SOCRATES, DEWEY
PHILOSOPHIES OF EDUCATION

by

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PREFACE

Educational philosophy has a wonderful way of biting me in the ass. As a child in a privileged American nook of the world, so much of who I was related to my experiences in alternative schools, many of which claimed some connection to one philosophy or another. I had gone to five distinct schools in my elementary and high school ‘career,’ I had graduated from three of them, and I had just returned my letter of confirmation for attendance to a liberal arts college. I was exhausted by school but had developed a stamina for thinking about them. Combine that with a frustration. I felt a need - equal parts personal desire and public vindication - to defend my absurd education.

Having attended these many schools, I became aware that the ‘environment’ in which I was trying to learn drastically affected the quality of my learning. These environments were each very different. I could not definitively state why some place would feel so comfortable, and another contrived. Why one would provoke in me excitement, and another banality? Why would one feel communal, and another disparate? What I really needed was a tool, one I could use to independently make informed judgements about my experiences. I needed something that could take my inquiry beyond people, beyond money, and beyond the school. I needed something that could help me address my real question: What is this education?

I was lucky enough to discover philosophy. It turned out to be, and I believe is today, the best possible method for such inquiries. It was eye, heart, and mind opening. There was a freedom about it. It was boundless, and seemed to open doors without touching them. Like great fiction, it was poetic. Like history, the epic texts awaited. Philosophy was alive and burgeoning. Everything was related, they would circle back to one another in a way unparalleled in my academic endeavors. Each work or author could be independent of the next, and yet each was also a piece seeming to fit into the whole. It was a science
for humanity. It was inspiration for art. It was an attempt at understanding existence, which I felt often connected to the idea that is education.

With the help of my mentor, Kenneth Sacks, I was introduced to many of the most classic and influential writings on the subject. I was specifically affected by those of Plato and Dewey. I began to imagine connections; between Socrates’ Cave Allegory, and Dewey’s Experience and Education, among others. Where one left off, the other picked up. It seemed to me the ideal balance between theory and application, and I felt that, using both as a lens, I might be able to construct some informed perspective on my own experience, and maybe try for education in general.

In this effort, the following represents a sort of hypothetical discussion between the principles of two distinct and related aspects of educational philosophy. On the one hand, the power of the mind to overcome its inherent limitations and to strive for wisdom, and the other, a most inspired method towards such an effort.

In a full circle, my endeavors into philosophies of education exemplified their own principles: in realizing the dangers of curriculums, I managed to escape one to write this. In realizing the subtle and most important role the teacher plays in the highest levels of formation, I became the recipient of it. In coming to understand the highest goal of a humane education, I tasted it. This is the product of my inquiry, as well as my self-proclaimed culmination of my primary education.
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Although controversial, many believe that Socrates the character and Socrates the man were much alike. Socrates never subscribed to any ultimate truth, and never claimed to “know” anything. However, this section focuses on two of his elegant and interconnected beliefs. Firstly “Chora”, of the universe, and secondly “The Cave”, our place in that universe. In light of these two understandings, Socrates proceeds to define the connection between the intellectual and the universal, and the principles that govern them.
“[Chora] is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible.”

Plato’s Timaeus - an Italian astronomer come upon request to Athens - breaks up all that is in the universe into three categories. Being, becoming, and chora. In this instance, Socrates only a witness. What resembles being, Timaeus claims, and what we are surrounded by, is becoming. Elements, or the indivisible parts of our material universe, are never stable, but always in motion, changing and transforming. It is 300 B.C.E Athens, before anyone analyzed the system of a star.

It is with this in mind that Timaeus makes the fundamental claim: even our best opinions, based off of our most astute senses are, in the face of this necessary transfiguration, illusionistic. Timaeus defines Being as the stable concept of something, and Becoming as the worldly manifestation or attempt at that source concept. The engendered is fleeting, but the conceptual is eternal.

Timaeus claims that if motion were to stop, and the things in our universe were to lose their propulsion, then whatever was immediately “now;” what existed in any one singular moment, would in fact be reality. But such was not his observation. The universe was and is now in motion, the motion of struggle. He claims that everything is struggling to reach an ideal perfection, perfection only attainable in the intelligible realm. Concepts, in their perfect forms, are perfect because they are not realized. Timaeus titles these “Being”. Since this perfection is, as Timaeus describes, not obtainable in our universe, it follows that if our universe were to cease moving it would fail its purpose. For the universe to stop it’s struggle towards conceptual perfection would be impossible. To give up would be to fail its own purpose.

Like a father, Being is the source of what we think and intellectually ‘receive’. However the universe, of which we are a part, is to Timaeus the image - but not necessarily the embodiment - of these
highest truths and goods. They are not Being, but strive to be. They are Becoming. Becoming is an attempt towards conception. Becoming, as a material, ever changing system, has therefore many iterations. All of sensible nature is Becoming, and all of these sensible manifestations are striving toward Being.

“There certainly are these self-existent ideas unperceived by sense, and apprehended only by the mind... We must acknowledge that there is one kind of being which is always the same, uncreated and indestructible, never receiving anything into itself from without, nor itself going out to any other, but invisible and imperceptible by any sense, and of which contemplation is granted to intelligence only.”

But what of the force needed to sustain this constant motion and struggle of Becoming towards Being? Timaeus claims a third, dynamic entity in our universe. One which can enable and facilitate both Becoming’s birth from Being, as well as it’s continued becoming. This mothering force, as Timaeus calls it, is Chora. Chora can be thought of as an imprint barer. She is the receptacle, herself is the bridge between the idea of a thing and that thing’s existence. She is the shaping force; a boundary for manifestation established by Being. Much in the vein of a mold, she shapes a form whose conception exists hitherto only in the intelligible realm of Being. Chora receives conception, and from her mold comes the attempt towards Being’s prototype, now put forth into as a creation: Becoming. Chora facilitates this process. For humans, this process might be compared to art making. Chora’s artistic vision is Being, her canvas the universe, and her creation, Becoming. These are Chora’s only boundaries.

[Chora is] the universal nature which receives all bodies -- that which must always be called the same; for, while receiving all things, she never departs at all from her own nature, and never in any way, or at any time, assumes a form like that of any of the things which enter into her; she is the natural recipient of all impressions, and is informed by them, and appears different form time to time by reason of them, but is not.

Chora, which is herself eternal, does not allow destruction, as one impression’s destruction is an others formation. It offers a place for existence, one for all the things she creates, much like a nest a mother creates for her young. “…While two things [conception and creation] are different, they cannot exist one of them in the other and so must be one and also two at the same time,” where the same time is
Chora. What enters into Chora, the “the one,” is being, making its imprint, and what comes forth from Chora, the “two,” is Becoming. Timaeus concludes “...There is no one self existent thing, but everything is becoming and in relation; and [the notion of material] being must be altogether abolished.” Indeed, even the terming of “Chora” is antithetical to its own description:

“[Chora] is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible.”

As her forms are the likenesses of the Being (which is the truest nature of a thing) they are attempts at their prototypical truths. As humans we are privy only to these conceptions in the realm of the intelligible, and, as Timaeus and Socrates both believed, their intelligent conceptions were the only things that could exist as entities outside of their immediate, material universe. Their conceptions could exist outside of themselves, as beautiful truths escaping the struggle of material realization.
THE CAVE ALLEGORY  
The Premiere Metaphor for Education in the Western World, Book VI of the Republic

Envision Socrates speaking with Glaucon, the brightest, most up and coming geometry student in all of Athens. Socrates invites him to contemplate his world as though it were a cave, underground and out of sight from the sky. Beyond this cave burns a sun, which illuminates all below it, including the entrance to the cave. Inside this cave, however, a worldly fire burns casting the only light in sight. It casts shadows upon the cave’s wall, deeply inset. From a rise, the objects of the world move fourth and back, each with its own distinct shadow. Below this wall Glaucon is seated, observing the shadows of the objects, in his ignorance confusing the shadows for the things’ themselves. Socrates suggests that Glaucon is living now without full consciousness, unable to self-reflect. As shadows are all that he has ever known, and to him seem most real, he must take them to be so.

Conversely, just outside the entrance to this primordial cave of the world and obscured by the aperture, there burns the brightest sun. It is a sun that burns with light that illuminates shadows, and this light first reveals then embodies the only truth. This light’s source is like the conceptual realm of Being, and its rays are like the mothering, creative force of Chora, enabling all of the Cave, Becoming, to continue in its struggle.

Behold! Human beings living in a underground cave, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the cave; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.”

Socrates’ Cave allegory represents one of the primer western metaphors for the progression of mind. Socrates shows the Cave to Glaucon in three tiers, where each is a vital piece in the said progression. Firstly, from inside of the Cave, Glaucon must look above to see the light which is projecting shadows upon the wall of the cave. To see this lights’ projection is to begin to reflect on his place in the cave. Socrates is illustrating a movement from passive survival to active reflection.
Glaucon: You have shown me a strange image, and they strange prisoners.

Socrates: Like ourselves... and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave... [to them] the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

In knowing this now for the first time, Glaucon must move towards this light, and begin to understand it’s workings upon the primordial wall. Through deduction and observation, he begins to understand this cave that governs him. It is upon a plateau - above mans origin at the bottom of the cave, but still within it - that shadows are cast down upon the wall. Here Glaucon will see the other things of the world, the varied creatures and objects that for so long existed only as shadows. Not only can Glaucon see the things themselves, but he can see that what casts their shadows, a fire behind them. Cautiously, laboriously, he must enter and observe this new environment, where for the first time he must bare witness to the shadow’s origin, the Fire. Glaucon sees that the other things were like him, seeing only the shadows of themselves and their fellows, and living in total subscription to them. It is through this new understanding that Glaucon has established a method of observation, science. He has made it through the second tier within the cave.

Socrates again references the immense sun outside the cave. In the same way light enables Glaucon to see the insides of the cave, so this light from this sun casts down outside the cave, emitting it’s truth. It can be interpreted as both the source and example of pure intellectual truth, undistorted by shadows of the Cave. This light enables the mind to understand at its purest, hovering for a moment outside of and beyond the Cave, above sense and science. This light to the mind is beautiful in its ability to encompass truth, it is beautiful because it is Being. This is the caves’ third tier, its entrance, towards which Glaucon unknowingly journeys.
After having reached a limit within the Cave, after having struggled tirelessly to understand it, Glaucon desperately begins to evaluate his own search. It is here that Glaucon begins to contemplate the cave itself.

It was then that Glaucon accidentally ‘stepped outside’ the cave. It was after his contemplation of the cave and his own journey within it, that he stumbled suddenly upon it’s entrance. Even if only for a brief moment, Glaucon could see the most brilliant light beyond. Not only could he see clearly his own cave, but he could see in that light the cave’s origin: the idea of the cave itself. The light was the origin, it had shaped it and it had enabled it to be shape. Even the fire, which cast those most amazing shadows, was revealed to be a mere attempt towards the purity he now witnessed in this Sun. He could see himself and his cave from a new perspective, in this realm of the light. He knew in his mind how true this sun was, because it was so much what he sought for. It was uninterrupted truth, true in a way that the shadows and the cave could never be.

But in that same moment, Glaucon realized that he also was only a product of that sun’s light. He was a imperfect, manifested conception, himself imperfect beneath it. He could create and construct and conceive, but there, under that light of the ideal, any of his creations would come to a fate same as his own. He could conceive in the conceptual, and birth into the cave his creation, but should it even come to be, it would receive only the same joys and sorrows of transitioning the cave. He and his creations would always be pieces of the cave, and never the Sun above it.

It is then that he understood that he must return to the Cave. He must return to his cave with his hopes for truth and good and beauty in his own conceptions, and admit that he is necessarily bound to it. But hereafter he knows of the light beyond. He is wise to the journey from the deep darkness to the light. Although he is dependent upon the Cave, he now possesses a freedom: He can, even if briefly, subsist in the beautiful light of truth. He is fortunate. In his mind at least, he can cease his becoming, sitting for a moment, warm in the Sun’s light.
Socrates’ Cave Allegory uses this metaphor of shadows, fires and sunlight to suggest our place within them. Respectively, they each are representative of a stage in an beautifully constructed allegory of the mind. Firstly, shadow, for the senses and our dependence upon them. Secondly, Fire, as the shadows ‘caster’, what would be considered the science of the cave. Finally, the Sun, the conception of everything in the universe, including the Cave below it. It is through these stages that Socrates constructs an Allegory that compactly summarizes the internal and external worlds, that of our universe and that of our conceptual natures, and the necessity of our becoming aware of both. Such is his depiction of the primordial education of man.
Socrates: Have you never heard, simpleton, that I am the son of a midwife, brave and burly, whose name was Phaenarete?

Theaetetus: Yes, I have.

Socrates: And that I myself practice midwifery?

Theaetetus: No, never.

Why does socrates call himself a practicing midwife? Indeed, such a title seems odd for a philosopher. It is in considering this third Socratic metaphor, of Midwifery, that we see the intended title revealed: that of a teacher. Socrates speaks of the labor of philosophic inquiry, and the art of his Socratic Method.

Dire are the pangs which my art is able to arouse and to ally in those who consort with me, like the pangs of women in childbirth; night and day they are full of perplexity and travail which is even worse then that of the women.

Socrates claimed never to have known anything, nor to have taught anyone anything. His own inquiries into the definition of knowledge, truth, justice, beauty and the rest were all conceived in his discourses. He claimed that, “None of these theories come from me; they all come from him who talks with me, I only know just enough to extract them from the wisdom of another, and to receive them in a spirit of fairness.”

Indeed, knowing the path to knowledge and the knowledge itself are two different things. Socrates’ wisdom rests in his understanding of the means by which the road is traveled most successfully. Even then, he does not insure success. All endeavors towards knowledge come with them the risk of “false delivery.” In a discussion on the subject with the greek mathematician Theodorus, he warns:

“We may have been wrong in making [in our metaphor] only forms of knowledge... there ought to have been forms of ignorance as well, flying together in the mind and then he who sought to take one of them might sometimes catch a form knowledge, and sometimes a form of ignorance; and thus he would have false opinion from ignorance, but a true one from knowledge, about the same thing.”
Conclusions of fact within the cave are dangerous to the mind of those whom subscribe to them. In front of the Cave’s fire, there is always the possibility of one’s own opinion being inverted numerous degrees from the true, like shadows upon the wall. Who can discern that which is knowledge and that which is ignorance? This is the role of wisdom’s Midwife:

“Women do not bring into the world at one time real children, and at another time counterfeits which are with difficulty distinguished from them; if they did, then the discernment of the true and false birth would be the crowning achievement of the art of midwifery...”

But for Socrates, a Midwife himself, there was no such luxury. At any moment in each of the Dialogues to which he is credited, Socrates encountered at once false opinions, dead ends and beautiful births of insight. So lies the danger and the beauty of teaching in the Socratic method. “I shall say nothing about myself, but [rather] shall endeavor to elicit,” Socrates said, and often he was successful. Throughout his dialogues, this principle of elicitation remains. Socrates’ work was to “birth” into existence, as Chora does for our universe, other’s conceptions within it.

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Socrates: And are you still in labour and travail, my dear friend, or have you brought all that you have to say about knowledge to the birth?

Theaetetus: I am sure, Socrates, that you have elicited from me a good deal more than ever was in me...

Socrates: ...If Theaetetus, you should ever conceive afresh, you will be all the better for the present investigation, and if not, you will be soberer and humbler and gentler to other men, and will be too modest to fancy that you know what you do not know. There are the limits of my art: O came no further go, nor do I know aught of the things which great and famous men know or have known in this or former ages. The office of a midwife I, like my mother, have received from God; she delivered women, I deliver men.
PART TWO
John Dewey

What Plato invests in aristocracy and reason, Dewey channels toward democracy and the scientific method, as it applies to the way we think, and the ‘subject matter’ of our lives. As Dewey puts it, democratic society represents an alternative to Plato’s Republic, it offers, in contrast, an equal arena in which the individual is not subordinate, but rather where “each individual constitutes his own class.”¹ To enable such an environment, Dewey believes that an intellectual habit must be established by fostering scientific modes of inquiry (seeking and discovery) in each aspect of life. “Science is experience becoming rational”² as he puts it, where the process derived from these rationalized experiences provides the surest and most organic pathway to knowledge in any endeavor. “There is no such thing as genuine knowledge and fruitful understanding except as the offspring of doing.”³

¹ Page 104, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
² Page 263, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
³ Page 233, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
Socrates envisioned a class system where a few philosopher kings or ‘knowers of truth’ would study with their predecessors to reach a point of transcendence above the laymen. Obtained through the study of mathematics, logic, and philosophy, a ruler could come to know these patterns well enough to base all of his decisions upon them. After years of preparation and trials, these chosen individuals would poses the foresight to not only transcend “the cave”, but to return back to it, in the ultimate sacrifice, to maintain the righteousness of the society. The chosen rulers would then sift through the people of their lands, assigning each to a course of life best suited to his or her ability, as they the Philosopher King saw fit.

Dewey recognized an inherent obstacle to such an philosophers republic: constant just and harmonious social order. He persuasively claims that,

“Everywhere else the mind is distracted and mislead by false valuations and false perspectives.... correct education could not come into existence until an ideal state existed, and after that education would be devoted simply to its conservation... a state which would be trusted to some happy accident by which philosophic wisdom should happen to coincide with possession of ruling power in the state.”

Even if this state were reached, both society and education would move toward a fixed and static end, however blissful it might seem. This fate seemed all too unnatural. Dewey feared that with the loss of ideologic diversity, from which the new and unknown stem, society’s ability to survive and thrive would be handicapped at best. Like darwinistic evolution, he believed that to strive for a static, ultimate state would be to undermine progress.

If, as Dewey claims, reason is “the ability to grasp the universal,” then the superior means of education would be to grasp the universality of change and progression. Dewey suggests that society is most stable when it embraces change within it’s constructs, and can therefore utilize the ultimate instrument of originality, the individual, to insure the success and advancement of the whole. By limiting

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4 Page 103, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
5 Page 135, Experience and Education, See Works Cited
society to classes, Socrates was excluding the nuanced contributions each individual might make if unrestricted by position or ranking. This same understanding, Dewey sees, must be applied to the educational experience. It cannot be the choice of the ruler as to whom will be educated, but rather, the ruling power must foster all to be educated.

**DEVELOPMENT VS. FORMATION**
The Oppositional Forces in Educational Philosophy

“"The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without; that it is based upon natural endowments and that education is a process of overcoming natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under external pressure.""

“Guidance is not external imposition. It is freeing of the life process for it’s own most adequate fulfillment.” This maxim represents the force behind Progressivism. It represents the middle ground between all-encompassing imposition and total independence. When the child is left alone, we see the effect of the lack of environmental conditions which serve as a critical guide for the advancement of learning. On the one hand, “Nothing can be developed from nothing, nothing but the crude can be developed out of the crude - and this is what surely happens when we throw the child back upon his self

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6 Page 117, Experience and Education, See Works Cited

7 Page 22, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
as a finality, and invite him to spin new truths of nature or of conduct out of that.”

On the other, each experience either expands or contracts our environment. The learned person does not live in another world then the rest, they live in an expanded aspect of it. They use knowledge as an instrument for dealing effectively with situations. They have developed their senses and power of judgement over the course of multiple experiences, an exercise that through living has granted them a special gift; the ability to garner the maximum information or knowledge from their experiences. This is a contradiction that must be navigated. Its a balancing act in the effort to educate off of experience.

Dewey writes, “The way to enable a student to apprehend the instrumental value of arithmetic is not to lecture him upon the benefit it will be to him in some remote and uncertain future, but to let him discover that success in something he is interested in doing depends upon ability to use number.” The instructor can not stop with the number itself, they must enable the student, in the process of actual experience, to learn the concept of number so as to apply what is learned to future endeavors where that same arithmetic might be necessary.

But such an ideal process is often unrealized. More commonly, by memorization, recitation, or examination, it becomes “...easier and simpler to leave it as it is, and then by trick of method to arouse interest, to make it interesting; to cover it with sugar coating; to conceal its barrenness by intermediate and unrelated material; and finally, as it were, to get the child to swallow and digest the unpalatable morsel while he is enjoying tasting something quite different.”

Therefore, the key to quality guidance is a matter of “...selecting stimuli for instances and impulses which is desired to employ in the gaining of new experience.” The goal is to predict what new

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8 Page 24, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
9 Page 282, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
10 Page 38, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
11 Page 25, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
experiences are most beneficial, in that they might provide the best stimuli for the desire for future, even more important experiences. It is Dewey’s claim that, if this ‘is developed properly, independently, the child will carry the habit into adulthood. “The only ultimate value which can be set up is just the process of living itself. And this is not and end to which studies and activities are subordinate means: it is the whole of which they are ingredients.”\textsuperscript{12}

The term ‘progressive’ in education represents, for Dewey, harmony of instruction with growth. Experiences that do not promote future experience are the worst kind, as they sever the pathways of connections normally associated with positive experience. Dewey called these “mis-educative.” This is exemplified in the way he speaks about the educational process. “The individual has to draw in memory upon his own past to understand the conditions of the present.”\textsuperscript{13} If these memories are negative, why would the student desire to propagate them further into the future? The child’s invaluable desire to ‘know’, to experience, to learn, is largely fueled by the memory of successful endeavors past. If this past is cluttered with failed attempts, unanswered questions and the dead-weight of imposed material, the result is, not surprisingly, a lack of investment. There is no worse fate for a education that hopes to develop a passionate learner.

\textsuperscript{12} Page 281, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
\textsuperscript{13} Page 93, Experience and Education, See Works Cited
THE EXPERIENTIAL MODEL
Reconnecting Education to Experience

Studies are possibilities. They lay the blueprint for development, inherent in the child’s immediate crude experience. They are not, however, part of the immediate and present life. How do we account for the future while learning in the present? Dewey says that to ask this question is a microcosm of its answer. “To see the outcome is to know what direction the present experience is moving, provided it move normally and soundly. The far away point, which is of no significance to us simply as far away, becomes of huge importance the moment we take it as defining the present direction of movement.”

Specifically, it is the stripping of the child’s own world from them. The child goes to school, and the studies and subjects divide and fractionalize their world. “Facts are torn away of their original place in experience and rearranged with reference to some general principle.”

This is obviously unnatural. Life’s extra-scholastic experiences do not come pre-codified. The connecting bonds of activity are what hold together and enable development. If these associations are made for us in a mold outside our experience, then these connections will not hold up in our unique applications. “The adult mind is so familiar with the notion of logically ordered fact that it does not recognize - it cannot realize - the amount of separation and reformatting which the facts direct experience have to undergo before they can appear as “study” or branch of learning.”

What concerns the teacher is the way in which the studies, the collective history of our experiences, might become part of the child’s experiences. Ideally, the separation between the world and the learning environment would be minimal, if at all, so that the transition were it necessary would be less arduous. The teacher would consider, “What is available in the immediate present and might serve as

14 Page 18, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
15 Page 10, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
16 Page 10, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
connection to what I hope to instill?” “How can it be used?” They would foresee the child’s needs in the world and produce them in the learning environment. Nothing is more subtle, difficult or important this skill for a teacher.

The ensuing and hopeful organic objective for the student is to take the ‘repercussions’ of their experiences - the excitement, the accomplishment, the questions - and make an informed choice as to the direction of their next endeavor. This is the environment the teacher must fill while attempting to birth into habit this pattern in the students education. Unless we can utilize the motivations which inspire us to learn, until we can harness the experiential habit, the individual will remain disillusioned, working in the present towards and ever moving goal post, eventually disinterested in future inquiries.

“...Subject matter never can be got into the child from without. Learning is active. It involves reaching out of the mind... literally, we must take our stand with the child and our departure from him. It is he and not the subject matter which determines both quality and quantity of learning.”

It is not just the subjects’ import, but equally the response on behalf of the student to that subject that is important to growth. Because a subject is not itself an end it is, rightfully, without regard to the individual. It relies upon the artistry of the teacher to make informed connections as to its relevance in present or feature experience. A topic and the transfer of its raw information cannot themselves be considered the inquiry. A study must be adapted to the needs and interests of the student and their experiences. Even something as abstract as mathematics finds its origin in the world of practicality and purpose. As a language it represents worldly values, organic shapes and relative relationships that are experienceable. As valuable as an abstract numerical language is, it must come from experiencing a need for it. Additionally, learning it and never ‘speaking’ it promotes artificial notions of separateness. These corroding conditions between student and subject can be seen across disciplinary lines, and what is worse, it can near irreversible. Between teacher and student, it is a short distance from an experience to an

17 Page 13, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
convenient abstraction, and from one convenient abstraction to a compilation of them. The former requires extensive interaction, and the latter requires comfortable separation.

The effect is that the educational process, instead of being seen as a whole, is squandered into sections. This is an imbalance. There is a beautiful duality, between the facts and truths that enter into the present experience, and those that are contained in subject matter awaiting. Collectively they are the initial and future truths of one reality. “To oppose the infancy and maturity of the same growing life; to set the moving tendencies and the final result of the same process over against each other, is to hold that the nature and the destiny of the child at war with each other.”  

If the teacher holds the position, in the life of the child, as an enabler - one who can birth into study what is sought in the mind - they will more effectively shape the path of study. In contrast, if the desire to learn - defined by Dewey as a series of favorable past learning experiences - is removed, how then is the teacher expected to gain the trust of their students in an effort to guide them? The possibility for failure, Dewey warns, is that the experiential method would not be adequately enacted. “There is no discipline in the world so severe as the discipline of experience subjected to the tests of intelligent development and direction.” Unless the educator takes it upon themselves to meet these standards of practice, the experiancerial model falls flat in the face of traditional convenience.

So the role of teacher must be redefined to address the subtly of their art. They must see their expertise as an invisible potential, embedded in the real moment to moment experiences of the child, needing to be brought to the surface by the right inquiry at the right time. Essentially, they themselves must embody their valuable knowledge, both acquired from their own education as well collected from reflection upon their own inquiries. They must facilitating such an environment for their students, with their students. In most cases, they must be responsible for actually creating them. The inquiry becomes an attempt to breathe the advanced bodies and abstractions of the past into the live action of the present.

18 Page 19, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited

19 Page 42, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
This goal, this condition, is really only satisfied when the educator embarks upon a “continuous process of reconstruction of experience,”20 a sort of real time curricular reconstruction.

Doing this properly, educating based on experience, usually means intimate contact between the “mature and the immature.” The educator must be able to notice when the present experience can be fuel for future experience, and how. The mature serve as the vital organ through which the wisdom of the world must flow towards its immature.

“The effect of and experience is not born on its face. It it is a problem to the educator. It is his business to arrange for the kind of experiences which... promote have desirable future experiences... wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in future experiences. Hence the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences. The value of maturity over immaturity is the ability to foresee future pathways of experience based upon the present.”

Dewey claimed that his new breed of education, based on experience, was simpler in principle then the old. It was in harmony with the nature of growth. Dewey acknowledged that inevitably the weakest part of progressive education had been the selection or organization of subject matter, or the areas of our collective history that must be covered. Experience contradicts a single course of study. If we abandon the idea that subject matter is fixed and readymade, something outside the child’s experience, if we simultaneously stop thinking of the experience of the child as hard and stagnant, limited by our own imagination of it, we see that subjects and experience are simply,

“two limits which define a single process. Just as two points define a single line, so the present standpoint of that child and the facts and truths of studies define instruction... We get the case of child vs. the curriculum; of the individual nature vs. social culture. Below all other devisions in pedagogic opinion lies this opposition.”21,22

20 Page 121, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
21 Page 8, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
22 Page 16, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
"Familiarity breeds contempt, but it also breeds something like affection. We get used to the chains we wear, and we miss them when removed. 'Tis an old story that through custom we finally embrace what at first wore a hideous mien. Unpleasant, because meaningless, activities may get agreeable if long enough persisted in. It is possible for the mind, to develop interest in a routine or mechanical procedure, if conditions are continually supplied which demand that mode of operation and preclude any other sort. I frequently hear dulling devices and empty exercises defended and extolled because "the children take such an ‘interest’ in them." Yes, that is the worst of it; the mind, shut out from worthy employ and missing the taste of adequate performance, comes down to the level of that which is left to it to know and do, and perforce takes an interest in a cabined and cramped experience. To find satisfaction in its own exercise is the normal law of mind, and if large and meaningful business for the mind be denied, it tries to content itself with the formal movements that remain to it”

Often times, what is taught is thought of as static. Inherent in a curriculum are the values of others; adults, ancestors or authorities. There is always a pressing need to pass on our collective bodies of knowledge from one generation to the next. However, it is also true that in most every human conglomeration, change is the rule, not the exception. “There is a vicious circle. Mechanical uniformity of studies and methods create a kind of uniform immobility and this reacts to perpetuate uniformity of studies and of recitations, while behind this enforced uniformity individual tendencies operate in irregular and more or less forbidden way. 23” When students are forced to conceal their organic inclinations, seeming interested is put before being interested. The goal is to preserve the appearance of obedience, attention and humility, so as to eventually escape the confines of it.

When subject matter is isolated from the students investment in it, when to know of something is enough, Dewey suggests that the following distinction be noted: Just because a subject might have the motivation of mandate does not mean it can equal the value of that same study pursued with investment

23 Page 142, Experience and Education, See Works Cited
on the part of the student. The pupil might suppose the material to have some future value, but often because it is imposed from without this understanding is not enough to maintain the interest vital to its successful transmission. If intelligence, as Dewey defines it, is about grasping the universal, we can only grasp the universal when the immediate is analyzed. “Every activity, however specific, is of course, general in its ramified connections, for it leads out indefinitely into other things.” Education’s ultimate inquiry is to establish a habit out of understanding this process.

When genuine interest is combined with mature guidance forward in that interest, we have the basis of good learning; good teaching. Instead of the teacher limiting their own wealth of knowledge to pre-determined guidelines of study, the teacher might instead foster the environment of the child by directing indirectly. Let the child’s own activities move inevitably through the teachers own expertise, utilizing the natural inclinations and curiosities of the student. If such an environment were to be established, the curriculum would no longer be autocratic. The present experience could instead be democratic.

“The proof of a [teacher’s] good inquiry is found in the fact that the pupil responds, his or her response is use. A student’s response to material shows that the subject has a function in his life... It is not sound to argue that, say, Latin has a value per se in the abstract, just as a study, as a sufficient justification for teaching it. But it is equally absurd to argue that unless the teacher of a pupil can not point out some definite visible future use to which it is to be put, it lacks justifying value. When pupils are genuinely concerned in learning latin, that is of itself proof that it posses value.” 24

Since the curriculum is always at the mercy of its deadweight; exterior energy of some influential person or group of persons in behalf of some thing or system dear to them -- it is always in need of inspection, criticism, and revision to make sure it is accomplishing it’s purpose: providing a pathway for the student to learn. It is here where first the matter of inquiry comes into question. “[An inquiry] must be

24 Page 358, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
flexible, it must be capable of alteration to meet circumstances. An inquiry established externally to the process of action is always ridged.25"

Good inquires utilize change as a driving force towards progress. Action, or doing, is the means toward these ends. If an inquiry is imposed from without, it cannot, save maybe for extreme coincidence, hold real time relevance for a genuine question in the present. To form an inquiry properly, Dewey says that it must reflect the natural process of need. Inquiry implies an action that must be taken. Each new experience, beginning in inquiry, represents “an activity that has become intelligent.26” Whatever the task, developing it’s appropriate inquiry is dependent upon the present action’s “intrinsic continuity.”27 Dewey explains this as such: “The external idea of the inquiry leads to a separation of means from the end while and end which grows up within an activity as plan for its direction is always both ends and means, the distinction being only one of convenience.28” When an inquiry is imposed, it clouds common sense. It interrupts not only the activity, but also deprives the student of the equal - if not more important - experience of developing inquiries in situations. A teacher’s aims must be translucent, and the student’s inquiry - if deemed beneficial - highlighted. Experience should originate organically, after a genuine inquiry that stems from another past experience. Such is the progressive cycle: finding solutions and developing them in a fruitful manner.

“Mind is capacity to refer present conditions to future results, and future consequences to present conditions... To have a mind to do a thing is to foresee a future possibility; it is to have a plan for its accomplishment; it is to note the means by which a plan capable of execution and the obstructions in the way...it is to have a plan which takes account of resources and difficulties.”29

25 Page 156, Experience and Education, See Works Cited
26 Page 129, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
27 Page 377, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
28 Page 124, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
29 Page 120, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
Dewey claims that thoughts by themselves are incomplete, or otherwise, templates for future experience. A thought is not an action. They are suggestions of opportunity, indications of knowledge, and fragments of a whole experience. Educators who have come to some mastery of the art begin to see the cycle as an end unto itself. “The aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education - that the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth.”\textsuperscript{30} We see that “knowledge”, in the sense of raw information or metal capital, is simply a resource toward further inquiry. Dewey expressed on multiple occasions that “Frequently, [knowledge] is treated as and end itself, and then the goal becomes to keep it up and display it when called for. This static, cold-storage ideal of knowledge is inimical to educative development.”\textsuperscript{31} It not only impedes future thought, but allows the present to go wasted. Education as an idea has no aim. Teachers and families and governments have aims, but education can not itself have an aim. Therefore, education is only as good as the aforementioned individuals, those who, in the name of their aims and by way of their own educational experiences, provide an open environment of inquiry and experience.

\textsuperscript{30} Page 117, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited

\textsuperscript{31} Page 186, Democracy And Education, See Works Cited
PART THREE
A Modern Educational Philosophy
SYNTHESIS
Over Two Thousand Years of recorded Educational Philosophy

If we are to grant Socrates any merit for his described transitions through the “Cave”, we must endeavor to construct a method which leads to the “Sun”. It is in such an effort, whether purposefully or not, that the 80 year old American philosopher John Dewey did just that. Ironically, and in contrast to Socrates, Dewey proposed a system of learning that could never be codified. Expressed clearly through his belief in the value of experience, John Dewey provided an educational philosophy that essentially removed predetermination of study from the equation. As Socrates claimed to never have known anything, and therefore could never have been able to teach, so too did Dewey see that nothing could be taught from without, but only could be “experienced” within. In the world outside of academia, often it is through a sort of “dis-satisfied’ understanding of something that we are earnestly motivated to know more about it, often leading to an equally valid offshoot. It is in this light that it becomes possible to discern the power of natural curiosity as a means towards intellectual advancement. If experience serves as the engine, then curiosity for experience serves as the fuel. It is hard to explain why students are so often full of questions and curiosity outside of the ‘school’ environment, and yet this same curiosity is conspicuously absent when faced with the subject matter of a curriculum. Where students are engaged in doing, actively partaking in the task at hand, contributing to the selection of that task and in discussing what happens in the course of that same doing, these experiences become not only spontaneous but numerous, and the developed solutions to the encountered problems are varied, advanced and even unpredictably ingenious. It is the active achievement of one’s own goals, be it the minute or seemingly impossible, that comprise the achievements of mankind.

However, unlike Socrates, Dewey did not separate intellectual discovery from sensual discovery. Dewey believed that each person should take advantage of the innate passion for discovery this sensual world provides. They should create a habit of such inquires, basing their education upon successive
experiences. The pupil ought to have a goal or problem, not for teacher or authority, but simply for themselves.

Hopefully, the habit would be so well established that it could be used to transition from tier to tier of the cave, each offering inspiration to venture to the next. Where Socrates, who was admittedly afraid of the natural sway of sense for its ability to fool the mind, shunned the ‘shadows” of ‘Cave’ experience, Dewey utilized them. Dewey believed that in order to understand the truth of a concept, one must have a foundation in that concepts’ manifestations. Reverence for conceptual truth could only be established properly by using sense as propulsion towards it. To empower ourselves -- which is the goal of the progressive educational endeavor -- we must capitalize on what our senses can provide. Dewey, with remarkable intuition, suggested that we utilize the Cave and our dependence upon it as means of transition though and eventually outside it. Where Socrates retired to a strict distrust of our senses, after what he believed to be many falsities propagated by them, Dewey stretched further backward into human behavior and history, to the more benign and rudimentary origins and capacities of thought and observation. He simply recognized their motivational force in discovery and innovation, and imposed a self-reflective habit upon them. In doing this, Dewey hypothesized that man could then understand the remote and abstract by having first thoroughly experienced the immediate. Or, in the terms of Timaeus’ metaphor, one must posses a whole knowledge of their place in Becoming in order to properly embark into the realm of Being.

Were he alive, Socrates would have criticized this assumption, saying that; to intrust our progression through the cave, our search for knowledge and truth and beauty, to experiences within the it, we would at best limit the search to its confines. If we agree that what is sought is the most true and beautiful knowledge and the ability to reach it, our search within the Cave could only lead to a false or fictionalized notion of it. To Socrates, knowledge lies outside the cave, and therefore cannot be understood using only tools inside of it. It would take conscious development of our minds, our only hope, to get outside it. Otherwise, what is sought beyond the cave would only be based upon speculative
and sensual hypothesize, empty opinions, and false perceptions. To Socrates, this represented the self-propagating circle of bad logic he saw all around him, a poor investment by his fellow Athenians that had so far caused more suffering then innovation in man’s education and prosperity.

But is it possible that both could be right? That possibly each is a vital piece to the other? Where Dewey proscribed an educational model that would use the progression of one’s life and the experiences within it to reach the entrance to the cave, it would take Socrates distrust of sense to see beyond it, into the realm of truth, beauty and pure conception? That it would be through Dewey’s understanding of our innate ability to self-reflect, experiment and scientifically understand the immediate world that Socrates would then release us from it, pushing instead toward the realm of Being beyond it. Could we indeed use the Cave to escape it? Socrates would make clear that the sun would never shine through man’s constructed aperture of cave knowledge, rather only down upon it, from above. But maybe it is only after Dewey’s method of living and progressing through the Cave that one could come to see properly the importance of abandoning it, even if only for a brief time, to partake in the beauty of Being beyond it.

When it comes to application, Dewey’s conclusions as to the role of the teacher, purposefully or not, reflect the same two thousand year old principals of Socrates Midwifery. In the Experiential model, there is a method of guidance that is not ‘instructive’. It does not impose, and it does not ‘form’. Rather, it is collaborative. The way Socrates trusts in the pangs of the student to bring about the needed questions for dialogue, Dewey trusted that the essential subjects needed in the modern world would eventually be reached, fueled solely by the indulged curiosity of the student. Much in the same way the socratic dialogues would clarify and confuse, the experiential model was a process that promoted the endless question and answer. For every definition sought in a Socratic dialogue, there were two more that needed to be redefined. For every curiosity satisfied using the experiential model, two more were sparked. The more the two methods are compared the more we begin to see the similarity of their functions. Where one leaves off in the sensual world, the other picks up in the conceptual.
"The source of whatever is dead, mechanical and formal in schools is found precisely in the subordination of the life and experience of the child to the curriculum." 32

We must defetishize the notion of curriculum as we know it. It must be reconstructed. If we are to lend credibility to the great thinkers of this essay’s focus, our notion of curriculum can not afford to remain. If we take a closer look into what Progressivism is - in both the light of student (experience) and teacher (midwifery) - curriculum must provide a goal that incorporates both. It must facilitate genuine experience, and provide the environment necessary for the art of midwifery.

A curriculum is a means of limiting study. Limitation acts as a parameter for the education it provides. It serves as a pathway to knowledge, available through its pre-established track. Consider the word “curriculum.” Taken literally is from the latin racetrack. Curriculum is a streamlined, universal path, a way of getting from the start to finish - infancy to adulthood - in the hope of the individual becoming part of the human community.

But these connotations of curriculum do not fit into progressivism. As it is manifest in the educational environment, the heart of progressivism is genuine, earnest inquiry. Inquiry is the way we experience what we are educated in, what Dewey saw as the beginning of good experience. It must be asked, “how can a curriculum and genuine inquiry be reconciled?” If you provide the inquiry, how can it be genuine? Indeed, it will have already been inquired. It stands to reason then, that if an inquiry were to take place inside of a pre-determined tract of study, it would be in spite of it, not thanks to it. Such is the case of the child vs. the curriculum.

But hope, for a moment, that curriculum could change. Hope that, if instead of providing the topics and pathways for study, curriculum provided more simply an environment for the collaborative determination of them. Instead of pre-determining the students educational pathway, the curriculum

32 Page 13, The Child and the Curriculum, See Works Cited
would stand as a requirement for the student to do so themselves. Employed in such a manner, it would provide a vital space, where informed parameters are cultivated for the construction of a student’s own, individualized experience and success.

If the curriculum stands as manifesto for both individual maturity and civic position, then the environment, or the parameters for experience, rests in the teacher’s expertise. The teacher must themselves have had successful inquiries, leading to successful experiences. A teacher is one most qualified to hold the responsibility of perimeter creation for their students. Who better to guide in the creation of progressive experience then those most successful at having done it? Teachers have experience, but more then that, they have had them in such that that understand the parameters of them.

Teachers must be talented at the art of midwifery. Their expertise as teachers in not just in their success within their own experience, but in their success facilitating good inquires developed by their students, those inquiries that have lead to progressive experiences. The teacher is the embodiment of our new curricular ideal: they can successfully enable students to determine good parameters for their own experiences. No singular, rote, pre-determined parameter could ever achieve such a democratic, intricate and wide reaching degree of success.

We see now that the progressive model does not describe a one-way street. Genuine inquiry stems from the student, and is invisibly guided by the teacher. For a time, the teacher acts to lead a shared inquiry, determine its direction, and cultivate the most beneficial experiences from it. Such is the art of midwifery. In such an environment, this leadership can not help but exemplify the process for the student. The process of progressive education is then itself a symbol for its own end.

On the brink of an educations’ culmination, there is a necessary appropriation that has to take place. Garnering the most from genuine experience is of paramount importance. It is not until the student becomes the true expert of their own process, the maker of their own parameters and experiences, that they can complete their educational journey by hardening the hypothetical goal of the newly defined curriculum into a solid truth of their being in the world. They must make the leap - from a student under
a teacher’s guidance - to being their own teacher in their own endeavors. Progressive education is teaching, by example, the process of learning. This fact must be made conscious before graduation into adulthood. They must have the ability to create their own parameters of environment, fashioned from their own self-initiated experiences. It is when there is an expertise in experience that the student becomes their own teacher.


Stork, Janet. Telephone interview. 3 Oct. 2007