

The Democratic Self and Moral Community: A Deweyian-Pragmatic Perspective

Rogene A. Buchholz and Sandra B. Rosenthal

In the United States, and increasingly in the world at large, there are ongoing efforts to further democratic community, which, in Dewey's words, is "the moral ideal" of community life at its best, and is constituted not by a particular body of institutions but a way of life incorporating particular types of personal attitudes in individual human beings.¹ However, in the United States, and increasingly in the world at large, the attempt to build a democratic community as a moral ideal is complicated by rapidly growing multiculturalism with its moral, as well as social, political and economic ramifications. The dominance of the problems posed by pluralism in the move from totalitarianism to democracy throughout the former Soviet Union and its satellite countries is apparent in the tensions that have developed within many multiracial or multiethnic societies in the process of this transition. These societies house substantial ethnic and religious minorities, and the problems posed by this pluralism are developing as part and parcel of the transition to liberal democracy. The rejection of totalitarian unity and the transition to democracy and a liberated pluralism is bringing in its wake a fragmentation that is incorporated in a tendency to stifle a sense of community embodying values held in common. The problems of cultural, national, linguistic, and religious difference are

© *Professional Ethics* 2000. Correspondence may be sent to Rogene A. Buchholz, Loyola University New Orleans, College of Business Administration, New Orleans, LA 70118; email: Buchholz@loyno.edu, and Sandra B. Rosenthal, Loyola University New Orleans, College of Business Administration, New Orleans, LA 70118; email: Buchholz@loyno.edu.

emerging as a challenge at least equal to the establishment of democracy and material well being.

Perhaps nowhere has the entrenchment of democracy coupled with the pervasive problems of multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious life been more pronounced than in the United States. Yet the conceptual alternatives in which American democratic theory has been couched, far from offering a pathway for resolving the dilemma of balancing the features of individual freedom and communal solidarity, too often announce their ultimate irreconcilability. This problem is starkly exhibited in Alasdair MacIntyre's view that the United States may well be founded on incompatible moral and social ideals: on the one hand, a communitarian vision of a common "telos," and, on the other hand, an ideal of individualism and pluralism. Thus, he holds that "We inhabit a kind of polity whose moral order requires systematic incoherence in the form of public allegiance to mutually inconsistent sets of principles."² Currently we seem to be bouncing from the extreme of the "grand melting pot" to the extreme of the "grand accumulator of fragmented parts."

The inability of so-called cutting edge moral-political theories to deal with the problems of pluralism and democracy throughout the world is highlighted in a journal symposium published in the closing years of the Twentieth Century.³ The central issue presented there—the seeming remoteness of political theory from the contemporary events surrounding and changes within political life—focuses primarily on the problems created by two central trends on the political scene, democracy and pluralism, as well as the key issues of libertarianism, communitarianism, and the self-other relation with which these issues are intertwined.

The theoretical trends which have taken hold in the United States are to a large extent, the fruits of foreign soil. All too often communitarians utilize the model of the Greek *polis*, which is the model of community one naturally draws upon if one is influenced by Hegel, Marx and the German tradition. This European model of community takes for granted a cultural homogeneity which has always been foreign to the United States and which is increasingly becoming extinct in far ranging parts of the world. Yet, many American theorists remain wedded to either the offshoots of a critique of Marxism which is now virtually dead, or a tradition of ideas growing out of German romanticism. On the other hand there is the an escape from this to a decontextualized rationality rooted ultimately in atomic individualism or to the radical critiques offered by deconstruction.⁴

The problems of these latter two trends have been aptly lamented in the claim that, "the 'poststructuralist' hermeneutics of suspicion developed in France, 'dissolves structure into chains of signification or patterns of representation and what you have is a form of cultural studies radicalism that thinks that all is possible in society under all conditions and at all times.'" On the other hand, the "prestigious paradigm" of rational choice theories "are catching on like hay fire in social science departments in American universities. But this paradigm also loses social structure from its vision in that it proceeds from a model of social motivation divorced from sociohistorical context and explicable in terms of decontextualized and idealized rational choice theorems."⁶ There is of course also a focus on a litany of conventional historical figures, and indeed, even theorists thoroughly committed to the deconstruction of such a corpus seem drawn to it. The unfruitful nature of this situation is expressed in the observation that "people in Central Eastern Europe took to the streets and fought for the establishment of liberal parliamentary democracies . . . and tolerant societies open to individual ambition and self-unfolding." But, "after two decades of poststructuralist, post-Foucaultian, psychoanalytic, feminist, postcolonial discourse" there is a great deal of suspicion about these.⁷ Moreover, many of the current approaches represent to the intellectual voices of these emerging democracies "mindless group psychology, the return of a different kind of tribalism, and the rejection of what is best in the American liberal-democratic tradition."⁸

Through all of this, the voice of Dewey has remained silent in any substantive sense. This silence seems strange, indeed, as Dewey's philosophy is in large part a response to American culture as an ongoing manifestation of the moral issues of community and pluralism embedded in American democracy, starkly polarized above in MacIntyre's claim. Dewey's thinking, whose very fiber is interwoven with the climate of American culture, has a unique paradigmatic framework for casting a novel light on all of these issues. A framework born of an absorption in the problems of democracy, pluralism, and community which constituted the native soil within which the climate of American culture was nurtured and which provides the source of its renewed vitality for the current intellectual scene. Central to this is Dewey's understanding of selfhood and scientific or experimental method. The significance of the former for the above issues can perhaps best be highlighted by a brief sketch of the nature of the self as operative in the respective positions of an American philosopher

representative of each of the above major camps within the ongoing debates, namely Rawls, MacIntyre, and Rorty.

Major Conceptual Models and their Problems

Rational choice models, such as that offered by Rawls, focus on an autonomous, unencumbered self whose disembodied, disembodied role is to impartially take the viewpoint of the other. Alasdair MacIntyre, along with such leading figures as Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer and Michael Sandel, has questioned both the epistemological and normative claims of liberal political theories, offering ongoing critiques of the “unencumbered self.” Postmodernists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard and, closely akin to these though much closer to home, the neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty, have gone so far as to question both the active, autonomous subject of ethical and political considerations and the possibility of any epistemological or normative claims.

Rawls’ position is rooted in the self-interest driven principles of abstract justice formed by isolated, pre-social individuals operating through a veil of ignorance as to their own position in society. It emphasizes the primacy of the individual, and the social features stem primarily from the aggregate decisions of individual selves stripped of any particular attributes. While his early position⁹ involves an atomism in which separate individuals are ontologically prior to their unity, he later reinterprets his position, holding that the concept of “artificial agents” deliberating in the original position does not imply any particular metaphysical conception of the self or person.¹⁰ But this still assumes that a self, abstracted out from its concrete relations and/or roles can be coherently thought of as a functioning self, and that such a “self” can be a decision maker. In *Political Liberalism*,¹¹ which some interpreters view as a “later Rawls” that nullifies criticism of the “early Rawls,” he in fact maintains his previous standpoint, claiming that the original position of the decision makers, with its veil of ignorance and non-historical nature, is the basis for his discussion throughout the book.¹² And, his qualifications of the abstract self remain the same as those offered in “Justice as Fairness.” Thus, in spite of some new twists to his position, the core criticisms of it remain. The self that decides in Rawls’ position is a peculiarly atemporal self, isolated from its historical attributes, ends and attachments.

Although in *A Theory of Justice* Rawls speaks of the formation of the principles through “our” intuitions, in “Justice as Fairness” the formation of the principles through “our” intuitions is modified to the position that there is a certain ideal implied—that of Western liberal democracies¹³ and the basic values of the agent, now called “citizen,” are not derived from basic intuitions but from an overlapping consensus. But Western liberal democracies seem to embody a pluralism such that there is no considered judgment that “we” must, as Rawls claims, “look for a conception of justice that nullifies the accidents of natural endowment and the contingencies of social circumstance as counters in a quest for political and economic advantage.”¹⁴ While the formation of this frame is done from a basis of atomic self-interest driven individualism, then, it is peculiarly non-pluralistic. Moreover, the frame which emerges from the debate is a peculiarly atemporal, rationally constructed frame imposed from above upon the contingencies of real life existence and isolated from the historically changing conditions within and among types of identities. Social structure is in some sense postulated in abstract principles and social reasoning is by and large the application of the rule to the particular case.¹⁵

What one has, then, are rational, decision making, atemporal, atomic selves structuring an atemporal frame in which existential contingencies and pluralistic differences alike have been left behind for commonly agreed to abstract principles. Rawls’ position, for all its contemporary trappings, is still caught in the traditional problems of top-down reasoning and atomic individualism, both of which block the path to pluralism, especially the pluralistic openness needed in a deep seated clash of cultures.

This ahistorical nature of the self is negated in MacIntyre’s communitarian approach, which reintroduces the classical Aristotelian concepts of character, happiness, and virtue and argues for the necessity of a general “narrative” view of action in a reformulated idea of character. This character is now understood as an on-going narrative which determines the meaning of specific actions,¹⁶ and it is impossible to judge the intent of any act by considering it in isolation from its context or the agent’s life-narrative.

MacIntyre turns to a description of societies in which individuals are subordinate to the social structure implicit in complex activities or “practices,” and in which individuals should endeavor to acquire the virtues necessary to achieve the goods internal to practices.¹⁷ He recognizes that

some practices are evil, and thus while holding that practices are subordinate to the traditions by which they are transmitted, he opposes the conservative, ideological understanding of tradition. A tradition "in good order" is "partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose."¹⁸ As he states, "The fact that the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities . . . does not entail that the self has to accept the moral limitations of the particularity of those forms of community."¹⁹

Yet, arguments about traditions and the limitations of community require some aspect of autonomy and some dimension of the self which outstrips social roles, a dimension of the self which remains unaccounted for in McIntyre's position. His position accommodates self-enclosed "traditions," each providing a context of rationality for working out its coherent community of civility. It does not provide for an autonomous self or creative agency which eludes reduction to roles and which engages in the ongoing reconstruction of the tradition. His communities are self-enclosed through their absorption of their pasts, rather than open to enlarging, self-transcending, future-oriented participation in a reconstructive process.

Rorty, in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, argues that there is not and cannot be a reconciliation in the conflict between our private desire for self-creation and our public sense of moral duty, though this has been the aim of all "moral metaphysicians" from Plato on. Rorty offers us an image of liberal society, an ironist utopia, which holds fast to its ideals while recognizing the incommensurability of values and its own historical contingency. In rejecting foundationalism, he disallows a function for argument of principles and turns to a commitment to conversation which allows for both novelty and the inclusion of others.

But, how does this openness take place? Rorty holds that "All that can be done to explicate 'truth', 'knowledge', 'morality', and 'virtue' is to refer us back to the concrete details of the culture in which these terms grew up and developed," and that "We have to take truth and virtue as whatever emerges from the conversation of Europe." He recognizes the validity of the objection that there is something very dangerous in the idea that truth should be characterized as "the outcome of doing more of what we are doing now," for this "we" could well be the Orwellian state.²⁰ To answer this line of criticism Rorty resorts to Habermas' claim that such a definition

of truth works only for the outcome of undistorted conversation, and that the Orwellian state is the paradigm of distortion. But, this of course will not quite do, for as Rorty well notes, Habermas offers transcendental principles, while he himself “must remain ethno-centric and offer examples.” Rorty can only say: “‘undistorted’ means employing *our* criteria of relevance,” where “we” are the ones who view truth and justice from the direction “marked by the successive stages of European thought.” “We” all share this contingent starting point for our “ungrounded conversations.”²¹

The undistorted conversation—which is supposed to embody novelty, openness, and inclusiveness—then, turns out to involve an ethnocentrism which encloses us within our past. This enclosure is strengthened by Rorty’s view that the self is “a tissue of contingent relations, a web which stretches backward and forward through past and future time,”²² and human life is a “reweaving of such a web.”²³ For, if the self is just the web, there is no creative agency to reweave, and its present cannot redirect the course of the future. The self and its conversation alike are ultimately enclosed within its past. Rorty emphasizes the importance of increasing our sensitivity to unfamiliar sorts of people to prevent marginalizing them, to promote solidarity.²⁴ Yet, the question remains as to how one becomes sensitive to “unfamiliar sorts of people” if one is stifled by ethnocentrism.²⁵ The ability to grasp different contexts and enter into the standpoint of the other requires a creative agent that transcends the confines of ethnocentric enclosure. In spite of, or perhaps better said, because of, our supposed liberation from the illusion of any embeddedness of ourselves within a thick reality with which we meaningfully interact and upon which our experience opens, we must remain peculiarly unliberated.

Each of the above positions yields, in its own way, a self which seems unable to execute its anointed community task. For Rawls, the self is locked in a present in which it functions in isolation from its past to make decisions which ignore the contingencies of the future. And, in spite of their radically different perspectives which color their understandings of the formation of the self by closed or ethnocentric communities, MacIntyre and Rorty alike offer an ineffectual self that is shut within an effectual present.

The Pragmatic Alternative

The following discussion will focus on Dewey’s understanding of the self, from the perspective of which notions of an atomic self—independent of its

tradition and roles—or a conforming self—exhausted by its tradition and roles—do not merely pose problems for resolving traditional tensions but represent ontological contradictions as well. Moreover, it is within the dynamics of the emergence of selfhood that the primordial embeddedness of experimental inquiry within which the very nature of, indeed as constitutive of, human experience can be found.

The essentially perspectival nature of experience and knowledge goes hand in hand with Dewey's radical rejection of the spectator theory of knowledge. All knowledge and experience are infused with interpretive aspects, funded with past experience. And, all interpretation stems from a perspective, a point of view. Knowledge is not a copy of anything pre-given, but involves a creative organization of experience which directs the way we focus on experience and is tested by its workability in directing the ongoing course of future activities. In this way, experience and knowledge, by virtue of their perspectival nature, are at once experimental, providing a workable organization of problematical or potentially problematical situations. Not only are perspectives real within our environment, but they are constitutive of our environment. Further, our worldly environment incorporates a perspectival pluralism; diverse groups or diverse individuals bring diverse perspectives in the organization of experience. The universe exists independently of our intentional activity, but our worldly environment is inseparable from our meaning or intending it in certain ways, and these ways are inherently pluralistic. For two reasons, such pluralism, when properly understood, should not lead to the view that varying groups are enclosed within self-contained, myopic, limiting frameworks or points of view, cutting off the possibility of rational dialogue. First, perspectives are by their very nature are not self-enclosed but open onto a community perspective; and, second, perspectival pluralism provides the very matrix for rational dialogue and ongoing development.

For Dewey, mind, thinking, and selfhood are emergent levels of activity of organisms within nature. Meaning emerges in the interactions among conscious organisms, in the adjustments and coordinations needed for cooperative action in the social context. In communicative interaction, individuals take the perspective of the other in the development of their conduct, and in this way there develops the common content which provides community of meaning and the social matrix for the emergence of self-consciousness. Not only can selves exist only in relationship to other

selves, but also no absolute line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others. This is because our own selves are there for and in our experience only in so far as others exist and enter into our experience. The origins and foundation of the self, like those of mind, are social or intersubjective. As Dewey notes, it is through social interaction that "the self is both formed and brought to consciousness."²⁶

In incorporating the perspective of the other, the self incorporates the standards and authority of the group; there is a passive dimension to the self. Yet, the individual responds as a unique center of activity; there is a creative dimension to the self. Any self thus incorporates, by its very nature, both conformity to a group and the creativity of unique individual. Thus, Dewey holds that the tension between conservative and liberating factors lies in the very constitution of individual selves.²⁷ Freedom does not lie in opposition to the restrictions of norms and authority, but in a self-direction which requires the proper dynamic interaction of these two poles within the self. Thus, "the principle of authority" must not be understood as "purely restrictive power" but as providing direction.²⁸ Because of this dynamic interaction constitutive of the very nature of selfhood, the perspective of the novel, "liberating" pole always opens onto a common, "conserving" perspective.

These same dynamics are operative in community. The novel perspective of the individual is emergent because of its relation to institutions, traditions, and patterns of life which conditioned its novel emergence, and it gains its significance in light of the new common perspectives to which it gives rise. In this continual interplay of adjustment of attitudes, aspirations, and factual perceptions between the common perspective as the condition for the novel emergent perspective and the novel emergent as it conditions the common perspective the dynamic of community is to be found. The act of adjustment between the novel perspective and the common perspective is the essential communicative dynamic of community.

This adjustment is neither assimilation of perspectives, one to the other, nor the fusion of perspectives into an indistinguishable oneness, but can best be understood as an "accommodation" in which each creatively affects, and is affected by, the other through accepted means of mediation of some sort. Thus a community is constituted by, and develops in terms of, the ongoing communicative adjustment between the activity constitutive of the

novel individual perspective and the common or group perspective. Each of these two interacting poles constitutive of community gains its meaning, significance and enrichment through this process of accommodation or adjustment. A free society, like a free individual, requires both the influencing power of authority as embodied in institutions and traditions and the innovative power of creativity as contextually set or directed novelty. In Dewey's words, "No amount of aggregated collective action of itself constitutes a community To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands and appreciates its beliefs, desires, and methods, and who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values. But this transition is never finished."²⁹

The individual is neither an isolatable discrete element in, nor an atomic building block of, a community. Rather, the individual represents the instigation of creative adjustments within a community, adjustments which creatively change both poles which operate within the adjustment process. There is an intimate functional reciprocity between individual and social intelligence, a reciprocity based on the continual process of adjustment. Novelty within society is initiated by individuals, but such initiation can occur only because individuals are continuous with others and with social institutions of which they are a part. "Wants, choices and purposes have their locus in single beings," but the content is not "something purely personal."³⁰ The "along with" is part of the very life process.³¹

The ability to provide the means of mediating within the ongoing dynamics of adjustment constitutes a community of any type as a community. The very nature of communities require openness of perspectives. And, no community is constricted by closed community perspectives. The adjustment of incompatible perspectives at any level requires not an imposition from "on high" of abstract principles but a deepening to a more fundamental level of community. As two communities recognize their openness of horizons in coming to understand the perspective of the other, there can be adjustment founded on a deeper or broader community. The demands of the human condition, in its deepest sense, can be understood as the community of communities, not in the sense that it contains many self-enclosed communities, but in the sense that it is that grounding community upon which all other communities must be founded and upon which they

all open. Thus, Dewey stresses the ideal of a world community, and holds that what would make the great community precisely a community as opposed to a mere society is "intercommunication," expressed above as the organs of accommodation which allow for the ongoing interplay of novelty and conformity.³² The understanding of a radically diverse way of life, or way of making sense of things, is not to be found from "above" by imposing one's own reflective perspective upon such diversity, but rather from "beneath," by penetrating through such differences to the sense of the various ways of making sense of the world as they emerge from the essential characteristics of beings fundamentally alike confronting a common reality in an ongoing process of change. Such a deepening may change conflict into community diversity, or it may lead to an emerging consensus of the wrongness of one of the conflicting positions. Such a deepening does not negate the use of intelligent inquiry, but frees it from the products of its past in terms of rigidities and abstractions, and focuses it on the dynamics of concrete human existence. In this way, over the course of time, incompatible perspectives, though not proved right or wrong, are resolved by the weight of argument as reasons and practices are worked out in the ongoing course of inquiry. If such adjustments do not emerge, then community has broken down.

To understand one's own stance on any issue is to understand its inherently perspectival approach and the illuminating light which other perspectives can rightfully cast upon it. The development of the ability both to create and to respond constructively to the creation of novel perspectives, as well as to incorporate the perspective of the other, not as something totally alien, but as something sympathetically understood, are at once growth of the self. Thus to deepen and expand the horizons of community is at once to deepen and expand the horizons of the selves involved in the ongoing dynamics of adjustment. The sense of history is very much tied to the Dewey's understanding of the reconstruction taking place in the present. Any novel perspective emerges from a cumulative process or history of adjustment which yields enrichment of intelligibility both of the old and of the new. By looking backward we can view the historical development within the social process, the direction of the movement. However, this looking backward is not some passive recovery of what once was but rather is a construction taking place in the present, and the past, as interpreted in the present, sets goals for the future. Thus Dewey stresses

that historical materials, in their most important sense, do not signify “the past and gone and the remote,” but rather heightened perception of “elements active in present experience, elements that are seeking expansion and outlet and that demand clarification and which some phase of social life . . . brings to the focus of a selective, coherently arranged and growing experience.”³³

Perspectival pluralism, though incorporating at its deepest level the endless activity of adjustment rather than convergence toward final completed truth, does not involve the stultifying self-enclosurement of a relativism in terms of arbitrary conceptual schemes or an historicism in terms of present happenstance. Rather, it involves an ontologically grounded temporalism in which perspectives emerge within the context of a past which presents itself in the richness of the present and which is oriented toward an indefinite future. What is involved is not a liberation from the ontologically grounded possibilities presented by the past, a position which has been seen to house its own kind of cultural historicism, but a liberation from a restricted access to them. Our primal epistemic and ontological openness to “the other” and its demands, as understood within pragmatism, results in more pluralism, not less.

The dynamics of experimental method, which embody “the fundamental principles of the relationship of life to its surroundings,”³⁴ is the vehicle by which the past becomes effective in the reconstruction of the present, leading to integration and fulfillment through organized movement. In this way, science is “operative art.”³⁵ The proper functioning of experimental method is, for Dewey, precisely the artful functioning of experience. Indeed, in the “immediate”³⁶ sense of the qualitative character of *an* experience as a unified whole, or experience in its aesthetic dimension, the experimental method is embodied in its most intensified concrete unification or fusion. The sense of the qualitative character of an experience as a unified, integrated whole involves a sense of its temporal flow, its own “little history.” The dynamics of experimentalism provides the creative organizing and ordering movement which brings to fruition the sense of the internal integration and fulfillment of the experience. Thus Dewey notes that “scientific and artistic systems embody the same fundamental principles of the relationship of life to its surroundings,” and indeed the differences between the work of the scientist and the work of the artist are “technical and specialized, rather than deep-seated.”³⁷

It has been seen that the ability to recognize the limitation of one's own perspective and to appropriate its openness onto other perspectives is at once growth of the self. Growth of self incorporates an ever more encompassing, sympathetic understanding of varied and diverse interests. Which leads to tolerance not as a sacrifice but as an enlargement of self. This involves as well the concomitant reconstruction of the institutions and practices which become incorporated within the self's conserving dimension, and at times demands also a reconstruction of the very organs of adjustment of the community which ground such reconstructive dynamics. Rationally directed change leads to growth both for the individual and the community. But, for Dewey, rationality, "is not a force to evoke against impulse and habit. It is the attainment of a working harmony among diverse desires."³⁸ As he stresses, more "passions, not fewer, is the answer."³⁹ The operation of reason cannot be isolated from the concrete human being in its entirety. Moreover, the human organism and the nature within which it is located are both rich with the qualities and values of our everyday experience, and thus experimental method as operative in the process of living must serve the qualitative fullness of human interests. In this way, rationally directed concrete growth, achieved through the expansive integration or harmonizing of novelty and continuity as guided by experimental inquiry leads to the aesthetic-moral enrichment of human experience.

Democracy as the Moral Ideal of Community Life at its Best

The various features discussed thus far are embodied in Dewey's understanding of democracy. Dewey stresses that democracy inherently incorporates not a particular body of institutions or a particular form of government, but the political expression of the functioning of experimental method. Any social structure or institution can be questioned through the use of social intelligence guided by universalizing ideals, leading to reconstructive activity which enlarges and reintegrates the situation and the selves involved. This provides both a greater degree of authentic self expression and a greater degree of social participation. In this way, democracy provides for a society which controls its own evolution. Participation in this process is "necessary from the standpoint of both the

general social welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals.”⁴⁰

Dewey, then, can point out that growth itself is the only moral “end,” that the moral meaning of democracy lies in its contribution to the growth of every member of society,⁴¹ and that growth involves the rational resolution of conflict.⁴² In this way, the moral import of democracy, for Dewey, lies in the fact that it is the ideal of community life itself.⁴³ Any authentic organization involves a shared value or goal, and the overreaching goal of a human society is precisely this control of its own evolution. Thus, the ultimate “goal” is growth or development, not final completion. Though Dewey refers to growth as an “end,” he does not intend this in a technical sense of “end.” Indeed, growth can best be understood not as an end to be attained but as a dynamic embedded in the ongoing process of life, just as experimental method is not an end to be achieved but a dynamic embedded in the very structure of experience.

This in turn indicates that neither democracy nor the working ideal of universality can imply that differences should be eliminated or melted down, for these differences provide the necessary materials by which a society can continue to grow. Though society indeed represents social meanings and social norms, yet social development is possible only through the dynamic interrelation of this dimension with the unique, creative individual. The creative perspectives of individuals offer the liberating possibilities of new reconstructions. The liberating is also precarious. But the liberating, the precarious, the novel, occur within the context of tradition, stability, continuity, community. The demands of adjusting the old and the new, the stability of conformity and the novelty of creativity, “is inherent in, or a part of, the very texture of life.”⁴⁴

A true community, as by its very nature incorporating an ontologically grounded temporalism and perspectival pluralism requiring ongoing growth or horizontal expansion, is far from immune to the hazardous pitfalls and wrenching clashes which provide the material out of which ever deepening and expanding horizons are constituted. But as Dewey points out,

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity

and resistance through which it has successfully passed . . . Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.⁴⁵

When there is lacking the reorganizing and ordering capabilities of intelligence, the imaginative grasp of authentic possibilities, the vitality of motivation, or sensitivity to the "felt" dimensions of existence, all of which are needed for ongoing reconstructive horizontal expansion, then instead of growth the result is irreconcilable factionalism. The acceptance of just such a lack is what Dewey sees as the basis for the rise of totalitarian states. As he characterizes the rejection of pluralism inherent in the basic tenets of the totalitarian moral code, it incorporates the belief that if human beings "are permitted to exercise freedom of mind their policies and decisions will be so swayed by personal and class interests that the final outcome will be division, conflict and disintegration."⁴⁶ What will solve present problems and provide the means for ongoing growth of the self and the community is human intelligence with its creativity, sensitivity, imagination, and moral awareness geared to the human conditions in all of its qualitative richness.

The skills of experimental inquiry are needed not just for the adequate exploration of specific subject matter but for the possibility of the interrelated ongoing reconstruction and expansion of the self, values, and the institutions and practices of the community, including the very organs of adjudication for the communicative adjustments which make possible such ongoing reconstructions and expansions. Experimental inquiry or "the method of intelligence," as it functions to further the enrichment of the fullness of concrete human existence involves, in Dewey's words, "wide sympathy and keen sensitiveness, and persistence in the face of the disagreeable," all which in turn allow for the "balance of interests" needed for intelligent analysis and decision.⁴⁷

Dewey stresses that to have "anything that can be called a community in its pregnant sense there must be values prized in common."⁴⁸ He is not seeking common values as a type of common content which infringes on individualism and pluralism, which erodes freedom or melts down differences, a situation which he disparages as "a factitious sense of direct union and communal solidarity,"⁴⁹ an artificial "moral consensus" which exits through a "unity of beliefs and aims" and is "of the very essence of

totalitarian states.”⁵⁰ These values, prized in common, foster aesthetic and moral sensibility and a concomitant attunement to the other, creative intelligence, imagination, and a healthy common sense rooted in the cultivation of these qualities. These qualities promote an atmosphere in which one can develop one’s values and talents. They promote the development of individuals who can engage in dialogue in such a way that society can continually reconstruct itself in a manner that will lead to the ongoing thriving of individuals and communities alike through a process of participatory self-government, directed by the dynamics that direct growth in all areas of human activity—that is, the dynamics of experimental method which are embedded in the very life process and its development within the emergence of selfhood. This synthesis of community, shared values and pluralistic freedom is precisely what Dewey sees as necessary to prevent the rise of regimes “which claim they can do for individuals what the latter cannot by any possibility do for themselves,”⁵¹ because the inadequacy of “doing for themselves” is based on the empty character of negative freedom, of freedom without a community solidarity of “values prized in common.”⁵²

Dewey’s position unabashedly reflects its nourishment in the climate of American culture, yet it speaks with a unique vitality not only to the ongoing attempt to balance community and pluralism here at home but also to the increasing struggles around the world to create a moral society. It does this by grappling with the issues of liberal democracy and community in the context of pluralism and diversity and the need to be open to the voice of “the other.” It offers not mere descriptions of the conditions from which it emerged, but depictions of yet to be realized possibilities of betterment, recognitions of what is required for any culture to achieve what it has the potential to become. As Dewey recognized long ago, “At the present time, the frontier is moral, not physical.”⁵³

Implications for Corporate Life

What, then, does this Deweyian position suggest for various dimensions of corporate activity? The pragmatic understanding of self and community has implications for corporate organizations and the way change and pluralism are incorporated. The corporation is often understood, particularly in classical economic theory, as a voluntary organization in which

people band together because of economic self-interest, a view again based on the understanding individuals as atomic units. From a pragmatic perspective, however, the corporation is viewed as a community, and the individuals are in part what they are because of their membership in a corporate organization, while the organization is what it is because of the people who choose to become part of it. The organization needs a certain aspect of conformity and common goal to operate and in this sense must have a common or group viewpoint, but at the same time it needs creative input from the unique individuals within it in order to grow and remain competitive. The differences among individual viewpoints provide the materials for ongoing reconstructive growth.

The relationship of business to the larger society in which it functions depends on how one views the corporate entity. Those who adhere to the traditional economic view of the corporation hold that business relates to society only through the marketplace and that marketplace transactions constitute the whole of its existence and reason for being. From a pragmatic standpoint, the corporation as understood in this way is an abstraction from its social context and the multiple relations and responsibilities which this involves. This isolated function has too often been allowed to take on a life of its own, detached from the social context which gives both it and the marketplace their existence and purpose, and in the process the corporation has been given a purpose in terms of only one aspect of the fullness of its existence.

What has been lost in the traditional view is the intrinsic nature of the corporation as part and parcel of a social community to which it is inextricably tied and within which it relates to and affect multiple "others," which in turn affect it in a reciprocal relationship. The corporation is not isolatable from society but is in fact constituted by the multiple relationships in which it is embedded, relationships that are part of the multiple relationships inherent in human existence. The corporation has as its major function the enrichment of the multiple environments—economic, social, cultural, natural—in which these relationships are embedded. The production of goods and services is primarily for the flourishing of human existence, and only in this context does their production gain its concrete rationale. Ultimately, the corporation's responsibility is for the welfare of community, for the multiple relations in which the corporation is embedded are at once the multiple relations inherent in community life.

The traditional conflict between the individual and the community emerges in enlarged fashion on the global scene as manifested through two interrelated but conflicting trends. Much of the world's cultural diversity is being destroyed through global assimilation, while at the same time, and as a counter to this trend, ethnic, religious, and other cultural groups are militantly defining themselves in opposition to this threat of assimilation.

Any theoretical frame for avoiding the extremes of isolationism or monolithic globalism must definitively reject the long history of atomic individualism which offers the choice between the collective homogeneous whole at the expense of the individual, or the individual at the expense of the collective whole. In this case, the atomic unit is the individual culture with its own unique traditions and meanings on the one hand, and the collective whole is the uniformity of global market forces on the other. Neither the engulfment of diverse cultures by globalism nor isolationist "tribalism" can produce a true pluralistic global community. What the dynamics of community requires at the global level is the essential dynamics of any community, and evolving, "ground up" experimental organs of adjudication must develop for the transformation of conflicting cultures into a vital pluralistic community.

The pragmatic position avoids the relativism of the false assumption that a particular culture is operating within a perspective closed to others and to objective evaluation, and the absolutism of an equally false assumption that cultures should operate devoid of perspective, thereby achieving the one true common content. There can be neither the relativism of arbitrary choice nor the absolutism of no true choice in shaping a pluralistic community. A truly global corporation can develop only in the climate of a truly global community, and this can occur only in a context which recognizes both the poles of conformity and diversity which constitute ongoing self-directed growth. Thus, as a citizen of a global community, a corporation has a moral responsibility to respect diversity and free choice of various cultures essential to the ongoing dynamics of community life.

It can thus be seen that the dynamics of community are the same whether understood as dynamics within the individual person, within the corporation, between the individual institution and the general other of a broader community within which the institution functions, or between the unique individual indigenous culture and the other of a global community.

And in developing this dynamics through an ongoing adjustment process, the nature of community must be constantly kept in mind. For any community involved, when one speaks of the good of the whole, this whole is not the common other as some collectivity which absorbs the individual, but rather the whole is community itself and the bi-polar dynamics it incorporates. Growth of the community depends upon a proper balance between its two poles of novelty and conformity and the ongoing adjustment between them as accomplished through developing organs of adjustment. Community itself is not static, but is an ongoing dynamic process of change through accommodating adjustment between its creative and conserving dimensions. Pluralism and change, then, cannot be set over against communal life, for they are its very lifeblood.

Notes

1. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy," *The Later Works*, Vol. 14, (1988), ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: University of Southern Illinois Press, 198) p.226-228.
2. "Is Patriotism a Virtue?," *Lindley Lecture*, University of Kansas, 1984, pp.19-20.
3. *Political Theory*, Volume 23, No. 4, November, 1995, pp.635-688.
4. See *Ibid* for an examination of these trends.
5. Benhabib, "Response," *Ibid*, p.679.
6. *Ibid*.
7. *Ibid*. pp.676-77.
8. *Ibid*
9. *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U.P., 1971.
10. "Justice as Fairness," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol.14, 1985, pp. 238, 239n.
11. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1993)
12. *Ibid*.; see, for example, pp. 22-28; 208; 242n.
13. Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," p. 223-251.
14. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 15. In *Political Liberalism*, pp. 147-148, Rawls holds that an overlapping consensus is quite different than what he calls a "modus vivendi" as a compromise position between individuals or states at odds in aims or interests. However, this distinction is not relevant to the points under discussion.
15. The legislators of justice can determine whether the implementation of any given set of principles at any given time is feasible, but Rawls

thinks it hard to imagine that we do not now have all knowledge needed for the feasibility test. See *A Theory of Justice*, p.137.

16. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Second Edition (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), see especially Ch.15.

17. *Ibid.*, p.191.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 222

19. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

20. Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p.173. Rorty here creates a dialogue between the pragmatist—which he considers himself to be, and the defender of the Enlightenment or the traditional philosopher.

21. *Ibid.*, pp.173-174.

22. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1989), p. 41

23. *Ibid.*, p. 43

24. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

25. His focus on imagination as the vehicle of increased sensitivity to unfamiliar sorts of people does not eliminate the problem but highlights it. He speaks of the meaningless, emotive function of imagination, as opposed to literal or cognitive content with its truth-value property. These characterizations arise in his discussion of metaphor in relation to the contingency of language, *Ibid*, p.18, but in his discussion of the contingency of the self in the following chapter, it can be seen that what holds of metaphor holds as well for imagination. *Ibid*, p. 36. This is in a sense a new twist to the positivistic dichotomy between the cognitive or meaningful and the emotive or meaningless, a twist that now views the dichotomy from the temporal perspective of the structurally located fixity of the old versus the utter capriciousness of a disconnected new. *Ibid.*, p. 17. This capriciousness can be seen in Rorty's assertion that "the difference between genius and fantasy" is that the former case represents "idiosyncrasies which just happen to catch on with other people." *Ibid.*, p. 37 Rorty's break between meaning and the meaningless, between the cognitive and the emotive, the literal and the metaphorical, is ultimately a break between past, present, and future.

26. *Art As Experience, The Later Works*, Vol. 10, (1987), ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1987) p. 286.

27. John Dewey, "Authority and Social Change," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11 (1987), p.133.)

28. *Ibid.*

29. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, *The Later Works*, Vol. 2, (1984), p. 330; p. 332. (Italics added.)
30. *Ibid.*,
31. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
32. *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 367.
33. "The Theory of the Chicago Experiment," *The Later Works*, 11, pp.209-210.
34. "Affective Thought," *The Later Works*, vol. 2, pp.106-107.
35. "Experience and Nature," *The Later Works*, Vol.1 (1981), p. 269.
36. Immediate experience, as here used is not the experience of pure immediacy—which does not in fact exist in experience.
37. "Affective Thought," pp.106-107.
38. "Human Nature and Conduct," pp. 136-137.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11, 1987, pp. 217-218.
41. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Vol. 12 (1982), *The Middle Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1976-1983), p. 181; p. 1864.
42. Dewey, *Ethics*, *The Middle Works*, Vol. 5, (1978), p. 327.
43. Dewey makes a distinction between democracy as a social idea and political democracy as a system of government, but notes that the two are of course connected. *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 325.
44. Dewey, "Authority and Social Change," p. 133
45. *Art As Experience*, pp.19-20.
46. *The Later Works*, Vol. 15 (1989), p.177.
47. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, *The Middle Works*, Vol. 12, pp.173-174.
48. *Freedom and Culture*, *The Later Works*, Vol.13 (1988), p. 71.
49. *The Later Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1981-1989), Vol. 13 (1988), p.176.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
51. *The Later Works*, Vol. 14 (1988), p. 93.
52. *The Later Works*, Vol. 13 (1988), p. 71.
53. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy," p. 225.