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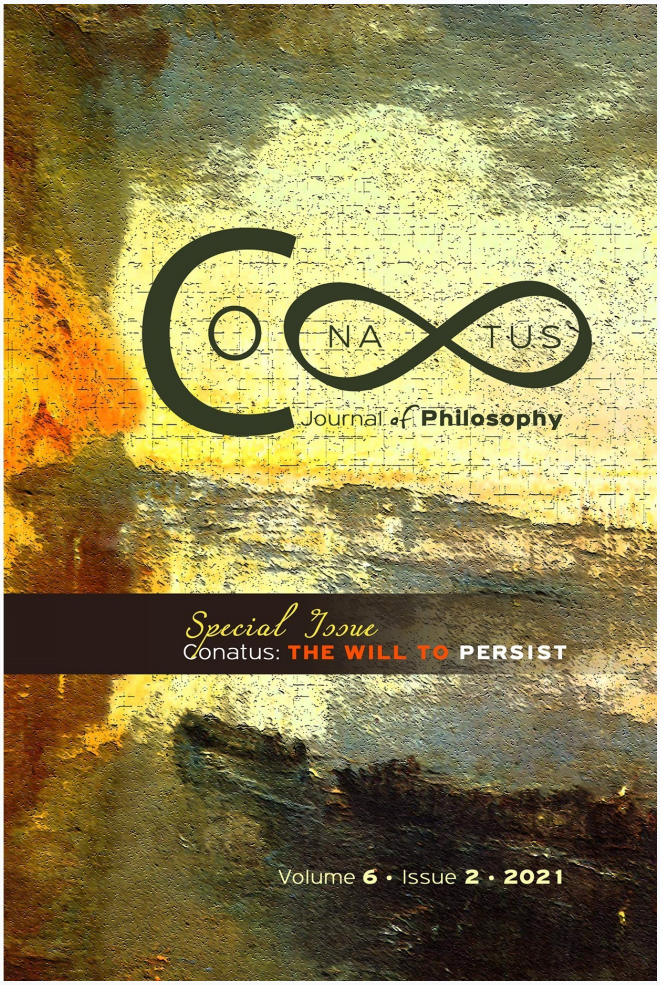

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A New Conatus for the New World: Dewey's Response to Perfectionist Conceptions of Democratic Education

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Abstract

We argue for a reconsideration of the claim that Spinoza's perfectionist conception of education was ushering in a form of radical humanism distinctly favorable to democratic ideals. With the rise of democratic societies and the corresponding need to constitute educational institutions within those societies, a more thoroughgoing commitment to democratic social ideals arose, first and foremost in American educational thought. This commitment can be seen especially in Dewey's philosophy of education. Specifically, Dewey and Spinoza had strikingly distinct conceptions of the overall aims of schooling. While Spinoza takes the aim of education to be the perfection of a student's original nature, Dewey takes education to involve the collective acquisition of an additional nature, reflecting the norms and expectations of one's specific community. In this paper, we juxtapose these two distinct conceptions of education alongside one another, with an eye towards illuminating the limitations of a perfectionist theory of education for the individual, as we find it in Spinoza, within a democratic society.

Keywords: *conatus; education; collective; democracy; humanism; perfectionism; Spinoza; Dewey*

I. Introduction

Recent scholars have taken Spinoza's thought, including his ideas about the education of individuals, as ushering in a form of radical humanism that is distinctly favorable to democratic ideals. However, with the rise of democratic societies and the corresponding need to constitute educational institutions within those societies, a more thoroughgoing commitment to democratic[1] social ideals arose, first and foremost in American educational thought. This commitment can be seen especially in Dewey's philosophy of education. Specifically, Dewey and Spinoza had strikingly distinct conceptions of the overall aims of schooling. While Spinoza takes the aim of education to be the perfection of a student's original nature, Dewey takes education to involve the acquisition of an additional nature, reflecting the norms and expectations of one's specific community. In this paper, we juxtapose these two distinct conceptions of education alongside one another, with an eye towards illuminating the limitations of a perfectionist theory of education for the individual, as we find it in Spinoza, within a democratic society.

II. Spinoza's educational thought

Spinoza's ethical thought, including his educational thought, has been lauded as that of a "pioneer" or a "radical" among the early modern thinkers. He has even been described as the "first philosopher of modern times to avow himself a democrat."[2] Spinoza's thought was in fact radical in its pronounced focus on the individual – at the expense of any deity or community. The *Ethics* espouses a "naturalistic, egoistic and enlightened ethical theory of self-actualization and

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[1] We will discuss the notion of democracy in detail in part III. It is worth mentioning here already that Dewey understands a "democratically constituted society" as characterized primarily by an increase in participation: On the one hand, we find here "more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest" and also a "greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control;" on the other hand, we encounter "freer interaction" between social groups that once used to be isolated from each other; this "varied intercourse" then leads to "continuous readjustment" between the individual members of society. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1944), 86f.

[2] Steven Nadler characterizes him as "one of the most important philosophers – and certainly the most radical – of the early modern period." Steven Nadler, "Baruch Spinoza," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2020 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/. Others have recently even gone so far as to claim that he was the one who gave us modernity, Rebecca Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew who gave us Modernity* (New York: Schocken Books, 2006); or to call him the "first political philosopher of modern times to avow himself a democrat," Lewis S. Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1987), 102. Quoted in Nimrod Aloni, "Spinoza as Educator: From Eudaimonistic Ethics to an Empowering and Liberating Pedagogy, *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 40, no. 4 (2008): 532.

self-affirmation,"[3] a "rationalist and perfectionist ethics of virtue" that manages to dispense with religious notions such as holiness, duty and sin,[4] or any other appeal to teleology. For Spinoza, through education the student reaches "higher levels of thought and knowledge," allowing them to conduct a rational life "governed *by reason*" – instead of *by God*.[5] In that sense, Spinoza's educational thought can be understood as part of his "pragmatic humanism"[6]: It focuses on the perfection of the rational nature of individuals as striving things, on their *conatus*.

For Spinoza, individuals are primarily understood as striving for natural self-perfection. His point of departure is that of an individual standing alongside other individuals in their environment, all striving – and occasionally competing – for self-preservation. Every being has its own *conatus* – a natural drive, power, and capacity for self-preservation. Indeed, the *Ethics* claims that our own individual essences consist in just this striving: "The conatus with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself."[7]

Rational beings like us have a particular capacity to enhance our powers to persevere, to free ourselves from the influence of other things that are also striving.[8] Such is the aim of education for Spinoza. As we strengthen our *conatus*, we "act more from our nature as striving things." Moreover, doing so makes us more virtuous, for the strengthening of one's *conatus* constitutes the basis of human virtue in the *Ethics*; the more an individual "endeavors and is able to preserve his own being," the more "he is endowed with virtue" and hence "human power"[9]:

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[3] Aloni, 532.

[4] William B. Frankena, "Spinoza's New Morality," in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation,* eds. Maurice Mandelbaum, and Eugene Freeman, 85-100 (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1971), 85, quoted in Aloni, 533.

[5] Stuart Hampshire, "Spinoza's Theory of Human Freedom," in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation,* eds. Maurice Mandelbaum, and Eugene Freeman, 35-48 (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1971), quoted in Aloni, 537. It is worth noting that we do not intend to take a stance here on the question of whether Spinoza understands reason as distinct from God in the *Ethics* (we thank an anonymous reviewer for raising the issue).

[6] Aloni, 537. Spinoza's focus on the "distinctive human way" of conatus, namely at the expense of a deity, is what makes him a representative of what Aloni calls "pragmatic humanism": "The distinctive human way – by virtue of human nature – to preserve their being and increase their power and liberty in relation to other things consists in reaching higher levels of thought and knowledge and therefore conducting rational life that is generated and governed by reason."

[7] Baruch Spinoza, *Eth.* III7, in *Spinoza Complete Works,* ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 283. All footnotes and corresponding bibliographical entries for Spinoza, *Ethics* use the notation of Part (Roman Numeral), Proposition, and Scholium (s).

[8] Johan Dahlbeck, "A Spinozistic Model of Moral Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 36, no. 5 (2017): 537.

[9] Spinoza, *Eth.* IV20, 332.

> The conatus to preserve oneself is the primary and sole basis of virtue. For no other principle can be conceived as prior to this one (preceding Pr.), and no virtue can be conceived independently of it.[10]

As rational beings, we all strive for self-preservation and are subject to the same (natural) forces. Education helps the student identify what strengthens their *conatus* and what hampers it, thus making them more effective in their striving for self-preservation. The individual reaches an understanding of the "rational unity of nature"[11] with the help of education, which strengthens their rational capacities and hence their *conatus*. Education also mutes the passions, and teaches the students how to distinguish the apparent from the real good, or, between what "truly benefits my striving to persevere and what does not."[12] Education in Spinoza thus affords the recipient with a better understanding of themselves and the world around them.[13]

Perfection in the *Ethics* is thus characterized by independence, or absence of dependence. The more perfect one is, the more self-subsistent and self-reliant they are. God, as the most perfect being, would possess the highest degree of independence. This notion of independence includes not just physical dependencies, but extends to social ones as well. For that reason, Spinoza was especially leery of institutional dependencies and influences born of church and state hierarchies. As a result, the freedom and independence that Spinoza espouses is a largely *negative* one. Education is beneficial because it can rid us of such dependency.

Under this conception, our social aspects generally fade away. A perfect being (like God) wouldn't need to be social, or have need of teachers. So, perfection does not require socialization or education. It is only a contingent fact that imperfect beings like us do. Although Spinoza may have envisaged at the end of his *Ethics* a utopia that includes a peaceful social order ("individuals that enjoy good health, tranquility and happiness, and a society that is blessed with a rational social contract that secures freedom,

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[10] Ibid., IV22, 333. And further: Proof. The conatus to preserve itself is nothing but the essence of a thing (ibid., III7, 283), which, insofar as it exists as such, is conceived as having a force to persist in existing (ibid., III6, 283) and to do those things that necessarily follow from its given nature (see Definition of Appetite in ibid., III9s, 284).

[11] Tapio Puolimatka, "Spinoza's Theory of Teaching and Indoctrination," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 33, nos. 3-4 (2001): 398.

[12] Dahlbeck, "A Spinozistic Model," 544.

[13] Much of this will be a matter of individual experimentation, especially when it comes to education of the imagination. Cf. Aislinn O'Donnell, "Spinoza, Experimentation and Education: How Things Teach Us," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 9 (2018): 821.

fairness, and peace"),[14] education is not directly aimed at the production of that order. It is a happy byproduct of individual perfection. Spinoza took a focus on the individual *conatus* without any view to their particular social environment, an "enhancing [of] the humanity of every individual," to be sufficient for "establishing a society based on the principles of reason, liberty and justice."[15] "The good which every man who follows after virtue desires for himself, he will also desire for other men."[16] Once "rationally activated," students may benefit more from being with others who are also rational: "The more students learn to do this [rational activation], the more powerful they will become, and the more they will benefit from being in a community with others who respond in a similarly rational way."[17] Thus the community is not an essential element of Spinoza's conception of education. It has at best a secondary role to play, both when it comes to its role for the process and to the aims of education.

Although perfection on this account is exhausted by a "development and actualization of the [student's] inner nature," it commonly leads to positive social consequences for the student. The end of education may be determined by the student's first nature, and hence "guided by a *telos* or vocation that is immanent in the nature of every human *qua* human,"[18] and yet, "the gradual development and actualization of the potentialities that lie in everyone's inner nature would lead to higher states of personal and social existence"[19] – as a mere corollary. But neither does the community figure as an *end* nor as a *means* in Spinoza's conception of education. In fact, even education itself is contingent here: Education is merely a "useful means by which students may be brought more in line with their nature, which is to persevere and to flourish in being."[20]

And yet, it is a fact that human beings are educated alongside with and by others. Although each individual strives for their own self-preservation independently of others, all humans resemble one another in their striving as rational beings. Due to the similarities we all share by nature, Spinoza claims that "there are certain things that are good for all of us."[21] It is the educators' role to see to it that the individual student becomes more rational

[14] Aloni, 534.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Spinoza, *Eth.* IV37, 339.

[17] Dahlbeck, "A Spinozistic Model," 535.

[18] Aloni, 535ff.

[19] Ibid., 535.

[20] Spinoza, *Eth.* III6, 283.

[21] Dahlbeck, "A Spinozistic Model," 543.

and thus virtuous. Successful educators impart what Spinoza calls "guiding principles" to their students, instructions that are beneficial to all rational beings, and that assure that their "striving for self-preservation will be guided by reason rather than by the passions."[22] Education improves the students' striving because they will know better how to draw on their "own cognitive resources," and hence they will increase "the number of true and adequate ideas."[23]

The educator in Spinoza's educational thought is just as self-interested as all other striving beings.[24] He takes on what LeBuffe calls the role of the "optimistic nutritionist."[25] He "oversees the cognitive training of the students" by "ensuring that their experimentation is guided by reason rather than by the passions."[26] And he does so by directing the student's attention towards what will be beneficial to him, instead of what merely appears beneficial, by keeping the passions from derailing the "imagination into seeking out things that are detrimental for the student."[27]

In particular, the "optimistic nutritionist" ensures that the correct relation between *laetitia* (joy) and perseverance is preserved, "so that students do not 'mistakenly, anticipate laetitia in other things [i.e. things that are not conducive to perseverance] and so desire them."[28] The student may, for instance, mistake sweetness for nutrition. But the teacher knows better and guides the student to help him seek out what is both sweet and nutritious, and avoid what merely tastes good but is in fact unhealthy. The teacher hence helps the students focus their attention on what will help them sustain themselves, on what will help them "strengthen their *conatus*."[29]

At the same time, the educator directly benefits from helping the student strengthen their *conatus*, for "if we perceive others to desire to be more rational, more active, more powerful, we will tend to emulate that desire and also seek to become more powerful."[30] Far from being altruistic, then, Spinoza's pedagoge is actually concerned with their own *conatus*: "the

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics – An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge, 2006), 193, 161. Quoted in Aloni, 537.

[24] Dahlbeck, "A Spinozistic Model," 545.

[25] Michael LeBuffe, "Spinoza's Psychological Theory," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2020 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza-psychological/.

[26] Dahlbeck, "A Spinozistic Model," 544.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

Spinozistic teacher is always motivated by his or her egoistic striving for self-preservation and flourishing (much like anyone else)." It is the "desire to become more rational" themselves that motivates the teacher to help the student become more rational. He "can mold the student into a moral exemplar for him or her to emulate."[31]

In summary, we can agree that the educational thought as we find it in the *Ethics* is in fact progressive in some respects, and hence already somewhat more suitable for democratic societies: First, the *goal* of education, namely rational activation, is common to all who are capable of it, and so in principle unrestricted by social status. Second, education proceeds with *means* that work for all, namely by way of "guiding principles" that help all rational beings strengthen their *conatus*. And third, the goal of education is no longer centered upon improving social status: "[A]cquiring understanding rather than social status is of the greatest importance."[32]

At the same time, however, there is an ultimately inegalitarian (and thus possibly undemocratic)[33] line of thought in Spinoza: While education should be extended to all, without regard to social distinction, not everyone is capable of achieving rational self-perfection. Those who are not capable of rational activation can only be educated by the imagination,[34] by the means of imaginative fictions, allowing them to do the right thing, even though they may not be capable of grasping the reasons why.[35] Though standing in the same general tradition as Spinoza, it is worth noting that Rousseau subscribes to a much more optimistic view regarding the natural capacities of *all* humans in the state of nature. Like Spinoza, Rousseau emphasizes the role of the drive for self-preservation, which Spinoza would call *conatus*, as an instrument towards individual and collective perfection. For both, a chief ethical aim is to free persons from the corrosive influences of coercive social hierarchies, perhaps by removing them from such environments altogether. Rousseau

[31] Ibid., 545.

[32] Aloni, 535.

[33] Although there may be a close connection between democratic forms of government and the promotion of the value of equality, we thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing that that while education is distributed in an inegalitarian way in Spinoza, this does not need to imply that his view is undemocratic in this respect.

[34] Genevieve Lloyd, "Spinoza and the Education of the Imagination," in *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives,* ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, 157-172 (London: Routledge, 1998).

[35] We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that imagination, as a source of knowledge, was also a common idea in Medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy. Cf. Alfred Ivry, "Arabic and Islamic Psychology and Philosophy of Mind," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2012 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/arabic-islamic-mind/.

sees that to be sufficient for them to develop their natural capacities fully, which in the end will be of mutual benefit. Rousseau thus calls on us not to conclude with Hobbes that man is evil by nature, "that because man has no idea of goodness, he must be naturally wicked."[36] Quite on the contrary, the state of nature should be understood as "that in which the care for our own preservation is the least prejudicial to that of others," and that it is hence "the best calculated to promote peace, and the most suitable for mankind."[37] Moreover, even in the state of nature, instead of merely competing in their striving, human beings are guided by the "force of natural compassion."[38]

III. Dewey's educational thought

As we have seen, Spinoza develops an educational theory, whereby the goal of education is that of individual self-perfection. A strikingly different account of the aims of education can be found in John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, to which we now turn. Though not mentioning Spinoza explicitly, there can be little doubt that Dewey had Spinoza in mind, especially in some of the earlier chapters of *Democracy and Education*. It is clear that Dewey was at least familiar with some of Spinoza's work. In 1882, Dewey published "The Pantheism of Spinoza" in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*.[39] We find him here raising many of the same issues as in many of the earlier chapters of *Democracy and Education* such as in the chapter on "Education as a Social Function," and in the chapter on "Education as Growth":

> Two logical pantheistic systems are possible. One must start with the conception of an Absolute Perfect Being in whom are all things, but this theory cannot account for things as we find them. It must deny that they are what they seem to be, and elevate them into the Divine [...]. Here is where Spinoza failed. The other theory must start from the conception of things as they seem to be, and produce its Pantheism, not by elevating them into God, but by bringing God down to them.[40]

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[36] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. George Douglas Howard Cole, 155-246 (London, and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1923), 196.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 79. "On certain occasions, the impetuosity of *amour-propre*, or, before its birth, the desire of self-preservation, tempers the ardour with which he pursues his own welfare, by an innate repugnance at seeing a fellow-creature suffer." Ibid., 73.

[39] John Dewey, "The Pantheism of Spinoza," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (1882), 249-257.

[40] Ibid., 257.

However, reflecting the limitations of an account of education that aims at the student's *independence* from other striving objects, the aim for Dewey here is rather *interdependence*.[41] As he puts it in *Democracy and Education*, the aim of education is to "enable individuals to continue their education," and the main objective of learning is to "develop a continued capacity for growth."[42] Growth in democratically constituted society, however, will take place in the context of a "social life in which interests are mutually interpenetrating and where progress or readjustment, in an important consideration,"[43] instead of mere independence. Rather than raising an egoistic specialist,[44] as advocated by Spinoza, the educator should focus on fostering *joint intentions*, both as means and ends of his instruction.[45] As Dewey puts it in "My Pedagogic Creed," education "comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself":[46]

> Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling, and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs.[47]

For Dewey, then, social factors feature much more prominently among the goals of education. Schooling is not merely contingent, but a human necessity, in particular for the survival of the social whole. The necessity of schooling arises as societies become more complex,[48] particularly once societies depend on a written record. "With the growth of civilization, the gap between the original capacities of the immature and the standards and

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[41] Or *solidarity*, as Rorty would put it later on. Cf. Richard Rorty, *Achieving our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[42] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 100.

[43] Ibid., 87.

[44] See also the work of Johan Dahlbeck, "The Egoistic Teacher: Educational Implications of Spinoza's Ethical Egoism," *Ethics and Education* 12, no. 3 (2017).

[45] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 16. Participating in a "joint activity," carrying out a "common pursuit" are the educational bedrock that sets up "an active connection between the child and the grownup," they are the "guarantee for the same manner of use," Ibid., 15. And further: "things gain meaning by being used in a shared experience or joint action."

[46] John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," in *The American Hegelians: An Intellectual Episode in the History of Western America*, ed. William H. Goetzmann, 310-320 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1973), 311.

[47] Ibid. Dewey's legacy from the St. Louis school of Hegelianism is manifest in this passage.

[48] Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 3.

customs of the elders increases."[49] Education is thus a "necessity of life," a "means of [the] social continuity of life."[50] The continuity of society and of the community depend on it.[51]

Apart from enabling its survival, education is also of paramount importance to the formation of community in the first place. Forming a community requires being cognizant of a common goal, and education is necessary in order to bring about the sharing of such a common end.[52] In stark contrast to Spinoza, a mere instruction of a set of rules that supposedly work for everyone hence cannot be sufficient: "Giving and taking of orders modifies action and results but does not of itself effect a sharing of purposes, a communication of interests."[53]

One integral aim of education, at least in such complex societies, is thus social. Dewey, reflecting his Hegelian roots, for that reason emphasizes *Bildung* or acculturation, or the inculcation of a *second nature*. Some ends of education cannot be found within us, waiting to be unfolded. Rather, they can only be identified by looking to the larger social milieu a student inhabits. The ends appropriate in one social environment might not carry over to another. Power here is not only self-perfection, but rather social power, and for Dewey, this power comes with an increase in dependence. As long as a community "remains social, or vitally shared," it will be "educative to those who participate in it,"[54] it will help them increase their power.

In order to perform this acculturating function, Dewey describes how schools set up simplified (or "special") environments, in which the students can be ushered into and internalize the greater social world that they will come to reside. Education proceeds indirectly: "We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment."[55] Instead, we educate by means of an environment that is modified with certain aims in view, such as a reduction of complexity, the elimination of undesired features in the curriculum, and

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[49] Ibid., 19. "Roughly speaking, they come into existence when social traditions are so complex that a considerable part of the social store is committed to writing and transmitted through written symbols [...]. Consequently as soon as a community depends to any considerable extent upon what lies beyond its own territory and its own immediate generation, it must rely upon the set agency of schools to insure adequate transmission of all its resources."

[50] Ibid., 3.

[51] Ibid., 4. "Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may be fairly said to exist *in* transmission."

[52] Ibid., 5. "If, however, they are cognizant of the common end and all interested in it so that they regulate their specific activity in view of it, then they would form a community."

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 6. "Only when it becomes cast in a mold and runs in a routine way does it lose its educative power."

[55] Ibid., 19.

with an eye to the balancing out of different social backgrounds: The school "provide[s] a simplified environment" by selecting "features which are fairly fundamental and capable of being responded to by the young."[56] It moreover "eliminate[s], so far as possible, the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence upon mental habitudes."[57] Finally, the school environment "balance[s] the various elements in the social environment." [58]

This last point is especially relevant in the United States, as a country "composed of a combination of different groups with different traditional customs."[59] Dewey of course was especially concerned with how educational institutions were to be implemented in democratic societies, and how they could foster and promote democratic ideals.[60, 61] Education is of particular importance in a democratically constituted society, where both a multitude of viewpoints ("more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest")[62] and simultaneously a greater need for social control arise ("greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control" [63]). There will be both "freer interactions between social groups," and at the same time a need for continuous change in social habits through "continuous readjustment."[64]

On this conception, education is sharply distinguished from mere training in that it requires the student's participation in a common pursuit in order for him to successfully form dispositions: Physical training may bring about a "blind response." Yet, education proper always requires the participation in a *joint activity*: "While we can shut a man up in a penitentiary, we cannot

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[56] Ibid., 20.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid. "and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment."

[59] Ibid., 21. "It is this situation which has, perhaps more than any other one cause, forced the demand for an educational institution which shall provide something like a homogeneous and balanced environment for the young. Only in this way can the centrifugal forces set up by juxtaposition of different groups within one and the same political unit be counteracted."

[60] Indeed, his brand of neo-Hegelianism owed much to the 19th-century reception of Hegel in the Americas. See, Joe Ervin, David Beisecker, and Jasmin Özel, "The St. Louis Hegelians and the Institutionalization of Democratic Education," *Philosophy of Education* 77, no. 1 (2021).

[61] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 87. It is worth noting here that Dewey understood a democracy to be "more than a form of government": "it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."

[62] Ibid., 87.

[63] Ibid., 86.

[64] Ibid.

make him penitent."[65] We hence ought not to "confuse a physical with an educative result."[66] Education is *direction*,[67] but not mere physical direction. It is rather by means of "the person's own participating dispositions" that education should develop "within him an intrinsic and persisting direction in the right way."[68] We form dispositions by participating in joint activities with others, just as we "attach the same meaning to things and to acts which others attach." Ultimately, engaging in joint activities will render us "like-minded with them."[69]

In short, for Dewey the goal of education is not individual self-perfection. Rather, the goal is *growth*. Specifically, it is growth towards greater social *interdependence*. While Spinoza's conception of education focused exclusively on the unfolding of the student's inner powers through the strengthening of their *conatus* by bringing the child more in line with their own nature and freeing them from any outside interference – Dewey's conception of education focuses on *social* efficiency and acculturation. Rational insight, understanding or other perfection need not, and even should not, be the primary goal of education. The educator's main purpose should rather be to provide the student with means that help him "come to identify his own interest with the interest of this social whole," to "interpret the child's present interest in the light of this objective reason and will" – to help the student develop his *second nature*.

One important implication of Dewey's conception of growth as the aim of schooling is that the end of education cannot be a "fixed goal."[70] Education cannot be subordinate to any goal other than growth. In fact, if there is any goal that we could ascribe to education, it would be perpetual change and transformation: The educational process "has no end beyond itself; it is its own end"[71] writes Dewey, and moreover: "the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstruction, transforming."[72] Growth consists in "*having* an end" instead of in "*being* and end."[73]

The purpose of institutionalized schooling on this conception is to foster life-long growth, namely by laying the foundations for continual learning. The

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[65] Ibid., 26.

[66] Ibid., 27.

[67] As we can even see in the title of the third chapter of Dewey, *Democracy and Education*: "Education as Direction," 23ff.

[68] Ibid., 27.

[69] Ibid., 30.

[70] Ibid., 50.

[71] Ibid., 30.

[72] Ibid., 50.

[73] Ibid., 50.

student's education should "not cease when one leaves school."[74] Schooling assists the student's continuing learning "by organizing the powers that insure growth."[75] And education just is "continuous growth, having as its aim at every stage an added capacity of growth."[76] Education ends, however, once any goals are fixed.[77]

The need for "continuous readjustment," depending on conditions, as a defining characteristic of education is also reflected in Dewey's comparison of the educator with the farmer. This comparison is quite different from Spinoza's vision of the educator as "optimistic nutritionist." Both the educator and the farmer have "certain things to do, certain resources with which to do it, and certain obstacles with which to contend."[78] Just as it would be absurd to "set up an ideal of farming irrespective of conditions," the same holds for setting up ideals when it comes to the growth of children.[79] Any educational aim will need to "be founded upon the intrinsic activities and needs [...] of the individual to be educated."[80] Education is democratic if it addresses the "intrinsic significance of growth," which is the only aim education has according to Dewey, and its "democratic criterion."[81]

Dewey also objects to the view that the purpose of education is merely *preparation* for the future.[82] In some sense, education is always preparation for the future, for it ought to further growth at later stages in life: Since growth consists in a "continuous leading into the future," at each stage, education needs to "make individuals better fitted to cope with later requirements."[83] Yet, in Dewey, very much in contrast to the perfectionist conception we saw in Spinoza, education does not consist in an "unfolding of latent powers towards a definite goal," the goal here is hence decidedly not "conceived as completion, perfection."[84]

Historically, Dewey sees these two conceptions of education exemplified in Froebel's and Hegel's thought respectively. Dewey concludes that Froebel's

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[74] Ibid., 51.

[75] Ibid., 51.

[76] Ibid., 54.

[77] Ibid., 54. The fixing of aims brings about the "arrest of growth."

[78] Ibid., 106.

[79] Ibid., 107.

[80] Ibid., 108.

[81] Ibid., 109.

[82] Ibid., 54. Dewey sees the view of "education as unfolding" as "[l]ogically the doctrine is only a variant of the preparation theory" of education, and as thus to be rejected. Ibid., 56.

[83] Ibid., 56.

[84] Ibid.

conception of education, in contrast to Hegel's, "failed to see that growing is growth, developing is development," instead "placing the emphasis upon the completed product."[85] Just as both Spinoza and Dewey claim to offer an "immanent" account of human life, so do both Froebel and Hegel. Both understand the "ideal" not to be a mere ideal, but as "operative in the here and now,"[86] yet their respective understandings of what it means for the goal to be "implicitly, 'potentially,' or in an enfolded condition"[87] differ: For Hegel, it is worked out through a series of historical institutions which embody the different factors of the Absolute. For Froebel, all the educator needs to do is present the child with the right kinds of symbols so that the "whole, or perfection, sleeping within him, is awakened."[88] Dewey mentions Froebel's discussion of the use of the circle in Kindergarten as a striking example in this context: The circle is not merely a "convenient way of grouping children" but rather, Froebel argues, it must be used "because it is the symbol of the collective life of mankind in general."[89]

Froebel thus sets up a goal, which to Dewey "means the arrest of growth."[90] Hegel, by contrast, focuses on institutions, rather than symbolisms: He sees the "weakness of an abstract individualistic philosophy" and the "impossibility of making a clean sweep of historical institutions."[91]

Dewey reminds us here that we find in Hegel a staunch advocate of the positive influence "of the great collective institutional products of humanity," just as we do in many other German thinkers around 1800 – Dewey mentions Lessing, Herder, Kant, Schiller, and Goethe.[92] But Dewey does not only reject the view that there are certain faculties that all of us share, and that can be activated through the same kinds of symbolisms, he is equally dissatisfied with the view that denies the existence of mental faculties altogether, namely Herbart's. Herbart argues that instead of education being an "unfolding from within," or a "training of the faculties resident in mind itself," education should rather be conceived of as the formation of mind itself: by setting up "certain associations or connections of content by means of a subject matter presented from without."[93] Herbart thus denies the "existence of

[85] Ibid., 58.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., 59.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., 69.

innate faculties," instead, the mind is "simply endowed with the power of producing various qualities in reaction to the various realities which act upon it."[94] Yet Herbart, according to Dewey, neglected the importance of what we could call *joint intentionality* in education: "it slurs over the fact that the environment involves a personal sharing in common experiences."[95] And, even more importantly, Herbart did not sufficiently capture what, as we say above, Dewey sees as the essence of education, namely "the operation of the genuinely novel and unforeseeable," the "vital energy seeking opportunity of effective exercise."[96]

IV. Conclusion

We saw that for both Spinoza and Dewey, education is a developmental process,[97] but the developmental ends differ: For Spinoza, we start with naturally common ends, the recognition of which is vital to our self-preservation and perfection. For Dewey, we need to achieve common ends as well, though they need to be nurtured and fostered, not disclosed or uncovered. Our starting point is rather one of difference, not commonality. In sharp contrast with Spinoza's conception of education for individual perfection, democratic education is marked by an appreciation of the "intrinsic significance of growth."[98] Growth occurs through the accommodation of these differences. Growth thus does not consist in a reduction of interference by others, but rather an increase in social dependencies, which equals an increase in power, an increase in *positive freedom*: "From a social standpoint, dependency denotes a power rather than a weakness; it involves interdependence."[99] The end of growth on Dewey's conception is thus not to be found within the individual, but rather within one's community.

The new conatus for the new world will hence not be that of an individual organism. Instead, it is that of the "social organism" Dewey was so fond of bringing up.[100] If we wish to determine an appropriate aim of democratic

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., 71.

[96] Ibid.

[97] As chapter 4 ("Education as Growth") of *Democracy and Education* argues.

[98] Ibid., 109. Growth needs to be the only aim of education and constitutes its "democratic criterion."

[99] Ibid., 44.

[100] See for instance chapter 5 of *Democracy and Education*: "But the social organism, interpreted after the relation of the organs of the body to each other and to the whole body, means that each individual has a certain limited place and function, requiring to be supplemented by the place and function of the other organs." Ibid., 60.

education, then, it ought to be the "continued capacity for growth"[101] of this *social* organism instead of just that of individual organisms.[102] The aim will constantly be subject to testing through the group action of such a collective, and it "must always represent a freeing of activities."[103] And so, through education, students come to identify with, and participate in, a social organism with its own growth trajectory and a *conatus* of its very own.

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[101] Ibid., 100.

[102] Ibid., 87. "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."

[103] Ibid., 105.

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