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J. Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Philip Deen. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012

If it is true, as Raymond Boisvert wrote almost a decade ago in the *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, that there are two schools of Dewey scholarship –the ‘method-centered’ set and the ‘lived experience’ group– then the publication of this manuscript, once thought lost, should be a force for reunification of the two.¹ Indeed, providing a common vocabulary between science and generic values such as freedom and consummatory experience, a vocabulary generated through a critical theory of society and culture, is precisely what Dewey claims to be about in this book. In the first chapter assembled from a number of manuscripts in the Dewey Collection in Southern Illinois University’s Special Collection, he writes:

Time generally reveals indeed a considerable amount of illusion in the supposition that prior science has been dealing with material pure from social adulteration. But the presence of this illusory does not affect the ideal of science; as it progresses, it develops a technique and a symbolism for the purpose of discounting the socially contributed factor, of reducing it to a minimum. Philosophy, on the other hand, is pre-eminently occupied with precisely this intervening factor. It is at home when engaged in criticizing, evaluating, clearing up, and systematizing socially conditioned beliefs. (p. 15)

What Dewey would want to cement in the minds of readers of this “lost” manuscript is that “the sickliest way in which a student of philosophy can approach his subject-matter is that of a search for ultimate impersonal revelation of truth.” (p. 16)

Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy (UPMP), stitched together from fragments written by Dewey between 1941 and 1943 by editor Phillip Deen, is a sprawling text with a not-too-unfamiliar thesis: “we have never been modern.” However, coining the right term for what western philosophical life *has* become over its 2500 year history is an opportunity for that rarest of occurrences, the Deweyan neologism. The adjective ‘unmodern’ jars, but as the reader will discover, it is an apposite term for what Dewey sees as an unfortunate double movement in intellectual history: first, a fragmented and unprogressive dialectic of epistemology and metaphysics constrained by ideas from Greek and medieval thought; second, the production of the illusion of revolutionary change around the time of Descartes, flowering in the Enlightenment and consolidated and sharpened by scientific and analytic philosophies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. ‘Unmodern’ as the name for this double movement in history thus serves as a stark contrast to Dewey’s own programmatic statement of ‘cultural naturalism’ –a truly modern philosophy– offered in the

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¹ Raymond Boisvert, “Updating Dewey: A Reply to Morse”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 37:4, Fall 2001, p. 576.

second part of the book. Taken together, Deen calls the pieces of *UPMP* a “cultural history of modern philosophy” (p. xli). His general introduction and editor’s notes are informative, and he provides a short but well-chosen bibliography of texts that allow interested readers to culturally and philosophically contextualize Dewey’s late work output.

The structure of the book, assembled as it has been out of “a manuscript of 160,000 words broken into hundreds of fragments” (p. xli), is more difficult to use than Dewey’s other extant works criticizing “with malice prepense” the history of philosophy, including *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, *The Quest for Certainty*, and the early, highly significant essay “The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge.” According to Deen, the completeness of portions of the text was highly variable—for example, the chapters “The Search for Salvation,” regarding medieval philosophy and theology, and “The Supreme Human Art,” dealing with advances from Hume to Hegel, were extremely fractured. Other chapters were extensively rewritten, but a few, particularly those in the latter part of the book, in which Dewey weighs in on supposedly perennial questions of philosophy, were largely extant. In general, the farther one reads into the book, the repetitions become fewer and textual gaps become narrower, plus the narrative becomes more cohesive while the arguments are more incisive. It is entirely possible to read the last six of the book’s fourteen chapters on their own in order to access a distillation of Dewey’s thinking during a time, of his own admission, when “philosophy didn’t seem to have much place in this hell of a world” (p. xli).

The themes of *UPMP* resound with other of Dewey’s well-known if shorter contributions from this period, like “Nature in Experience (1940), “Anti-Naturalism in Extremis” (1943), and his extensive introduction to the collection *The Problems of Men* (1946). This latter source provides a favorite quotation of Dewey’s from Matthew Arnold that serves as both the title for a pivotal chapter in *UPMP* and the theme of the entire book: “Wandering between two worlds, one dead/The other powerless to be born.” *UPMP* serves not only as Dewey’s effort to diagnose the reasons for this kind of wandering, but also as an opportunity to clarify his opposition to a certain self-defeating view of philosophy’s role in general in fueling intelligent social progress. Also in the introduction to *Problems of Men*, Dewey introduces the challenge by taking aim at the Humean dimensions of Bertrand Russell’s social theory, claiming:

A distinguished member of this school of contemporary thought has recently written that “the actions of men, in innumerable important respects, have depended their theories asto the world and human life, as to what is good and evil.” But he has also written that what men hold about “what is good and evil” is wholly a matter of sheer likes and dislikes. They, in turn, are so completely private and personal—in the terminology of philosophy so “subjective”—as to be incapable of judgment having “objective” grounds. Likes and dislikes are immune to modification by knowledge since they dwell in inaccessible privacy.²

Questioning Hume’s emotivism, but endorsing his anti-intellectualist slogan, “Be a philosopher, but amid all your philosophy be still a man,” Dewey launches a program of “cultural naturalism” in *UPMP*.

‘Culture’ became an extremely important term for Dewey in the last few of his major publications. Just as a number of other Dewey scholars has done, Deen muses on why Dewey would have chosen to replace the titular ‘experience’ with ‘culture’ in the unfin-

² J. Dewey, *The Problems of Men*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 15, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985, p. 159.

ished reintroduction to *Experience and Nature*. “It is clear that it is a term inclusive of the whole range of human association,” Deen writes. “By turning to ‘culture,’ Dewey once again hoped to escape the inherited dualisms and divisions that had brought down *experience, practice*, and a host of other terms” (p. xli). It also seems clear that, by the point Dewey began the project of *UPMP*, he realized that ‘experience’ was an appropriate term to unite the organic metaphors that *Experience and Nature* was structured around. Indeed, he says just this in introducing the final chapter of *UPMP*, “Experience as Life-Function.” Even here, however, the distinction between ‘experience’ and ‘culture’ cannot be clearly made, since the former, as a synonym for ‘living’ and ‘life-functions’, “stand for events whose nature is most clearly and fully presented in *human* living, a fact which is equivalent in general to recognition of the soci-cultural nature of the phenomena dealt with” (p. 315). Building on this, the ‘culture’ of ‘cultural naturalism’ represents a plethora of distinctive *types* of experience –explored, for example, in the arguments of *A Common Faith* and *Art as Experience*. In the indexing of *UPMP*, Deen calls our attention to Dewey’s own formulation of ‘cultural naturalism’ as a way of broaching the artificial distinction between the categories of ‘material’ and ‘ideal’. After contrasting the approach of historical materialism to social phenomena with neo-Hegelian views equating Reason with the state, Dewey claims:

The issue as between these two schools of thought is not even debatable, provided the social phenomena in question are defined in cultural terms. For when the identity of *social* in its human sense and bearing with the cultural is admitted, it has also to be admitted that material aspects of culture...exist and act only in connection with that which is non-material; only in connection with knowledge, valuations and communication of meanings, while it is equally true that the latter exist in a social sense only through the instrumentality of a more or less complex equipment of material agencies. And, to repeat, the material and the non-material are so fused or interpenetrated in culture that the subject matters in question represent only distinctions in inquiry and discourse, not separations in existence. (p. 294)

UPMP demonstrates that ‘culture’ can be substituted for ‘experience’ in the same way that Dewey once claimed that experience is both process and product. Thus the Deweyan critical cultural theory in this book utilizes cultural resources to critique other strains of culture, without every displaying the need to resort to a transcendental level of criticism. In point of fact, Dewey is extraordinarily vocal about why there is no need to move to such a level in this manuscript, an unnecessary strategy that he terms in one place a “maze of re-duplications” (p. 165).

As previously mentioned, *UPMP* is sweeping in its scope, and this is perhaps the reason why Dewey thought that the project had gotten away from him in correspondence with Ratner. Its first chapter, “Philosophy and the Conflict of Beliefs,” sees Dewey delving far back into human prehistory in an effort to ground his analysis on pre-philosophic beliefs. His starting point is “the distinction drawn...between the ordinary and the extraordinary,” which will eventually be treated as the natural and the supernatural. Advocates of naturalism may have a more difficult time gauging the birth of genuinely philosophical thought (as opposed to rationalists, who can point to methodological considerations in Thales or other Presocratics) without simply referring to the shift from religious, supernatural thinking, but Dewey doesn’t lean on that post here. Instead, he claims that the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary (which may itself be divided into the ‘lucky’ and the ‘sacred’) is one based on “immediate emotional and imaginative experience” (p. 6). Heightened emo-

tional states –and in particular, those based in fear and the need for security– led beliefs about the extraordinary to a higher estate in the hearts and minds of early peoples. This analysis works well with Dewey’s understanding of the social forces underlying classical Greek philosophy as utilizing hierarchical metaphysical principles to guard cherished values, a view presented in *UPMP* and “The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge,” among other works. In this early chapter, Dewey also displays a degree of foresight about cultural universals reflected more currently in the work of Kwasi Wiredu. Wiredu has famously shown that the animistic Akan tradition does not couch their notion of the supernatural in terms of a material/spiritual distinction. Similarly challenging the notion that “primitive man, in that early stage wherein some religious belief demonstrably exists, had attained a definite notion of any coherent psychological unity,” Dewey calls such a view about “the centre of thought” as being “the outcome of a highly sophisticated subjective doctrine” of much later times (p. 10).

The Greek philosophical heritage is assayed in two chapters, “The Story of Nature” and “The Discovery of Rational Discourse.” In dealing with Greek naturalism, Dewey points to the importance of the early Greek sensitivity to change and often reminds us that *physis* was understood in terms of principles, or *archê*, not substances. Establishing at least partial connections with his own naturalism, Dewey notes, “Nature is the native, the inherent and abiding, and also the normal, the pattern of regularity, the base-line from which to measure deviations” (p. 25). Up until Aristotle, the absence of a concept of substance, with all its inherent problems, provides both “a relief and a perplexity” to modern thought, according to him (p. 23). By contrast, one intriguing thesis that Dewey develops here is the connection between the Greek agrarian tradition, the notion of growth and later philosophical systems that that rely on a picture of “orderly change” through “the resolution of the opposed tendencies of growth between opposites and by union of opposites, and of stable, unchanging kinds” (p. 28). More familiar to students of Dewey’s work on the prehistory of science will be the countervailing tendency toward promoting values discovered through *techne* and craftsmanship—the idea that “since the reshaping of things comes from without,” for example, “it is absurd to ascribe to natural elements a tendency toward some particular outcome...” (p. 30). When we move to the Athenian Greeks in the following chapter, Dewey’s examination is more *de rigueur*, save for the interesting spin put on the character of Socrates implied by the title. In “discovering rational discourse,” Socrates was not merely paving the way for the abstraction and specialization that all philosophizing requires, but also asking the question, “What is the nature of thinking when it reaches or purports to reach its goal: the truth about things?” (p. 40). The attempt to answer this question from Platonic and Aristotelian perspectives occupies Dewey for the rest of this chapter.

The chapter inquiring into the conditions of philosophizing during the Middle Ages is where Dewey begins to reveal the persistent hold that certain ancient ideas continue to have on modern philosophy. One of these is the legacy of scholasticism, which for Dewey is less about a particular body of knowledge or even deductive ‘scientific’ method, but rather about *spectatorship* and *disciplinary power*. Participation in remaking the social order was not to be spontaneous, but “dictated from the side of Being,” on this scheme, and those in charge of the most important social affairs, medieval theologians whom Dewey compares to Platonic philosopher-kings, work in the service of rigid social stratification. Dewey also begins to develop a critical focus on the history of the concept of ‘law’ beginning with the Romans, continuing on through the conception of physical laws and the Kantian moral law. In his view, the primary contribution of Roman culture to western philosophy was providing an opportunity for will to usurp the place of reason: not only the Stoics tell us that

“Moral laws are inherently rational. They come to us as commands in that Supreme Being, Reason and Will are one” (p. 60).

When we come to the early modern period and the scientific revolution that is so key in Dewey’s reevaluation of *episteme*, *phronesis*, and *techne*, we must ask, “what is genuinely modern in the philosophies that have appeared since the sixteenth century?” (p. 74). As mentioned earlier, the four middle chapters form the ‘spine’ of this book’s arguments; together, they represent an interpretation of philosophy from Bacon through Hegel, with a particular emphasis on the rationalism of Descartes and the empiricism of Locke. This period, framed by the ‘moral crisis’ of Copernicanism, is one of false starts and intellectual cul-de-sacs, Dewey explains. He points out the period’s hidden “new emphasis,” appearing in germ in this period, on the meaning and implications of “the discovery of *human* nature as a potential means of directing the human career emancipated from submergence in the cosmic scheme” (p. 74). To oversimplify, Dewey sees this new emphasis as resting on three realizations: first, an aversion to fatalism in the discovery of new human powers; second, the way to operationalize this discovery through a “new method of knowing,” freed from pre-scientific pretenses by thinkers like Descartes and Hume; and third, the end toward which this all tends, “what Bacon called the advancement of the human estate” (p. 75).

Much of what Dewey ponders regarding Descartes and Locke in these chapters—particularly the chapter “From Cosmic Nature to Human Nature”—should be of interest not only to scholars of pragmatism and Dewey’s genealogical method of criticizing the tradition, but also to those interested in comparative investigations of rationalism and empiricism. In particular, Dewey links the problem of solipsism in Descartes’s *Meditations* not only to his proof for the existence of God, but to the fatal flaw of assigning certainty to mathematical knowledge fundamentally. Through a close examination of Locke’s theory of ideas, Dewey lays the groundwork for a closer association of this British physicist with Gottfried Leibniz than is normally assumed to exist. Dewey’s assertion that “‘sensations’ in the case of Locke are not mental; they are rather physiological; they become ideas when the power of perception is directed upon them” opens up the possibility that for Locke, as well as for Leibniz, there is more in sensation than what is perceived at any given time (p. 89, n. 32). Dewey also spends time examining Locke’s hypostatization of reason, an investigation that leads him to assert that, at least “in the popular sense of the word rationalist”, Locke was more of a rationalist than Descartes.

Three strategies undergird the transition from the ‘unmodern’ residue of European philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to Dewey’s reconstruction of philosophical problems of “Mind and Body” and “The Practical and the Theoretical” (among others) in the last six chapters. The first will be familiar to those well versed in Dewey’s “The Need for a Recovery in Philosophy” (1917): the critique of generic epistemological problems about knowledge in favor of local epistemologies of practice. The second takes this framework of criticism and reconstruction and applies it to the examination of idiomatic uses of philosophical terms like ‘mind’ (a strategy also employed by Paul Ricoeur in looking at etymological usage and which might interest those attempting to define a Deweyan hermeneutic as Charlene Haddock Seigfried did for William James³). Dewey believes that when idiomatic usage strays far from even the simplest philosophical usage, the former can provide pragmatic clues to the meanings attached to behaviors that use the term, and that this provides a significant type of behavioral (but not behaviorist!) analysis. For example:

³ Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *William James’ Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

The word *mind* in these cases is equivalent to an attentive act, an act of *caring for* which involves doing something with or to surrounding circumstances, and hence, truisitically, involves organic action, that is, *the body*. As long as we take our clew from and find our relevant data in observable facts, we are bound to employ the kind of *behavior* exemplified in the above words as the subject matter on the ground of which to form a theory of mind and [the] mental. (p. 207)

Another trenchant analysis of the term “person” in the chapter “Things and Persons” presents innovative views that complement the important essays “The Unity of the Human Being” (1939) and “Time and Individuality” (1940). In this chapter and “Mind and Body” there are a number of passages that relate Dewey’s cultural naturalism to commitments and normative statuses, and should be of interest to those who look at pragmatism through the lens of Robert Brandom’s analytic philosophy. The project of these later chapters can also be read to engage with Richard Rorty’s deflationary concept of the role of philosophy as an ongoing conversation. Although Dewey would agree that this conversation on values and vocabularies should, by its very nature, not have a terminus, it’s clear from the mode of presentation of the chapters in Part Two that Dewey believes considerable work needs to be done by public intellectuals deploying cultural naturalism to criticize and revise beliefs, attitudes, practices and institutions.

Deen’s edition of Dewey’s book should be a welcome addition to the bookshelves of Dewey scholars. They will find much in the chapters in Part One of the book to be repetitive, as we have a manuscript that Dewey was not able to refine nor subject to the editorial concerns of his own time and place. However, as noted above there are significant new passages in Part One; Part Two, on crafting a genuinely modern, distinctively American philosophy, is well worth one’s careful and close attention. *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* not only asserts the impact of scientific method and technology on Dewey’s burgeoning cultural naturalism, providing a bridge allowing Boisvert’s ‘method-centered’ and ‘lived experienced’ Deweyans to converse more freely, it also demonstrates both a harder edge to Dewey’s criticism of the tradition as well as his incipient romanticism. Dewey not only frames the central chapter of the manuscript around Victorian poet and social critic Matthew Arnold’s “Wandering between two worlds” stanza, but he initiates that chapter with an extensive quotation from Arnold that, in many ways, conveys Dewey’s entire project. “Modern times find themselves with an immense body of institutions, established facts, accredited dogmas, customs and rules, which have come to us from times not modern. In this system their life has to be carried forward; yet they have a sense that their system is not of their own creation, and that it by no means corresponds exactly with the wants of their actual life; that, for them, it is customary, not rational. *The awakening of this sense is the awakening of the modern spirit*” (p. 92). The genius of Dewey’s critical history of philosophy is his ability to defer the creation of an artificial end for this practice, just as in his political philosophy he abjured predicting or prescribing final ends because authentic politics requires inclusion of individuals. “Those who live with a sense of [a] definitely achieved present exist in a state of hallucination,” he writes; and this idea, no matter how unsettling, is genuine possibility (p. 92).