

Re-reading Dewey's Ethics III
Berlin, Dec. 7-8 2018

Program

Friday 7 12h-19h, Salle Tillon

12h

Welcome lunch

13h-16h

Stéphane Madelrieux, "Dualism, Atomism, and Moral Theory"
Discussant: Tullio Viola

Camille Pascal, "Bridging the Gap Between the Good and the Right: the Social Dimension of Moral Decision"
Discussant:

Roberto Frega, "What Exactly is the Place of Virtues in Dewey's Ethics?"
Discussant:

16h30-18h30

Céline Henne, "Dewey and the British Sentimentalists on the Role of Sympathy in Moral Judgments"
Discussant:

Steven Levine, "The Speculative Identity of Self and Act: Chapter Fifteen of the 1932 *Ethics*"
Discussant:

Saturday 8, 9-14h30 Salle Simmel

9h-11h

Just Serrano Zamora, "The Democratic Method and the Problem of Domination"
Discussant: Brendan Hogan

Matteo Santarelli, "Towards a Unitary Theory of Interest: Integration, Self-interest and Disinterestedness in Dewey's 1932 *Ethics*"
Discussant:

11h30-13h30

Sarin Marchetti, "Dewey's *Ethics* Between Theory and Practice"
Discussant:

Jörg Volbers, "Rationality as a Moral Problem. Dewey's Metaethical Response to a Modern Challenge"

Discussant:

13h30

Farewell lunch

Abstracts of presentations

Stéphane Madelrieux, "Dualism, Atomism, and Moral Theory"

Chapter 10 can be read as a general introduction to the second part of *Ethics*. It deals with the origin and function of moral theories, their subject matter, and the data which can be used in any moral inquiry. But the core of the chapter lies in Dewey's criticism of the common presuppositions of past and present moral theories. A familiar reader will readily recognize his well-known criticism of the central dualisms that divide the field of moral philosophy into opposing schools such as Kantianism and utilitarianism. Human action has been divided in two parts, the inner and the outer, the motives and the consequences, the character and the overt conduct, and each school has picked up one part to the exclusion of the other as the true subject matter of morality. While it is true that Dewey takes up again this anti-dualistic line of thought from the 1908 edition of *Ethics*, the main contention of this paper is that he has now shifted his criticism on another hidden presupposition, which can be labelled "moral atomism". Moral atomism refers to the idea that we could judge the moral value of a given act in considering only this particular act, whether it be from the point of view of its particular motives or from the point of view of its particular consequences, without placing this particular action within the whole line of conduct and the general ways of acting of the agent. Traditional moral theories have been dualistic because they were first atomistic in this sense. The solution Dewey proposes to overcome both presuppositions at once is to reconstruct both character and conduct, motives and consequences, in terms of habits, considered as general ways of behavior. All in all, this chapter deals with the changes that should affect our moral reasoning when we understand that habits should be placed at the center of reflective morality as well as of customary morality.

Camille Pascal, "Bridging the Gap Between the Good and the Right: the Social Dimension of Moral Decision"

This chapter discusses Dewey's interpretation of Kant's moral theory or, more broadly, theories of the Right developed in Chapter 12 of the *Ethics*. Commentators have shown that Dewey's ethics is composed of three factors - the Good, the Right and the Virtue - that are interdependent. I investigate the connection between the Right and the Good. My hypothesis is that Dewey translates the Right into the moral structure of the Good. More precisely, I show how Dewey bridges the gap between the Good and the Right by introducing into his account the social dimension of moral decision. I proceed in two steps. First, I describe two dilemmas internal to theories the Right: How can we objectively know a universal law of what is right? How can we obey a law that is external to our desires? Second, I analyze how Dewey solves these problems using two concepts of the Good - consequences and desires: 1) Kant's universality does not refer to an general law disconnected from consequences of our action but it gives priority to social consequences; 2) Kant's objectivity does not mean that we have to distance ourselves from our desires but it enjoins us to integrate others' desires.

Roberto Frega, "What Exactly is the Place of Virtues in Dewey's Ethics?"

Chapter 13 of Dewey's *Ethics* deals with the place of the virtues in moral life. Yet, trying to clarify the place of the virtues in Dewey's moral theory reveals more problems than one would expect. His moral philosophy has evolved over several decades, and significant changes have affected his understanding of the role the virtues should play within it. The hypothesis I will investigate is that over three decades Dewey has offered at least three different answers to the question of the place of the virtues in *Ethics*. In the 1908 version of the *Ethics*, the virtues are conceptualized as the connecting link between the good and the right. I call this the connectionist model. In the paper "Three Independent Factors in Morals" (1930), the virtues are conceived as an autonomous factor, one that is irreducible either to the good or to the right. I call this the irreducibility model. Then, in the 1932 version of the *Ethics*, the virtues are presented as a synthetic principle capable of integrating the other two moral factors, reconciling the morality of the good and the morality of the right. I call this the reconciliation model. While the different solutions do not radically diverge, they nevertheless articulate different explanatory schemes to which Dewey has resorted in order to provide a comprehensive account of morality. The chapter will provide an overview of these different attempts and propose a theoretical framework to explain the evolution of one of the pillars of Dewey's moral theory.

Céline Henne, "Dewey and the British Sentimentalists on the Role of Sympathy in Moral Judgments"

This chapter examines Dewey's view of moral knowledge developed in Chapter 14 of the *Ethics*. I focus more specifically on the role played by sympathy in moral inquiry. While Dewey claims that sympathy is "the general principle of moral knowledge" (MW5:303) as well as "the surest way to attain objectivity of moral knowledge" (LW7:270), it has not been the object of any extensive discussion by commentators on Dewey's ethics. I emphasize the originality of Dewey's position by contrasting it with that of David Hume, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill, who all stressed the fundamental role of sympathy in making moral judgments. Accordingly, I examine their respective answers to the moral problem raised by natural sympathy: how can such a biased and partial psychological mechanism play a beneficial role in the formation of moral judgments, which specifically aim at impartiality and objectivity? I will argue that while Hume, Smith and Mill choose to simply *extend* the scope of natural sympathy, Dewey argues in favor of a deeper transformation of natural sympathy: (1) the spontaneous emotional reaction becomes intentional perspective-taking; (2) it loses its function of direct approval or disapproval, and takes on an epistemic function of data-gathering subordinated to moral reasoning.

Steven Levine, "The Speculative Identity of Self and Act: Chapter Fifteen of the 1932 Ethics"

In this chapter I explore Dewey's treatment of the self in Chapter Fifteen of the 1932 *Ethics*. I do so by taking up two questions about the relationship between this text's account of the self and the account of self at play in Dewey's earlier ethics of self-realization. In the 1932 *Ethics* Dewey endorses a pragmatic pluralism in which the good is seen as one moral principle amongst others, namely right and virtue. Dewey's view is pragmatic because it posits that the moral theories that are based on the good, right, and virtue are tools that help agents solve moral problems; and it is pluralistic because it claims that these principles cannot be reduced to one another insofar as they have independent sources in natural features of human life. But as Axel Honneth points out, in the 1932 *Ethics* Dewey seems to endorse the idea that there is an ultimate good for the self, i.e., freedom understood as growth. This concept is a clear descendent of the concept of self-realization. My first question is: how is the idea of growth compatible with Dewey's pragmatic pluralism? While Honneth argues that there is here an unsolved conflict in Dewey's moral theory, I argue that if we understand Dewey's Hegelian theory of action correctly that we can see our way to a position in which there is no conflict between growth and Dewey's pragmatic pluralism. My second question concerns the relation between self and other in Chapter Fifteen. This issue is central to the chapter as it has an extended discussion of egoism, altruism, and the self's social interests. In the ethics of self-realization of Green and Bradley the self had an interest in the good of others because one's own realization depends on the social relations that enable the free

development of one's capacities and potentialities. While in the 1932 *Ethics* Dewey sometimes takes recourse to this idea, he does not think that it can do all the work that is necessary to ground the self's interest in the welfare of others. My second question is: but then how does he account for this? What I try to show in this chapter is that Dewey does not think that a *philosophical* answer to this question is possible but only a *pragmatic* answer.

Just Serrano Zamora, "The Democratic Method and the Problem of Domination"

Chapters 16 and 17 of 1932 *Ethics* develop the idea of the "democratic method" as the most adequate way of approaching social problems. For Dewey, social problems involve very often situations of structural domination where one group is able to take advantage of current institutional arrangements at the expense of other groups. The idea that democracy represents the best method for solving social problems involving situations of economic, cultural and political domination is not obvious for those leftist critiques of democracy which emphasize the reproductive effects of democratic institutions on relations of domination. From this background, the aim of my paper is to explore how Dewey is able to respond to the challenges posed by such a skeptical view in a way that the ideal of democracy can be saved for an emancipatory project aiming at a just society. Dewey's strategy is particularly productive, since it is able to acknowledge the domination-reproductive effects of existing democratic practices (1). For him, radicalizing democracy represents the most adequate political and social response to the normative goal of abolishing class or group privilege (2). Finally, Dewey's proposal seems able to respond to the challenges posed by the inequalities generated by current neoliberal deregulation and financialization (3).

Matteo Santarelli, "Towards a Unitary Theory of Interest: Integration, Self-interest and Disinterestedness in Dewey's 1932 Ethics"

This chapter deals with Dewey's definition and discussion of the concept of interest in the 1932 version of *Ethics*. In part I, focusing on chapters XIII and XV I will attempt to reconstruct the definition of *interest as integration* that Dewey adopts in *Ethics*. In particular, I would like to point out that the integrative force of interest is at work in at least two directions. According to Dewey, interests are able to integrate 1) the objective and subjective dimensions of conduct and experience; 2) the prereflexive dimensions of needs, impulses, desires, emotions, and human reflexive capacity. Part II analyzes how the definition of interest as integration is articulated by Dewey in the direction of a radical critique of the *self-interest vs. Disinterestedness* dichotomy. This double dismissal hinges on a radical rethinking of the relationship between self and interest. Dewey's innovative reconstruction can be summarized as follows: every interest is an interest of the self, but not every interest is a self-interest; disinterestedness does not mean lack of interest, but rather a particular type and quality of interest. In Part III I will attempt to highlight how Dewey in the 1932 edition of *Ethics* systematizes and analytically develops some insights introduced in his psychological, pedagogical, and political essays. Specifically, I would like to point out that the clarifications made in the 1932 volume have at least two consequences: 1) they make some of these insights clearer - for example, the coexistence of the double affective and cognitive nature of common interests introduced in *Democracy and Education*, *Lectures in China*, and *The Public and its Problems*; 2) they help to conceive the unitary nature of Dewey's concept of interest.

Sarin Marchetti, "Dewey's Ethics Between Theory and Practice"

What is moral philosophy (good) for? In attempting an answer to this vexed metaphilosophical question about the very nature and point of ethical thinking, the multi-layered position advanced by Dewey in his 1932 *Ethics* represents a rich source for pragmatist reflection. What we find in this text, in fact, is both an elaboration of a number of ethical insights already sketched in earlier texts (most notably, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* and *Human Nature and Conduct*, as well as "Moral Theory and Practice",

“Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal”, and “Three Independent Factors in Morals”) and an attempt at systematization. In particular, in the later work we find the problematic yet productive coexistence of a conception of moral philosophy as piecemeal criticism of conduct from within moral practice and as prescriptive device for moral education and growth governing practice from without. This very duality lies at the core of pragmatist moral thinking, and hence Dewey’s text can be seen as a source of both therapeutic/quietist and substantive/prescriptive approaches. The present chapter aims to explore this tension in the light of the contemporary debate on the scope and limits of moral philosophizing.

Jörg Volbers, “Rationality as a Moral Problem. Dewey’s Metaethical Response to a Modern Challenge”

Since the rise of modern sciences, ethical thought has been constantly challenged by what one could call ‘ethical skepticism’. From Nietzsche to Wittgenstein, Cavell and Williams, authors have pointed out that modern thought – seeking universality and certainty – is quite unable and unprepared to face the complex reality of ethical life. Instead of putting further hope in classical philosophical reflection, these authors recommend to turn, i.e., to literature in order to develop moral sensitivity.

Modern moral philosophy, then, is challenged by the criticism that the very *form* of modern rationality is somehow at odds with ethical reality. Dewey’s *Ethics* represents an original and still underappreciated answer to that challenge. Instead of opposing moral sensitivity and rational inquiry, Dewey seeks to establish a common ground from which we can understand both modern moral philosophy and its critics. For Dewey, moral problems basically pertain to the moral self, and this moral self, he claims, cannot be seen as a finished, determined or otherwise ‘objectified’ entity. Thus, the different ways to approach moral problems reflect the many different ways in which the self is being constituted. For Dewey, then, there is not *one* final form of moral rationality. Moral theory, be it literary or classical philosophical, is not to be seen as a meta-ethical inquiry at a distance from the self. Rather, it is itself a formative articulation of a specific self-understanding and has to be evaluated as such.