

## John Dewey on Stages of Morality and Self-Realization Confronting Death

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*Much moral speculation has been devoted to the problem, of equating personal happiness and regard for the general good, note John Dewey and Tufts. If I do what is morally right for justice and benevolence, will I necessarily be happy or rewarded with happiness? In fact, some very bad people are happy, and some very good people suffer terribly. The problem thus put seems insoluble in this life and soluble only in the next life in which the bad will be punished and the good will be rewarded. However, Dewey and Tufts argue: "the problem is insoluble because it is artificial." The argument of Dewey is not that morality is to be viewed as a means to an external end of happiness whether in this life or in a life after death but that morality involves a profound transformation of the self in an ongoing process that aims to transform the self so that one is a fit member of the developing moral community that all moral agents may seek even if one were to die in being true to the moral transformation of the self and of the community. This paper will support Dewey's argument by a consideration of the way Socrates confronts his death as interpreted by Plato especially in *The Apology* which is agnostic about the immortality of the soul rather than in *The Phaedo* which affirms the immortality of the soul. For the dying of Socrates for the central moral value of his life, the examined way of life, is not unique as a moral decision. On the contrary, it is a moral decision that exemplifies what should be going on in moral decisions all the time, that is, precisely the subordination of earlier felt desires and impulses and social roles from babyhood and childhood to the highest moral ideals of the examined way of life and the life of mutual respect in the virtues which Dewey does not, of course, grasp as eternal Platonic forms of moral values. Socrates has always subordinated his life of sensation and emotion to the more lasting values of morality, and he is more deeply happy in finding his self-realization in striving to realize something greater than himself, the ongoing, social self involved in the moral community of self-examination and of virtue than in merely continuing to live.*

### Dewey on Moral Development as a Process

The paper begins by identifying the three broad stages of moral development for John Dewey.

We may distinguish then three levels of conduct.

1. Conduct arising from instincts and fundamental needs. To satisfy these needs certain conduct is necessary, and this in itself involves ways of acting which are more or less rational and social. . . .

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2. Conduct regulated by standards of society, for some more or less conscious end involving the social welfare. [This is t]he level of custom. . .
3. Conduct regulated by a standard which is both social and rational, which is examined and criticized. [This is t]he level of conscience.<sup>1</sup>

### The Pre-Moral or Pre-Conventional Stage

Reflecting upon the pre-moral or pre-conventional stage of development, we may say that it is Dewey's view that the human nature of an individual is not found in isolated instincts that could only be focused upon achieving the respective goals of the instincts. Except for the sucking reflex and the fright reaction in the new born infant, the baby's activities are not the direct result of instinctual impulses or the emotional need to suck and do not seek well-defined goals or conscious ends, and even then the baby does not know what to suck or whether the fright reaction has discerned something truly frightening.

As Dewey argues about fear that it is not simply one impulse because:

Fear of the dark is different from fear of publicity, fear of the dentist from fear of ghosts, fear of conspicuous success from fear of humiliation, fear of a bat from fear of a bear. Cowardice, embarrassment, caution and reverence may all be regarded as forms of fear.<sup>2</sup>

Dewey explains elsewhere when he insists upon the plasticity of instinctual impulses such as fear being able to be formed in many different social habits:

In the case of the young it is patent that impulses are highly flexible starting points for activities which are diversified according to the ways in which they are used . . . . The actual outcome depends upon how the impulse of fear is interwoven with other impulses. This depends in turn upon the outlets and inhibitions supplied by the social environment.<sup>3</sup>

Psychologists have given up the attempt to explain human behavior and habits as the direct result of instinctual impulses. See, for example, Maslow, Abraham H. "Instinct Theory Reexamined," *Motivation and Personality* (1954). For almost any human instinctual impulse can be overridden or greatly modified though human learning. Our instinctual impulses are not instincts as contemporary biology defines them: they are not complex patterns of unlearned behavior adapting individuals in a species to survival and reproduction.

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1. John Dewey, and James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), 38.

2. *Ibid.*, 154.

3. *Ibid.*, 95.

So, there is a strong argument from the analysis of an impulse as being able, in Dewey's own words above, to "become organized into almost any disposition according to the way it interacts with surroundings." So Dewey is pointing to finding it almost impossible to explain human behavior or to identify human nature through the impulses of the individual alone. Consequently, when the baby's inchoate impulses are organized by parents and other significant adult others in the baby's life, the baby's behavior is structured into socially approved habits and roles, at first, with little or no self-control by the baby. These plastic impulses of the child give rise to desires and the end goals desired by the baby only insofar as the baby's cries are shaped by how the parents respond to the impulses of the child.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that Elizabeth Anderson in her encyclopedia article points out that Dewey specifically chooses "impulses as the original motor source of conduct," a view which she notes contrasts with "conventional desire-based psychology." Desires arise later as a child notices the consequences of "its impulsive activity".<sup>4</sup> As Elizabeth Welchman sums up Dewey's critique of a desire based psychology of human nature,

Which desires a child will form and what the objects of those desires will be depends upon an interplay between impulse and environment. The human mind is not pre-equipped with latent desires waiting to be triggered by contact with their predetermined objects. Anything can be an object of desire provided the context is right. But in the absence of obstacles to action, we neither form nor act upon desires. Thus desires cannot be the motivational basis for all human action. They are instead just one kind of conduit through which impulsive drives are released.<sup>5</sup>

For Dewey, impulse comes first in prompting human actions, and desires develop as that impulse interacts with and is interacted upon by child's social environment especially. Perhaps a good example of an impulse which seems to break out into direct action would be the sexual impulse since it can be strong and spontaneous. Nevertheless, this sexual impulse, I would note, might be developed into many different sexual habits of behavior, or even some combination of these various possibilities, so the meaning or end-result of the impulse is not fixated by impulse but greatly influenced, as Dewey has already said, "according to the way it interacts with surroundings." What the writer of this article, Anderson and Welchman can agree upon is that all impulses, consequently, can be developed

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4. Elizabeth Anderson, "Dewey's Moral Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://stanford.io/2BqTnUb>, (accessed 10 March 2018).

5. Elizabeth Welchman, "Dewey's Moral Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey*, ed. Molly Cochran (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 170.

into various habits depending upon how these impulses are negated, affirmed, or moderated within a community's interaction.

### **Conventional Morality**

Consequently, in conventional morality, when the developing child can understand the socially approved roles and standards of one's group, that child is more or less locked into those roles and standards and can hardly subject those ideals to a sustained criticism that carefully evaluates those ideals either from the socially approved roles and standards of another culture or from an unrealized but future community whose ideals may yet have not been realized. For example, if the child in one culture learns the socially approved role of being cruel to people of other ethnic groups, that child will have difficulty in understanding and evaluating another culture, either from an actual or from possibly a future community, where people of different ethnic groups are treated with respect.

### **The Examined Stage of Morality**

Consequently, when the individual becomes more fully capable of critiquing the conventional social roles by seeing those roles from the viewpoint of other cultures and conventional groups or from the viewpoint of future, ideal communities, then the adolescent growing into a critical adulthood moves towards the critical level of morality. Such an individual can evaluate both one's own culture and the cultures of others in an ongoing process that constitutes the moral community of critical thinkers seeking better social roles and standards growing towards a universal community that can embrace all of these cultures insofar a wise integration can be accomplished. This evaluation of level (2) conventional morality should not be conceived of as an *a priori* judgment instituted by the reason of the self alone. Rather, all level (3) moral judgments of an individual are meant to be offered as hypotheses to the community for their further critique by the community and individual in the ongoing development of the moral community. In Dewey's Pragmatist theory of knowledge, all truths whether theoretical principles or practical moral guidelines are hypotheses that need to be tested. He affirms that "in the practice of science, knowledge is an affair of *making* sure, not of grasping antecedently given sureties. . . Truths already possessed may have practical or moral certainty, but logically they never lose a hypothetical quality."<sup>6</sup>

These three levels of morality, namely, the pre-conventional, the conventional, and the examined, reveal that our human nature is found only partially in the product of instinctual impulses and only partially in socially

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6. John Dewey, *Later Works of John Dewey, Vol, I, 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Il.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 123.

developed habits and roles, but most especially in and through a critical self-consciousness capable in an ongoing process of evaluating our pre-conventional, instinctual impulses and our earlier conventional social roles.

### **The Focus of the Third Stage of Moral Development: Individual or Community?**

Having identified the three levels of moral development, the paper now turns to a further analysis of the third level. If we grant Dewey's thesis that human nature is not a fixed, unchanging reality but rather something that can be changed and developed through the creation of new social habits and new social roles, what should the focus of the development of the self, the individual, for example, in the individual's self fulfillment whether in this life or a next life that has a heavenly reward, or on something else than the mere individual? Dewey's answer is that our focus should not be on a conscious emphasis upon our self-development and our self-realization either for the self's sake, that is, upon how we feel when we have attained our goal, but upon our involvement in something richer than the present self, that is, upon the ongoing moral interaction of persons who are striving continuously to evaluate our pre-conventional and conventional selves.

Here is Dewey's argument. Whenever we consciously act, we are acting to achieve a goal or end. Either the word "end" can mean the end, final results of an action whether intended or not, or the word "end" can mean conscious aim of an agent. There is no doubt for Dewey that this conscious aim of an action necessarily includes the consciousness of some realization for the self who is the agent. However, Dewey argues that the focus upon one's own self-realization actually frustrates proper moral action. Proper moral action requires that an agent be focused upon some intended state of affairs in which the self is acting for something greater than the self. As Dewey writes: "For there is no way of discovering the nature of the self except in terms of objective ends which fulfill its capacities, and there is no way of realizing the self except as it is forgotten in devotion to these objective ends."<sup>7</sup> For example, if a child were to fall into a well, proper moral action requires that the focus of the agent acting to save the child be precisely that of acting to save the child rather than upon the agent's own greater realization of one's own moral self in the eyes of others. Precisely because the agent who is risking one's life to save another may not survive in the rescue attempt, to focus directly upon one's own self-realization is to make it difficult to act for the aim of saving the life of the child. As Dewey writes in another example:

For example, the patriot who dies for his country may find in that devotion

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7. Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 390.

his own supreme self-realization, but none the less the aim of his act is precisely that for which he performs it: the conservation of his nation. He dies *for* his country, not for himself. He is what he would be in dying for his country, not in dying for himself. To say that his conscious aim is self-realization is to put the cart before the horse. That his willingness to die for his country proves that his country's good is taken by him to constitute himself and his own good is true; but his aim is his country's good *as constituting* his self-realization, not the self-realization. . . . The problem of morality, upon the intellectual side, is the discovery of the self, in the objective end to be striven for, and then upon the overt practical side, it is the losing of the self in the endeavor for the objective realization. This is the lasting truth in the conception of self-abnegation, self-forgetfulness, disinterested [impartial] interest.<sup>8</sup>

An anonymous reader of this essay has well emphasized Dewey's general point above that self-realization should not be the focus of a person's moral endeavor even though the self is being realized or destroyed whenever we consciously act. As Dewey has written, "every good act realizes the selfhood of the agent who performs it; every bad act tends to the lowering or destruction of selfhood."<sup>9</sup> For, as Dewey continues, "this realization of selfhood in the right course of action is, however not the end of a moral act—that is, it is not the only end."<sup>10</sup> Robert Roth emphasizes Dewey's point: "Egoism is avoided, however, for Dewey states that if one adopts a selfish attitude in his relationships with others and makes self-realization a conscious aim, he would probably 'prevent full attention to those very relationships which bring about the wider development of self.'"<sup>11</sup>

Now, however, the question arises as to what we should be concentrating upon when we do not generally make self-realization our direct end. Dewey does not argue that we should have our focus only upon the self-realization of the community. For there can be times in our lives when we are doing some actions precisely "for the sake of acquiring more skill and power" as when we are practicing the development of small acts of generosity, and there can be other

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8. Ibid., 393-394

9. Ibid., 392.

10. Ibid., 393. While Dewey and Tufts have positive things to say about self-realization and ethics, this paper will be following the interpretation of Gregory Pappas in *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience* where Pappas argues strongly against any grasp of Dewey's ethics as "an appeal to some ultimate good, such as self-realization, human flourishing, or growth." Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience*, 302-303.

11. Robert Joseph Roth, "The Conditions for Self-Realization in the Philosophy of John Dewey," *ETD Collection for Fordham University AAI6201041*, 1961, 19, <https://bit.ly/3eRRpL1>. Dewey and Tufts. *Ethics*, 335.

times when we might refuse to do actions which generally are good for the community because the actions required for the good of the community might involve “an improper sacrifice of personal capacity.”<sup>12</sup>

Because of these exceptions to working towards the good of the community, we cannot say that the self-realization of the community is the only proper end of our third level of moral development. Every moral action will have effects both upon self-realization and upon the moral community’s self-realization. At different times in our lives our focus needs to vary. Nevertheless, our broad moral aim should not be upon either the ready-made existing self or the ready-made existing community but upon the future development of both. However, even here in working towards the good of self and of others, Gregory Pappas points out that Dewey has suggested a significant comparison between the hedonistic paradox and the altruistic paradox.<sup>13</sup> In the hedonistic paradox, happiness is the goal of life, but if we make it the focus of our conscious goal and striving, we find ourselves unable to attain happiness. In his chapter, “A Crisis in My Life,” from his *Autobiography*, John Stuart Mill summed up one of the key things which he learned from his terrible depression when he was about 21:

I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness. . . . Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way.<sup>14</sup>

In a parallel fashion, Dewey affirms that an individual needs to avoid making the good of others and even of the self the primary focus by an individual moral agent because:

. . . before he can really do good to others he must stop thinking about the welfare of others; he must see what the situation really calls for and go ahead with that, and the reason is the same in both cases. Whenever one makes his own good or the good of others the end, it becomes an extraneous end.<sup>15</sup>

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12. Ibid, 394.

13. Pappas, *John Dewey’s Ethics: Democracy as Experience*, 212.

14. John Stuart Mill, *The Project Gutenberg Ebook of Autobiography*, (2018), ch. V, <https://bit.ly/3ihMKUF>.

15. John Dewey, *Lectures on Psychological and Political Ethics, 1898*, ed. Daniel Koch (New York, N.Y.: Hafner Press, 1976), 214. See also: “As there is a ‘hedonistic paradox,’ namely that the way to get happiness is to forget it, to devote ourselves to things and persons about us; so there is a ‘moralistic’ paradox, that the way to get goodness is to cease to think of it—as something separate—and to devote ourselves to the realization of the full value of the practical situations in which we find ourselves. Men can really

In learning to develop habits of moral action, we may need in the beginning to focus upon our own self-development and/or upon the self-development of our associated community, but in the mature action of the moral self we need to focus upon the concrete steps we need to do in order to avoid the altruistic paradox. Yes, it is true that we have to study and practice the mechanics of moral self-realization in learning to do what is morally right and good for both ourselves and our associated community, but the best moral agents are those who forget themselves in the realization of something greater than themselves just as the greatest dancers and the greatest basketball players are those who forget themselves in the realization of the concrete tasks and interactions with others that can result in a great dance performance with others or a great basketball game with others.

### **A Problem within the Third Stage of Moral Development: Self-Realization Confronting Death**

A problem of the relationship between self and the community can now be developed. Much moral speculation has been devoted to the problem, of equating personal happiness and regard for the general good.<sup>16</sup> If I do what is morally right for justice and benevolence, will I necessarily be happy or rewarded with happiness? Some very bad people are happy, and some very good people suffer terribly. The problem thus put seems insoluble in this life and soluble only in the next life in which the bad will be punished and the good will be rewarded. However, Dewey and Tufts argue:

*'the problem is insoluble because it is artificial.'* It assumes a ready-made self and hence a ready-made type of satisfaction of happiness. It is not the business of moral theory to demonstrate the existence of mathematical equations, in this life or the next, between goodness and virtue. . . . To demand in advance of voluntary desire and deliberate choice that it be demonstrated that an individual shall get happiness in the measure of the rightness of his act, is to demand the obliteration of the essential factor in morality: the constant discovery, formation, and reformation of the self in the ends which an individual is called upon to sustain and develop in virtue of his membership in a social whole.<sup>17</sup>

In reflecting upon this important quotation, we can note that all moral reflection and action involves an evaluation of impulses, feelings, and social roles. For example, if a person does not reorder one's impulses towards revenge and

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think of their 'duty' only when they are thinking of specific things to be done; to think of Duty at large or in the abstract is one of the best ways of avoiding doing it, or of doing it in a partial and perverted way," Dewey and Tufts *Ethics*, 353.

16. *Ibid.*, 395ff.

17. *Ibid.*

hatred in subordination to the social order in which fair and impartial justice is to be sought through a fair trial, judged by one's peers, that person has failed the moral task of elevating justice to its more proper role in a democracy. Again, another example, if a person does not reorder one's impulses to selfishness in subordination to generous action that advances both self and others, then that person has failed the moral task of affirming the value of our common humanity. Moral evaluation and action need to revolve around the central value of our associated humanity and to subordinate impulses, feelings, and actions that either detract from or even fail to advance the invaluable value of our association and interaction, always aware, from the quotation above, "of the essential factor in morality: the constant discovery, formation, and reformation of the self in the ends which an individual is called upon to sustain and develop in virtue of his membership in a social whole."<sup>18</sup>

In his summation of the topic, "Self-Realization as a Consequence of Moral Action," Dewey likewise affirms:

This conviction that at bottom and in the end, in spite of all temporary appearance to the contrary, the right act effects a realization of the self, is also evidenced in the common belief that virtue brings its own bliss. No matter how much suffering from physical loss or from material and mental inconvenience or loss of social repute virtue may bring with it, the *quality of happiness* that accompanies devotion to the right end is so unique, so *invaluable*, that pains and discomforts do not weigh in the balance. It is indeed possible to state this truth in such an exaggerated perspective that it becomes false; but taken just for what it is, it acknowledges that whatever harm or loss a right act may bring to the self in some of its aspects,—even extending to destruction of the bodily self,—the inmost moral self finds fulfillment and consequent happiness in the good.<sup>19</sup>

### Socrates on Self-Realization Confronting Death

Having concluded with Dewey that moral evaluation and action generally involve reordering and subordination of impulses, feelings and action to the higher value of one's membership in a social whole, we may now reflect on the moral quandary of Socrates in being sentenced to death because, in Plato's view, he has lived the examined way of life for the virtues. My reading of Dewey and Socrates is guided by Dewey's acknowledgement of fourth meaning of Socrates' usage of "know thyself," found by Joseph Betz in:

Dewey's fourth treatment of the Socratic "know thyself" is in his 1908 "Intelligence and Morals", a public lecture delivered at Columbia University. He is once again writing to overcome an aspect of the classical tradition in

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18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 392-393.

philosophy. This time it is the inegalitarianism which Dewey finds in Plato and Aristotle. . . . Dewey holds that only the man Who knows himself sharing a common destiny with all other men — not just his class or group is realizing the Socratic imperative to “know thyself”.<sup>20</sup>

Dewey sees Socrates in opposition to the hierarchical structuring of society found in Plato and Aristotle and as deeply concerned with common destiny of all humans. My essay agrees with Betz that Socrates proclaiming “know thyself” to all humans is calling for all to lead the examined way of life and can be grasped as serving as a great exemplar of moral virtue in dying for the value of the examined ways life both in himself and in all humans.

As we shall see, Plato's representation of Socrates in *The Apology* favors an interpretation in which Socrates is uncertain of his personal immortality whereas the representation of Socrates by Plato in *The Phaedo* does seem to favor an interpretation in which Socrates definitely argues for the conclusion that the soul is immortal. For purposes of this paper, we shall interpret Socrates more in line with the view presented in *The Apology* in order to see how Socrates could be interpreted without belief in personal immortality in order to make a comparison with the reflections of John Dewey on moral development and the good of the moral community of humanity rather than to present a definitive study on Plato's understanding of Socrates or of Plato's affirmation of the immortality of the soul.

We turn, then, to the dilemma in *The Apology* between the mere desire to live and be with family and friends versus the desire to live the examined life. Like most human beings, Socrates desires to live and he desires to care for his family, however he does not merely wish to live and to care for his family. He has reformulated the desires of his life so that at the center of his desires is precisely the desire to live the examined way of life and the life of mutual respect in the virtues. His happiness and his self-realization are precisely to be found in his ongoing commitment to the examined way of life and the life of virtue. If need be, he will give up his mere physical life and his own personal care of his children for a greater good, the good of the moral community of self-examination and the life of virtue. He will ask his friends who live for the very same moral community of the examined way of life that they will care for his children and guide them towards the realization of that very same moral community. If there is a life after death, it can only be found in precisely that moral community of self-examination and of mutual respect in the virtues. Socrates does not need a life after death for him to find self-realization and happiness in that moral community for which he has lived in his adult commitment to the examined way of life. He is happy in being true to his moral principles even though he dies because he is convinced that a good person cannot be harmed either in life or in death. Yes, of course,

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20. Joseph Betz, “Dewey and Socrates,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy*, vol. 16, (1980): 354.

there is some regret that he is dying; he would rather continue to live the examined way of life in community with others. The project of the examined way of life is never fully completed. Nevertheless, Socrates is as fulfilled as he can be in an ongoing process of the self-actualizing with others of the examined way of life and the life of mutual respect in virtue even though he dies in his attempt to realize that way of life.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Plato has Crito sum up the profound respect with which Socrates lived for others and the profound respect Socrates' partners in dialogue held for him at the conclusion of the *Phaedo*: "Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend, who was, as we may say, of all those of his time whom we have known, the best and wisest and most righteous man."<sup>22</sup>

Socrates in *The Apology* does reflect on whether death is an endless sleep from which we never awake or whether there is an afterlife which he envisions as a life where he would pursue the highest value of the examined way of life. His understanding of such a life after death is precisely that life for which he is willing to die since he cannot abandon that highest value in his mortal life now and at the same time regard the examined way of life as the defining choice of his life.<sup>23</sup>

To confirm this point in a thought experiment, we may try to imagine that the life after death focused upon the examined way of life could face such a great obstacle that Socrates would either have to be faithful to the examined life or have to give up such a great value in order to continue the life after death, it is clear that Socrates would stay committed to the examined way of life and the life of virtue and let go of the life after death. So, the key point is not that there is a life after death that supports and rewards the examined way of life but that living the examined way of life is its own reward in that it necessarily involves profound, mutual respect for all the partners, both self and others, in dialogue. Furthermore, if Socrates is not personally immortal because of his faithfulness to his great commitment, nevertheless he is objectively immortal in the memories of those who continue to live their lives with their central value being the very examined way of life and the necessary mutual respect for the partners in dialogue for which he perished. The examined way of life and the life of virtue which is inherently a life of mutual respect should be the most precious values and the source of our deepest happiness and satisfaction in our lives now even as they were in the life of Socrates.

Although, contrary to his doubt about life after death in *The Apology*, Socrates in *The Phaedo* affirms that he is as certain as he can be that after death that he will be with the gods who are wise and good, it is worth our while to point out the

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21. Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1 transl. Harold North Fowler; Introduction by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1966), <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text> (accessed 10 March 2018) *Apology* 37e, 41d-e.

22. *Ibid.*, *Phaedo* 118a.

23. *Ibid.*, *Apology*, 40b-42.

connection in his attitude toward being a philosopher and being unafraid of death, Socrates affirms that the philosopher should not be afraid of death since the philosopher is ever pursuing death and dying since the philosopher is living the examined way of life. It is clear that the *Phaedo* has a strong argument for the immortality of the soul since Socrates and Simmias in their dialogue reach the conclusion that death frees and separates the soul from the body and that it is central to the philosopher's goal throughout one's life to draw the attention of the philosopher away from the sensible to the intellectual.<sup>24</sup> Of course, it is clear, as Joseph Betz argued, that the description of the philosopher's activity as "always abstracting his thought away from the sensible and pursuing the lasting definition of the essences of things sensed" is precisely what John Dewey was opposed to in Greek philosophy.<sup>25</sup> As a pragmatist philosopher, profoundly influenced by Darwin's evolutionary perspective and evidences, Dewey holds that structures of human society and any ideal moral developments of those structures are not rooted in eternal essences but are always subject to change and development.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, there are passages in *The Phaedo* which weaken the strength of the conclusion which Socrates and Simmias draw about the immortality of the soul. Dylan Futter makes three points in his analysis of Socrates.<sup>27</sup> First, Socrates himself states in *The Phaedo* that he has a positive attitude toward death because he has "hope that there is something for those who have died, and as has long been said, a much better future for the good than for the wicked."<sup>28</sup> (*Phaedo* 63c4-7]. But hope in immortality involves recognition of the fact that immortality is uncertain. Second, Socrates himself also affirms that he is uncertain of immortality:

For I am thinking ... that if what I say is true, it is a fine thing to be convinced; if, on the other hand, nothing exists after death, at least for this time before I die I shall distress those present less with lamentations, and my folly will not continue to exist along with me—that would be a bad thing—but will come to an end in a short time. Thus prepared, Simmias and Cebes ... I come to deal with your argument.<sup>29</sup>

And third, at the conclusion of *the Phaedo*, after the death of Socrates, the text states: "Shortly afterwards Socrates made a movement; the man uncovered him;

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24. Ibid., *Phaedo*, 67d-68e.

25. Betz, "Dewey and Socrates," 39-40.

26. John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought* (NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1910): 1-19.

27. Dylan Brian Futter, "The Death of Socrates," *Philosophical Papers*, 44, no. 1 (March 2015) . 42-44.

28. Plato, *Phaedo* 63c4-7.

29. Ibid., 91b1-8.

he had fixed his eyes. Seeing this Crito closed his mouth and his eyes.”<sup>30</sup> Futter interprets that this passage leads to the conclusion that the courage of Socrates in facing death is grounded not on the certainty of immortality, but on the knowledge of ignorance because “[t]he image of open mouth and eyes is a trope for wonder. In wonder we become aware of ourselves as not-knowing. Thus it seems that Socrates died as he had lived, a life of perpetual *aporia* and wonder.”<sup>31</sup> Futter’s analysis of these three passages from *The Phaedo* does permit us to emphasize the passages from *The Apology* in which Socrates clearly professes his ignorance about what comes after death, whether it be an eternal sleep or the immortality of the soul of Socrates.

Consequently, in this paper, we will now adapt the argument of Socrates on the central task of the philosopher without using the conclusion which Plato is affirming about the immortality of the soul. *The Phaedo* has essentially argued that the philosopher is always abstracting his thought away from the sensible and pursuing the lasting definition of the essences of things sensed. So, in a parallel manner, we may point out that the philosopher in making wise moral decisions does not base a decision merely upon what happens to be desired or merely what happens to be approved of by one’s fellow citizens but upon the more lasting moral values which Socrates never fully possesses but of which he is always in search. Consequently what is central to one’s actualization and fulfillment of moral values is the examined way of life which is always a continuing journey. Ambury offers support of this grasp of the continuing journey of the examined way of life as central to the ethical life leading to human self-actualization, that is, to happiness, interpreting Socrates as a proponent of eudaimonism:

There are a number of passages in the *Apology* that seem to indicate that the greatest good for a human being is having philosophical conversation (36b-d, 37e-38a, 40e-41c). *Meno* 87c-89a suggests that knowledge of the good guides the soul toward happiness (cf. *Euthydemus* 278e-282a).<sup>32</sup> [Ambury, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*].

Consequently, the dying of Socrates for the central moral value of his life, the examined way of life, is not unique as a moral decision. On the contrary, it is a moral decision that exemplifies what should be going on in moral decisions all the time, that is, precisely the subordination of earlier felt desires and impulses and social roles from babyhood and childhood to the highest moral ideals of the examined way of life and the life of mutual respect in the virtues. This paper’s interpretation of Socrates is similar to that of Gadamer, as pointed out by

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30. *Ibid.*, 118a.

31. Futter, “The Death of Socrates,” 44.

32. James M. Ambury, “Socrates,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.ieutm.edu/>, (accessed 10 March 2018).

Ambury. For Gadamer finds that the examined way of life, especially in Socratic questioning, to be a key part of the ethical way of life. It is not that Socrates engages in dialogue about the virtues, but that this engagement in dialogue with others is a necessary condition for the partners in dialogue to become ethical, that is, to become partners whose dialogue is an essential component of their mutual respect for each other "because without asking questions as Socrates does, we will not be ethical."<sup>33</sup> Socrates has always subordinated his life of sensation and emotion to the more lasting values of morality as founded in mutual dialogue, and he is more deeply happy in finding his self-realization in striving to realize something greater than himself, the moral community of self-examination and of virtue which includes realization of both self and others, than in merely continuing to live.

As Dewey has written:

it is the business of people to develop such capacities and desires, such selves as render them capable of finding their own satisfaction, their invaluable value, in fulfilling the [highest moral] demands which grow out of their associated life. . . .

Our final word about the place of the self in the moral life is, then, that the problem of morality [and happiness] is the formation out of the body of original instinctive impulses which compose the natural self of a voluntary self in which socialized desires and affections are dominant, and in which the last and controlling deliberation is the love of the objects [most especially, namely, the community of self-examination and moral virtue] which make this transformation possible.<sup>34</sup>

Dewey, of course, does not appeal to any Kantian ideal that governs all moral thought as an a priori absolute independent of our developing self and developing communities, rather Dewey emphasizes our moral aim as forming, in the quotation above, "a voluntary self in which socialized desires and affections are dominant and in which the last and controlling deliberation is the love of objects," most especially, the ongoing community of self-examination and of moral virtue. Precisely this community is worthy of a person's pervasive and final dedication in one's life and death.

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33. Ibid.

34. Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 396-397.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the paper has been to examine how John Dewey understands the third stage of moral development, the examined stage of morality, as devoted to a good which recognizes that the self has arisen through control of one's impulses through one's membership in one's original family community and which can develop into an ongoing critique of one's present community through interactions both with other already existing and also future ideal communities. We have focused not on the ready-made self or the ready-made community but upon the developing moral self and the developing moral community. Even here, Dewey warns us that just as we should avoid the hedonistic paradox, we should also avoid the altruistic paradox. We have considered Dewey's proposed analysis of the three stages of moral development: (1) the premoral stage in which the infant has uncoordinated instinctual impulses which need guidance from the parenting adults into, (2) the customary stage of morality in which the child and/or adolescent must adopt uncritically, more or less, the habits and outlook of that child's social group, and (3) the critical stage of morality in which the individual may examine the pros and cons of those customary social habits and outlook, seeking a morality of habits and outlook that may be an improvement upon the earlier adopted habits both for the self and for community. So, for example, if a child has adopted from one's social group the habit of disparaging the dignity and humanity of another group of humans, it is possible for the young adult to examine such prejudice critically and to find the invaluable value of all humans.

In this third stage of critical morality, Dewey has argued that moral fulfillment is to be found, not in focusing upon one's self-realization as the ultimate end of human action and not in focusing upon a community of moral agents who all participate in the invaluable value of humanity, but rather upon the concrete tasks in serving the specific goods of others and the self. Sometimes one's moral actions may focus upon the self's development and other times more on the community's developing. Nevertheless, just as one's action as a basketball player or as a dancer is diminished in the long run by concentration upon one's own action and fulfillment except when one is first learning to dribble or to shoot the ball or one is first learning the proper dance steps and basics of coordination with one's partner but later is enhanced greatly in the long run by a focus upon the greater good of one's team or upon one's dance partner, so also one's achievement in morality is crippled by excessive focus upon one's self-realization of good moral habits except when one is first learning to practice the virtues but later is enhanced by a focus that involves a full consideration of the ongoing moral development of others in the community. Even here, Dewey has warned us of the altruistic paradox when we would focus upon the self-realization of the community, affirming instead that we need to focus upon the concrete goods of the community that we intend to assist.

It is precisely this focus of the more mature self upon a good in which the value of the self is intertwined with the value of others in an ongoing and developing community that allows Dewey to argue that the moral of the self can be found intertwined with others even though the moral self may die precisely because one's dedication to the interlacing good of self and others in the moral community in which the invaluable value of all moral agents is the goal and because this community of value continues on after the death of the individual.

The paper concludes with an analysis of Dewey and of Socrates, finding that both affirm that the morally mature individual in what Dewey has named the third stage of moral development is one who is always critiquing one's own socially acquired habits in search of an ongoing transformation of both the self and one's community. Moral behavior is not to be evaluated by one's own self as to whether or not it leads to some external reward, like a pay raise in this life or even an immortal life of happiness after death or even in self-realization, rather the moral life is precisely the transformation of the self from any supposed focus upon individual instinctual impulses or individual emotional wants and needs of one's original family group into a focus upon a good in which the self's value is intertwined with the development of others, namely, the moral community of the invaluable value of all moral agents. It is in this invaluable value of all moral agents that releases the self from excessive focus upon the self and for the proper focus upon the precious value of self and other in the mutually enriching community of moral agents.

To contrast Dewey and Socrates, we may note that Socrates has affirmed that the philosopher should not be afraid of death since the philosopher is ever pursuing death and dying since the philosopher is living the examined way of life, always abstracting his thought away from the sensible and pursuing the lasting definition of the essences of things sensed. Of course, Dewey has rejected the Platonic interpretation of Socrates which would assume eternal forms and an eternal, immortal soul reuniting with these forms through death. As with things that are sensed so also with things that are desired, we have only argued that the philosopher, for Socrates, is not seeking what is merely desired on a sensory level but what is desired after a critical examination of what is truly worthwhile, namely, the examined way of life and the life of mutual respect in virtues worthy of being shared by all humanity. So, for Socrates, his dying for the central moral value of his life, the examined way of life, is not unique as a moral decision. On the contrary, it is a moral decision that exemplifies what should be going on in moral decisions all the time, that is, precisely the subordination of earlier felt desires and impulses and social roles from babyhood and childhood, even the very desire to continue one's physical life, to the higher moral ideals of the examined way of life and the life of mutual respect in the virtues. Socrates has always subordinated his life of sensation and emotion to the more lasting values of morality which are founded in mutual respect, and he is more deeply happy in finding his self-realization in striving to realize something greater than himself,

the ever-developing moral community of self-examination and of mutual respect in virtue rather than in merely continuing to live.

So also for John Dewey we have emphasized his analysis of the third stage of morality, the examined stage, precisely as the stage not in which the self seeks an external happiness in this life or the next for one's morally good actions, but as the stage in which self-realization of the moral self is to be found in dedication to a community of moral agents greater than the self but also including the self, namely, the community in which the mutual and invaluable value of all moral agents is the end result but not the primary focus as the ultimate goal of all our moral action. The goal to focus upon is the concrete tasks in serving the specific goods of others and the self. In this community there is, as Dewey has emphasized, "the constant discovery, formation, and reformation of the self in the ends which an individual is called upon to sustain and develop in virtue of one's membership in a social whole."<sup>35</sup>

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