

BUILDING THE CONFLICTED COMMUNITY

A Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2004

Major Subject: Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Building the Conflicted Community. (December 2004)

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This thesis will examine the individual and the community. The question will be, what effect does the community have on the individual, and whether or not this limits individuals' development and personal freedom. I will contend that while individuals have limits placed on their freedoms by the community, they are also indebted to it, finding within it a necessary place. As such, I will examine various communal models, questioning the benefits and vices of each, hoping to draw a clearer picture of a community that allows the individual the most personal freedom, while not diminishing from the strength of the community.

I will focus first on the model of Hegel and his speculative idealism, examining his method, and overarching goal, as a means to question what an idealistic society would look like, and how it would function, in order to inquire whether such a community is both plausible and preferable. And as this question was taken up by John Dewey, the thesis will also argue from his standpoint that a community such as Hegel's was not possible. I will examine why John Dewey drew this conclusion, as it did not take into account individuals, and how they have experience, as personal and ever changing. And finally the thesis will question, was Dewey firm enough in his stance, or was his just a softer version of idealism, leading us to the present state of affairs where

the community is still dominated by idealistic sentiments, favoring the community over the individual, and diminishing personal freedom. The conclusion will be drawn that a move should be made to return to individuals choice in their personal lives, as originally proposed by Dewey, both giving, and making them take responsibility for those lives. Consequently, the thesis will show that a community that allows for the most personal development of individual freedoms will also be one that thrives as a community, drawing from those individual developments a richer source of potentials, capable of changing in a more varied and expansive way that is more aptly able to accommodate both the individual and the community.

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This thesis represents the culmination of my academic work at Texas A&M University. And although it is the product of my intellectual abilities, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the role that others have played in helping create both this work and the man who has created it. The influence they have had in my life has been an invaluable asset to my life, providing for me development and encouragement that has fueled my desire to produce not only this work, but hopefully many more works to come. We are all in many ways the result of others around us; through their influence and guidance they shape us into the people we are today, and I consider it the greatest gift of my life that I have had these people, and many others, around to help create the man I have become, and am still becoming.

First I would like to thank Dr. John McDermott, who remains the greatest professor and lecturer that I have ever had the pleasure to see. His classes are as awe inspiring as they are thought provoking, creating amongst his students an excitement that permeates all aspects of their lives. For me his encouragement and insight has proven to be the single greatest influence in my academic life, propelling me to live a genuine life that always seeks out the new and novel, experiencing all that life has to offer. He is an invaluable asset to Texas A&M University, knowledgeable of all aspects of the human condition, willingly and ably transferring that wisdom to any who desires to hear it, and in my opinion should be required coursework for anyone who seriously desires to undertake the quest of what it means to live life.

To Dr. Theodore George, I would like to thank for pushing me to understand Hegel, even when at times that understanding was severely mistaken. And although I should doubt that I will ever really understand Hegel, I feel that I am better for having been encouraged to work hard at it. Dr. George showed me that that which is the most confusing to us, may also be invaluable for us, pushing us to overcome it. I would like to thank Dr. Jimmie Killingsworth, who even though I did not get the chance to meet with on a frequent basis, I have the feeling that he would have been a great influence on my academic career, and I consider it a shame that as I pursued my BA in English at Texas A&M University I did not have the opportunity to participate in one of his classes.

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is a woman of exemplary character, capable of bringing joy to the most down trodden of hearts. She has shown me what a person can achieve when they have the support of someone who loves them, making me want to achieve more and more. Her spirit has lifted me more times than I can count, and for that I will be forever in her debt, and constantly grateful for this chance I've had to know and to love her.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of the individual and the community is one that has born with it a tenuous relationship, characterized by a torrid stream of emotions that has found with it both times of peaceful union and prosperity, as well as unfathomable horrors and conflicts. As individuals have generally sought a less restrictive community, giving them the rights they feel inherently due, free to pursue lives of their own volition, the community has sought to tighten those reigns, taking the individual as such less into account, as they must consider the body of individuals, leading to this affair where at no times has either truly known what their place should be in this world, as both find themselves members of each side.

Both find themselves mutually indispensable to one another, necessary bodies not only for their own survival, but the survival of the world as well. This has led to the individual and the community continuing this dance of wills, attempting this balancing act that might satisfy, providing a system that takes into account their mutual indispensability to one another and allows this relationship to flourish. Historically, political philosophy and theory has sought to bridge the gap between the individual and the community, bringing their interests closer together so that each might fully enjoy the advantages and benefits of the other.

This thesis follows the style and format of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

But typically solutions have favored the community over the individual, leading individuals into a communal thought and action that excludes the truly original, or at the very least disregards them as unbeneficial to the community. It has all too often been believed that the individual as such could not come to any deep understanding or accomplishment as an individual. Rather, such a quest could only culminate in the collective body of individuals, coming together to realize an absolute reason underlying their collective lives. Embodied in the community as the living representative of this absolute, as it more adequately represents this assumed collective thought that acts as the undercurrent in each individual's life, it is thought that a strong community equates to a better understanding of the absolute reason that it represents. But more times than not, this strength of the community has been one that does not take into account the individuals who compose it, but rather it is a strength that seeks to oppose the individual, conforming them into its system of uniformity and making its will the individual's.

Characterized by the desire to alleviate conflict and tension from the life of the community, a general consensus has arisen over the years that this can only be accomplished through the collective body that individuals compose. And though the community, and the individual, is correct in their continuing struggle to overcome strife and tension, they take the struggle as the enemy, rather than as a tool. Conflict, struggle, tension, pain, suffering, just as joy and happiness, are necessary elements in the life of the individual and the community. Through conflict, and our struggle to overcome it, we grow; through strife and our pains to work through it, we learn. We would find ourselves unable to progress without something to overcome.

Conflict is not the enemy, it is not an evil to be alleviated; it is a desire within each of us that drives us to accomplish, to work towards something better. This is not to say that all conflict and tension are good; there exists famine, death, disease, natural disasters, war, homicidal maniacs, all of which pose serious threats to our lives, possibly preventing those lives from struggling anymore. But should we find ourselves able to work through them, to somehow come out on the other side, we will find ourselves stronger because of them, better equipped to meet conflict in the future. But at all times we will be forced to face it, as it provides for us the struggle that gives meaning to our lives.

Nevertheless, it has been imagined, and attempted, through various systems of political philosophy and theory, that by overcoming this conflict, or at the very least providing ready made answers to deal with it, that individuals will be better off having eliminated this struggle in their lives. By giving meaning to those lives, rather than making individuals work for it, it has been thought that this would provide freedom and happiness. This has proven the justification for discounting the individual's will and drawing it into a collective whole, as it is within the individual that conflict finds its origination. As individuals are inherently conflicted, pulled from extreme to extreme within their psyches, this vibration reverberates out into the world through their speech and actions, providing further conflicts in the lives of others, so that it eventually becomes a conflict that everyone must deal with. And because the conflict resonates through the collective masses, it is argued that the only way the conflict can affectively

be dealt with, is by allowing for that collection to deal with it, while repressing the individual for fear of the further conflicts that arise.

The problem, however, that must eventually be realized, is that as these problems arise on a personal level, they will also have to be dealt with on that same level.

Otherwise, though we may suppress individuals, preventing them from conflicting others, if we do, we will eventually find a society comprised of no individuals at all, but rather mindless automatons. As individuals need conflict within their lives to learn and grow, by suppressing it, and robbing them of their ability to learn and grow from it, we prevent them from contributing anything at all to society, good or bad. Individuals must be allowed to individually deal with the conflicts that they are presented with, developing as a result of them so that they may in turn contribute back to society. And if they should project their conflicts out into society, then it will learn and develop accordingly. For just as the individual is a living, breathing entity, requiring conflict to grow, so too is society, so that without this conflict society will find itself a barren wasteland.

The community must find within it a wealth of individuals, all contributing individually, so that just as they receive nourishment from the community, so too can it be nourished through their ongoing struggles. This seems to have been the fundamental problem over the years with all these systems of political thought, as they fail to take into account the fact that an individual is an individual first and foremost, and the community is nothing more than a collection of individuals. The result is that the individual life, and the experiences that characterize it, will always be of the first and

utmost importance to the individual person, as this is the only life and experience known. Any attempt of a community to create, conform, or regulate the lives of individuals will always run counter to individuals' true natures, as they cannot assume a life as someone else sees that life, as they have but only their own eyes to look through. And any attempt to do so will inevitably lead to the problem that individuals will find their persons confused, or dazed by a life they don't understand, incapable of functioning properly, as they find themselves unfamiliar with the life they're leading. Otherwise, the situation will arise where the individual falls victim to a sort of brainwashing, their individuality diminished to the point of extinction through the constant conditioning that the community levels upon them, at which time we must ask, is that individual truly alive?

We must seek not for a community that sees itself as prior and superior to the individual. Nor should we prefer the opposite. Rather, we must see them for what they are, a singular entity made up of a collection of singular entities. And as they are, they necessarily need the other for their continued growth, nourishment, and general well being. They do not need each other as carbon copies of the other, but as varied and complex additions, allowed to develop these diverse natures, as they contribute to the rich stream of experience that enriches each of us. It should neither be the goal of the community to conform the individuals that inhabit it to some absolute will, nor should it be the goal of individuals and their separate individualities to overrun the communities they inhabit. Rather, it should be the goal of each to develop their respective lives more fully as individuals, through this system of give and take, conflict and recovery, as each

is an experience that provides growth for the other. And the individual and the community will find through their conflicts, and struggles to overcome them, that they can build a conflicted society that is richer for it, as it is enhanced with the wealth of various experiences that run through everyone.

My project shows the mutual indispensability of the individual and the community, while recognizing the importance of individual experience and development, not only as they pertain to the individual's life but to others as well. It will not be my hope to try and bring these lives together, so that they both realize their experiences and struggles as the same, but rather to stress upon the fact that as their lives are different, so too should the development of those lives differ. And the hope is to recognize that through this difference, which comports to the ever changing nature of reality, that each life can be more closely attuned to this infinite variety of reality, as they find within the other this differing perspective and flow of experience, which subsequently allows each a more enriched and varied view of their own, and others as well.

Primarily this task will be taken up in three chapters, where each gives credence to its predecessor, while attempting to make the natural step beyond it. Beginning first, with the pinnacle of European idealism, as seen in the philosophy of Hegel, I will attempt an exposition of the absolute spirit as it was to become real in the body of the state. Secondly, covering the work of John Dewey and his subsequent departure from the Hegelian absolute, I will detail Dewey's experiential metaphysics, which returned to the individual a sense of reverence for experience as unique and novel. And finally,

continuing with Dewey's work, I will attempt to show that while Dewey laid the groundwork for the individual, he failed to slip completely out from under the veil of idealism, providing what I perceive should have been the natural conclusion to his theories, bringing back to the individual, and the community, their true import and place within this world and its history.

CHAPTER II

SACRIFICING INDIVIDUALS SO THEY MAY GAIN FREEDOM:

THE HEGELIAN DEVELOPMENT OF ABSOLUTE REASON

STEPPING OUT OF THE SHADOWS OF KANT

Hegel's speculative idealism represented the pinnacle of European idealism. Rooted in the real world, his idealism was one that found the individual and the community not as distinct parts, but rather as moments of the whole, such that the realization of one was the realization of the other. He discovered the unity of consciousness amongst the individual and the community, wherein though they were not the same, the two were united through an adherence to a common will. Consequently, we may say that individuals sacrifice their individual wills, at least in so far as that means they sacrifice their distinctness from the community, in order that they may actually, through duty and adherence to rule, discover the will of the absolute, as that is their own, providing for them their true freedom.

Because Hegel provided the clearest picture how the absolute was to become real, he has been chosen in the context of this thesis namely to try and discover what such a community, and the individuals who inhabit it, would look like. Wherein, we must question, could such a community come to fruition; is Hegel's development of the absolute possible? And, we must further probe, if such a community could exist, should its subsistence be preferable to other possible societal organizations? And finally, in light of the overall project, the question will arise; does the individual truly appear free?

In this chapter, primarily two texts of Hegel's will be focused upon. The first, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, will be examined as it pertains to the individual consciousness coming to recognize itself through the recognition of another, as they become entangled in a struggle of wills. And as this recognition is characteristic of the recognition of a somewhat more primitive individual, the more fully developed thought of Hegel, at least in the context of how the individual is placed within society, will be examined in the *Philosophy of Right*, wherein individuals recognize their freedom within the societal structure of the state, as cooperating and aligning their wills with the common will. Although, it should be noted, that while these two texts will be dealt with as different phases of the Hegelian thought, underlying both of them was the same theme, that the individual can only come to self-consciousness and absolute reason in and of the real world, developing through societal structures. As such, just as the individual and the community should not be thought of as distinct parts, neither should these two texts, but rather as moments of the whole.

Following Kant, philosophy was left with a series of unresolved dualisms. As such, Hegel sympathized with Fichte and Schelling, whose expositions attempted to expound upon the unresolved conflicts left behind by Kant, attempting to make the absolute real. But inadequacies still remained, leading Hegel to attempt a much more ambitious evolution of the history of the absolute, or reason. Within Fichte, we were left with the problem that this resolution ended with the theoretical deduction of consciousness, so that only the idea of the objective world was deduced, not the

objective world itself; we are presented with the real world, but only as it exists as the opposite of the ego. And with Schelling, although he showed that nature is both real, and ideal, visible spirit, and subsequently how subjectivity objectifies itself, he still left us with the problem that the absolute transcends conceptual thought. Consequently, following Fichte and Schelling we were still left with the absolute as being something out there, beyond our reality, so that the only way we could participate in it was to somehow transcend our finite selves.

Owing to these mystified tendencies, Hegel's breakthrough was something of a Copernican revolution, even if it was grounded within reality rather than out amongst the stars, as he provided a system wherein the absolute existed as the total process of its self-manifestation through the finite, in and of the real world; "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational."¹ Copleston explains the way this discovery is to be made as, ". . .not by plunging ourselves into a mystical night that we can come to know the Absolute. We come to know it only by understanding a determinate content, the self-developing life of the Absolute in Nature and Spirit."² Consequently, it became Hegel's task to examine the phenomenological process whereby the absolute comes to know itself, a process that takes place in and through the existence and reason of human beings, as individual self-consciousnesses coming to realize their existence 'in and for themselves'.

Mirroring Hegel's dialectic method, the individual is initially recognized as subjective spirit; self-consciousness apart and opposed to the world around it. The

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 10.
2. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. VII (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 169-170.

individual is initially confused, certain of its existence, but uncertain of anything else, unable to see itself as in and of the world, as the world does not really yet exist. Next, the individual finds itself as objective spirit, a self-consciousness which is just a piece of the world around it, recognizing the existence of others, yet unable to comprehend the bond that exists between it and all others, regulating both its life and that of everything. And finally, the individual finds itself as the synthesis, as absolute spirit, existing as the creator and the created, understanding and coinciding with the universe as a whole, recognizing the underlying unity that creates unison with everything else. It is the process of reason, as reason coming to understand its own fruition.

THE PRIMITIVE INDIVIDUAL

Initially the development of the individual consciousness is one of struggle and confusion, as the individual is certain of its own truth, yet uncertain of anything else. Characterized by the individual's certainty of its own existence, it is an existence that knows itself only in opposition to everything else around it. This results in the individual consciousness taking the world as an imperfection, desiring the negation of this imperfect world in order to reaffirm its own self. To do so, the individual must destroy, or consume, that which is other than its self, and by in so doing the individual consciousness finds itself without any substance to its world. For although the individual consciousness only desired to negate the imperfection of the objects around it, it must find that the only way that this may be accomplished is by destroying those objects, and

thus negating their existence, leaving it still uncertain of the existence of anything other than its own conscious self. This led Hegel to write:

... hence the sensuous world is for it an enduring existence which, however, is only appearance, or a difference which, in itself, is no difference. This antithesis of its appearance and its truth has, however, for its essence only the truth, viz. the unity of self-consciousness with itself; this unity must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness is Desire in general.³

The self-consciousness is trapped, as the object it took as pure nothing gains independence as a result of the self-consciousness' desire to negate and destroy it. Yet, it must continue this negation, as self-consciousness desires to realize itself as the unity of the difference between itself and the object, leading Jean Hyppolite to conclude:

The object is negated and desire is quenched, but then desire arises again and another object presents itself to be negated. The specificity of the objects and the desires matter little; the monotony of their reproduction has a necessity: it reveals to consciousness that the object is needed so that self-consciousness can negate it.⁴

Self-consciousness finds itself in a reoccurring anomaly of desire, destruction, and the resurgence of desire, unable to affect its end, as the unity with itself in another cannot be made explicit. As such, Hegel can say, "it is in fact something other than self-consciousness that is the essence of desire," as the living object is merely a unity for self-consciousness, rather than for itself. Consequently, self-consciousness is not free from having to negate the object, for the object is unable to negate itself, as the object could only serve to prove consciousness' unity with itself in the other, rather than through the negation of it, if the object itself existed for itself. This leads to the

3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 105.
4. Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Chernick & John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 162.

emergence of another self-consciousness, as the only object that may carry out its own negation, existing for itself, leading Hegel to claim:

... it must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is in itself negative, and must be for the other what it is. Since the object is in its own self negation, and in being so is at the same time independent, it is consciousness.....But this universal independent nature in which negation is present as absolute negation, is the genus as such, or the genus as self-consciousness. Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.⁵

The individual self-consciousness may only truly recognize itself, and its existence, through the occurrence wherein two individual self-consciousnesses recognize the other as another. As Hyppolite notes, “Desire bears first on the objects of the world, then on life, an object already closer to itself, and, finally, on another self-consciousness. Desire seeks itself in the other: man desires recognition from man.”⁶

But in so far as they do not initially recognize the other truly as another, but rather as extensions of their own self, they still do not recognize the other self as an individual self with actual existence. They see each other as reflections, equating the other self as a being that must necessarily act with the same intentions and thoughts. Yet, this leads to the inevitable problem that the one believes that the other exists for its benefit, and this other is as it is because of who the original one is, while the other believes in the same fashion, and so on ad infinitum, so that they keep reflecting off one another indefinitely. Neither is willing to coalesce, recognizing the other as an individual, independent self-consciousness, as they still find that they are certain only of their own existence.

5. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 109-110.

6. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 160.

Consequently, the situation presents itself that in order for either self-consciousness to prove their existence to the other, they must both wage their own lives in a battle to the death, for only by destroying the other can one truly lay claim to superiority. The sacrificing of one's life is of supreme importance to Hegel in the development of the self-conscious being, as it is only through the sacrificing of one's life to the ultimate master, death, that the individual is able to truly recognize freedom, shunning all desire in the name of duty to purpose. As Hegel puts it:

And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure being-for-self.⁷

The problem that occurs in respect to these encounters is that one individual will not be willing to make that ultimate sacrifice, clinging to a desire for life that leads to that individual sacrificing a freedom from all desires, as it's not yet conditioned enough to forego these primal instincts and desires in the name of duty and reason. But by in so doing, the individual must inevitably still sacrifice life, at least in part, forfeiting freedom in this world to the stronger master, to whom is owed the physical life that was desirously clung to, becoming a servant to the would be slayer, and providing the services of labor in exchange for that life.

It may be said that the master has now come to realize self-conscious. As the master has now consumed the servant, using the servant's ability to fulfill desire, without at the same time negating the servant's existence, the master has proven superiority

7. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114.

superiority without destroying the existence of another, and negating that existence. However, the master still does not truly recognize the servant as a separate self-consciousness; the servant is a consciousness that exists in the master's eyes only to serve. The master does not see the servant as existing separately, but rather as someone whose existence exists solely for the master's benefit. The master still does not recognize the truth of existence, seeing the world as existing for himself, rather than as the two existing for one another. Hyppolite notes:

The master is master only because he is recognized by the slave; his autonomy depends on the mediation of another self-consciousness, that of the slave. Thus his independence is completely relative.⁸

What's more, because the master can only recognize his own freedom, he cannot recognize that freedom as being in many ways contingent upon the servant. As the servant now produces the goods that fulfill the master's desires, the master comes to rely upon the servant to fulfill those needs, unable to any longer fulfill them; the master becomes dependent upon the servant, never truly free from desire, and unable to satisfy them without the aid of another.

Conversely, the servant, who in the first instance is unable to recognize his own freedom, and only that of the master, receives, however, a sense of duty in work, which will ultimately provide a greater sense of own self-consciousness. As the servant develops a skill, working not out of a desire to fulfill desires, but rather out of a sense of duty to a higher purpose, toiling at work in realization that it is what he's supposed to do.

8. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 173.

The slave, on the other hand, comes up against the independence of being. He can only transform the world and in that way render it adequate for human desire. But it is precisely in that apparently inessential action that the slave becomes able to give to his own being-for-itself the subsistence and permanence of being-in-itself. Not only does the slave shape himself by shaping things; he also imprints the form of self-consciousness on being. Thus, in the product of his work, he finds himself.⁹

Even though the servant was unable to originally sacrifice himself to the ultimate master, he does sacrifice in the name of duty and work, sacrificing individual freedom to contribute to the greater whole. And by in so doing, the servant is learning a trade, learning how to provide for himself, while developing various other skills that will allow him to produce for society. The servant is coming to recognize what it means to participate within the ethical life, sacrificing individual selfish desires so that he may come to understand, and contribute to, the greater whole.

THE FULLY DEVELOPED INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIETY

Having built up this primitive recognition of other self-consciousnesses for the individual self-consciousness, Hegel could make the movement whereby the self-conscious individual recognizes itself within the absolute self-consciousness. As Heidegger summarized the purpose of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “. . . the absolute self-presentation of reason (ratio-logos), whose essence and actuality Hegel finds in Absolute Spirit.”¹⁰ The absolute self-presentation was a movement, wherein taken as the whole of that movement Hegel saw it as a method, described as:

9. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 176.

10. Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Parvis Emad & Kenneth Maly (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), 30.

. . .it exhibits itself as a circle returning upon itself, the end being wound back into the beginning, the simple ground by mediation; this circle is moreover a circle of circles, for each individual member as ensouled by the method is reflected into itself, so that in returning into the beginning it is at the same time the beginning of the new member.¹¹

A sentiment reflective of Kant's earlier description in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Reason is driven by a propensity of its nature to go beyond its use in experience . . . and to find peace only in the completion of its circle in a self-subsisting systematic whole."¹²

And though Hegel took up this task of describing this movement in its social context in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, at least in so far as the context of this paper, and his chapter on the master-servant relationship, we may treat that movement more as it pertains to the individual as such, rather than the individual's development within the societal structure. As Hyppolite noted in his chapter, *Domination and Servitude*, "It is noteworthy that Hegel is interested here only in the individual development of self-consciousness."¹³ However, it need be noted that while the rest of the *Phenomenology* is not dealt with here, Hegel was at all times aware of the individual's place within society, leading Kenneth Westphal to write:

Briefly, Hegel held that individuals are fundamentally social practitioners. Everything one does, says, or thinks is formed in the context of social practices that provide material and conceptual resources, objects of desire, skills, procedures and the like. . .one's society deeply conditions one's ends because it provides specific objects that meet

11. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1969), 842.

12. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Plubar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. Inc., 1996), 730.

13. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 172.

those ends, and it specifies procedures for obtaining them.¹⁴

And though Hegel was aware of this, it should be noted that Westphal's statement was written in response to Hegel's, *Philosophy of Right*, to which I now turn as the most fully developed version of Hegel's views on societal structures and the individuals that inhabit it, continuing with the methodological approach of *The Science of Logic*, and providing the best explication of the development of the individual and the community.

Its content is:

. . . the science of objective spirit. In the circle that is Hegel's philosophy, it follows the science of subjective spirit, in which the free will develops itself fully, but in abstraction from the objective external world. Faced with that world which is so different from itself, the free will seeks to grasp and comprehend it, to transform the objective world into a world of freedom and into a world penetrated and permeated by the free will.¹⁵

In the *Philosophy of Right* the individual comes to the true understanding of freedom through the ethical life, where, "In duty the individual acquires his substantive freedom."¹⁶ For in duty:

the self-will of the individual vanishes together with his private conscience which had claimed independence and opposed itself to the ethical substance. For when his character is ethical, he recognizes as the end which moves him to act the universal which is itself unmoved but is disclosed in its specific determinations as rationality actualized. He knows that his own dignity and the whole stability of his particular ends are grounded in this same universal, and it is therein that he actually attains these.¹⁷

14. Kenneth Westphal, "The Basic Context and Structure of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 236.

15. Peter G. Stillman, "Person, Property, and Civil Society in the Philosophy of Right," in *Selected Essays on G. W. F. Hegel* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), 117.

16. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 107.

17. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 109.

In the ethical life the individual becomes a part of a greater whole, sustained by infinite reason that gives direction to life. But this is somewhat misleading, as the individual is that greater whole. It is not necessarily that infinite reason sustains the individual, or dictates its path, but rather the individual recognizes a place within absolute reason and judges that it should act in accord with the absolute. Copleston writes, “The infinite life unites all finite things from within, as it were, but without annihilating them. It is the living unity of the manifold.”¹⁸ We may say that the universal is the process of the individual participants coming to understand their true freedom, that of absolute reason.

It was to this process that Hegel turned to in the *Philosophy of Right*, discovering this process in the formation of the state; it being the truest reflection of the absolute coming to know itself. As it is only in the formation of the state that a collective consciousness can be found, bound together by its universal aim to protect and better the state and its inhabitants, Hegel realized that this universal movement could only be achieved through the discovery and adherence to reason, through the recognition of its being within the infinite of the state. This should not be thought of as a dual movement, wherein the individual and the state are separate parts, rather they are of one movement, so that only as the individual recognizes its true freedom can the state recognize its own, and vice-versa. Absolute reason can only be realized as the unity is realized of the finite parts that gives the absolute its infinite freedom.

The process of the ethical life can first be seen through the family, initially with the birth of a child, the rejuvenation and perpetuation of the state community; the

18. Copleston, 165.

individual family and their interaction with the community models the process whereby all individuals must come to realize their place within the community and the absolute. As the child's very existence relies upon the nourishment of the community surrounding it, even if that community only exists of one other member, the child is necessarily taken on as a part of a community. The child is initially dependent upon the community for nourishment, shelter, and health. And, even though the child is not conscious of the fact, it must necessarily find its will as aligned with the will of the community, as it is the community that perpetuates the child's existence. Furthermore, as the child grows and develops, so too does the community play a role in that development, as it conditions the child with its language, customs, and various other elements unique to that community, so that the child becomes another part of it; the child is now conscious of a place within a community, but only in as much as it recognizes this fact through the eyes that the community has provided.

Yet, as the child grows and receives education, developing a sense of consciousness, it must realize that while it has borrowed many customs and mannerisms from the community, and is indebted to it, it is at the same time an individual, apart from any other member of the community. The child must recognize a certain uniqueness that places it in difference to all other members of the community, recognizing a certain propensity for one thing or another, or a desire for one thing or another, to which reason it can only attribute that it comes from being unique, designed for a different purpose. This results in the individual breaking away from the community in a sense, leaving

behind the family that originally reared it, to pursue a life as an individual, as a distinct personality. Hegel portrays this break as:

The ethical dissolution of the family consists in this, that once the children have been educated to freedom of personality, and have come of age, they become recognized as persons in the eyes of the law.¹⁹

This should not be thought of as a break necessarily in the physical locale of the individual, as the individual may not even leave the community. Rather, it is a break with the ideal that had before dominated the individual's life, in order to discover a personal ideal life, developing a life and personality outside the sphere of the family environment. This dictates the truest moment of the individual self as apart from the community, rejecting all that had been relied upon before in order to live a life that is unrestricted by the bonds that the community must put upon it.

Yet, it is a short lived rejection for most, as the individual becomes incapable of living and existing outside of the scope of the community. As the individual is still reliant upon the community for food, shelter, and many other desires to maintain subsistence, if those desires cannot be satisfied, a voluntarily consent must be made to reinsert one's self back into the community, realizing that the continuation of existence depends upon the existence and the thriving of the surrounding community, as both derive a subsistence from the other. This results in the individual taking some position within the community, usually designated by work, providing goods for the community, and asking for goods in return, realizing this mutual dependence, and recognizing itself as a part of a greater whole, while gaining recognition from the community.

19. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 118.

A man actualizes himself only in becoming something definite, i.e. something specifically particularized; this means restricting himself exclusively to one of the particular spheres of need. In this class-system, the ethical frame of mind therefore is rectitude and esprit de corps, i.e. the disposition to make oneself a member of one of the moments of civil society by one's act, through one's energy, industry, and skill, to maintain oneself in this position, and to fend for oneself only through this process of mediating oneself with the universal, while in this way gaining recognition both in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others.²⁰

The reinsertion of the individual has a two-fold effect. First, it provides the individual with the means to subsist in the community, and more importantly it provides a way to stave off desire, as the individual is now developing and producing goods, which in turn holds desire in check. Hegel said it as follows:

Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing. The negative relation to the object becomes its form and something permanent, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence. This negative middle term or the formative activity is at the same time the individuality or pure being for-self of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence.²¹

The individual begins to recognize the infinite within the community, as that which the individual produces, subsists and provides continuance to the community.

As a result of the individual's recognition of the permanence and the need for the community, along with a place within it, a fuller embracing of this duty is sought. Only by fully embracing the community and the responsibility to it, can individuals recognize their own permanence, grasping more fully the life of the infinite. Namely this

20. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 133.

21. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 118.

recognition initially takes the form of starting a family, as the children who set out on their own, “. . .now have their substantive destiny in the new family.”²² This is a necessary step within any community if it is to move beyond generation to generation, and have a permanence that exists within the real world. The result is that two individuals come together within the community, forming a pact of sorts with it. Yet, this initial encounter is not one that is subject, or ruled by a sense of duty to the community, although Hegel would have had us believe that these relationships should be forged through reason, as two people are brought together because their union best serves the community. Rather, initially the attraction is one that is of another form of desire, most typically that of physical attraction; their relationship is one that is ruled by love, or lust, for the other, as they consume each other in their passions.

As a result, they are once again left with a sense of impermanence, as those passions and desires flee with each brief encounter, creating with these encounters nothing that remains, leaving the two individuals an empty feeling in the pits of their stomachs. As nothing is created and no permanent bond forged, they once again fall into the cycle of desire, destruction, and resurgence of desire, leading Hegel to note, “When the parties are in this frame of mind and their union is actual, their physical passion sinks to the level of a physical moment, destined to vanish in its very satisfaction.”²³ The relationship may only gain permanence when they solidify it through the compact of marriage, a permanent bond ideally intended to unite them forever. And then, “. . .the

22. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 118-119.

23. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 112.

sensuous moment, the one proper to physical life, is put into its ethical place as something only consequential and accidental.”²⁴

This compact, which is of supreme importance to Hegel, is solidified when both parties freely enter into it with the community, signing a marriage certificate that enters them into the bond with each other, as well as with the state. Hegel states it as follows:

. . . the solemn declaration by the parties of their consent to enter the ethical bond of marriage, and its corresponding recognition by their family and community constitutes the formal completion and actuality of marriage. The knot is tied and made ethical only after this ceremony, whereby. . . the substantial thing in marriage is brought completely into being.²⁵

As they sign the certificate, they place themselves as a unit within the ethical life of the community, working for its betterment, as they in turn receive the benefits of it. By signing the legal contract they give their allegiance to the community, as they are now voluntarily adhering to the laws, and the will of the community.

Subsequently, this compact can only achieve an outward unity through the subsequent rearing of children, which is the only real purpose of the family.

In substance marriage is a unity, though only a unity of inwardness or disposition; in outward existence, however, the unity is sundered in the two parties. It is only in the children that the unity itself exists externally, objectively, and explicitly as a unity, because the parents love the children as their love, as the embodiment of their own substance.²⁶

Produced from this outward unity is also the negative effect of placing the family before the community. As the having of children, and the raising of them, is a

24. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 113.

25. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 113.

26. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 117.

bond that is ruled by love, rather than reason, the family must see itself as a self-existing unit, ignoring the rules and duties of the community if it should deem those rules counter to the family itself, for it is now a community unto its own. As such, if conflicts should arise between the family and the community, the family will put itself, and its needs, as a unit, before the demands of the community, feeling more obliged to the duties of the family over that of the community. This sense of family obligation is what provided the essential conflict in Sophocles, *Antigone*, as Hegel writes:

For this reason, family piety is expounded in Sophocles' *Antigone*-one of the most sublime presentations of this virtue-as principally. . .the law of a substantiality at once subjective and on the plane of feeling, the law of the inward life, a life which has not yet attained its full actualization. . .The law is there displayed as a law opposed to public law, to the law of the land. This is the supreme opposition in ethics and therefore in tragedy.²⁷

Antigone felt a higher sense of duty to her fallen brother than to the demands of the state. At the cost of her own life she fulfilled those obligations by burying her brother, eventhough the state demanded that she not. Yet, it is because of this bond that is based on love, that Antigone, or any family, will consider their initial duty and obligation to another family member as superior, as it is their desire to first provide allegiance to those they love.

Hegel would point out, though, that while these familial obligations are natural, they are misplaced, as another form of desire that each family member is trying to stave off, containing no real permanence, just as no particular family has any real permanence. Eventually the individual members will die off and provide the natural dissolution of the

27. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 114-115.

family. The only thing that will remain is the community of those particular families, leading Hegel to conclude that individuals must move beyond their personal obligations to the family, and the bonds that unite them, conquering the fleeting desires that characterize those bonds, to form stronger, more permanent ties, with the community, characterized by an adherence to, and unity with, reason. And in so doing, they will find that this has the added effect of benefiting the family, as what is right for the community is also right for the individual units within it.

This can only occur when the child moves away from the family and takes a place within the community, ethically dissolving the family. For it is at this time that the family, and the two individuals who initially comprised it, becomes fully immersed within civil society, eventually realizing the end of desires in the institutions of the state. The individual self-consciousness realizes the end of desires as provided for through the works and abilities of other individual self-consciousnesses, where also through its works and abilities the desires of others are staved off. Consequently, the individual, through recognizing others, and the subsequent reciprocation of that recognition, recognizes itself as a part of the permanent whole, realizing that what is good for the individual is also good for the whole. And as the individual does, its reason becomes aligned with absolute reason, as the subjective will of the individual freely chooses to act in accord with what is truly reasonable, namely the will of the state. The individual finds the truest sense of freedom as acting freely in accord with the will of the state, which is pure reason realized, acting in accordance with the dictates of the state not because these things are demanded, but rather because they are what is in accord with reason,

providing the greatest good for individuals' lives, leading Hegel to write, "Ethical life is the Idea of freedom in that on the one hand it is the good becoming alive-the good endowed in self-consciousness with knowing and willing and actualized by self-conscious action."²⁸

Yet, it must be realized that the realization of reason for the individual, as well as the state, is not an end unto itself. Nor is it a realization that brings with it a Utopia of sorts, free from such catastrophes as disease and natural disasters. Rather, this realization is a realization of the living process, wherein the individual and the community see that theirs is a life that is universally controlled by reason, allowing them the means to continually overcome the adversities that are placed before them; it is a realization that they are equipped with the necessary tools to readily satisfy their needs and survive in a world that might otherwise seem treacherous. The fully realized state is one where the particular members of it, participating within the ethical life, do their duty for the state, as this is ultimately the duty they have to their own existence, allowing for the state's perpetuation and continuation, which is nothing other than the continuation of the particulars that constitute it.

IS HEGEL THE END?

Hegel described the process whereby individuals must lose their persons in order to gain a truer sense of who those selves truly are. By shedding away their own individual particular wills, as those are opposed to the will of the community, they no longer exist solely as finite individuals, opposed to the universal will, but rather as

28. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 105.

having a place within the infinite will. The individual self-consciousness gains not only a truer sense of itself, but also how that consciousness exists for itself. Consequently, the individual realizes that the only way it can truly taste of freedom is through the participation in the ethical order of the community, by gaining a freedom from wants and desires, in order to live in accord with reason.

And though there can be no doubt that each individual's life is one that is ultimately dictated by reason, trying to live in accord with it, it may still be questioned whether Hegel's all encompassing system is in fact how individuals come to understand reason? Moreover, it must be asked, is there a reason to which every individual of a community adheres to in the same fashion; is there a universal reason that applies equally to each member of a community? Or does reason enact itself in a much more personal way with each individual, coming to be understood in a manner that befits each individual? It was to these questions that John Dewey would turn to upon departing from the systematic philosophy of Hegel, developing a much more personal theory that relied solely upon the individual's experiences and interactions, and the subsequent reflection upon them, and development from them.

CHAPTER III
LIVING WITHIN EXPERIENCE:
THE DOCTRINE OF JOHN DEWEY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMERICAN SENTIMENT

Whereas Hegel found within his system of philosophy a community which adhered to the common will of reason, John Dewey, though he did not abandon such hopes, did not at the same time maintain the belief that such a common understanding was possible; he did not envision a community where the individuals who inhabit it would be able to participate in an actualized common will. Rather, he recognized, as did Hegel, that individuals of a community share a common history, and experience, from which they may develop common beliefs and attitudes toward the community. Differing on this point, Dewey helped set the stage for the dismantling of Hegelian idealism by recognizing that the individual and the community's movement was not a movement towards something, but rather an ever flowing movement, wherein they continue to reevaluate past and present experiences for the benefit of the future.

This chapter will initially examine Dewey's departure from the Hegelian system, wherein I will discuss Dewey's experiential metaphysics as they pertain to how the individual has, and develops from, personally unique experiences. Broadening the scope of the individual's experiences, I will then examine how Dewey saw the individual's experiences as both being contributed to, and contributing to, the collective body of individuals, or the community, as he tried to postulate a society wherein through the

open communication and sharing of experiences, something of a common experience, or understanding, could be achieved, providing a community that might openly confront its problems and decide, as a community, upon that particular problem's merits how best to deal with it. At which point, in the context of the larger theme of the paper, it will be questioned, did Dewey allow for his own process to be taken far enough, or did he simply present a softer form of Hegelian idealism? Which is to say, did he truly allow for the open development of individuals, as well as the community, free to contribute their uniqueness to an ever expanding well of ideas and experience?

The philosophy of the nineteenth century was one that found itself dominated by Hegel, who set the tone for on-going discussions; discussions primarily rooted in explaining and aiding human beings in a quest to move towards the absolute will. As a result, individuals' experiences were ones that were not necessarily their own. Though they were had by the individual, they were had within this greater framework of the absolute will, and for the purpose of achieving that will. And though the individual's purpose was not exactly laid out, there did exist at all times the idea of what was to be sought after, an absolute understanding of that purpose. This meant that the individual was not responsible in life, at least in so far as that meant dictating what path that life should take; rather, life was one that had only to fall in line with the common will.

A different story, however, would emerge in nineteenth-century America, for as the newly emerging nation found itself embracing a new frontier as yet undiscovered and traveled, so too did individuals find the all encompassing systematic philosophies of Europe insufficient to satisfy their desires to consume the experiences of their new

nation in their own personal manner. As yet unclothed in the deep-seeded traditions that ensnared Europe, it became for the American individual to create unique traditions. And in so doing, they came to realize that it was also their responsibility to create their own lives. As the new and novel was realized beyond every new hill, it became a way for them to see their own experiences, as new and novel, rather than tied up within some common experience that never allowed the individual to truly live. And as those adventurous spirits set out to tame the new frontier, so too did they set out to create a philosophy that recognized each individual's experiences as unique, to be created and nurtured as the individual deemed proper.

Reflective of this mentality and borrowing from its voice, there arose a new breed of philosophical thought that attempted to capture and explain this spirit as the way every individual truly has experience. Bringing with it a reverence for one's own experience, the teachings of William James, and his radical empiricism, and later John Dewey, and his experiential metaphysics, taught us that the substance of our reality was ours, stressing that it was the collections and connections of the activities and experiences of our lives that were important for us and should give direction to our lives, rather than some mysterious absolute that existed somewhere outside of us. As such, it was a doctrine of responsibility, whereby those activities of our lives, and the subsequent consequences of them, were placed solely upon our shoulders. This meant that it was in many ways a liberating doctrine, as it returned the experiences of our lives back to us, but at the same time it was a doctrine of burden, as it made us take control of those experiences.

Siding firmly with Hegel's historical process view of philosophy, John Dewey could have early on been regarded as one of the Young Hegelians. And in fact, he sympathized with Hegel's efforts to trace the evolutionary development through history, realizing that human beings found themselves living within a historical matrix, so that every continuing generation was influenced by the generations and events before them, contributing to their own development, just as they would contribute to the successive generations after them; the evolution of human beings was the result of not only the reflection upon the events as they occurred to them in the present, but also as those events had been shaped by others prior to them, and subsequently how they would be shaped in the future. Thus, Dewey too viewed the individual, and the penchant for reason, as something coming to be, rather than as given, leading him to conclude, "The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action."²⁹

Yet, even contained within such statements were the seedlings of discontent with the Hegelian systematic philosophy that would eventually serve as Dewey's point of departure. Aided in large parts by the pragmatist movements of such men as William James, as well as the scientific breakthroughs of Charles Darwin, Dewey came to view the self as something that truly was in "continuous formation" rather than something that might eventually reach some fixed goal. As he came to see the world as an ever changing, evolving process, he realized that Hegel's view of reason, as eventually concluding in the knowledge of itself, was irreconcilable with a reality that could never reach any fixed conclusion. And as there could never exist a reality that comes to fully

29. John Dewey, "Democracy and Education," in *The Middle Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 9 (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 361.

understand reason, then so too could no individual person ever reach an end in the quest to understand that reason. This departure led to a truer expression of Dewey's views regarding the individual:

Individuality is inexpugnable because it is a manner of distinctive sensitivity, selection, choice, response, and utilization of conditions. For this reason, if for no other, it is impossible to develop integrated individuality by any all-embracing system or program.³⁰

Nevertheless, it would be an error to believe that Dewey did not maintain a certain loyalty to his Hegelian roots, as he often remained true to the spirit of the Hegelian process, only differing from Hegel on the point that the ideal could actually become real. Instead, Dewey sided more with Royce, who held the ideal to be something that should guide our actions, as we strive to attain it, but which must remain forever beyond our grasp, providing a vision much more as an ideal, a figment of sorts that we might catch glimpses of, but which we would never see the whole picture of, as that picture did not actually exist.

Stemming from this realization, Dewey presented a much more individualistic account of the relationship between the individual and the community, wherein the individual, as opposed to the community, took responsibility for development through choice and action, determining how to live within the world. Yet, although this is true, Dewey at the same time viewed the community as an integral part in the development of the individual, and the living collection of these individuals. The community for Dewey was a collection that breathed life as well, determining on its own behalf the life that it would lead. It was a whole of separate parts, independently developing and determining

30. John Dewey, "Individuality in our Day," in *The Political Writings*, ed. Debra Morris & Ian Shapiro (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1993), 86.

their own lives, while pooling those experiences into a common well to determine the life of the community, which maintained itself by the parts coming and working together through free and open communication for the betterment of said community. Only through such free and open communication, wherein each individual transfers upon the whole a unique individuality, contributing to the wealth of knowledge and reason, is the society, and those that inhabit it, able to thrive and flourish in the perilous world.

THE METAPHYSICS OF EXPERIENCE

To understand Dewey's views regarding the individual and the community, it is first necessary to understand the metaphysics of John Dewey, a metaphysics whose prime import is that of experience, and how that experience shapes the individual. For only by understanding the importance that experience holds for Dewey can one realize why each individual's experiences must serve as the basis, and continuing nourishment, of the communal experience. As the community is nothing more than a collection of individuals, to understand the life that it takes on, we must understand the motives and lives of those who create, and develop it. For what we will find is something of a parallel between those lives, as each is responding and developing in accord with the conditions and experiences they are confronted with.

Disparaged by the Aristotelian metaphysics, Dewey set out to create his own, a metaphysics that he felt took into account the meaningfulness and import of the individual's experiences, as well as the subsequent reflections and developments upon them, while at the same time aligning itself with a reality that more aptly described the

human perception of the world around it. Influenced in large part by Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, Dewey realized that while it had been mistakenly attacked upon ill-conceived religious objections, its true importance and influence lay in the realm of the sciences, and for Dewey, philosophy, leading him to correctly note:

In laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanency, in treating the forms that had been regarded as types of fixity and perfection as originating and passing away, the Origin of Species introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics, and religion.³¹

What was confirmed by Darwin in his treatise was the ancient Heraclitean view that the world is in a constant state of flux, meaning the development of the world, as well as human beings, could no longer be regarded as something that was either a permanent, and fixed process, or as something that might hope to attain a fixed and permanent goal, leading Frankel to conclude of Dewey:

Central to his belief in the scientific attitude was his implicit identification of that attitude with the evolutionary attitude. Human ideas and social institutions, he thought, should be constructed as instruments of adaptation. When circumstances change, beliefs and institutions should change, and inquiry into facts and consequences should control this change, not rigid doctrine.³²

In *The Live Creature*, Dewey once again recognized this attitude when he wrote:

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surroundings things and then recovers unison with it – either through effort or by some

31. John Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1981), 32.

32. Charles Frankel, "John Dewey's Social Philosophy," in *New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey* (Hanover: The University Press, 1977), 15.

happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recover is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.³³

Life was realized as something that developed through a series of random occurrences, a system of trial and error wherein certain traits were found to be fit while others necessarily proved their own extinction, as they could not adapt to the times and environment they found themselves in. Any creature, or species, who could not change and evolve to meet the conditions of life, would find their own come to an end. Correspondingly, any aims to reach a permanent goal such that the reality of human beings ceases to change and evolve would not mean the perfection of that reality, but rather a cessation of reality, for reality must continually develop and change, evolving ever into something new.

Realizing the ramifications that such a breakthrough possessed, Dewey turned his attentions to how this affected the development of the individual person. And what he realized was, as reality cannot have a fixed and ordered experience, then so too no individual could have a fixed and ordered experience of it. Though a semblance of structure may be assumed on reality by an individual, it is but a semblance, as reality carries with it a series of random occurrences that defy and amaze, forcing individuals to rethink, or restructure, what they took reality to originally be. What's more, Dewey rightfully concluded that if this was true, the experience of reality that is had by each

33. John Dewey, "The Live Creature," in *The Later Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 10 (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 19-20.

individual is personally unique. As there can be no ultimate reality experienced by two individuals as unchanging and undiffering, then it stands to reason that their experiences are just that, theirs. It was a sentiment reflective of William James' radical empiricism and principles of psychology, to whom Dewey was indebted for his legacy, who originally stated:

In this room - this lecture-room, say - there are a multitude of thoughts, yours and mine, some of which cohere mutually, and some not. They are as little each-for-itself and reciprocally independent as they are all-belonging-together. They are neither: no one of them is separate, but each belongs with certain others and with none beside. My thought belongs with my other thoughts, and your thought with your other thoughts. Whether anywhere in the room there be a mere thought, which is nobody's thought, we have no means of ascertaining, for we have no experience of its like. The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousnesses, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's.

Each of these minds keeps its own thoughts to itself. There is no giving or bartering between them. No thought even comes into direct *sight* of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own. Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law. It seems as if the elementary psychic fact were not *thought* or *this thought* or *that thought*, but *my thought*, every thought being *owned*. Neither contemporaneity, nor proximity in space, nor similarity of quality and content are able to fuse thoughts together which are sundered by this barrier of belonging to different personal minds. The breaches between such thoughts are the most absolute breaches in nature. Everyone will recognize this to be true, so long as the existence of *something* corresponding to the term 'personal mind' is all that is insisted on, without any particular view of its nature being implied.³⁴

34. William James, "The Stream of Thought," in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1977), 23-24.

The uniqueness of each individual's experiences is obvious to anyone who seriously reflects upon the way experience is had. For while we may be presented with a situation where any two individuals come to find themselves at exactly the same time, close enough in proximity to one another to be presented with the same stimuli, so that we may say they are having the same experience, we cannot at the same time say that that experience is being had in the same way by each individual, as we have no way of determining what is truly going on in the minds of each. We may say that each is seeing the same thing, both perhaps identifying it in the exact same fashion. They may also interpret what it is in the same manner, reflecting upon their common learning as to what the stimulus signifies. But, whereas for one the stimuli might promote no response, beyond that it excites the senses, for the other the experience might be accompanied with a great sense of dread. Perhaps because of an earlier childhood experience one had and the other didn't, the equivalent stimuli might trigger such a panicked experience, or maybe the one equates the stimuli with evil, or maybe even the one is just wired differently. Whatever the case, the fact remains that the experience truly is had in such a fashion for each individual as it is believed to be. It is a subjective matter that can only be rightly judged and rightly interpreted by the individual having the experience. And though we may be aided in the interpretations of our experiences by the descriptions of others, ultimately it is only to ourselves to whom we may look to grow from and use those experiences.

Dewey realized, as well, that every individual is fed by those personal experiences just as they are had. For just as no individual can experience as another

individual, then so too growth cannot result from other experiences except those of the individual, as it is only to them that correct reflection can be made upon. Those experiences inform, teach, and nourish the individual, interacting with past experiences as they probe into future ones. A web of experience is created as each line passes from another just as it passes on to future lines, ensnaring the individual in a net of experience that constantly turns back on itself as it moves further, so that the life of the individual is one that constitutes a continuous restructuring and reviewing of one's experiences, beliefs, and intentions. Reflectively, the individual, through experience, also affects and enriches experience. Dipping a finger into the well of experience, experience is created anew, adding to experience the individual's own actions, thoughts, and histories, such that this interaction is symbiotic, as experience both helps to create and shape the individual, while it is created and shaped in return. Consequently, the individual, through interactions, connections, and reflections with experience, develops a view of reality, as well as a place within it, creating, as it were, a unique experience.

We may conclude in the same fashion that reason is developed by each in an individualistic manner. For if Heraclitus and Darwin were correct, if reality could never have a fixed and ordered appearance, then reason, as Hegel perceived it, as an absolute, could never reach fulfillment, at least within the scope of reality, where Hegel intended for it to develop, as that reality must forever remain in flux, unable to be enveloped in an all comprehensive system, leading Dewey to say that:

Every living self causes acts and is itself caused in return by what it does. All voluntary action is a remaking of self, since it creates new desires, instigates to new modes of

endeavor, brings to light new conditions which institutes new ends. Our personal identity is found in the thread of continuous development which binds together these changes. In the strictest sense, it is impossible for the self to stand still; it is becoming, and becoming for the better or the worse. It is in the quality of becoming that virtue resides. We set up this and that end to be reached, but the end is growth itself. To make an end a final goal is but to arrest growth.³⁵

Dewey concluded that for each individual, reason developed as a matter of personal reflection upon reality, independently, though necessarily influenced by, any other surrounding individual. For if two people were to develop a sense of reason in the exact same fashion, it would have to be assumed that they had come to an understanding that was not subject to change, as any change on either's part would reflect a divergence in that individual's sense of reason and reality. Yet, in order to have such a fixed and ordered sense, is ultimately to have a sense of the cessation of reality, as life must halt to a stop, no longer changing with each passing moment, which is ultimately to say that reality should cease to be.

Consequently, Dewey's metaphysics of experience allowed no ultimate reason, no end, wherein any two individuals could have a univocal understanding of reason. As their lives and experiences are ever changing, so too must each individual's interpretations, conceptions, and developments, or reason, ever change. As each individual is presented with new experience and stimuli, it is the reflection and incorporation of those experiences into a system of beliefs, past representations, and expectations, that dictates how reason is developed. And because these processes, or experiences, happen in a personal manner, because every experience is unique to each

35. John Dewey, "The Moral Self," in *The Essential Dewey*, ed. Larry Hickman & Thomas Alexander, vol. 2 (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 353.

individual, so too is reason unique. The task for the individual is to develop reason accordingly to how experience is interpreted, growing in accordance with a unique individuality and conception of the world.

This meant that Dewey's experiential metaphysics, though it admitted of no ultimate consequences, or end for reason, was a doctrine of responsibility, placing the consequences of the individual's life upon that life. Consequently, though liberating to the individual, it would also have been terrifying. For, whereas before, though this ultimate design may not have been understood in its entirety, the hope still remained that such knowledge could be possessed and subsequently followed without fear of being led astray, as it was the ultimate guide, not subject to error or misdeeds. But with Dewey, such knowledge could not only not be possessed, it did not even exist, so that individuals could not even hope that there exists some force that could show them the light. Instead, the path of their life was one that could only be determined by them. The burden of responsibility and choice fell upon the individual, who could look only to past experiences and present in order to try and determine what actions might promote in the future, and whether life should prove a success. As each individual is responsible for interpreting experience and moving beyond and with it, then each individual must determine how experience is to carry on.

This is not to say that experience, or other individuals, do not play a part in determining how any individual's life may progress, or even cease. We are not completely capable of controlling the tides of experience that often roll over us, without warning, and without thought to how they affect us, leading Dewey to note:

Man finds himself in an aleatory world; his existence involves, to put it baldly, a gamble. The world is a scene of risk; it is uncertain, unstable, uncannily unstable. Its dangers are irregular, inconstant, not to be counted upon as to their times and seasons. Although persistent, they are sporadic, episodic. It is darkest just before dawn, pride goes before a fall; the moment of greatest prosperity is the moment most charged with ill-omen, most opportune for the evil eye. Plague, famine, failure of crops, disease, death, defeat in battle, are always just around the corner, and so are abundance, strength, victory, festival and song. Luck is proverbially both good and bad in its distributions. The sacred and the accursed are potentialities of the same situation; and there is no category of things which has not embodied the sacred and the accursed: persons, words, places, times, directions in space, stones, winds, animals, stars.³⁶

Experience, and all that it entails, is at best a battlefield, where anything can, and often does happen. The task, and responsibility, of the individual, is how to react, and interact with the conditions that are presented; this is the only thing that the individual, as an experimental being, muddling through the world, has any control over.

We may conclude that Dewey's metaphysics both liberated the individual, allowing for the fact that each individual is truly that, experiencing and developing from those experiences in a unique manner, but at the same time it provided an enormous burden to the individual, preventing deference to some mysterious absolute that controls destiny and guides actions. Yet ultimately, it provided the individual with a justification of individuality, allowing for the fact that each individual is a unique entity, capable of controlling and contributing to a destiny in a way that best suits that uniqueness. As philosophies before had condemned the unusual, or that which deviated from the norm, Dewey's system praised the unique and abnormal as that which was truly original, as

36. John Dewey, "Existence as Precarious and Stable," in *The Later Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 1 (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 43.

that which breathed new life into experience, reaching out in all directions to excite the hearts and minds of others, providing the truly individual a place to thrive and develop, placing hands upon the world to enrich the experiences of everyone.

THE MARKET PLACE OF EXPERIENCE

The problem of Dewey's experiential metaphysics, which provides the essential struggle in the life of the individual and the community, is how the individual can be incorporated into, and develop within the community as a whole; how a community of individuals, who basically live lives tempered ultimately by their own conception of them, can interact and thrive amongst one another. As there are no ultimate consequences to be meted out, it would seem that any restriction placed upon the individual by the community, is a restriction upon the individual that has no merit, for the individual is the only one who can control and shape that experience. It was a problem that Dewey recognized in a discussion of liberalism:

The whole temper of this philosophy is individualistic in the sense in which individualism is opposed to organized social action. It held to the primacy of the individual over the state not only in time but in moral authority. It defined the individual in terms of liberties of thought and action already possessed by him in some mysterious ready-made fashion, and which it was the sole business of the state to safeguard. Reason was also made an inherent endowment of the individual, expressed in men's moral relations to one another, but not sustained and developed because of those relations. It followed that the great enemy of individual liberty was thought to be government because of its tendency to encroach upon the innate liberties of individuals.³⁷

37. John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), 5.

But Dewey also recognized that this is both a misconception of the community, and the individual, who is necessarily indebted to the community, and needful of it, wanting of its guidance and structure, while praising the rewards that have been reaped under its loving cover. As such, the individual

. . . is at first spontaneous and unshaped; it is a potentiality, a capacity of development. Even so, it is a unique manner of acting in and with a world of objects and persons. It is not something complete in itself, like a closet in a house or a secret drawer in a desk, filled with treasures that are waiting to be bestowed on the world. Since individuality is a distinctive way of feeling the impacts of the world and of showing a preferential bias in response to these impacts, it develops into shape and form only through interaction with actual conditions; it is no more complete in itself than is a painter's tube of paint without relation to a canvas.³⁸

The individual is necessarily created within a community, shaped and molded into the individual it is to become. Through the interaction with the community of objects and persons, the individual develops according to the customs of the community; a certain language and dialect give voice to thoughts; a certain sense of how the world is viewed is influenced by the knowledge of others. And though one may come to reject the community, even that rejection is indebted to the community for its coming to fruition, and necessarily takes place within the scope of the community. The result is that no individual can live outside the scope of the community, as that community has been charged with the task of rearing the individual, who in turn must borrow from that aid to persevere in a sometimes treacherous world.

This means that no person of reason will be able to discredit the need for the community, or for its continued thriving, wanting to abolish it. As the reason of each

38. Dewey, "Individuality in our Day," in *The Political Writings*, 86-87.

individual is the product of the community, the abolishment of the community must also mean the abolishment of reason, and subsequently the individual's uniqueness. This led Dewey to conclude that:

social arrangements, laws, institutions. . . are means and agencies of human welfare and progress. But they are not means for obtaining something for individuals, not even happiness. They are means of creating individuals. Only in the physical sense of physical bodies that to the senses are separate is individuality an original datum. Individuality in a social and moral sense is something to be wrought out. It means initiative, inventiveness, varied resourcefulness, assumption of responsibility in choice of belief and conduct. These are not gifts, but achievements. As achievements, they are not absolute but relative to the use that is to be made of them. And this use varies with the environment.³⁹

However, there is a sense, or time, when every individual, who strives to understand the self, must break the ties with the community, setting out to experience individually. For although the community is a necessary force in the creation of the individual, it is also a restrictive one, limiting the individual's ability to experience in a truly unique manner, restricting a life that could have been otherwise than the community created it. As the community gives a voice to the individual's thoughts, it also gives a direction to them, so that often times the individual can never break through that original molding and discover a truly unique self, leading a life as seen through the eyes of others; the definition of an inauthentic life, controlled not by one's self, but by some mistaken perception of the self inherited from an inability to break through the shell. The result of this is prejudices, customs, habits, all of which can be bred into an individual, and play a role in how that individual will experience, often becoming so

39. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 194.

deeply seated within the psyche of the individual that they do harm not only to the ability to have other experiences, but also to the community, as individuals perpetuate these sentiments out into the world causing harm to others. And if life continues in this fashion, then it becomes a series of those prejudices, customs, and habits, reconstituting with each successive generation, with no room for growth or change, leaving experience in a stagnant state of despair.

Moving past this was the task for Dewey, to discover a means to balance the individual's desire to truly be an individual, separate from the community's influence, without at the same time destroying the institutions necessary to prepare the individual to make that choice. As there exists two extremes, neither is favorable for the perpetuation of the community or the individual. For just as the totalitarian community that restricts the actions, speech, and even attempts to restrict the thoughts of the individual, will destroy individuality and ultimately its means to rejuvenate, so too will the community of individuals who pay no mind to the community, acting only upon their own behalf till they have left the community barren of any members. There must exist some middle ground, where both recognize the others needs and rights, cherishing the relationship and the ties that bind them, and growing from this mutual relationship and dependence, changing and developing from this complex and intricate interaction.

Not surprisingly, the means for this attainment fell in line for Dewey with his experiential metaphysics, even if this seemed to side more with the individual than with the community. However, as he rightly realized, "Every act has potential moral significance, because it is, through its consequences, part of a larger whole of

behavior.”⁴⁰ Though his metaphysics may stress the importance of individuality, it also stresses the importance of responsibility and consequences. And it is the consequences that determine our moral behavior, which determines the way we interact with the community, and come to view our relationship with it. As these consequences do affect the community around us, to negatively affect it also brings with it the negative effect of harming ourselves, as the community is an organization of give and take, such that the relationship of the individual and the community is one where should one affect the other, then that affection must necessarily be reciprocated through their ongoing interaction. The environment of conditions that an individual creates in the community is one in which that individual must still coexist within, whether that environment proves for the better or the worse. The hope is that through the realization of the individual that harmful actions rendered upon the community will be reciprocated harmfully; through a sense of self-preservation the individual realizes a moral responsibility to the community, who must reciprocate that responsibility as well. Thus, Dewey was confident in writing:

I believe that this conception has due regard for both the individualistic and socialistic ideals. It is duly individual because it recognizes the formation of a certain character as the only genuine basis of right living. It is socialistic because it recognizes that this right character is not to be formed by merely individual precept, example, or exhortation, but rather by the influence of a certain form of institutional or community life upon the individual. . .⁴¹

Yet, as Dewey believed that the individual was not formed by merely “individual precept, example, or exhortation,” he also believed that the influence of the world and

40. John Dewey & James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1932), 169.

41. John Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” in *The Early Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 5 (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), 93-94.

other persons upon the individual should be broad in scope, allowing for the greatest possibility of a wealth of experiences for the individual, allowing a fuller development. Dewey believed in a strong community, where ideas and experiences rained freely upon each individual member; a community of ideas. His conception of the community was one where every individual was allowed free expression, adding to the well of ideas personal conceptions, perceptions, opinions, and possibly even dreams of how experience should take place within the community. This common sharing would create an experience all to its own, where everyone could interact with it, taking with them experiences that they had not had before, nor even possibly conceived of, allowing each individual to come away from the experience with a different view of the community than had before been had, richer in its scope, as it is enhanced with the experiences and perceptions of others. Such an openly democratic system led Frankel to conclude:

In principle, it ruled out decision by personal fiat or superior physical power; and though, like science, it gave free rein and encouragement to individuals who dissented from established opinion, its method, again like science, was not to take any individual's word for anything, but to subject all opinions to the collective judgment of a community.⁴²

Through this outward communication of individual ideas, each individual's opinions could come to light and be openly scrutinized by other members of the community, while in turn, openly scrutinizing some other, so that through this dialogue a more open understanding might be arrived at. And, if an individual should have preconceived notions regarding how experience and the community should take place, through this open sharing, or marketplace of ideas, even if those notions should not change, they will

42. Frankel, 17.

be stronger, better informed, more well-refined, as they have now been allowed to see, if only a glimmer, into the minds of others, and how experience can also be had, preventing the individual from mistakenly believing that experience, and how it is had, is an absolute.

Yet, the hope for Dewey remained that through this common sharing of experience, that a more common understanding of how the community should function would develop, moving ever closer to the ideal, even if that is to remain a goal forever beyond the community's reach. Nevertheless, it is assumed that by developing a well of sorts of experience, and allowing everyone to dip their cups into it, that there will also develop amongst each person a better understanding of the other surrounding persons, and subsequently a respect and concern for their well being that goes beyond the individual's own desire for self-preservation. And by in so doing, the community of individuals will be one that acts not simply on the behalf of each individual, but rather upon the behalf of the community as a whole. And in turn, this will allow individuals to gain a greater understanding of themselves and a freer expression of those selves. As the wealth of experience that helped form the individual is poured together, through this concoction the picture of the individual will show itself, providing a truer sense of how that life came to be, and where it is to go.

WAS DEWEY REALLY A DEWEYAN?

John Dewey returned to the individual a sense of reverence for experience, giving credence to the individual as a unique entity. He recognized that no community

that attempted to stifle this individuality, or ensnare it in an all encompassing system of beliefs, was one that could ever prove fruitful, as it did not recognize the true character of the people it was composed of. He sought for a community of individuals, wherein their natural talents, personas, and abilities would be able to thrive, as they took place in response to the conditions and environments they found themselves in. And in turn, he recognized that by allowing this natural development of the individual, that a greater sense of responsibility fell upon the shoulders of the individual, as it was only upon the individual's shoulders that the consequences of the actions resided. Therefore, the individual must be responsible for whether the community succeeds or fails. Yet, as the individual is indebted to the community for an individuality and continuing development, Dewey recognized, and hoped, that each individual would come to see the success of the community as its own success, the community's growth as its own. Consequently, he stressed the need for each individual member of the community to be a willing participant within it, sharing with the community as it shared in return, for only then could each individual member continue to develop and grow.

And though we are indebted to Dewey for returning to the individual a reverence for experience, as unique, it still must be wondered whether infused within this reverence isn't still some of the same idealistic sentiments. Although Dewey stresses the point that the ideal is something that must forever remain as a goal, yet may never be attained, it at the same time seems to be an ideal that the community at large should hold collectively, rather than as a personal ideal which guides each individual life. Consequently, the question must still be asked, is the individual truly free to develop life

accordingly individual, apart from how that life is seen through the eyes of the community? Or must the individual eventually recognize life as nothing more than a part of the collective whole, constructed within the community as it seeks to fulfill itself within the ideal?

CHAPTER IV

THE VIRTUE OF CONFLICT

HEGEL AND DEWEY, AND THE TIE THAT BINDS

Both Dewey and Hegel assumed a certain vision of the community that every individual should work towards collectively; implicitly in Hegel, while vaguer in Dewey. Hegel believed emphatically that a common, universal reason, both existed and would be developed in the real world, while Dewey simply believed that there is a common reason, drawn from the conclusions we share regarding our common history, to which we are all hoping to attain, though never necessarily to be reached. Nevertheless, within them both, there is this assumption that we should be moving towards a common experience, even if only Hegel believes this will actually be attained. Yet, within them both, there is the underlying belief that each individual's personal experiences should be united, and working towards a more common understanding of them.

The reason this communal experience, or understanding, has been typically desired and assumed, is the fear of the individual's ability to structure life without at the same time trampling upon the lives of others. There are those who consider the individual, taken as such, incapable of dictating life while participating in that life with others, fearful not only of the individual's ability to lead that life responsibly as it pertains to others, but also in respect to that life as it pertains to the individual. This has led to the attempt to bring the individual into this communal bond, repressing the sense of self and individuality as it is considered detrimental to the whole. And though this is a valid concern, acting upon it, and subsequently trying to structure the individual's life in

the mold of the community, still runs counter to the true nature of the individual, and as it does, it ultimately runs counter to, and threatens to destroy, the true nature of reality and human experience. The individual must always remain a person leading a life that cannot be interpreted by other's experiences, as everyone must ultimately be responsible for their own life, interpreting their experiences, and acting upon them as only they can do.

So why this desire to unite everyone's unique, individual lives into a common will that betrays their own uniqueness and ability to contribute in a unique fashion? It resides in the belief that individuals, as such, are incapable of overcoming the tension and conflict that permeates their lives; only by bringing those individuals into a common understanding may conflict be resolved. But through this attempt, the point is missed that the individual's life, as well as the community's, is necessarily conflicted, promoting the struggle that provides growth. And while it is true that individuals should strive to lead lives ruled by reason, it is no less true that those lives must also pay heed to the passions, desires, and emotions that flood over them. This is what provides the uniqueness of every individual, which in turn contributes to the developing uniqueness of the community. This means that the point of any community should be to develop the individual persons it is comprised of individually, for only then can we have a truly diverse community that can accept change, and change with it, as it is one that finds itself as an ever evolving entity, flooded with an infinite number of ideas for advancement and growth.

The fear consists in the fact that by allowing the individual this level of autonomous, unrestricted ability, that said individual will run roughshod over the community. It is the fear that philosophers have when being labeled relativists, as Dewey feared, possibly preventing him from fully developing his experiential metaphysics. Yet, it is my contention that it is an unwarranted fear, as there is nothing within the relativistic individual that should lead us to believe that this behavior would take place, as the relativistic individual is one who necessarily must strive for self-preservation, and must see that preservation as contingent upon the preservation of the community. Consequently, rather than the idealists' fears being realized, it is my contention that the opposite would occur, as the individual would, though driven by relativistic desires, come to have a genuine concern and regard for how the community is affected, as that affection is the individual's. I will show as the individual develops uniquely, that uniqueness will be recognized as complementary to the unique development of other individuals; that unless the individual allows for the fact, and does not prevent the development of other individuals, then no one will be allowed to develop uniquely, as everyone will hinder the growth of everyone else, which is detrimental to the individual's being.

It will be argued that the goal of any community, while it must strive for its survival and the members that compose it, should accomplish this task not by trying to unite the individuals in this common goal, bringing everyone's wills into a unison as such, that restricts individual thought and action, stripping away the uniqueness and capabilities of the individual, as it strives with conflict. Rather, its goal should be to

return to the individual as much autonomy as it possibly can, thriving off the tension that ensues, moving to the point where the individual is fully autonomous, unfettered by the restrictions that the community places upon it, able to develop uniquely and as completely as possible, which will subsequently lead to a more fully developed, complex community, enriched by the infinite wealth of those individuals who inhabit it.

Primarily, I will return to the thought of Dewey, arguing that while his was an approach that stressed the importance of individual experience, underlying it was a softer version of idealism, which still sought the development of a common understanding as a means to overcome conflict, not to be preferred anymore than the Hegelian system, as both ultimately lead down the same road. I will present what I believe should have been the natural progression of the Deweyan thought, presenting a picture of autonomous individuals who accept and respect the responsibility for the community, as it is the same respect they must have towards themselves.

THE FAILURE OF IDEALISM IN THE COMMUNITY

Dewey argued in his experiential metaphysics that individuals' experiences are unique, only to be interpreted and acted upon by them. But within it, there seems this fear underlying Dewey's work that he will be labeled a relativist, cast into the doldrums of philosophy with all the other relativists before him, even though his metaphysics quite obviously sides with how the individual interprets and grows individually with experience. And though this relativity is implicit within his metaphysics, it seems to only apply within the context of the individual, as they are such. But when this is carried

forward into the community of individuals, Dewey takes the line of other idealists, accepting that individuals existing within a community should be united within their conception of how reality, reason, and the community should take place, even if he didn't accept the Hegelian idealist approach that this common conception would actually come to fruition. Nevertheless, by allowing this desire to linger for a common understanding and conception of society, Dewey allowed the idea to linger that there exists some guiding force in individuals' lives, rather than that those lives are guided by the individuals' conceptions of them, so that the strands of idealism undoubtedly remain within Dewey's conception of society.

Consequently, it must be asked whether this denial by Dewey, that this common conception could never be fully realized, truly separates him from his idealist predecessors. Or, is it enough to believe that there should be a common goal, or understanding, to warrant such a classification? And finally, if Dewey is an idealist, does the fact that he believes in a limited idealism strengthen or weaken the position of idealism, or does it remain the same?

It is my contention that Dewey is indeed an idealist. Though his idealism is definitely a limited idealism, existing only as a theoretical goal, to always be out there beyond our reach, he still holds that a common understanding is something that everyone should universally seek. The fact that it may not be attained does not limit the grip that Dewey believes that this goal does and should have over us, dictating to us a certain sense of how we should have our experiences and subsequently act upon them, cohesive with the community as a whole. Even though he realized that each individual has

experiences uniquely, he nevertheless thought that our actions and developing beliefs could and should be guided by our common desire to unite them into this common understanding, finding within them a bond that connects all of us and gives our collective experience something of a universal meaning. This Dewey felt would enable the community to more ably overcome the conflicts that it is presented with, achieving a more affluent society; a machine of sorts, whose cogs need only the occasional oiling.

Yet, is this definition sufficient to characterize Dewey as an idealist, who traditionally sought for the absolute somewhere within reality, even if that reality should transcend our own? As idealism has traditionally aspired to an absolute end, it would seem that Dewey's unrealizable idealism would separate him from his overly optimistic predecessors. Yet, it is my contention that this is a misconception of Dewey and idealism. While there is no end in sight for Dewey, there always remains an 'end' to which the community as a whole should aspire towards. He believed that individuals should always come together, drawing their individual experiences into a collective one, wherein they could come to have a better understanding of reason and their purpose, moving them forward as a united whole. And though individuals are responsible for interpreting and acting upon experience, Dewey's contention, or hope, was that they would at the same time realize that their purpose fell in line with the common purpose, acting on its behalf as they acted on their own (a view reminiscent of Hegelian idealism). He does not necessarily differ from his idealist predecessors in his aim, as both sought to unite individuals within the scope of a common reason, rather he simply differs because he doubts that such a state could ever come about. Although, one might argue that this

difference is moot, as neither he nor his predecessors were able to effectively see their particular idealisms reach any end. Consequently, we must contend that Dewey was indeed an idealist, attempting as it were to provide a system that might unite the individual consciousnesses into one that satisfied the collective goal.

But Dewey did maintain that such a goal could never be reached, that an absolute consciousness was the stuff of fiction. So the question becomes, to what effect does such an unrealizable idealism play in the idealist's desire to overcome conflict? Which is to say, was Dewey's addition to idealism a revelation of advancement in the cause, or did it actually retard its progress, as it allowed for the fact that the overcoming of conflict can only be sought? And furthermore, as idealism has traditionally been concerned primarily with the development of the strong and reasonable community, producing individuals who may benefit it later on, what effect did Dewey's position have upon this tenuous relationship?

Yet, these questions are of little import, as the answers it would seem lie not in whether Dewey was a better or worse idealist, but rather in how we accept or disagree with the idealist conception of reality and our place within it. As Dewey was an idealist of some variety, his cause was primarily the idealist's cause, the advancement of reason to a state of commonality, where strife and struggle could be overcome, as individuals aligned their wills with the common will, not because they were forced to, but rather because they came to see their reason as that of the community. It is not a matter of whether he strengthened or weakened the position, but rather if any form of idealism is either tolerable to, or comportable with, the way reality actually takes place and human

beings exist. Consequently, the true question should be, can individuals conform to, and the community survive in, a system that attempts to unite them in a common understanding of their individual purposes?

As idealism must always seek, whether it is to be realized or not, a common understanding of existence and its purpose, the individual's unique experiences must remain secondary to how they fit in with the historical matrix that they are present in. The individual who finds experience as moving not towards a common experience and understanding, but rather as unique, lives on the fringes of the community, as one who has a less developed sense of reason, subject to the slaughter benches of Hegel, as that individual contributes nothing to this common reason, retarding its progress. Yet, is such a person's reason less developed because it does not comport with some common purpose?

True, human beings naturally develop as a result of the influences, conditionings, and teachings of the environment and community they find themselves in; they are programmed by the community to see things as it were through its eyes rather than their own. They develop their belief systems and opinions in accord with the eyes they learned to see the world with, measuring their actions to whether or not they fit in with this framework that surrounds them. Resultantly, those who continue with this trend, developing in the image of the community that shaped and molded them, are said to have developed reason; they remain within the common conception that originally reared them, never questioning the influence of its methods as they close a blind eye and continue their life within the commonality as it has seen fit.

Yet, is this truly what we should take reason to be? Should thought and development simply be a continuation of the molding that shaped us as a child? After all, such individuals do little more than small children, spitting out a series of conditioned responses that they judge will provide them the accolades of the community around them, just as a child does a good deed in hopes of a treat. But in so doing, they come to look less like reasonable creatures and more like machines, living lives that are calculated not by a complex brain that is able to interpret and act upon things of its own volition, but rather as creatures who use that brain to simply decide what falls most in line with what they've always done and seen; a defense mechanism of sorts that prevents the individual from having to make real choices and face conflict. But life is filled with choices and rife with conflict, so that such individuals prove not necessarily to be a proponent of some communal will, but rather fearful of their ability to use their own. Such fear led Theodore Roosevelt to once say:

Far better it is to dare mighty things even though
checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor
spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because
they live in the grey twilight that knows not victory nor
defeat.

We should think more of those who live upon the fringes, thinking and experiencing in fresh and unique ways, as those who truly develop their own reason; a reason that is richer and fuller for it has confronted the true nature of experience as varied and complex. By shedding away the conditioning and preconceived notions, at least in part, that helped mold their beginnings, they are able to truly use their minds, sifting through vast amounts of information to discover a path that is right for them,

rather than one that has ultimately been chosen for them. They enjoy a freedom that others may never know, a freedom to see and experience reality fresh and renewed on a daily basis, a collection no longer of stagnant reflections that seem to constantly repeat, but rather a vibrant and varied life of experience. And they are those whose lives, and conceptions, more truly comport with the true nature of experience, as they recognize their place within the infinite and ever changing.

What's more, though idealism has been a champion for the position of the community as the ultimate guide of reason, such a position should have disastrous repercussions on it as well. For as individuals are living and breathing entities, so too is the collection of those individuals, represented in the community, a living and breathing entity. As Royce said:

A community is not a mere collection of individuals. It is a sort of live unit, that has organs, as the body of an individual has organs. A community grows or decays, is healthy or diseased, is young or aged, much as any individual member of the community possesses such characters. Each of the two, the community or the individual member, is as much a live creature as is the other. Not only does the community live, it has a mind of its own,-a mind whose psychology is not the same as the psychology of an individual human being. The social mind displays its psychological traits in its characteristic products,-in languages, in customs, in religions,-products which an individual human mind, or even a collection of such minds, when they are not somehow organized into a genuine community, cannot produce.⁴³

43. Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 80-81.

A community aspires to grow and learn, developing itself to the fullest of its capabilities. However, unlike the individual, who at some point may be able to subsist without the community, the community must always rely upon the individuals who compose it for its subsistence. It must constantly receive the breath of new life from individuals, rejuvenating it with each new experience that it receives. To unite individuals within a common understanding of their experiences, would disallow for any new and unique experiences for both them and the community, affectively choking the life out of the community, as it may no longer receive new experiences from which it may grow, hovering in some state of neutral, which will ultimately lead to its demise, as that which can no longer grow or better itself must eventually suffer decay and death.

Individuals are by nature necessarily that. Only by accident, though naturally as well, do they find their persons as existing within a particular community. Yet, it is a community that acts counter to their true nature and existence, as beings that experience uniquely and act upon those experiences of their own volition. As such, idealism is a system that disregards the nature of the individual, replacing it with a nature and reality that is foreign to it, preventing the individual from enjoying true growth in accord with nature, forcing the individual to assess life not in unique terms, but rather in terms of the community. But by in so doing, idealism stifles the growth of the community as well, as the collective experience ceases to be enriched with unique and varied experiences, resulting ultimately in its decay. The individual, as well as the community, should not seek to develop some universal, common understanding of their purpose, but rather to more fully develop their own, individually unique lives, for only then will each continue

to grow and thrive as result of the other, using this tension to create for each other a more varied, enriching stream of experience that constantly expands with each successive generation.

RESCUING THE RELATIVISM IN DEWEY

The fear of such a collection of autonomous lives coexisting with one another has always been and still remains the fear of relativism. It is a fear that perhaps prevented Dewey from fully developing his experiential metaphysics; the fear of being labeled a relativist. It is a fear that resides in the belief that individuals create conflict rather than resolve it. However, Dewey's metaphysics is quite obviously one of relativism, allowing for the fact that each individual's experiences are personal, and at the root of what each individual must compose reality of. For if we are to believe in Dewey's experiential metaphysics, we grant that the doctrine must allow for an infinite variety of experiencing; to each individual must experience be relative, an experience composed of how that individual uniquely has it, reacts to it, interacts with it, and moves beyond it. As a result, it must follow that no two individuals can have the same experience, as no two individuals can possess the same mind, nor interpret the mind of another. And if this is true, those same individuals could never react to the experience in the same way, as neither has had the same experience on which to react.

This results in the qualms of anti-relativists, for if we cannot react in the same way, there can be no such things as moral universals, as each experience is new to the individual and cannot be reacted to by appeal to some universal mandate, as it has as yet

to be presented with such a case. The anti-relativists lose the rule book that guides their lives, incapable of pigeon holing experience into a system that provides ready made answers to the same situations and questions. So why should this equating of Dewey's experiential metaphysics with relativism come as a surprise, or even a criticism? As no two people can share the same experience, how can we expect them to interpret, and grow from those experiences in the same way? One has only to examine life, and how we have experience, on a completely personal level, to realize that we can't expect this. We should not expect everyone else's lives to not be relative to how they have their experiences as well, unless we assume ourselves as God like figures, who are only capable of unique experiences as opposed to everyone else. This is not to say that we don't have common beliefs; we may share certain opinions, moral assumptions, or any number of things. However, such similarities do not come in to play in the immediacy of our experiences, whereby the flood of experience in that first case is simply had, and had in a totally individualistic manner. It is had by each of us, immediately and very personally by each of us, so that that experience can only be relative; it is not a matter of whether we choose or don't choose to be relativists, it is a matter of experience being relative to us. And as it is, we have no choice but to interpret, grow, and act upon those experiences relative to how they are presented in our lives.

The problem with Dewey's metaphysical relativity is how it comes to affect the communities that individuals necessarily exist within. The question remains, is how is that community supposed to survive and flourish if individuals' lives and actions are relative only to themselves, rather than some communal will? How is the community

supposed to sustain itself if we are all granted free license to act upon our experiences solely relative to how we interpret those experiences in our lives? As an amalgamation of individuals living in close proximity to one another does not a community make, we should find such a situation detrimental to individuals and whatever sort of communal situation we should like to call them living in. For if we should each act with solely our own intentions in mind, we should find that not only will the community cease to exist, but so too will the individuals that inhabit that community, as no one will be accountable for their actions.

Such a contention and fear is what led to Hobbes' account of the state of nature, wherein relativism runs rampant and society inevitably finds itself in a situation where it is unable to function and thrive, as no one can work together to benefit others for fear that one's own benefit will be diminished. As individuals act purely for their own self-interest, they must subsequently realize this trait in others as well, in which case no one can rely upon, or trust another's help, as they cannot know at what point such help will cease to satisfy the other's self-interest, and cease to be reciprocated. Subsequently, when that help should cease to be reciprocated, the one individual will be forced to carry a heavier burden, creating more work with less reward, and diminishing self-interest. In which case, it makes more sense for neither individual to do anything for the benefit of the other, as it may result in their own self-interest being defeated. In such a society trust and cooperation cannot exist, as no one trusts their own person to honor an agreement. As a result, this leaves the world in a state of war, as everybody must fight amongst themselves to gain access to that which fulfills their personal needs, whereby only those

most adept can survive. Although, one must think that eventually there can only be one, in which case society will cease to exist, leaving us with a system that by its own virtue will eventually destroy itself, as it will be unable to withstand the mistrust that must inherently plague every relationship.

Yet, relativism has been lauded by those who believe that it is the only way that the individual can gain true expression, praising the virtue of allowing the fullest development of the individual expression. And quite rightly they recognize that terms such as good and evil are simply that, terms, concocted by human beings to explain things they do not understand, recognizing that the terms themselves play no real part in nature; there is no such things as good and evil inherently in the world; there is no intentionality within nature that sets out to destroy or create as it deems such actions to the benefit or detriment of those that inhabit the world, or even as such actions affect itself. Rather, there is simply what occurs and happens in nature, to which we attach the labels, making them good or evil. As they realize this, they can easily make the leap into the affairs of human beings, giving credence to relativism. For if there is no such thing as good or evil, then an individual cannot be said to be acting in such a fashion, rather they are simply acting. And as individuals cannot be characterized in such a fashion, their actions can only be characterized in so far as they judge them, namely in regards to whether those actions produce a positive or negative effect for themselves. But in so far as there are no such entities actually existing within nature, it is once again only the individual who may make this judgment. Nor could it be said that the individual should act towards the purpose of the good, as such a cause does not exist, beyond the

mythologies that have been perpetrated on individuals to scare them into an unwarranted belief that they will ultimately be judged for their actions. When filling that void of purpose in human beings lives, the only avenue which relativists may turn to, is that of the individual, and grant that the greatest purpose is to act upon one's own behalf, and the sustainment of that life, which is truly acting towards the good, fulfilling the purpose that characterizes the individual.

What these relativists fail to realize, however, is the self-depreciating effect that this behavior is likely to have on individuals, whereby they destroy themselves while attempting to fulfill their interests. For while they are correct, that human beings' primary purpose will generally be towards benefiting themselves, they generally consider this tendency upon a singular level, such that the individual is seen as existing as an individual. And when this is granted, it may seem reasonable to grant license to carry out the individual will exactly as it is presented. Yet, when the individual is expanded into the realm of many individuals, the problems arise for the relativists, as each of those individuals are granted the same license. Subsequently, the actions of any particular individual will inevitably have some effect on another individual, be that effect of a good or bad nature. Now, should the individual's actions receive no reciprocity, such that it provides harm, we may say that the particular individual has fulfilled the purpose of that life, acting solely upon and preserving it. But what is likely to occur when our actions cross into the threshold of some other's existence, some sort of reaction will be returned, as self-interested action must be taken, preserving the other's life and benefits. And if this reaction should take on a violent or negative effect upon the

initial, acting individual, we should say that the initial actions resulted in a negative effect for that individual. And though those initial actions were not intended to harm the individual, but rather to benefit, because the effect on some other was not taken into account, the consequences were counter-productive to the self-interest of the individual. This provides us the understanding that by acting always solely for our own benefit, our actions may actually provide a negative consequence upon the purpose of our being, as we threaten our own being and way of life by providing threat to others, having created a hostile environment that we must still coexist within that is likely to at some point prove volatile, boiling over in its wrath and consuming all who might in some way be involved. And lest we should think ourselves that one person who will eventually outlast all others, we must realize that we cannot at all time act with just our own self-interest in mind.

We must realize some sort of middle ground between the strict relativists and the idealists, as both eventually lead down the same path, the annihilation of both the individual and the community. And the answer comes through Dewey's experiential metaphysics and our common understanding of our relativists' wills. As Dewey's doctrine requires that each of us be responsible for the consequences of our lives, by in so doing, we must take into account consequences that affect others, for so too may they eventually affect us. For eventhough his metaphysics is a doctrine of relativism, because it is, it is one that requires us to take responsibility for our actions, and the consequences that may occur. This is not a responsibility to others as such, or to a common will, but rather a responsibility to ourselves, as we must ask, how will the consequences of our

actions affect us. And not necessarily as they may affect us immediately, as our initial action may not affect us at all, except in so far as we possibly feel the physical movements. Rather, we must realize that each of our actions will eventually be revisited upon us, sometimes in a hundred fold force, as there will always exist a cycle of action followed by reaction, so that we must be aware of what possible future effects might occur to us, whether they be good or bad, helpful or harmful, joyful or sorrowful; lest we find that we can no longer preserve our own lives.

For while no common will exists that unites us as parts of a greater whole, there must be an implicitly common understanding that as we each are relativists, so too is every other individual. And as we are creatures concerned with our own self-preservation, we must come to realize that as our actions affect others, and possibly reflect back upon us, we put our own lives in danger when we negatively affect others. It is through this realization that we come to understand that our existence is bound to others and how we affect and interact with them; the origination of morality, which though based upon our selfish wills, dictates to us that we must tame those wills as they affect others.

Conversely, as we realize that our existence is bound with others, we must also realize that our ability to flourish is bound with others as well, as our ability to produce and receive is bound to their ability to produce and receive, our ability to learn and grow to theirs, and our ability to ultimately live and die to theirs. This forms the societal ties that we voluntarily enter in to, as we understand the benefit that they may provide for us, as it is only through them that we can ultimately survive and carry out that purpose we

deem best suited to satisfy the lives we find ourselves striving towards. And this is what I take to be the origination and definition of a community, not as an amalgamation of individuals all grouped together, nor as an all encompassing system that dictates the lives of individuals; rather, it is a group of individuals who realize both the benefit of their own individuality and the individualities of others as well, pulling together those varied personas to gain even greater benefits.

We draw from the well of society as it behooves us, while realizing that in order for it to continue nourishing us we must add to it our own varied experiences, creating a common well that we all dip our fingers into, but one which will dry up if each individual does not continue to add personal experiences to it. In the process, we do not forfeit our individuality to the commonality, as it is still each individual experiencing and acting, determining a life through this implicit understanding that it is a life that is intrinsically bound with others. Yet, nor do we fall into a state of rampant relativism, acting without regard to those others around us, as we realize that our fate is tied with that of others. Rather, we act to benefit ourselves, enriching our own experience, while realizing that as we benefit others and society, so too does this continue to feed and nourish our own lives.

Dewey's metaphysics is a doctrine of relativism, so that ultimately the individual is only responsible for that life. But borne from this understanding comes a deeper understanding that while our fates are dependent upon ourselves, so too is the fate of the rest of the world and its inhabitants, which subsequently means that we are dependent upon them as well. Thus, we cannot simply act without thought to how those actions

may happen upon others, for those happenings might also befall upon us. And from this mutual interdependence comes an understanding that we must in some ways limit how we have our experiences and act upon them, which forms the community structure, so that while the underlying goal is one of self-preservation and growth, it is realized that in order for that to happen we must preserve one another in the process.

We need not be afraid of the stigma of relativism that is attached to Dewey's experiential metaphysics. As it is quite obvious that each of us must have our experiences as we have them, rather than as someone else has them, so too it should be equally obvious that we must each interpret and act upon those experiences in a manner that we deem to be the best course for us. As ultimately it is to ourselves that we must look for direction in our lives, we need not be concerned if we live our lives in a fashion intended to enrich those lives. At the same time, we also mustn't fear the effect that society will play upon us. For while it is true that it strips from us a certain degree of our individuality, we are also indebted to it for our continuing survival. And so too is society necessarily indebted to individuals for its survival, for as individuals grow, they contribute their experiences back to society, allowing society a continued growth and life.

THE NECESSITY OF TENSION

Though this is a tenuous relationship, it is a necessarily tenuous one. As the individual's life is one that is characterized by conflict, it is necessarily conflicted, as it is through the conflict and the struggle to overcome it, that the individual is allowed to

grow and develop, using these conflicts as stepping stones on which to build, as it is through this process of trial and error that an individual learns, developing a conception of what is a right and proper life. Analogously, the life of society is one that must also be characterized by conflict, allowing it to build through its struggles to overcome these obstacles. Primarily the conflict that both the individual and society works towards overcoming, is the tension that exists between them, as their relationship will always be one of give and take, push and pull, stretching the limits of their relationship before relaxing that stress and returning to a more comfortable, but expanded existence. It is through this constant tension, as each attempts to exert their will upon the other that they actually do become something close to a cohesive whole, even if that unity must remain forever beyond their reach. Nevertheless, through the individual struggles, as well as the struggle with one another, they both feed the other, providing each other with the means for growth. The individual and society are mutually indispensable entities, acting upon their own benefit, while realizing that as they benefit the other, so too will this benefit be reciprocated, providing benefit to their own life.

Sophocles recognized this tension between the individual and society early on in the *Antigone*. And perhaps it has been the goal of all philosophers since to somehow bridge this gap and solve Sophocles' problem. But by in so doing they have failed to realize the fundamental necessity of human existence, and correspondingly that of society, namely that there must be strife and conflict in their respective lives. Without it, and the subsequent trials to overcome it, they both will cease to grow. And without growth, both the individual and society will die. Rather than disparage over the condition

that they both find themselves in, they must relish the quest, learning to accept their own individual places, growing off one another as they both struggle to make their identities more clear. For in so doing, they will find a society whose well is filled with an infinite number of individual experiences, all of which may be drawn from to better enhance the condition of the individual and the world. Individuals, and their relativistic lives, play an integral role in whether or not society will function and thrive, and we, as individuals, must strive to experience, and to experience as much as we can, in order that we may produce for ourselves, and subsequently for others, a society that may continue to allow us the freedom to grow and develop as unique individuals.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Sophocles wrote in the *Oedipus*:

Keep your eyes on that last day, on your dying.
Happiness and peace, they were not yours
unless at death you can look back on your life and say
I lived, I did not suffer.⁴⁴

Although he realized the fundamental problem between the individual and the community in the *Antigone*, he also realized the fundamental purpose of their respective lives, that they be lived. It is the living and experiencing of life, sucking the marrow from its bones, that gives to us our sense of self. And as it is our experiences, it is the ‘we’ as our individual selves who must have those experiences.

And as we live, we live lives that are conflicted, estranged in many ways from the lives we believe to have or hope to have. As experience communicates with us, and transforms us, we find our life as a series of events that fall out of line with our past expectations, hopes, and dreams. At the same time, those experiences, and the impressions they leave upon us, are richer, as they do not conform to a system of beliefs that have been premeditated both for us and by us. They prevent us from falling into a pattern wherein our experiences provide for us a sense of commonality, of the humdrum, as such experiences do not add anything to our experience, preventing us from growth and leading to decay. Consequently, we are left with experiences that give fruit to our lives, new and unique experiences that force us to constantly redefine ourselves and what we believe, providing for us our constant hope for growth and renewal.

44. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. Stephen Berg & Diskin Clay (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 94.

Yet, because of this, we are left in a situation where we find ourselves unable to control our lives, at least in so far as that means we have no control over the flood of experience that constantly washes over us. We may live lives that seem nothing more than a series of random occurrences, incapable of being given direction, as life is forever new and novel. But we must gain control of those lives, taking responsibility for them in spite of the fact that we are oft times at a loss for what we are to do with them.

Nevertheless, they are controllable, at least if we recognize that everything that occurs to us is a part of us, a part of our being, shaping us into the people that we are, and are to become. Regardless if that person is who we might have hoped to become, we recognize still that these lives are ours, to be cherished and appreciated for what they are. And here lies our responsibility to ourselves, to recognize the uniqueness that our lives have undertaken, in spite of whatever preconceived notions we might have had regarding them, recognizing our own individuality as that which is ours, impossible to be destroyed and more precious than any dream we might have had, as it is what is here, and what is real.

And as we have a responsibility to ourselves, we must also recognize our responsibility for the community of other individuals who coexist with us. For as we affect them, they in turn affect us, providing us, as we provide them, with the experiences that shape our lives. We must take responsibility for their lives as well, allowing them to develop their own selves so that they may contribute back to our selves. And as we do this, through this free development and mutual understanding, we become a more vibrant and understanding community, feeding off each other's tension

as we accept our differences not as something that makes one or the other better or worse, but as that which enriches both of us, giving to life a more complex pattern that makes it more beautiful for its trouble. Only when we are allowed this unfettered development, as we allow it of others, will the community truly exhibit this quality of a cohesive whole, working together, to develop individually and give texture to the fabric of everyone's lives.

Communities have oft been the enemy of the individual. Through oppression, regulation, and pressure to conform, the individual has too often been forced to live a life that is foreign, taking a course which they feel no responsibility or control over, as they are not allowed to develop freely of their own, in a natural fashion as it should. At such times, the individual has turned on the community, becoming an enemy of sorts through revolution and rejection. It is a cycle that simply rejuvenates and perpetuates itself, never really moving forward, as the conditions simply repeat, time and time again.

Namely the problem lies in the fact that underlying the cycle is this fundamental belief in an idealism that permeates both the life of the individual and the community, controlling their lives as it carries out its own. Both the individual and the community see this cycle of oppression, revolution, and return as a necessary function in their lives, controlled by some absolute reason that wills such occurrences to happen, as it helps the life of the absolute move closer towards its goal, and subsequently brings the individual closer to it as well. It is a belief based in part on the idea that life, and the individuals that inhabit it, are riddled with imperfections and must be moving towards something better.

The problem here is that no such idealism exists, beyond that which exists in the minds of individuals. There is no visibly present reason, or absolute, that guides our actions and provides for us a hope for a better tomorrow, or even a fear of it. The only reason we have for developing such a belief is the belief that might exist within our own spirits. But as it does, it is our belief, our idealism, constantly conceived and reconceived within us; it is our only trustworthy guide, as it is the most constant, best known source of advice that we may turn to. It is the only ever present voice that we know; the only reliable friend whom we know will always be with us, and who we can always count on to render advice, even if it isn't always the best.

But we attribute this will to a communal one, believing that it is from this source that we draw our inspiration, even though the thoughts never spring forth from anywhere other than from inside of us. We lack a trust in ourselves, as we never believe that we are the ones truly responsible for the choices of our lives, whether those choices are good or bad. Yet, this belief is based on a fear that has been conditioned in to us, diminishing our self-worth and capabilities, and must be shed away if we ever hope to improve our own lives and the life of the community.

Human beings have been and always will be capable of taking responsibility and control over their own lives. We are blessed with capabilities and reason that allows us to decide for ourselves what is the best course of action in our lives. And as it is our lives, it is a course of action that not everyone needs agree with, nor understand, and nor should they, as theirs is a life completely of their own. But as they realize such a fact,

and choose to develop their life in their own fashion, they must recognize this and respect this attribute in others, not acting to prevent their free development.

This is not to say that this will always take place if we simply realize that we live respectively different lives, staying out of the way of each other; this is neither possible, nor should it be desired. Invariably we must exist in some sort of communal environment, and as we do we must interact in some way or another with each other. Naturally these interactions will cause repercussions in the lives of various individuals, perhaps spiraling their lives down courses before unseen. Yet, this is natural, and not necessarily an impediment to individuals' lives, as they are still allowed to freely develop along this new course that their life has taken. Rather, as we respect other's lives, we must respectfully allow for them to develop freely and naturally upon the courses they may take, not impeding upon the decisions that affect their persons.

The lived life is one that is full of choices. Through this abundance of choices the individual has the freedom to choose from any one of them. Some will prove good, some bad, but it is the individual's choice in that matter, who ultimately will have to live with those repercussions. And if individuals are allowed to live lives freely, unimpeded by the restrictions of others, ultimately whatever repercussions may occur to them, they will have lived a life that is truly theirs, more fruitful as it was their own. They will have led a good and productive life, as all life is good if it is truly lived, if it is experienced as new and unique. And those who experience the richness of life, experiencing the vibrancy and novelty of it, realize the perfection of it, and their own lives, as they are the only degrees of perfection that a living being may have any knowledge of.

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