyn Keall and the element of agency in education stressed by Daniel Pekarsky. Elaborating on these readings of Dewey, I argued similarly that growth might be understood as an idea regarding agency, emphasizing the way in which growth characterizes an element within educational experience that allows students to glean a greater understanding of themselves with respect to the situations in which they act, as well as an element which allows them a greater sense of intelligent, deliberate, and efficacious action within their worlds. I also maintained that such agency is not just a cognitive or rational faculty, but represents an experiential, felt, and thoroughly embodied quality of one's potential within experience.

From this point, chapter three took up more of Dewey's ideas on experience, on habit and the human self, on embodiment, and on elements of experience that might be understood as growth or as agency. We found that Dewey's conceptions of human experience and the human being fall along naturalistic lines, viewing the human being as

an organism in an environment whose construction and character emerge out of habits, from the repeated ways we transact with others and with our environments, through the relationships of mutual influence we build with our surroundings and which sustain our existence. I also outlined Dewey's conception of the body-mind, an organic take on human life that views the self as emerging out of the habits an individual and a culture practice, paired with the qualities of experience that result from those habits and the ways these habits and qualities structure an individual's future encounters. In looking at Dewey's conceptions of habit and experience, we also looked at his conception of the reconstruction of experience, seeing how habits and the connections between them might be transformed to alter the character of experience or our manners of responding to experience. In outlining some characteristics of experience that might relate to a sense of Deweyan agency, we looked at his conceptions of will, intelligence, freedom, and the cumulative quality of having *an* experience. This chapter concluded with a discussion of different facets of embodied life and different philosophical approaches to embodiment: ways of experiencing and conceiving of the body as mine and as not-mine, which pose alternatives to Dewey's naturalistic conception of the body-mind as an organic being.

Thus, these chapters outline the foundations of the educational vantage point which I am exploring in this project as well as much of the grounding material for what, in Dewey's educational work, constitutes a sense of growth. I am compelled by Dewey's assertion that growth is a touchstone of educational goals: that in the variety of subject matter and the range of possibilities offered by its methods, what education aims toward is the kind of reconstruction and expansion of experience that leads toward more reconstruction and expansion, offering the tools and proclivities to reach into experience

and discover what it has to reveal; and as Dewey claims, one of the most important habits imparted by education is the inclination and desire to continue such reaching and exploring. This sense of possibility, of the endless potentials of learning more, of discovering more about oneself and one's world, is one of the highest rewards that education can offer. Indeed, Dewey closes *Democracy and Education* with the line, "Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest."²⁸⁷ As such, it stands to reason that one is best able to learn from all the contacts of life when one is able to *make meaningful contact* with the encounters of life, approaching such contacts with a sense of "what one is about," and with a sense of purpose balanced with openness and generosity. It seems to me that, recalling Keall's insights about self-knowledge and Pekarsky's insights about agency, one might best encounter the various contacts of life when she has a sense of her place within her world, and thus, this entails having an embodied sense of trust in her self and her situation. As such, I relate educational growth to embodied agency by linking the sense of expanding capacities and skills that genuine learning provides with the sense of expanding possibilities that genuine learning enables, stressing that such capacities and possibilities are both intellectual habits and skills as well as embodied, experiential qualities of existence.

However, while Dewey's work gives us many rich resources for outlining what such an education calls for, I believe his work is somewhat wanting when it comes to articulating what such experiences can feel like "in the flesh," as well as what conditions those very feelings and qualities of experience. As such, I turn to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as well as Michel Foucault in fleshing out a picture of the experienced

²⁸⁷ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 370.

and conditioned body, such that we might develop a thicker conception of embodied agency.

Merleau-Ponty: Transcendence and the Body's Expressive Agency

In articulating the feeling of the body as mine, I argued that a supplemental view might be a benefit to this project, in presenting a perspective that expresses a sense of what experience is like as a human body, how human life and agency are available to us because of our particular, embodied existences. As such, chapter four takes up the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who examines and describes various qualities of human perception, human meaning-making, and human expression in their thoroughly fleshy, material characters. In this chapter, I emphasized Merleau-Ponty's discussions of embodied habit as a manner of increasing our potentials of meaning and activity in the world, as well as his claims that the body itself is an expressive capacity. More importantly however, I stressed that his account of transcendence is significant for articulating a sense of embodied agency, insofar as the felt qualities of agency's potential require a sense of moving beyond one's own embodied subjectivity, of moving forward in time and outward into the world. I believe that while Dewey's accounts of intelligence, will, freedom, and having *an* experience all capture something significant about this facet of agency, Merleau-Ponty's account presents a richer sense of the felt experience of (paradoxically) having one's potentials rooted in one's embodied life, while such rootedness is also the condition necessary for our agency and potential to extend beyond – transcend – the boundaries of our limited, bodily existences. While indeed operating with a somewhat different conception of what the human self or the

human subject is than Dewey, I believe that Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body and the extensive attention his analyses give to it provide a thicker sense of what the experience of agency is like, insofar as it is experienced as real and actual to the degree in which it is felt, not the degree to which it is rationally understood.

Foucault: Social Conditions, Discipline, and Transformative Agency

Conversely, in articulating how the body is also, in a way, not-mine, I argued that another view on embodiment would further benefit this project, thus taking our attention to the work of Michel Foucault. Because Foucault's work emphasizes the ways in which the body is a social, historical structure, influenced through and through by the play of cultural forces upon and within it, I incorporated this view to articulate some of the ways in which we can experience and view the body as not-our-own, as influenced from "outside;" including the extent to which those "outside" forces structure much of our experience precisely by the ways in which pervasive cultural forces are experienced as interior, personal, and embodied qualities of existence. While Foucault, like Dewey, operates with a constructivist conception of the human self or subject, his analyses go further than Dewey's in detailing many of the historical trajectories that influence our contemporary environments. I outline Foucault's conception of discipline, specifically, to articulate a mechanism by which we internalize and embody meanings and patterns of our social culture, but also to articulate one of the primary ways we can then take up such meanings and transform them to suit our own purposes. Foucault's account of discipline, while in his earlier work stresses the character of social conditioning and the ways we modify our bodies and selves to work within cultural structures, also represents, in his

later work, some of the ways we can deliberately and responsively transform our activities, our bodies, and our selves. Such transformations can represent huge boons, both for expanding our own experiences and enacting our potentials, increasing our capacities and senses of agency, as well as for our communities, insofar as transformations can take on social, cultural, and political norms and practices, addressing themselves to these spheres and aiming towards change in the climate of our historical present. I argue that Foucault's accounts of embodied subjectivity, discipline, and self-transformation are helpful for characterizing some of the conditions of agency that pervade our embodied lives, thus enabling us to see them with more transparency and take them up with greater perspicacity, direction, pleasure, and possibility.

All Together Now

Since this project has been focusing on educational growth, and my interpretation of this concept has focused on embodied agency, what might a picture of this agency look like, taking all these perspectives into account? First, working from Dewey, we can say that agency involves intelligence, will, freedom, and it can involve the satisfaction he describes resulting from the completion of an experience. It involves the operations of the body-mind, insofar as body-minds are organic beings that develop habitual manners of living, and through those habits, Dewey claims, we develop the kind of characters or selfhoods that can recognize and thus, alter those habits. But further, I hope for this project to articulate more about the experience of embodied agency, about how the potentials and capacities for action require both the cognitive, conscious awareness of one's abilities, but also the felt, experienced qualities of potential that entail the body's

involvement. Part of what this quality includes is, as Keall argues, the knowledge and felt capacities one builds up over time, knowing how past actions influenced past results and developing a sense of “what one is about” in given situations. And I would further this: a solid sense of “what one is about” is not simply a kind of intellectual facility; it is a feeling of competence and capability, a sense of confidence that influences the way one approaches tasks, others, and the world. As such, what Merleau-Ponty’s work contributes to this account of agency is the thoroughly embodied reality of human existence; the ways in which our manners of relating to the world and discovering ourselves are suffused with bodily intentionality, bodily feeling, bodily receptivity, bodily expression, and bodily transcendence – the “I can” of primary bodily consciousness. This highlights the fact that my existence occurs as and through my body’s existence; but this is also not to limit human existence to a kind of “brute” materiality, claiming the complexities of human experience, intellect, and imagination are insignificant. Rather, it is to acknowledge how complex, interdependent, and meaningful our human materiality is. It is to underscore how our bodies are our pivots of existence, our openings to the world, and our sites of possibility; they are the locations of our agency, the sources of its existence and the means of its expression.

However, the fact that our bodies are our openings to the world and the sites of our possibility signals the fact that they are also sites of vulnerability, locations of influence and pivots for the operations of power. The conditions that structure the possibilities of agency often work by means of the body, targeting it while working also on our social subjectivities. Our possibilities are influenced and often limited by our concrete situations, and many of these situations revolve around issues of the body: age,

race, ability, gender, gender presentation, and sexual preference are among those enactments and engagements of the body that structure large portions of our lives, and those engagements are largely structured by cultural norms and practices as well as laws and institutional policies. While the particular questions and controversies surrounding these issues change as knowledges and discourses change, as Foucault notes, the fact remains that bodies are a site of control, a site in which the operations of power find their points of contact, the places where they become effective. However, as I discuss in chapter five, the fact that bodies are sites of power does not make them absolutely controlled, as if the reality that they are influenced by power means that their agency is nullified. This, as I interpret Foucault, is far from the case. The fact that bodies are sites of power means that they are also sites of resistance. We can draw a kind of parallel here between Merleau-Ponty and Foucault: for Merleau-Ponty, bodies are sites of existence, meaning that they are also the sources or movements of transcendence; for Foucault, bodies are sites of incorporating power, meaning also that they are sites of resisting power and transforming experience. Similarly, Dewey's account of habit entails that because we are structured by individual and social habits, we can change our "selves" through modifying the very habits which constitute our character. What these thinkers all stress is that because bodies are the locations where these habits take place, where existence finds transcendence, and power meets subjectivity, they are also the locations where subjectivity can reinterpret itself, where bodily practice can transform the power working within it, where expression and transcendence make the body more than existence, where habits coalesce to create a new "home." In McWhorter's example of political activism, the behaviors and engagements of her body are precisely the targets of

discrimination, insofar as she is protesting the restrictions of gay rights, and the behaviors and engagements of her body are also what move against this discrimination, as she *stands up* and actively resists the policies regarding gays and lesbians in her state. What this example shows, in articulating the point I wish to show in incorporating these perspectives together, is that while bodies are sites of influence, limitation, and inhibition, they are also sites of activity, potential, and agency.

Nonetheless, the fact that bodies contain this conglomeration of mixed meanings does not mean that they are uncontrollable, “brute” matter, or are beyond the bounds of approach; rather, it means they are the bearers of life in all its complications, injustices, and beauties: they are our existences, and as such, they are the homes for and the actualizations of our possibilities. What we might hope for, along the lines of Foucault’s emphasis on transformation and Dewey’s emphasis on growth, is that we allow them – and they allow us – the possibility to keep experiencing possibility, the potential to keep increasing our potential, the reality of expansion and wonder in expanding our possibilities of experience. It is in this light that I, interpreting Dewey’s idea of growth, believe that education might facilitate and encourage these possibilities. As Dewey makes mention that attending to the obvious fact of the body in education would nearly revolutionize many of our educational practices, we might then think about some ways to enhance students’ possibilities of experiencing agency through their bodies in schools. In engaging students’ entire embodied being in the practice of education, they might develop more and more effective resources for continuing to direct their own educations, to continue transforming their lives and their world. Such practices encourage them to experience themselves as agents, and more specifically, as embodied agents with the

potential to continue growing, continue expanding the possible experiences their lives might encounter. This is my interpretation of what Dewey means, at heart, when he emphasizes that the aim of education is growth, and the aim of growth is more growth: the embodied experience of agency, experienced as possibility.

As Marjorie O’Loughlin notes in *Embodiment and Education*, students, teachers, and others involved in schooling learn to carry their embodied selves in certain ways, and the ways they learn to carry themselves then works in creating a certain set of possibilities. She explains that certain bodily behaviors – “walking, being seated, moving around and lingering in certain spots before taking up another cycle of activity” – shape “the perceptual tools of the individual ... creating patterns that will be repeated as certain kinds of relations and as layers of identity throughout life.”²⁸⁸ She elaborates further that these patterns of bodily movement and comportment, along with the values and categorizations of experience they impart, end up being much more than just corporeal habits, but become “ingrained as basic orientations towards the world.”²⁸⁹ Let us take this general example and see what kind of analysis the body thinkers of this project might perform, with respect to its potentials for cultivating embodied agency.

While there are certainly exceptions, the typical school day for American middle-school students consists largely of being seated in one room for a period of time, working on a particular task or subject, moving through hallways or corridors to another room at a prescribed time (often signaled by a bell or alarm), and sitting in this room for a period of time, working on another task or subject. Including breaks for eating and for recreation,

²⁸⁸ Dewey, *Embodiment and Education*, 64.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

this structure tends to form the bulk of the school day's patterns. Physical education and art classes are, of course, another break in this routine; but as they often constitute a categorical split between intellectual work and physical work, they also move within a paradigm that designates mind/body engagements as relatively distinct and hierarchically organized.²⁹⁰ But let us focus for a moment on the long periods of seated work and walking through hallways as transitions in the spaces where such work occurs.

As we have seen Dewey note previously, the pupil “brings his body to school with him,” despite the fact that this model can make it appear that the body is simply what carries the student's mind from place to place. But if we think about Dewey's emphasis on habit and the ways in which organism-environment transactions are the processes that shape the body-mind or the self, then this model creates a quite limited set of variations in the kind of body-environment transactions possible. The spaces students occupy tend to be rather limited – hallways, desks, chairs, lockers – and moreover, they tend to be highly monitored. As such, students tend not to have a very broad range of possible movements or possibilities for varying their environment within this scheme. And due to the ways they are monitored, aberrations from the proscribed kinds of movements or variations of environments tend to be met with reprimand. The main thrust, however, is that greatly limiting the kinds of engagements and explorations students have with their environments – both natural and constructed – will in turn limit

²⁹⁰ It is well-documented that such programs are also under serious threat by drastic budget cuts in current educational systems (see National Education Association, NEA Today Magazine, accessed July 26, 2012, <http://www.nea.org/home/39774.htm>). The limitation or entire elimination of these programs are huge drawbacks for students, for more reasons than I have the space to delineate here, but especially when it comes to developing bodily confidence and agency in a wide variety of tasks.

the kinds of possibilities they discover and the ways in which they might understand “what they are about” within them. If the felt sense of one’s place and potential within a situation is hesitant, lacking in self-confidence, or is simply suffused with impediment and inhibition, then one is less likely to develop manners of expressing and expanding one’s embodied agency within them; her options for engaging in this aspect of growth are likely to be limited.

Merleau-Ponty’s work on the body’s incorporation of habits continues this analysis, insofar as he characterizes the body’s acquisition and modification of habits as the “dilation” of one’s embodied dialogue with her environment. If the conditions requiring modification are limited – students traversing and occupying the same types of spaces, performing similar bodily engagements even while taking on more challenging intellectual material as they progress through school – then we might look at how Merleau-Ponty’s analysis offers a phenomenological reading of how those limitations and repetitions might be felt. Specifically, some of them might be felt as the intensification of one skill set at the expense of others; some might be experienced as actual impingements on one’s bodily flexibility and dynamism; some might be felt as anxiety or tension if bodily energies do not have the same degree of outlet as strictly “academic” energies. To remain true to a thoroughgoing phenomenological account, the content of what each student feels as their embodied experience is likely to be somewhat different, and particular experiences are likely to have different effects on how students understand and feel the potentials of their agency.

However, working with the model outlined, Merleau-Ponty’s approach might diagnose a limitation in the ways students incorporate new types of bodily habits, it might

also be telling for describing limitations in how they manifest their body's expressive capacities. Because he emphasizes that the body is expression itself, restrictions on one's space and on the potentials for how she can occupy, move through, and utilize that space – even if unconsciously felt – can have the effect, in turn, of making her experience her body's expressive capacities as not equal to her intentions, or that her felt capacity for executing her purposes or taking on new bodily engagements is somewhat constrained.²⁹¹ Moreover, when it comes to the feeling of embodied agency in relation to a kind of transcendence, insofar as intentions, purposes, and actions carry one beyond oneself and past one's bodily limits, the feeling of restriction in one's capacities or potentials may have the further effect of curtailing the feeling of one's agency in moving beyond oneself, as carrying out purposes into the future and into one's world.²⁹²

When looking at Foucault and how his approach might treat this situation, we might think about the question he raises in *Discipline and Punish*: “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?”²⁹³ This might guide us in a Foucauldian analysis of the model described above. This is not to say that the form or function of schools, prisons, factories, etc. are all the same, but what it calls out is that they share an approach to modulating the space and time of individuals such that they experience themselves as *subject to* the codes and knowledges operative in those structures, effectively shaping their subjectivities with respect to those

²⁹¹ Iris Marion Young's analysis of “inhibited intentionality” is a paradigmatic example of this feeling, with reference to feeling one's body as feminized in an inhibiting way. See “Throwing Like a Girl,” 147-150.

²⁹² Again, Young's treatment of “ambiguous transcendence” is helpful here (Ibid.).

²⁹³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 228.

mechanisms. When it comes to the model of sitting, bell, coursing through hallways, sitting again, etc. we might see how Foucault's approach would characterize these movements and practices as subject-forming, insofar as they provide the disciplinary mechanisms by which students come to understand their tasks, roles, successes, failures, and basically, their identities. Again, we see that the habits developed in these transactions or the disciplines incorporated through these routines are ones that offer a relatively limited set of bodily possibilities, when it comes to the body's proscribed role within the activities of the school day. As such, we see from another angle ways in which the structure of spatial and temporal arrangement in schools, and the mechanisms for accomplishing the objectives therein, can be read as limiting the possibilities for cultivating the embodied agency of individuals.

However, when we think about Foucault's emphasis on care of the self, *askesis*, and self-transformation, we might think about how bodily discipline can be engaged in a wider variety of ways and how this might offer potentials for students learning to empower themselves. While disciplinary practice is at the heart of many forms of self-transformation, the key to making such practices empowering is ways in which they might open up more possibilities for the individuals practicing them. Thus, while not all school-centered disciplinary practices must be entirely self-directed, thinking about how to expand the range of possible disciplines students might engage in schools might open up new ways for them to envision their own bodily practices and embodied agencies, particularly in terms of new experiences of *feeling* bodily possibility.

Following up this more positive note, I would also like to look at a briefly noted example from the introduction to see how it might compare against these analyses. The

EATS program of Downtown High School in San Francisco is a project-based curriculum designed for students who have been through the juvenile detention system or who have been unable to succeed in traditional high schools, for a variety of reasons. The program consists of a year-long course broken into four components, focusing on (1) the basics of nutrition and the current condition of agribusiness in the U.S. market, (2) ecological sustainability, (3) local botany and horticulture, and (4) the social and philosophical implications of food accessibility and community health. All the while, the class constructs an urban garden on the school's campus, including the preparation and organization of space and construction of components within it (such as tilling soil, preparing composts, building raised bed frames, etc.), the planting and regular tending of the garden, and finally, the harvesting of crops and the celebration of its yield. Not only did this program carry many students through to graduation who otherwise did not believe themselves likely to complete high school, but they also learned a variety of academic and life skills through the marriage of intellectual engagement and embodied action toward a collective goal.²⁹⁴ They developed skills and cultivated their felt possibilities of agency through this collaboration.

We might think about Dewey's response to this scenario: in many ways, it enacts much of what his vision of education outlines. It takes on local issues of importance to the individuals involved, while tackling the intellectual, investigative elements necessary to understand multiple sides of an issue, including its broader social impacts. It engages

²⁹⁴ Personal communication with Lauren Hoernig, a former Downtown High School teacher instrumental in designing and executing this program. She reports that many students confided in her that they did not think they would finish high school, and this program was one of the few things that kept them engaged and invested enough to complete it.

the students in a variety of ways: from “book learning” to individual and collective inquiry to communal design and participation in a practice that benefits them all. All facets of the academic content relate to the physical work and the tangible results of the students’ endeavor. They get to literally reap the fruits of their labor, all while deepening their understandings of history, geography, agriculture, food science, economic and political issues, and conditions within their own communities. Most importantly, they expand and enrich their felt, experienced potentials in approaching and changing socio-cultural structures that have an impact on their lives and the well-being of their communities.

From Merleau-Ponty’s perspective, we might see how individual students develop bodily habits and expressions that may not have been available to them before; for some, perhaps answering part of the riddle for why traditional school systems had failed them. Many students may have experienced embodied possibilities in ways that schools had not presented to them prior, and this program allowed them to experience their expressive and transcendent embodiments by engaging new tasks and by collaborating with others in innovative ways.

From Foucault’s perspective, we might see how these students move from one predominant form of embodied subjectivity toward a different range of disciplinary emphases, which may contain more possibilities for transformation within it. Because this program aims to develop disciplines and practices not taken up by most traditional schools, it is possible that students working in this program experienced new potentials and new benefits of disciplinary practice, thus opening up possibilities for self-transformation by opening up new avenues of bodily engagement and social meaning.

What these provisional analyses show is the extent to which meaningful bodily engagement can be a significant part of changing a student's perspective toward and participation in learning. If an important part of growth is the development of embodied agency as I have been arguing throughout this project, then exploring different models of educational participation could have tremendously beneficial results. In addition to the EATS project and some experiments noted in the introduction (practices such as yoga, *qi gong*, and meditation), O'Loughlin suggests strategies such as educational drama, creative incorporations of dance in a variety of subjects (such as geometry), using music in math classes, explorations of architecture and built environments and the bodily relations they construct, incorporation of craft-knowledge with an emphasis on the body's productive characters, and an emphasis on studying place in connection with politics and citizenship.²⁹⁵ Each of these practices could open up new potentials for the living meaning of what students learn in schools, not just seeing their relevance but *feeling* their significance through embodied practice. While I am not advocating the complete elimination of the traditional classroom or school – this would offer a hardly tenable suggestion in practice – I do believe that exploring with more possibilities for engaging the body in the everyday structures and practices of learning would provide many benefits, particularly with regard to students' experiences of embodied agency. The EATS project demonstrates one particular model that employed variety in its approach to the curriculum and the practices of the school day; moving forward from their successes might be a place to start when it comes to modifying the conventional school structure. However, part of what the EATS model employs is a sensitivity to local circumstances

²⁹⁵ O'Loughlin, *Embodiment and Education*, 52, 69, 111, 165, respectively.

and community needs; as such, any school working to adopt a similar approach would have to respond in kind with their own community's situations. However, as O'Loughlin suggests also, there are myriad ways in which students could engage bodily movement and action within the school day, without overhauling curriculum or structure. In brief, what I believe these possibilities might enhance are the ways in which students might experience themselves as embodied agents, as capable and efficacious actors within situations, acknowledging that a significant content of situations are the felt qualities present within each one. Whether addressing large scale modifications to educational approach, such as the EATS project, or smaller scale modifications like those O'Loughlin proposes and some of those I mention in the introduction, I believe that if students are equipped with a wider variety of tools for reading, understanding, and *feeling* the characters of situations, then they are more likely, I believe, to develop their capacities for *feeling their own embodied agencies as actors* within them. Moreover, this might be understood as an important component for increasing one's feeling of agency and ability to intelligently engage possibilities as she goes through life, which is a central part of what Dewey advocates for when he claims that growth is an aim of education.

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