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CHEST KNOWLEDGE

> Next, then, compare the effect of education and that of the lack of it on our nature to an experience like this. Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up that is open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They have been there since childhood, with their necks and legs fettered, so that they are fixed in the same place, able to see only in front of them, because their fetter prevents them from turning their heads around.
> —Plato[169]

> Head tilted up perhaps, cramped, gritting teeth, holding back tears, the little child's tensions and fears still held in the muscles and the joints of the middle-aged man's jaw. Lacking a strong body and a secure position in the world, the child as head has tried to go it alone.
> So in 1916 Dewey consulted the pioneering psychobiotherapist.
> —Bruce Wilshire[170]

If every university provides a key for its particular campus map, John Dewey offers us a legend for the curricular architecture of higher education itself. If you are interested in English language and literature, you need to head to the main quad. However, if you want to use English to make sense of the events of the day, you should head over by the parking lots, where you will find the School of Journalism. Curiously, the Biology Department is right across the quad from English, while the School of Applied Life Sciences sits over by Journalism. And we find the same pattern with Economics and the Business School, Mathematics and the College of Engineering, Political Science and the School of Government. For some reason, each major domain of human experience is doubly represented, first as a liberal, disinterested study and then again as an applied, professional pursuit.[171] What is this principle that is so clear that it goes without saying, so powerful that it can divide every domain of human experience and split every campus?

This is arguably the driving question of *Democracy and Education*, the book that Dewey himself described as having "most fully expounded" not only his views on education but also his philosophy in general.[172] And his answer is a surprising one. There is no conceptual principle. What divides

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liberal and vocational education is "only superstition."[173] And yet, there is something strangely stubborn about this superstition. As Dewey observes, "The separation of liberal education from professional and industrial education goes back to the time of the Greeks," making it "probably the most deep-seated antithesis which has shown itself in educational history."[174] How could mere superstition become so entrenched that it shapes educational thought and practice for two and half millennia? In Dewey's discussion of the liberal/vocational dichotomy we find three main factors.

First, and it will be worth exploring this point in some detail, there is our basic tendency to either/or thinking. It takes time and effort to notice nuance and perceive each phenomenon on its own terms. In many situations, the capacity for rapid recognition is extremely useful. Right now, for instance, I am looking for my copy of Dewey's *Art as Experience* to look up his distinction between "bare recognition" and "full perception."[175] I recall green text on a white background. I scan the shelves. This is no time to think about what I am seeing (e.g., Why did I used to think that book was so important? Why do I buy books I never read?). To finish this paragraph, I need the Dewey volume ASAP. So I become a high-speed sorter: green/not green; if green, Dewey/not Dewey; if Dewey, *Art as Experience*/not *Art as Experience*. This high-speed wiring was originally laid in to help us survive. Stick or snake, path or cliff, shadow or swooping crowned eagle, these are the kind of distinctions where speed matters much more than nuance. Thus, in matters of survival and moments of convenience, we have the ability to shrink the world down to a toggle switch. Friend or foe; green or red light; Dewey or Descartes?

Here's the rub: when you have such a handy switch, it is hard not to use it all of the time. And it works pretty well when it comes to simple conceptual pairs whose opposition is definitional. What is big is not small; what is hot is not cold, what is near is not far.[176] The key word here is "not." Through negation, we can streamline thought, essentially cutting in half the number of concepts that one must keep track of. "Short" is a perfectly nice word but you don't strictly need it once you have "tall." The problem is that we don't limit ourselves to definitional contrasts. We reduce more complex conceptual relationships to either/ors, which risks blinding us to important features of reality, namely the both/ands and the neither/nors. The person who is too rigid about the distinction between poetry and prose will fail to appreciate Claudia Rankine's both/and book,

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Citizen. The person who is too attached to the binary "healthy/sick," will fail to appreciate the fact that, though he is not sick per se, he is definitely not healthy.[177]

At least in such cases there is still some logical basis for the contrast. Dewey shows that the opposition between the liberal and the vocational falls into the further category of fully specious dichotomies. His method is simple: fill in each concept a bit, without resorting to the usual contrasts between them. What emerges is that, far from antithetical, the two concepts are deeply congruous. While he devotes an entire chapter to his reconstruction of vocation, his remarks on liberal education are more indirect and scattered. An education is liberal if it is "liberative of imagination" and "perfecting of judgment," cultivates "the disposition to penetrate to deeper levels of meaning," nurtures "self-directive thought and aesthetic appreciation," frees us "from the dominion of routine habits and blind impulse," and contributes to the "cultivation of the self."[178] Nothing in this list of aims is incompatible with vocation, which Dewey defines broadly as any continuous, purposive activity that "balances the distinctive capacity of an individual with his social service" (308). It is this "balance" that many previous accounts of vocation overlook. The etymology of the word itself suggests that we are *called* away from our personal concerns to service. By contrast, Dewey stresses the role of vocation in the practitioner's own formative quest. Each of our "diverse and variegated vocational activities" is an expression of what constitutes the "dominant vocation of all human beings at all times," namely "intellectual and moral growth" (310).

For Dewey, then, to find a true vocation is to find an educative medium. One way to recognize this is in the felt rightness of the work: "A right occupation means simply that the aptitudes of a person are in adequate play, working with the minimum of friction and the maximum of satisfaction" (308). However, the full worth of a vocation is found only over time. Vocations catalyze our growth by shaping experience in two ways. First, vocations contribute to the continuity of experience. Their purposive frames help us link our past, present, and future in meaningful ways. Without them, experience would deaden into repetition or fray into happenstance. With them, we experience events as meaningful consequences and harbingers. Life becomes episodic. Second, vocations contribute to the richness of experience helping us draw forth from our surroundings a rich, informal, lifelong curriculum. Dewey explains:

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> A calling is also of necessity an organizing principle for information and ideas; for knowledge and intellectual growth. It provides an axis which runs through an immense diversity of detail; it causes different experiences, facts, items of information to fall into order with one another. The lawyer, the physician, the laboratory investigator in some branch of chemistry, the parent, the citizen interested in his own locality, has a constant working stimulus to note and relate whatever has to do with his concern. He unconsciously, from the motivation of his occupation, reaches out for all relevant information, and holds to it. The vocation acts as both magnet to attract and as glue to hold. Such organization of knowledge is vital, because it has reference to needs; it is so expressed and readjusted in action that it never becomes stagnant. No classification, no selection and arrangement of facts, which is consciously worked out for purely abstract ends, can ever compare in solidity or effectiveness with that knit under the stress of an occupation; in comparison the former sort is formal, superficial, and cold.[179]

Far from viewing vocation as self-sacrifice, Dewey sees it as a way of pursuing our growth and flourishing. Instead of depicting vocational experience as dull and disconnected, Dewey envisions it as stimulating and integrating. Vocations offer mediums for soul action!

Indeed, if we follow Dewey in liberating the concept of the aesthetic from the artworld (where it means "related to art and beauty"), we can see both liberal learning and vocational experience as modes of *aesthetic appreciation*. When Dewey describes the non-aesthetic, he sprinkles in the term "anesthetic" to signal that the aesthetic is best understood through contrast not with the ugly or utilitarian, but with the routine, the numb, the somnolent.[180] Aesthetic experience, to recall the earlier quote from Emerson, is what gets the soul out of bed. Aesthetic appreciation does not mean prescribed praise for approved works of art but vital, dynamic responses to the world aided by art, nature, work, or whatever vivifies. For Dewey, appreciation "denotes an enlarged, an intensified prizing" (237). It suggests "a depth and range of meaning in experiences which otherwise might be mediocre and trivial," a "concentration and consummation," where experience too often remains "scattered and incomplete" (238). Thus, it is precisely in vocational experience that we find the hallmarks of aesthetic education and liberal learning: a richness and vitality of experience; a stimulus to thought, imagination, and meaning-making; a vehicle of self-cultivation.

There is, then, no logical reason why liberal learning and vocational education should have become antonyms. Rather, contingencies of culture and

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history conspired with our tendency to either/or thinking to press a pair of mutually supporting concepts into a false opposition. Still, if we are to explain the millennial stubbornness of this false dichotomy, we need to look both broader and deeper, and that is where Dewey's second and third layers of explanation come in. The liberal/vocational binary, Dewey suggests, is just one part of a thick network of mutually supporting dichotomies: leisure and labor, culture and utility, freedom and necessity, knowing and doing, mind and nature, individual and society, interest and duty.[181] We identify liberal learning with leisure, culture, and freedom, with personal refinement and the life of the mind; we identify vocational education with necessary preparation for socially useful, manual trades. The tight linkages among these conceptual cousins makes it difficult to interrupt one dichotomy without interrupting them all. And this compounds the problem of negative definition, as one misleading contrast devolves into full shadow play, absurd were it not for its real grip on our thinking and educational arrangements. Here is one of our familiar if faulty syllogisms:

1. Whatever vocational education is, it is not liberal education.
2. Liberal education relates to freedom and culture.
3. Therefore, vocational education must be mechanical and crude.

Or, starting from the other side of the dichotomy, we grab liberal education by its most convenient handle, reasoning that

1. Whatever liberal education is, it is not vocational education.
2. Vocational education is practical and concerns our contribution to society.
3. Therefore, liberal education must be useless and selfish.

We could think of these dualisms as weeds appearing separate aboveground but entangled in their roots. Digging up just one won't get the job done: it will simply spring up in a new spot. Indeed, Dewey's third layer of explanation concerns two taproots, as it were, of this conceptual network, one planted deeply in society, the other buried deep in ourselves. The social taproot is class:

> Behind the intellectual and abstract distinction as it figures in pedagogical discussion, there looms a social distinction between those whose pursuits involve a minimum of self-directive thought and aesthetic appreciation, and those who are concerned more directly with things of the intelligence and with the control of the activities of others. (255)

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In a surprisingly Marxian move, Dewey reads our deep assumptions about education, work, and the self as but superstructure to the basic fact of a classed society. To make this point, Dewey first revisits Aristotle, who appears ready-made to serve as an inegalitarian foil to our democratic virtue. We can cluck our disapproval when we learn that, in Aristotle's day, "slaves, artisans, and women [were] employed in furnishing the means of subsistence in order that others, those adequately equipped with intelligence, [could] live the life of leisurely concern with things intrinsically worth while."[182] But then Dewey begins to disabuse us of this modern conceit, noting that "there remains . . . a cleavage of society into a learned and an unlearned class, a leisure and a laboring class" (255). Certainly the landscape has shifted. Now "the manufacturer, banker, and captain of industry have practically displaced a hereditary landed gentry as the immediate directors of social affairs" (313). The fact remains, though, that "the great majority of workers have no insight into the social aims of their pursuits and no direct personal interest in them" (260). Then Dewey twists the knife, praising Aristotle for at least describing "the life that was before him" without "insincerity" and "mental confusion" (255). We pride ourselves on our egalitarianism, on the idea that what determines your life prospects is not your wealth or family name but how hard you pull on your bootstraps. And yet, judging from our actions rather than our rhetoric, we still seem firmly to believe that only some members of society are suited for lives of purpose, meaning, and leadership while others are best prepared for subservient roles of alienated labor. In the end, it turns out that there is an important difference between Aristotle and us: Aristotle was not a hypocrite!

If Dewey, in 1916, could be humble about the progress made in the 2,300 years since Aristotle, we should certainly be sober about the stubborn persistence of social sorting over the last century. Indeed, as Richard Rorty observes, Dewey did not "foresee that an increasingly greedy and heartless American middle class would let the quality of education a child receives become proportional to the assessed value of the parents' real estate."[183] We have private schools for the superrich, lavish quasi-public schools for the plenty rich, and bleak public schools for the poor and working classes. By quasi-public, I mean government-run schools with ample physical, emotional, and intellectual resources, located in wealthy enclaves where parents pay the equivalent of private school tuition in the inflated housing prices and taxes of these exclusive neighborhoods. In contrast, children living in

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poor neighborhoods will typically encounter behaviorist pedagogy, a curriculum narrowed to transmission of skills needed for low-wage jobs, and physical environments that range from the deeply anesthetic to the outright unsafe.[184] Meanwhile, since race and class remain closely coupled in the United States, this so-called voluntary residential segregation has all but undone any gains accomplished by de jure desegregation—five decades after Brown, there were 2.3 million African American students attending what the Civil Rights Project calls "apartheid schools," in which 99%–100% of the students are non-White.[185] Merit, not family background, is supposed to determine access to higher education, but SAT results read like a fine-grained demographic map. There is 162-point gap between the median scores of African American and White students and a 247-point gap between the bottom and top quintiles in median family income, with smooth progressions in between.[186]

Such facts lead David Labaree to ask why, given the evidence that schools are largely unsuccessful at solving the social problems we have laid at their doorstep, we continue to educationalize more and more such problems. His answer is that schools enable us to "formalize substance," giving us a "mechanism for expressing serious concern about social problems without actually doing anything effective to solve those problems."[187] Thus, while we lack the will to tackle the problems of inequality, we also no longer quite have the stomach for a bald-facedly two-tiered educational system: one set of institutions for elites and another that doles out menial skills for menial jobs for "menial" people. And so we create a formal solution: the common school as a stage on which both cultural and utilitarian values can each take a bow. This results not in a real synthesis, only an "inorganic composite."[188] Thus, Dewey reads the modern curriculum as confusion of concessions: subjects such as literature are included because of their cultural cachet, but only if "taught with the chief emphasis upon forming technical modes of skill"; a subject such as "science is recommended on the ground of its practical utility," but only if taught "in removal of application."[189] We appease our class anxieties by titrating the useless and the unimaginative.

As I indicated, the second taproot is located in the soil of the self. To find it, let us return to our campus map, stealing a page out of Plato's book. I am thinking of the moment in the *Republic* when Socrates proposes that the group first examine justice at political scale before inspecting the harmonies and disharmonies of the soul:

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> The investigation we are undertaking is not an easy one, in my view, but requires keen eyesight. So, since we are not clever people, I think we should adopt the method of investigation that we would use if, lacking keen eyesight, we were told to identify small letters from a distance, and then noticed that the same letters existed elsewhere in a larger size and on a larger surface. We would consider it a godsend, I think, to be allowed to identify the larger ones first, and then to examine the smaller ones to see whether they are really the same.[190]

Similarly, the cordoning of campus has helped us to magnify the fissures in the soul. We have already read the divorce of head and hands, knowing and doing, in the large font of higher education's rigorous separation of pure and applied subjects. But let us examine this curricular architecture further.

In particular, the arts provide an interesting test case for our theory that each mode of human experience is doubly represented. At first, aesthetic experience seems to fit the model: on the quad, we find liberal arts majors and Gen Ed students studying poems, plays, paintings, and performances; over by the parking lots, we find studio majors learning how to dance and design, paint and sculpt, perform soliloquies and sonatas. Here, though, there is an interesting kink in the usual logic that divides inquiry from application. The word "art" in the phrases "liberal arts" and "arts and sciences" does not refer to aesthetic practices of creation and performance. It is used in the older, broader sense of principled practices that rely on teachable modes of inquiry and bodies of knowledge.[191] And this is just how we should understand the arts, as rich traditions of sense-making, as modes of embodied understanding. However, it is precisely this aspect of art that is suppressed in the curricular architecture. The arts appear on the quad not as modes of inquiry in their own right but as objects of discursive knowledge. The seminar on the history of ballet is not teaching you how to move/think/feel like a dancer, but how to think historically. It is closer to a course on military history than it is to a ballet class.

Nor is it clear how often (fine, performing, industrial) art majors are being introduced to their specializations as disciplines of sense-making and as vehicles for self-formation. When this does happen, there is still the absurdity that some of the richest occasions for general education are being reserved for specialists. More worrisome is that this often does not happen at all. We study the arts as meaningful texts in one precinct and as crafts in another, and this maims both. Studio programs often become narrowly

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focused on technique, with a sprinkling of career preparation. The aspiring actor or cellist or architect may never be introduced to the arts as humane disciplines through which we seek to understand self and world. Thus, to the student qua future practitioner we offer know-how in the arts. To the learner seeking a general education we offer discursive knowledge (historical and philosophical, anthropological and sociological, political-theoretic and literary-critical) about artworks. What drops out is knowledge *through* the arts. We are uncomfortable with the very idea of embodied knowing.

This becomes even clearer when we examine our differing relationships with the several arts. Academics are most comfortable when dealing with thin symbol systems that abstract away from the messiness and the fleshiness of reality. Thus, we seem to be most comfortable with verbal arts, but even here we find a spectrum. As the embodied aspects of these arts (voice and metaphor; rhythm and rhyme) rise, our scholarly comfort falls. We are completely at ease with expository prose, comfortable enough with prose fiction and drama, but already somewhat uncomfortable with poetry. However, it is when we move from literature to the plastic, musical, and performing arts that the sensuous aspects of art become truly undeniable.[192] Here we find another hierarchy, among the senses themselves. There is a long history in the West of associating knowledge with vision, a history that is evident from the visual metaphors embedded in our everyday vocabulary related to thinking and understanding: we *see* a point, we find a study *illuminating*, we offer theoretical over*views*, we take a fresh *look* at the evidence, we speak of in*sight* and *brilliance*.[193] Thus, the visual arts may be a touch safer for study. Then comes music, especially music that approaches us primarily through the ears, via pitch, rather than through the gut via rhythm and vibration. Finally, dance could be said to have the hardest row to hoe in the academy. The academy is not very comfortable with the idea that there is a mode of knowing centered on the pelvis. Kinesiology is quite acceptable, maybe even dance criticism: but dance as criticism knocks the cogitator off-balance.

Why do we elevate telling over showing? Why do the sensuous arts need a discursive escort to appear on the main quad? Why do we separate knowing from doing, feeling, and moving? In the zoning of the campus map, we read the legend of our own dividedness. In the large font of the curriculum, we perceive our ambivalent relationship with our fleshy nature. Thus,

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the second taproot of our educational dichotomies is the dis-integration of mind and body within the modern soul.

Dewey was acutely aware of these psychic fissures, and healing them was central to his calling as a philosopher. In his late intellectual-autobiographical sketch, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," he describes his younger self as riddled with "divisions and separations."[194] Struggling to recapture this "early mood," at one point even declaring the task "impossible," Dewey reaches for phrases with sufficient charge (153). He experiences the "isolation of self from the world, of soul from body, of nature from God" as an "inward laceration" (153). He feels a "hunger," "an intense emotional craving," "a demand for unification" (153). His failure to join the formal and abstract with the material and concrete reveals itself in the "stigmata" of the false facility and "specious lucidity" that marked his early writings (151).[195] As for the next three decades of Dewey's life, there are two different ways of telling the story, as a rapid rise to success and as a slow climb up the "rough, steep, upward path" that leads out of Plato's cave.[196]

The first story goes like this. In his PhD studies at Johns Hopkins (1882–1884), Dewey finally found the resources to heal these lacerations. In Professor George Morris he found a model of integrity, a remarkably "single-hearted and whole-souled man—a man of a single piece all the way through" (152). In "Hegel's synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and the human," Dewey discovered "no mere intellectual formula" but "an immense release, a liberation" (153). Dewey's career then takes off like a rocket: PhD, Johns Hopkins, 1884; chair, University of Michigan Philosophy Department, 1889; president, American Psychological Association, 1898; director, School of Education, University of Chicago, 1902; president, American Philosophical Association, 1905; founding president, American Association of University Professors, 1915. His scholarly output during this period was unreal. He published two books in the first four years after graduate school. In the 1890s and 1900s, he published key essays such as "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology" (1896), "My Pedagogic Creed" (1897), "Emerson—The Philosopher of Democracy" (1903), "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education" (1904), and those eventually collected in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (1910). These decades also yielded a slew of significant books: *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (1891), *Interest in Relation to Training of the Will* (1896), *The*

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School and Society (1899), *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903), *Ethics* (1908), *Moral Principles in Education* (1909), *How We Think* (1910).

Such output bespeaks a unity of purpose, and the work itself was offered to help us reunify ourselves. Dewey pointed to an interactive psychology that transcended both the reductive materialism of the new observational psychology and the otherworldly idealism of the old intuitionism. He helped move us from the reflex arc (stimulus, response) to the hermeneutic circle (acting, we encounter a meaningful situation, and this elicits further meaningful actions and propels us into new situations). He never minimized the importance of the inner life. He just showed that it was not that "inner." Mind was right there in the supposedly brute sense data. Knowing was visible in doing. The soul was immanent in the body. As early as 1887, Dewey would write,

> Sensation is the meeting-place, the point of coincidence of self and nature. It is in sensation that nature touches the soul in such a way that it becomes itself psychical, and that the soul touches nature so as to become itself natural. A sensation is, indeed, the transition of the physical into the psychical.[197]

And throughout this period, we find Dewey developing his critique of the dualisms between the liberal and the vocational, culture and utility, leisure and labor, interest and duty, humanism and naturalism, the abstract and the concrete.[198] Thus, as Dewey headed into the war years, no one would be blamed for thinking that he had long since found his medium. According to this triumphalist narrative, Wilshire observes, Dewey "achieved influence fairly early," and "at fifty-seven he had pretty well summed up his views in the magisterial, tightly organized *Democracy and Education*."[199] By 1916, Dewey had not only achieved his own reeducation, but had also laid the groundwork for all of us to reintegrate head and hands.

There is another story to tell about Dewey's development as the philosopher seeking to heal the rift between body and soul. In this story, 1916 marks not a happy ending, but a difficult turning point, launching a new, deeper phase in Dewey's ongoing process of "discovery and reawakening."[200] The war years were difficult for Dewey. There was the deeply unsettling nature of the cataclysm itself, but also a series of painful personal attacks on Dewey because of his support of US entry into the war. This came on top of family worries: his daughter Evelyn began to struggle with

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depression even as the depression of his wife, Alice, grew more severe in the decade following a second death of a child (in 1904, the Deweys' son, Gordon, had died of typhoid fever at the age of eight, echoing the loss of their two-year-old son Morris from diphtheria a decade earlier). During these years, Dewey found himself "exhausted emotionally and physically," in the midst of what he himself appears to have described as a "breakdown."[201]

From his poems (written almost entirely during this period), his letters, and secondhand reports, Dewey's biographers have pieced together a portrait of a profound midlife crisis.[202] Dewey had worked himself up into a "state of tension" so severe that it was making him ill.[203] His physical symptoms included "neck aches, headaches, and blurred vision."[204] And his emotional experience seems to match Freud's account of the process of mourning: a painful withdrawal of prior emotional investments in the service of eventual fresh attachments.[205] Dewey all but lost his usual appetite for work, with even a few hours causing "him great fatigue and . . . painful depression."[206] His poems paint a picture of a man who feels trapped and emotionally frozen ("And shut me in this barren field / Docks and thistle its only yield").[207] One of his narrators begs God for just "a little space in which to move"; another describes himself as "joyless, griefless."[208] The poems are littered with images of cold ("the freezing years did harden"),[209] desiccation ("thistles, cockleburs, and a few grains"),[210] drudgery ("an unadventurous trudge"),[211] and suffocation ("They have choked and stifled him").[212] In the midst of this cold and barren landscape, Dewey was also discovering new sparks of interest, "springing like flowers from unfrozen sod"; this is clear from his poetic efforts themselves and more dramatically from his now well-documented affair (passionate, if platonic) with Anzia Yezierska.[213]

It was in the midst of this crisis, this period of "distraction and depression," that Dewey met F. M. Alexander and began what would prove to be a quarter-century-long engagement with the form of bodywork that now bears Alexander's name.[214] (The Alexander Technique involves a reeducation of deep psychophysical habits through postural manipulation and coaching). I see this as a crucial turning point in Dewey's biography. It is only recently, though, that the importance of Dewey's work with Alexander has come into focus. The entire first generation of commentators on Dewey's life and work either ignored it altogether or laughed it off as an instance of an overly forbearing Dewey being taken in by a quack.

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It is worth quoting in full Frank Jones's recounting of this conspiracy of misprision:

> In the face of Dewey's positive statements about the moral and intellectual value of the technique, I have always found it difficult to understand the insistence by his disciples that its application was purely physical—as if the technique were a kind of Australian folk remedy which Dewey in the kindness of his heart had endorsed in order to help Alexander sell books. I ran into this attitude long before I met Dewey. Sidney Hook had given a lecture at Brown on some aspects of Dewey's philosophy. I had just discovered Alexander's books and had been impressed by Dewey's introductions to them. At the end of the lecture I went up to the platform to ask Hook about Alexander's influence on Dewey. He looked at me uncomprehendingly at first and then said with obvious embarrassment: "Oh yes! Alexander was an Australian doctor who helped Dewey once when he had a stiff neck." A little later in an article on Dewey in the *Atlantic Monthly* Max Eastman described Alexander as "A very unconventional physician . . . an Australian of original but uncultivated mind." "Dewey was smiled at in some circles," Eastman wrote, "for his adherence to this amateur art of healing but it undoubtedly worked in his case." In Corliss Lamont's *Dialogue on John Dewey*, Alexander again appears as a quaint character who was "concerned with your posture and that sort of thing." The speakers agreed that "Dewey thought Alexander had done him a lot of good," but none of them gave Dewey credit for intelligent judgment, and Ernest Nagel (according to Horace Kallen) attributed the whole episode to superstition. This picture of Dewey as the naive supporter of an ignorant Australian doctor has unfortunately been given increased currency in a recent biography, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, by George Dykhuizen (1973).[215]

For decades, all that was available was Dykhuizen's biography and the tributes by Eastman and Hook, cementing this picture of a minor episode with a faith healer. With the renaissance in Dewey studies in the 1990s and 2000s, matters have improved. While Jay Martin (in the biography that supplanted Dykhuizen's early effort) devotes only two paragraphs to Dewey's relationship to Alexander, he does acknowledge not only that Alexander helped Dewey feel better physically, but also that the technique provided Dewey with "a practical confirmation" of his own theories of the relation of body and mind.[216] Still, there is much to be desired in this account, as if Dewey found in the Alexander Technique simply one nice illustration of something he had already worked out.[217] I would argue that only his work in the lab school and his dialogues with Albert Barnes (in front of his

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famous collection of modern art) are comparable in importance as practical engagements that generated and deepened theoretical insights. Steven Rockefeller counts Dewey's work with Alexander as one of four main resources during this decade helping Dewey turn his crisis into an occasion for growth, adding a nature retreat (the Deweys' new farm in Huntington, Long Island), new emotional outlets (Dewey's poetry and a turn toward more self-disclosure in his correspondence), and important new relationships (Yezierska and Barnes). The work with Alexander, Rockefeller concludes, brought Dewey "relief and healing and a fresh sense of life and growth."[218] Rockefeller also better captures the importance of Alexander to Dewey's work, describing it as "deepen[ing] his insights into the relation of the body and mind" and as "crystallizing" a line of thought that had been developing for two decades.[219]

Even Rockefeller's more appreciative account hardly runs ahead of the evidence.[220] Dewey stressed the importance of Alexander's method and discoveries from the moment he began his lessons to his last days. From the start, he would recommend the Alexander Technique to others, including members of his own family. And already by August of 1918, Dewey appeared physically to be "a radically changed person" to someone who had not seen him for a while.[221] Dewey reported to Frank Jones that his lessons with Alexander first cleared up his vision problems and later led to improvements in his breathing. Where his ribcage had been "rigid" (leading presumably to shallow breathing), his ribs acquired a "marked elasticity," a fact still remarked on by doctors in his final years.[222] At the age of eighty-seven, Dewey declared, "My confidence in Alexander's work remains unabated. . . . If it hadn't been for [the] treatment, I'd hardly be here today."[223]

The evidence for impact on Dewey's work is just as clear. This shows up right away in *Human Nature and Conduct* (published in 1922 but building on lectures given in 1918), wherein Alexander plays a starring role in the key second chapter, establishing habits as "active means" and not mere tools at the disposal of the will.[224] Alexander's influence continues, McCormack shows, as late as the *Theory of Valuation* (1939).[225] It shows up most significantly in what is arguably Dewey's greatest work, *Experience and Nature*.[226] It is here that Dewey finally fully works through the mind-body dualism that had occupied him throughout his career, and when he reaches the "heart of the mind-body problem," it is Alexander he cites.[227] Dewey himself puts

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his previous knowledge of the mind-body relation in scare quotes, writing of his experience with Alexander that "the things which I had 'known'—in the sense of theoretical belief— . . . changed into vital experiences."[228] How could influence this plain have been so widely and persistently discounted? The answer seems clear. Dewey's readers have tended to read his work, even his critique of mind-body dualism, through a dualist screen. What could bodywork with Alexander, the thought goes, have to do with the development of Dewey's *theory* of psychophysical unity? As we have seen, even those who acknowledge the importance of Alexander to Dewey tend to parse this into remediation of physical symptoms, on the one hand, and a confirmation of theoretical insights, on the other.

It is the virtue of Wilshire's account that he reads Dewey's work with Alexander as an existential, psychophysical encounter that "drove him into his deepest critique of psycho-physical dualism."[229] The Dewey of *Democracy and Education* had discovered a vicious circle. A society that cleaves itself into a ruling class of knowers and a subservient class of doers will find itself dividing education into two tiers: one intellectual and cultural, another physical and utilitarian (whether this shows up in different institutions, divergent curricular tracks, or the conflicting "why" and "how" of individual subjects). At the same time, this sort of schizophrenic educational system will tend to reproduce class divisions. To escape the dichotomy, Dewey proposed a "travail of thought," a thorough process of reconceptualization enabling us to "construct a course of study which [was] useful and liberal at the same time."[230] However, even as Dewey was writing these words, he was discovering another vicious cycle, closer to home. Wilshire resorts to both Dante and Descartes to capture Dewey's ordeal of disorientation and dissociation:

> Like Dante's "Midway upon the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, where the right way was lost," life for Dewey was stale, flat, pointless—something was missing. All his efforts to achieve a theory that integrated body, self, and experience were blocked by the painful experience of his own life. He detected a rude discontinuity between his powers of inquiry and perception, and the very conditions of these powers in his functioning organism. It was a kind of waking nightmare in which Descartes' psycho/physical dualism could be expelled from Dewey's critical consciousness, but only to have it reappear in Dewey's own everyday behavior and carnal reality.[231]

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One cannot *think* one's way out of the divorce of thinking and doing, mind and body. The prisoners in Plato's cave (see the epigraph to this section) are able to form all sorts of sophisticated thoughts about the shadows projected before them. It takes literal movement, and indeed the hand of another to "[drag] him into the light," before the prisoner may begin to glean the unreality of his cave-world.[232] As Dewey himself asserts, in *Art as Experience*,

> No thinker can ply his occupation save as he is lured and rewarded by total, integral experiences that are intrinsically worth while. Without them he would be completely at a loss in distinguishing real thought from the spurious article.[233]

It was in his work with Alexander, Wilshire asserts, that Dewey "learned the real meaning of the phrase 'mind cut off from the body.'"[234] This is not to denigrate the achievement of a work such as *Democracy and Education*, but one can gain only so much traction on the mind-body problem through disembodied prose. At some point, one needs literal traction! Wilshire again: "Dewey's case is particularly ironical. His asserting of general truths about the conditions of consciousness in the body prevented him from dilating his own consciousness and allowing his own body to take the lead in disclosing itself."[235] It was time to tackle the problem in a unified, embodied way.

Alexander's first impression of Dewey was telling, describing Dewey as "drugged with thinking" and prone to "fall asleep during lessons."[236] "Judging from the way Dewey talked and held his head and neck," Wilshire offers, it "was indeed as if his mind were disassociated from his body."[237] Dewey found himself to be "an inept, awkward, and slow pupil."[238] Attempting to compensate for his "practical backwardness" with his "powers of discipline in mental application" was no use.[239] Finding that he was unable to execute even simple directions to move in new ways, Dewey had what he described as "the most humiliating experience of my life, intellectually speaking."[240] Alexander, whose technique centered on the relation of the head, neck, and torso, slowly helped Dewey learn to act, for the first time, with both greater awareness and increased spontaneity. As Dewey declared, a decade into his work with Alexander,

> We need to distinguish between action that is routine and action that is alive with purpose and desire; between that which is cold, and that which is warm and sympathetic; between that which marks a withdrawal from the conditions of the present and that which faces actualities; between that which is expansive

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> and developing (because including what is new and varying) and that which applies only to the uniform and repetitious.[241]

Far from being "just a speculative question," Dewey declares, the "integration of mind-body in action is the most practical of all questions we can ask of our civilization" (12). And Dewey credits Alexander with the insight that the solution must involve "a procedure in actual practice," for to try to think our way out of the problem will only "increase the disease in the means to cure it" (13). "Until this integration is effected," Dewey writes, "we shall continue to live in a society in which a soulless materialism is compensated for by soulful, but futile, idealism and spiritualism" (12).

Thus, we should resist the narrative that 1916 represented the high point in Dewey's educational theorizing, at which point he went on to tackle other questions. I think Wilshire is right to read Dewey's later, more embodied works—*Experience and Nature* and *Art as Experience*—as sequels to *Democracy and Education*:

> The archaic background of experience is painfully difficult to reveal. But if it is not revealed all the talk about the unexamined life being not worth living is mere twaddle, and what passes for education a sham. Dewey contributes to what the Greeks meant by chest-knowledge, humane and ethical knowledge, the union of intellectual freedom and ethical responsibility, and he points to regenerative possibilities of experience.
>
> But it would be a mistake to infer from this that all of Dewey's thought about education prior to 1916 was a mistake. Indeed, it is because it is so brilliant that what it still leaves out—courageous self-engagement—is so evident. The culminating element in Dewey's epistemology is raw courage: chest and guts.[242]

Dewey himself was quite clear about the educational importance of the hands-on search for embodied self-knowledge:

> Education is the only sure method which mankind possesses for directing its own course. But we have been involved in a vicious circle. Without knowledge of what constitutes a truly normal and healthy psycho-physical life, our professed education is likely to be mis-education. . . . The technique of Mr. Alexander gives to the educator a standard of psycho-physical health . . . in which what we call morality is included. It supplies also the "means whereby" this standard may be progressively and endlessly achieved, becoming a conscious possession of the one educated. It provides therefore the conditions for the central direction of all special educational processes. It bears the same relation to education that education itself bears to all other human activities.[243]

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Undeclared

A Philosophy of Formative Higher Education

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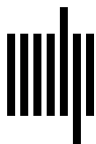

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