

The Formation of the Thought of J. Dewey and the Process of the Growth of Experience

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I. Why Have I Been Interested in the Formation of the Thought of Dewey?

I studied “Self-Realization” at the post-graduate school of Hiroshima University from 1954 to 1961. I obtained the degree of Litt. D, in 1965. I visited Oxford University to study Green’s MS. at Balliol College from 3 May, 1972 until 15 April, 1973. I was invited by Professor S. Morris Eames to give a special lecture at Southern Illinois University, 30 April, 1973 and accepted the offer. The title of the lecture was “T.H. Green and J. Dewey.” I read Dewey’s two articles “Green’s theory of the Moral Motive” (1892) and “Self-Realization of the Moral Ideals” (1893) for the presentation of the lecture, as well as Dewey’s *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920). I was deeply impressed by Dewey’s sentences; “To find the Self in the highest and fullest activity possible at the time, and to perform the act in the consciousness of the complete identification with Self (which means, I take it, with complete interest) is morality and is realization.” (*EW*, 4, P.51) Why did Dewey put emphasis on this point? Dewey’s question was whether the theory of self-realization was considered as an action for a fixed self or as a present and complete action. Dewey says that “morality consists in not degrading any required act into a mere means towards an end lying outside itself, but in doing it for its own sake, or, again, in doing it as self.” (*EW*, 4, P.52) Dewey explains this as an “absorption of attention.”

II. Green’s Influence on Dewey and the Continuity of Experience

It was not only Green, but also the two Cairds, Wallece, and the Late Lord Haldane that exercised great influence upon Dewey. This is well known in his article “From Absolutism

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This paper is the manuscript of the keynote speech at the session “Thought Formation of John Dewey: Japanese Perspective” at the 1st International Symposium on Global Citizenship Education “Restoring Learning to Daily Living: Global Citizenship and John Dewey” (22 October 2022, at Soka University). This session featured *The Formation of the Thought of J. Dewey and the Process of the Growth of Experience*, edited by Shigeru Yukiyasu (Tokyo: Hokuju Shuppan, 2022). As its editor, I reported on my own interpretation of Dewey.

to Experimentalism” (1930). It was also through George Sylvester Morris that Dewey knew Hegelianism. Dewey wrote three articles on Green. I introduced already two articles on Green. The other article is “The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green” (1889). Dewey developed two works of Ethics in his early period. One is *Outlines of A Critical Theory of Ethics* (1891) and the other is *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus* (1894). The former is Dewey’s critical work of Green’s *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883). The latter is a psychological ethics based on “The theory of experimental idealism.” This is noted as Dewey’s original work.

Dewey’s starting point is the mediation of impulse. According to Dewey, impulse is not blind, but is mediated with an object. He says that “A child puts forth, by natural impulse, his hand toward a bright color; his hand touches it and he gets new experiences—feeling of contact; these, in turn, are stimulus to a further act; he puts the thing in his mouth, and gets a taste, etc.” (*EW*, 4, P.236) Dewey thinks that the relation of impulse to experience may be the interaction of cause and effect. Dewey says that “every expression of every impulse stimulates other experiences and these react into the original impulse and modify it. This reaction of the induced experiences is the psychological basis of moral conduct.” (*EW*, 4, P.236)

Dewey thinks that every impulse operates with intelligence. The two are twins. They connect naturally with each other. The end can be harmonized with the means in this way. When the end can be attained by the cooperation of impulse and intelligence, experiences become continuous. The attained end is a means to a next and new end. The former is connected with the latter. Thus, the end and the means can become mutual and continuous. This is called the process of growth.

III. Dewey’s Theory of Growth and Good as a Present Activity

Dewey says that “cease conceiving as education as mere preparation for later life, and make of it the full meaning of the present.” (*EW*, 4, P.50) A paradox is contained in this sentence, because he wants to say that “an activity which does not have worth enough to be carried on for its own sake, cannot be very effective as a preparation for something else.” (*EW*, 4, P.50) Dewey finds the worth and meaning in the present activity. This is to say that education is not a mere means to attain a remote end. In this way, Dewey thinks that the present activity can not only realize the end, but also has a meaning. This is very important for understanding the process of growth. How and why can this process go on?

Dewey says that there is a close relationship between an end and the means to this end. Usually, the end is separated from means. When the end has been attained, a next end may not be imagined. Even though the idea of an end may be imagined, the means of attaining the end cannot closely be investigated. The planning of realizing the end and the effective

means of this attaining may not be discovered. Dewey says that “The bad man is the man who no matter how good he *has* been is beginning to deteriorate, and grow less good. The good man is the man who no matter how morally unworthy he *has* been is moving to become better. Such a conception makes one severe in judging himself and humane in judging others.” (*MW*, 12, pp. 180-81)

There are three points here. The first is the standard of judging individuals and groups. The point is whether they are moving to become better here and now. They do not always try to move to a new direction. The other point is that when they have attained “some fixed result,” they have been satisfied by a sense of this attainment. This satisfaction cannot always make them move to a new direction. The third point is that a man who has a sense of growth “makes one severe in judging himself and humane in judging others.” Why is this possible? He has a generous mind. His mind is very calm. He is not selfish and judges others objectively.

Dewey concludes that “Growth itself is the only moral end.” This means that growth is a process of present activity itself. He says that “The end is no longer a terminus or limit to be reached. It is the active process of transforming the existent situation. No perfection as a final goal, but the ever-enduring process of perfecting, maturing, refining is the aim in living. Honesty, industry, temperance, justice, like health, wealth and learning, are not goods to be possessed as they would be if they expressed fixed ends to be attained. They are directions of change in the quality of experience.” (*MW*, P.181)

According to Dewey, the process of growth is an activity which is “the active process of transforming” the situation under which man is living. Growth is a continuous change of the circumstances. It is called an adjustment to the present situation.

IV. How did Dewey Consider the Relation of the Ideal to the Actual?

How did Dewey consider God in *A Common Faith*? He says that God unifies the ideal and the actual; “the *function* of such a working union of the ideal and actual seems to me to be identical with the force that has in fact been attached to the conception of God in all the religions that have a spiritual content; and a clear idea of that function seems to me urgently needed at the present times” (*LW*, 9, P.35)

Here, Dewey’s stand point is shown. The ideal is projected by imagination. The actual is the actual condition under which man is living. There may be a gap between the ideal and the actual, because there are resistances against the actual circumstances. How can man overcome this gap? How can he harmonize himself with an environment? We must consider the relation of spirit to mind.

Dewey says that “the artist, scientist, citizen, parent, as far as they are actuated by the spirit of their callings, are controlled by the unseen. For all endeavor for the better is moved by faith in what is possible, not by adherence to the actual.” (*LW*, 9, P.17)

Why are they actuated by spirit? I think that spirit cannot be understood without training of mind. How can mind be disciplined? Dewey says that “Imagination of ideal ends pertinent to actual conditions represent the fruition of a disciplined mind.” (*LM*, 9, P.35) He does not explain in detail how mind can be disciplined. But we can discover a way of training mind in *Art as Experience*. Dewey says that “Experience like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings. Their succession is punctuated and made a rhythm by the existence of intervals, periods in which one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing.” (*LW*, 10, P.62)”

It is by the theory of experience suggested by W. James that Dewey paid attention to the succession of breathing. This experience has attracted attention in Japanese Zen Buddhism. Zen involves paying close attention to breathing in and out in our daily life. It has tried to unify intakings and outgivings with our acts here and now. According to Zen, this is a discipline of mind. Its method is always to identify breathing with each of our actions every moment. But we are inclined to lose sight of this rhythmical succession. It may be difficult here to learn the method of Zen.

If Dewey understood the rhythmical succession of breathing in and out, he could have learnt the method of cultivating mind. What is this method? The mediation of the rhythm of breathing in and out and the actions of our daily life is possible by the unity of calmness and activity. In particular, a difficult point is that intakings and outgivings are always to become one with our whole self. Dewey has already known this difficulty to some degree. He says that “one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing.” It may be required to be self-conscious of a delicate stream every moment. Again, it can be a question to ask whether Dewey paid attention to this rhythmical succession here and now.