

How is democracy educative? A Deweyan  
Democratic account of education and learner  
agency in non-school contexts

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## Abstract

The political philosophy of education has developed a systematic understanding of how schools shape, and should seek to shape, our democratic and civic character. So far, it has paid less attention to how non-school institutions also leave an educational deposit on our individual self-realization and capacities to engage in democratic social cooperation. In this thesis, I construct and defend a Deweyan democratic account of learner agency and epistemic and ethical growth, capable of providing a systematic treatment of how ordinary social institutions educate us. I argue greater conversation with the work of John Dewey, a famous philosopher of both education and democracy, pays dividends in enriching our conceptual and normative reflections on how non-school institutions should contribute to the ethical project of democratic education. I argue throughout that a focus on Deweyan philosophy deepens our understanding of how learner agency can be supported, and frustrated, by our everyday social contexts. It also broadens the scope of what social contexts count as contributing to our democratic education, opening our discussion to non-school contexts such as parenting, working, and public culture.

The thesis comes in two parts. In Part I, I establish the Deweyan theory of learner agency and growth. I then connect my Deweyan-inspired theory of learner agency with social epistemological research into epistemic injustice to clarify and explain how institutions can harm, frustrate, and warp the development of our educational capacities. In Part II, I examine three non-school contexts that most people will inhabit at different points of their lives: parenting, our working lives, and our engagement with a shared public culture. I re-examine debates surrounding the role of these contexts in supporting democratic character and problem-solving processes, demonstrating that a robust understanding of learner agency and growth can illuminate their educational and democratic consequences further.

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## Author declarations

I have read and understood the University of York's regulations on academic misconduct and plagiarism. I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

The approximate word count of this thesis is 76,360 words. This figure excludes the bibliography, abstract, and title page.



## Abbreviations of cited works by John Dewey

In alphabetical order:

AaE [1934] “Art as Experience” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 10* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 1-353

CTfY [1934] “Character training for youth’ in Simpson & Stack Jr. (eds.) *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools: Essays by John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), pp. 65-68

D&E [1916] “Democracy and Education” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924, Volume 9: 1916* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 3-356

D&EA [1937] “Democracy and Educational Administration” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 11: 1935-1937* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 217-226

EBNS [1939] “The Economic Basis of a New Society” in Shapiro & Morris (eds.), *John Dewey: the Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp. 169-173

E&E [1938] “Experience and Education” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 13: 1938-1939 [a]* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 3-63

E&N [1925] “Experience and Nature” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 1: 1925* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 1-327

*Ethics* [1908] Dewey, J. & Tufts, J. H. *Ethics* (New York, George Bell and Sons, 1908)

F&C [1939] “Freedom and Culture” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 13: 1938-1939 [b]* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 63-189

IO&N [1930] “Individualism Old and New” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 5: 1938-1939* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 41-144

L&SA [1935] *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963)

LTOI [1938] “Logic: The Theory of Inquiry” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 12: 1938* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 1-506

- P&C [1932]            “Politics and Culture” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 6: 1931-2* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 40-48
- P&IP [1927]            “The Public and Its Problems” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 2: 1938-1939* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 235-376
- S&S [1899]            “The School and Society” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924, Volume 1: 1899-1901* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 3-111
- TCT [1924]            “The classroom teacher’ in Simpson & Stack Jr. (eds.) *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools: Essays by John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010) [b], pp. 104-8
- ToV [1939]            “Theory of Valuation” in Boyston (ed.) *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 13: 1938-1939* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 189-252
- TWA [1938]            “Those who aspire to the profession of teaching” in Simpson & Stack Jr. (eds.) *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools: Essays by John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), pp. 31-33

## Introduction

### Research aims

In this thesis, I aim to provide a Deweyan democratic account of how and why non-schooling education matters for democratic life. Contemporary political philosophy on education has yet to systematically articulate and evaluate the educational deposit that everyday social institutions confer on the agency of their citizenry. The impetus behind ordinary turns of phrase such as “learning on the job”, or the autodidactic impulse shown through visiting a museum or a library, are typically bracketed in favour of a focus on schoolyard issues. The educational benefits conferred through these alternative institutions are left underappreciated, and worse, the effect, and extent, of any harms upon our agency to learn from experience are left understated.

By identifying this theoretical lacuna and attempting to fill it, the thesis aims contributes to work in the political philosophy of the nature of democratic education. Democratic theories of education explore the ways in which institutions, primarily schools, contribute to the agency of individuals, or their groups, to engage in democratic politics. A prime example is Amy Gutmann’s seminal work *Democratic Education* (1999), wherein she argues the lodestar value for democratic education is to provide a citizenry with the attitudes, habits, and values necessary to engage in conscious social reproduction (Gutmann, 1999). Understandably, the lion share of attention is devoted to issues of mandatory schooling, especially where we find tensions between public and private interests regarding schooling and social diversity. The need for an education to prepare individuals for conscious social reproduction is well-tempered with the realities of social pluralism in a democratic society, culminating in examining in deliberative controversies regarding schooling, e.g., exemptions from sex and religious education (ibid: 107-8).

This *preparatory* reasoning is prevalent throughout the research on democratic and egalitarian theories of education. The need for mandatory education to foster the development of a desirable civic character is a well-trodden path of discussion. Normatively, our practical judgments focus on the correct balancing act between the ethical need to promote autonomous agency, to recognize claims as to the preservation of culture, and the need to inculcate the correct civic virtues that glue together individual commitments to social diversity and liberal justice (Macedo, 2000). The details boil down, typically, to matters of curriculum design and pedagogical practice: how much specialized pedagogy would be necessary to cultivate the desired civic character, and to what extent is it justifiable for schools to promote greater diversity through the mechanisms afforded by classroom organization? (Callan, 1999; Neufeld, 2007; Gutmann, 1999). A focus on the normative implications of mandatory state schooling in the face of diversity is understandable – schooling is the major area of

policy where we directly confront the controversies over individual autonomy, social pluralism, and social requirements for collective decision-making to go right (Levinson, 1999).

However, a focus on schools has led to a relative dearth of research on democratically salient education which can be gained outside of the school. This is a puzzling oversight. Consulting Rawls' magnum opus *Political Liberalism* (2005), we find Rawls hypothesizing that democratic institutions will exert significant formative power over the aspirations and sentiments of their participating members (Rawls, 2005: 169). In other words, as I argue heavily within this thesis, social cooperation under a democratic basic structure will pose educational problems and raise questions concerning the effects of ordinary social institutions for democratic character formation. This implies a theoretical need to focus on other institutions other than the school.

Yet, as of the time of writing, there are few examples scattered throughout contemporary liberal and democratic theory of education that addresses education done outside of mandatory, child-age schooling. In one of the leading examples, Amy Gutmann clarifies the value of adult and 'extramural' education for conscious social reproduction. Adult education helps to guarantee adequacy of literacy and numeracy attainment (Gutmann, 1999: 256-7). Any extramural education has preparatory value—children's TV shows and public broadcasting, along with libraries (ibid: 232-3). In a similar vein, we find Liam Shields arguing in favour of greater state funding in adult education, to ensure the availability of sufficient opportunities for an adult's interest in self-realization and personal autonomy (Shields, 2015: 63). Another example is Ben Colburn's recent attempt to justify the provision of adult education through a luck egalitarian framework, arguing for the public funding of adult education to assist those who suffered from the effects of bad luck on their first round of schooling (Colburn, 2010: 97).

While these exceptions are important and refreshing, they do not provide the systematicity and comprehensiveness of philosophical scope to match research on schoolyears education. Take Gutmann's contribution as an example. Adult education has *remedial* value as far as it guarantees the adequacy of literacy and numeracy among the population. Her discussion on the value of extramural education seems to be parasitic on the wider aims of schooling her theory prescribes. This presents us with a missed opportunity. The problem is we often evaluate informal education as parasitic on values established in debates over schoolyard politics. The overall argument of the thesis implies we engage in diverse forms of learning as adults which are unconnected with remedial aims, for example. Hence, I cover the learning we do while at work, the voluntary forms of education we engage with when we spend an afternoon at a public library, and the education we engage in while parenting. In sum, I contribute to the democratic education research by demonstrating how careful attention to

how we conceive the scope of what counts as ‘education’, and examining alternative sites of ‘education’, within a democratic society can help to bolster our understanding of how we should seek to foster the achievement democratic character in both epistemic and ethical terms.

My point surrounding the appropriate scope of ‘education’ in a democratic society has gained extra importance thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the waves of infections came a concomitant wave of lockdown policies across the world. Conventional approaches to mandatory education hit a limit with new emergency conditions. Despite this, learning and education did not cease. Instead, the locus of education shifted, in part by a switch to remote forms of learning, whether we discuss schooling or work training. Software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams allowed schoolteachers and colleagues to continue with their work. Outside of those traditional contexts, the demand for entertainment and crafts drove libraries, collectives, galleries, and museums to offer virtual and online services to provide. A noteworthy example is a friend’s music collective ‘TRACKS’ in our hometown of Darlington ([Tracksdarlington.co.uk](http://Tracksdarlington.co.uk), 2022). TRACKS offered music workshops in production, sound engineering, and guitar work. The virtue was that being online, it was impossible to oversubscribe in a virtual space, so they got a surprisingly worldwide cross-section of eager students! The pandemic shows that our actual educational horizons are much wider than the school.

To provide the theoretical resources required to expand scope, I draw heavily on Deweyan democratic theory. In doing so, I seek to provide a robust and comprehensive understanding of how ordinary social institutions contribute to our ability to learn from experience or, as I often term it, how these institutions safeguard and expand our ‘learner agency’. On the one hand, my Dewey-inspired analysis seeks to provide conceptual tools to understand how democratic social life provides opportunities for intellectual and ethical self-realization; and, on the other, it takes seriously how the self-same institutions may frustrate, stunt, or warp our development in ways inimical to democratic character, requiring the construction of normative tools to assist in pragmatic judgments of how to promote the growth of democratic character through ethically sound channels and pathways. In engaging with Deweyan philosophy more, I hope to exploit the ways in which John Dewey himself weaved together the ideas of democracy and education to reveal substantial philosophical overlap and interdependencies. Indeed, I engage in extensive conversation with both Dewey’s political and educational philosophy, arguing Dewey helps to enrich our thinking of how democratic education, especially outside of the schoolyard, supports democratic problem-solving and vice-versa.

Another core aim is to promote greater engagement between the political philosophy of education and social epistemological research into epistemic injustice. If we are concerned with how our everyday environments affect our opportunities to develop and exercise epistemic agency, then

we require a negative account of how our epistemic capabilities can be harmed by the institutions we cooperate under. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I attempt to triangulate questions of democratic institutional epistemology, our educational interests in experiencing epistemic growth, and concerns of epistemic injustice and active ignorance. Here, I contribute to the research by discussing how a Deweyan focus on learner agency and growth helps to identify and diagnose epistemic injustices as it pertains to our learner agency. In particular, I outline Deweyan political epistemology to provide regulative norms of social inquiry to identify epistemic injustice in the process of social inquiry. I then draw on the work of Fricker (2007) and Medina (2012) to provide core conceptual and explanatory value, such as the types of epistemic justice, the social causation of epistemic injustice. I evaluate the impact of epistemic injustice on the development of vices and virtues of democratic character, for the thesis to draw upon when examining specific non-schooling educational contexts in Part II.

#### Example research questions

The reader can expect the following research questions to centre the focus of this thesis:

- What is the nature and scope of ‘education’ in a democratic society?
- How should a democratic social form seek to provide its members with educative experiences?
- Why is learner agency important in the formation of democratic character?
- In what ways do democracies exhibit problem-solving capacities? What normative demands does this place on our educational social, and political institutions?
- How should we resist epistemic injustice and active ignorance in educational situations?
- What is the role of non-schooling contexts in democratic education? Which non-school contexts count?
- How can parenting, working, and engaging with public culture enrich our educational lives? How can they detract from it? How should we seek to reform these contexts to promote greater learner agency?

#### Normative focus: a brief very introduction to Deweyan philosophy

For the reader’s benefit, I give a brief primer on Dewey’s political and educational theory as part of clarifying the normative commitments of the thesis. While I will cover Deweyan democratic theory comprehensively over Chapters 1 & 2, this subsection will preview the essentials of Deweyan democracy to help ease the reader into the more substantive unpacking in Part I.

John Dewey (1859-1952) is often readily associated with his voluminous contributions to educational philosophy and theory. Dewey’s research interests spanned over virtually every development in natural and social thought in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including psychology, curriculum

design, sociology, biology, logic, and political theory. Dewey is often referred to as the quintessential 'philosopher of democracy', devoting substantial time and effort into promote the twin projects of liberalization and democratization of everyday life in response to the challenges posed by the political, economic, and cultural modernization of the USA (Ryan, 1997).

Dewey is also heavily associated with the development of American pragmatist philosophy. While I do not intend to give a full understanding of pragmatism here, we can understand it as an intellectual movement that foregrounds theoretical reflection in the practical and pragmatic elements of our philosophical, social, and natural inquiry. Key is the concept of 'inquiry' -- the social and institutional dimensions of our knowledge production and problem-solving capacity. According to pragmatists, knowing and learning is inherently social in nature. To provide knowledge of the world around us, inquirers must cooperate in epistemic practices, communicate results, and design experiments that require a complex coordination of mutual interests and vantagepoints. The pragmatist stresses that knowledge (a) has an 'active' as opposed to 'spectator' or 'passive' character, (b) carries significant practical and social implications for how to organize knowledge production practices, and (c) places an emphasis on the empirical and experimental features of modern scientific practice (Misak, 2013).

Relevant to our purposes is Dewey's pragmatist interpretation of both democracy and education. Dewey's centrepiece contribution to democratic theory is through his ethical interpretation of democratic life. To Dewey, democracy is a social form, or 'a way of life' (Frega, 2019). A democratic society provides the community, peer, civil society, and political groundwork for an individual to negotiate pursuit of their self-realization and their civic relationship to others (*P&IP*). In other words, a democratic society provides the associative ties needed to ensure that individuals can reciprocally experience meaningful growth in their moral, epistemic, and social capacities. Growth is not aimless or random; living in a democratic manner should encourage the growth of democratic forms of individuality, promoting greater communication across social divides. Democracy captures both the instrumental and constitutive conditions for individuals to achieve self-realization (Festenstein, 2010). Democratic institutions help to direct individual character toward social cooperation, ergo Dewey sees ethical or social democracy as having important educational properties. During our association with others, we frequently come to the realization we have shared interests and common problems that impinge on our opportunities for self-development. Engaging in democratic politics and social movements enables us to conjointly influence, shape, and transform the institutions that affect our opportunities for growth in both ethical and epistemic terms (Jackson, 2018).

Education is another mainstay for Dewey and Deweyan inspired theorists. Dewey is best known for his contributions to educational theory and practice. Although his educational interests are varied, it is helpful to think of his motivation as an attempt to navigate the two extremes of authoritarian and child-centred pedagogy (*E&E*). On the one hand, authoritarian modes of teaching dull our native intellectual curiosity, discourage an active identification with the topics one is engaging with, and cramp the growth of our learner agency into rigid modes of reacting to problematic situations. Consequently, the habits we gain from such an education are likely to hinder us, in both motivational and pragmatic terms – we are likely to lose the desire to continue learning about the topic, and unlikely to be able to reconstruct our habits, reactions, and problem-solving heuristics to solve unfamiliar problems (*D&E*). On the other, purely child-centric education which does not furnish the individual with good intellectual and ethical habits is likely to lead them into an aimless, wandering state. There is a risk that our experiences of education are diminished from a lack of guidance, leaving us with problems in how we go about connecting current knowledge and information to future situations; or, how we connect the present means, materials, and knowledge help us realize desirable ends, including self-development and growth (*E&E*).

Dewey's philosophy displays a considerable aversion to dualism and philosophical dichotomies (Festenstein, 1997). His conceptions of education and democracy overlap and mutually sustain each other to a great extent. A good education should provide people with democratic habits, heuristics, communication skills, and induct them into the communities they are participating, active members in. Democracy as a way of life harnesses and puts agency front and centre of attempts to transform our shared institutions and reconstruct our collective habits to ameliorate the plight of those whose growth is frustrated, blocked, or warped by unjust states of affairs. I turn to these matters in greater detail in Chapters 1 & 2.

### Methodology: analytic political philosophy and pragmatist political philosophy

This is primarily a work of analytical political philosophy, with inspirations from pragmatist-inspired social and political philosophy. The thesis makes use of the analytical method to clarify the normative significance of research findings in adjacent social sciences, especially findings in sociology, organizational theory, and educational theory (McDermott, 2008: 12-13). Like other analytical political philosophers, I devote a generous amount of intellectual labour to constructing a set of normative tools—learner agency, growth—which allow us to systematically relate political philosophy on education to undesirable realities of social injustice in educational matters.

What makes any work of political philosophy distinctly 'analytical'? It is hard to capture a convincing definition of analytical political philosophy. McDermott argues we should think of this



approach as a style of philosophy that heavily values “*clarity, systematic rigor, narrowness of focus, and an emphasis on the importance of reason*” (ibid.). There is something to this description, especially its mention of narrowness of focus and clarity, though it would be insufficient to differentiate it fully from alternatives on its own, such as critical theory.

G. A. Cohen offers a practice-oriented understanding of analytical political philosophy in his essay *How to Do Political Philosophy* (2011). From Cohen’s discussion, I highlight two generic features of analytic political philosophy which applies to the methodological commitments of this thesis:

1. Analytical political philosophy is concerned with *conceptual clarification*, especially around the level of one’s initial research premises, e.g., one’s research questions.
2. Analytical political philosophy focuses on *normative analysis and justification* through the leveraging of reasoned argument. These analyses tend to revolve around three main subjects: justice, the state, and which social state of affairs ought to be instantiated. (Cohen, 2011: 227).

I will go through these in turn, explaining how a focus on point one is often in service of clarifying point two.

Political philosophers take professional pride in articulating concepts in a clear and systematic manner. Often, our everyday discourses may be quite unclear about what key ideas such as *justice, education, and equality* should imply. It is quite possible we use these concepts in a polysemous manner when we engage in public debate with our family, friends, or communities. This is fine for certain contexts, but one inherent risk is polysemous ordinary talk may hinder systematic thinking into the nature of normative concepts, such as justice, and obscure what we should be doing (Swift & White, 2008). Analytical political philosophy prefers to take its time in this respect, as I have done in the thesis. So, for example, in Chapter 1 I rigorously clarify the ideas of ‘learner agency’ and ‘growth’, then relate these ideas to a specified, Deweyan concept of ‘democracy’ as a way of life. When all three concepts are clarified in this manner, I think we reach a surprising conclusion if we were to stay at the level of ordinary talk about education policy: we may have to pay more attention to what happens outside of schools when we are talking about how we should be promoting democratic education.

A focus on conceptual clarity lends to the analytic style of political philosophy by way of encouraging rigorous argumentation about conceptual and normative issues. What follows, logically and practically, from defining ‘democracy’, or ‘education’, in one such way and not another? Why is it important to conceive of democracy as a way of life and not simply a decision-making procedure? Pressing ethical and conceptual questions deserve a set of clear and justified answers that our

interlocutors can readily follow and understand. This will involve the political philosopher taking due care to elaborate on their research questions, core concepts, and normative reasoning in a step-by-step manner, thus providing much needed clarity for the reader (Cohen, 2011).

As I intimated above, these considerations serve a wider mission to which analytical political philosophers are steadfastly committed: specifying the way things *ought to be* when we have a clear-headed understanding of our normative concepts. The current thesis attempts to do this for education policy. It argues that we do not sufficiently recognize the educative potential of our everyday lives. I recommend ways in which we could move closer to realizing the potential of everyday social institutions in shaping our learner agency, such as in Chapters 3, 4 & 5 where I recommend a more focused role for parents, workplaces, and public cultural institutions to educate their members.

Current states of affairs are not always the way they should be, according to our best available ethical theories. This leads us to an apparent drawback of the analytical method, as far as it focuses on the way things ought to be. Where the social states of affairs are not what they should be, we can be at risk of experiencing what Owen gestures to as a translatability problem of moving from theory to practice. Here, the prescriptions we make for social reform can often be frustrated by the nature of contemporary political practices, whether by state or non-state agents (Owen, 2016: 175). If normative political philosophy is inattentive to empirical circumstances, then our recommendations on what policymakers ought to do risk lacking utility, via overgeneralizations (Swift & White, 2008: 57). For example, Elizabeth Anderson rightly points out that failure to sufficiently account for limitations in our cognitive-affective capacities, e.g., unconscious bias, risks producing wayward advice that cannot be instantiated by current political and social institutions (Anderson, 2010: 3-7).

This thesis attempts to hedge against this methodological risk. Firstly, I take influence from contemporary 'non-ideal' theory within analytical political philosophy. Political philosophers typically contrast 'non-ideal' with 'ideal' theories. An ideal theory seeks to articulate a desirable *end-state* to which social reform should aim (Valentini, 2012: 226). It may pay dividends in this approach to bracket empirical limitations, e.g., in our abilities to fully comply with ideals, for the sake of getting a clear idea of what normative concepts, such as justice, equality, or liberty demands of us. I have chosen not to go down this methodological route. Instead, I have opted to treat significant parts of the current work in non-ideal fashion. Non-ideal theorizing attempts to articulate the requirements of a *transitional* state between more-unjust and less-unjust circumstances (ibid: 226-7). So, for example, the normative focus I give to the ideal of growth in Chapter 1 provides indications of where we ought to focus if our goal is to ameliorate the institutional hindrances to learner agency. In Chapter 2, I examine how

epistemic injustice tends to prevent us from improving our knowledge production practices, hence frustrating attempts to transition to less unjust educational circumstances.

Secondly, the thesis attempts to account for limitations on our cognitive-affective capabilities in transitioning to more desirable circumstances. Anderson argues that one core feature of a non-ideal approach is to specify the motivational and cognitive limitations that we expect social agents to exhibit. We can then ask questions about the reasonability of any ethical expectations we demand of others (Anderson, 2010: 3-7). In respect of this, my strategy in Chapter 2 is to focus on the epistemic limitations imposed onto our experiences by social and cultural inequalities, in conversation with epistemic injustice. I partially clarify these limitations in terms of ignorance: when affected by active forms of ignorance, it is harder to motivate us to improve our circumstances; even worse, it more difficult to reason with us on what we are ignorant about. If we were to sidestep questions of epistemic injustice and ignorance, it becomes more likely otherwise well-intentioned talk of reform will fail to achieve its specified ends.

Thirdly, I occasionally make use of empirical work in the sociology of education to provide further grounding in actual circumstances. As such, I sometimes lean on Diane Reay's *Miseducation* (2017) as a source of potential examples and problematizations. This especially the case in Chapter 2 on epistemic injustice, and in Chapter 3 when I discuss the educational values that accompany parent-school interactions. Hopefully, consulting other, more empirical disciplines during the thesis' main body maintains a link between the social sciences on education and normative theorizing about democratic education. However, I am not claiming to provide a comprehensive overview of the sociology of education, nor do I claim to be systematically relating it to political theorizing. In other words, I seek to avoid overstepping the disciplinary boundaries recognized within the current academic division of labour (Swift & White, 2008: 68-9). Nonetheless, cautious engagement with sociology and adjacent social scientific disciplines can help foreground crucial elements of social context. More social context provides more opportunities to reveal the institutional and structural inhibitors of self-realization, thus sharpening the relevance of normative analysis (Young, 1990).

Finally, I want to make the methodological room for idealization, albeit contextualized within broader commitments to pragmatist and Deweyan philosophy. I do not attempt to forsake ideal theorizing; I utilize idealizations quite often throughout the thesis. However, it is worth clarifying the role that 'ideals' play, as this concept occupies a highly specific place in pragmatist methodological vernacular. A good contemporary example comes from Elizabeth Anderson. In her excellent *The Imperative of Integration* (2010), Anderson argues we should treat ideals as hypotheses derived from, and evaluated within, the field of social experience. As hypotheses, the success of any ideals will

depend on whether following their prescriptions leads to the desired consequences. We would ask: 'does following this ideal enrich or expand our social experience?' Anderson goes on to argue that reflecting on social experiences can enable us to improve our concepts and theories, as well as our conduct toward one another (Anderson, 2010: 6-7). Matthew Festenstein further clarifies regulative-functional role of 'ideal' in Dewey's philosophy. Dewey's interpretation of ideals helps to separate the pragmatist from both the ideal and non-ideal theorist. In this vein, "*ideals do not directly act as blueprints or standards of judgment of existing society, on this account. Rather, they suggest pathways for change: clarifying and following those paths, and judging the ideals in the light of this, form tasks for actual, nonideal agent.*" (Festenstein, 2017: 109). In avoiding construction of ideal end-states, the Deweyan does not aim at ideal theory as traditionally conceived. However, she will end up insisting that idealizations of crucial normative concepts, such as democracy or growth, provide the substance for practical reasoning agents can draw upon while acting *in medias res* of problematic circumstances (Weber, 2010).

### Thesis structure

I have separated the thesis into two parts. Part I covers the theoretical portion of the thesis, comprising of Chapters 1 & 2. Part II provides three potential case studies of educative contexts which are not schools.

In Part I, I construct a theory of learner agency and growth from a Deweyan democratic perspective. Chapter 1 provides the theoretical and normative core of the thesis. By careful engagement with Dewey and sympathetic commentators, I argue an ethical understanding of democracy implies we should be concerned with how everyday social institutions affect ability of their participants to co-develop and self-realize. Educationally, this implies we tend how those institutions affect the educational experience of their participants, along with an implication that we should broaden the scope for what counts as an 'educative context' aside from the school. I address some criticisms that Deweyan ideals of growth and agency are conceptually and normatively indeterminate. In response, I reconstruct Dewey's central ideal of 'growth' for a more contemporary audience in analytic political philosophy. I recast the growth ideal in a dual-aspect concept, emphasizing the epistemic and ethical dimensions of our learner agency.

In Chapter 2, I further unpack the institutional and social epistemology of Deweyan democracy. I elaborate on Dewey's argument that social inequality distorts the epistemic aspect of our learner agency. Here, I argue that research into epistemic injustice helps to provide the ingredients for a thoroughgoing negative account of how social practices and institutions can stunt our epistemic agency. I engage with the work of Fricker and Medina to substantiate how epistemic injustice

threatens our epistemic agency, and how epistemic injustice discourages collective improvement of shared epistemic practices. In return, I suggest, through its institutional focus, that the Deweyan view can further develop Medina's suggestion that a satisfactory account of epistemic injustice should include the effects of second-order ignorance, or meta-blindness, on our epistemic lives.

In Part II, I turn my attention to applied contexts. I have selected three non-schooling contexts which should have meaningful implications for our learner agency. Parenting (Chapter 3), working (Chapter 4), and public cultural institutions, such as museums and libraries (Chapter 5).

In Chapter 3, I explore the educational implications of parenting. Despite a surprising paucity of output from Dewey on this topic, I argue he points us to two analytically separate axes of concern: the educative quality of the parent-child bond, and the educative quality of the parent-school relationship. I argue to align Deweyan democracy with broad perfectionism in parent-child ethics, through examining Brighouse & Swift's relational view and Timothy Fowler's project view. However, when examining the parent-school nexus, I attempt to show that the Deweyan democratic view reframes the problems of parental influence over schools to highlight the situation of disadvantaged parents who suffer from increasing powerlessness over the educational process.

In Chapter 4, I revisit arguments on the educative potential of the workplace. A tradition of thought running from J.S. Mill, Dewey, and Pateman in democratic theory seeks to reform workplace practice to promote greater levels of civic and democratic character. I clarify Dewey's contributions to this democratic educationalist argument for workplace reform, then I connect Deweyan democratic thought with recent work on the philosophy of work and organizations through Lisa Herzog's work. This enables me to outlook four concrete problems—lack of self-direction, workplace hierarchy, negative epistemic culture, and unclear responsibility for structural injustices—that have educational salience. I return to Dewey's philosophy to offer a positive conception of work that can provide some guidance on how to resist the deleterious educational effects of these problems.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I examine public culture and public cultural institutions. Museums, libraries, and public forums provide unique opportunities for voluntary and autodidactic education in a democratic society. However, liberal political philosophy has diverged on the proper content and justification of 'public culture' required to integrate arts and cultural spending into wider programmes of distributive and liberal justice. I examine three possible views—anti-perfectionism, perfectionism, and civic nationalism—for how they would, hypothetically, justify funding education through public cultural institutions, teasing out strengths and limitations in their arguments about the nature and value of public culture. I then offer a Deweyan interpretation, grounded by the points raised in

Chapters 1 & 2, as a potential ecumenical position that emphasizes the need to resist epistemic marginalization and promote aesthetic experience in ordinary life.

## Chapter 1: Outlining a Deweyan Democratic Theory of Education, Learner Agency, and Growth

In this opening chapter, I articulate and defend a Deweyan democratic account of the value of education for a democratic society. The account focuses on the value of an individual's educational--or learner--agency, with particular focus on the way individual agency is formed, supported, and given significance within broader processes of democratic problem-solving.

I open the chapter with a brief sketch of Dewey's interpretation of democracy. To Dewey and his sympathetic commentators, the idea of democracy can be distinguished between its political-legal apparatus and its social culture. In other words, we can conceive democracy as a 'way of life' that imbues social relationships with a recognizably democratic quality for its participants. Seeing democracy in this unorthodox manner allows Dewey to emphasize the reciprocal relationship between social context and autonomous agency, culminating in a novel re-interpretation of political freedom, the nature of democratic character, and the social-political conditions required for an individual to grow as a member of democratic, self-governing community.

When understood in this growth-centric manner, Dewey's fusion of political theory and educational theory carries valuable implications for theorists working on democratic education. Firstly, Dewey emphasizes continuity of experience and the forward-looking aspects of educational experience. The capacity for individual agency to grow over time and circumstance implies educational thinking must be geared toward promoting and safeguarding a continual desire to learn from future experience. It also carries an expansion of scope, meaning education is ubiquitous within the project of democratic living. This implies, all things equal, that political philosophers of education have ample reason to extend their scope of analysis outside of schooling contexts. Thirdly, learner agency requires democratic social and political conditions to be efficacious, and this links together education as an interest in reciprocally participating, shaping, and transforming the institutions one is governed and shaped by. Finally, I attempt to explain Dewey's immanent conception of what should count as an educational end.

The attempt to clarify Dewey's stance on the proper ends of education warrants probing longstanding criticisms of his educational thought. As far as the chapter proposes to rehabilitate Dewey's ideal growth for contemporary political philosophy, the ideal itself faces a steep hurdle in a series of objections grounded by a claim of conceptual indeterminacy. The apparent lack of clarity in Dewey's conception of growth often leads to charges of unclear practical guidance, thereby threatening to defeat the pragmatic spirit behind Dewey's educational and political philosophy. This

warrants a thorough examination of salient objections from indeterminacy, necessity, and demandingness.

I close the chapter by reconstructing the concept of growth with a more explicit focus on analytical method. By distinguishing aspects of growth between two polar interpretations of Dewey's philosophy—the epistemic and the ethical—I aim to demonstrate there are determinate uses for growth as an ideal. After a clarificatory exposition on the intersection of Dewey's epistemology and axiological thoughts, I find such a use in evaluating proposed lines of reform in experiential terms, i.e., whether an institutional action is likely to result in an educative or mis-educative experience for its participants. I provide examples to demonstrate fruitful application of these evaluative tools.

### 1.1. What is Deweyan democracy?

John Dewey is often remembered by his commentators as the 'philosopher of democracy' by biographers, and in a sense, this is quite literally the case. Throughout his eighty-year corpus, the nature, and moral demands of democracy as an ideal preoccupied Dewey's thought. While I am not out to give a full exegesis of how Dewey develops his idea, I aim to reconstruct what is distinctive about Dewey's account of 'ethical' or ideal democracy community for a contemporary audience in the political philosophy of education.

#### 1.1.1. Democracy as a 'way of life'

It is best to start in familiar territory. When evaluating democracy, we are led to focus on political institutions and procedures which rely on popular legitimacy. A basic example is the UK Parliament. Parliament embodies the idea of popular sovereignty in its composition, while at the same time enshrining majoritarian legislative procedure at the heart of the institution itself. To Dewey, this is the 'political mode' of democracy in action. At this level, the thought is unremarkable and in line with much of liberal democratic political theory. Political democracy and the associated institutions have a core role to play in the protection of the individual from established authorities through claims to non-interference and rights.

Where Dewey becomes distinctive is by arguing political democracy only forms a part—yet a core part—of a wider conceptual architecture. Democracy is also a mode of associated living, in other words a 'way of life' that enables a community to possess distinctive ethical characteristics (*P&IP*: 327-8). In his political theoretical mainstay, *The Public and its Problems*, we find Dewey arguing for a conceptual continuity of the meaning of both community and democracy. They should be understood as co-extensive terms to the extent that democracy functions as an idealization of



community. Hence, we find Dewey arguing “*Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself.*” (ibid: 328).

### 1.1.2. Freedom between ideal and fact

It is important to understand the role ‘idea’ plays in this quotation to fully see what Dewey means. Not unlike a Weberian ideal-type, Dewey is arguing ‘democracy’ as an idea helps to identify and accentuate certain elements of community of life from a reflective standpoint, without representing a mere aggregate or average of these identifiable tendencies (Weber, 1949: 90). Unlike ideal types, however, this vantagepoint is intrinsically ethical in its direction. The ‘ideal’ of democracy accentuates certain communal tendencies for the purpose of considering how we should perfect them away from morally undesirable influences, such as injustices arising from power asymmetries. For our purposes as inquirers embedded with a democratic community, this means the ideal of democracy acts in a regulative capacity on our deliberations. That is, the democratic ideal guides our reflections on (a) how to understand interrelationships between ethical ends we orient collective action toward, for the purposes of (b) how our conception of these ends may generate practical guidance as to what social, organizational, and political means would be needed to realize them. As Matthew Festenstein aptly sums up “*Dewey’s articulation of the democratic ideal suggests how we should think about the relationship among the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and what it would mean to instantiate them.*” (Festenstein, 2017: 108). As such, it is an ideal which can never be fully instantiated but retains its action-guiding purpose (P&IP: 327-8).

We should contrast this with Dewey’s next move, to consider the ethical implications of community “*as a fact*” (ibid: 329). Under this framing, we come to appreciate that community life provides the normative fabric for other values, such as individual liberty. In order to avoid vacating these concepts of their full significance, any attribution of philosophical content must therefore be contextualized within community life. Importantly, this leads Dewey to reject conceptions of freedom which posit a form of independence from social relationships and structures, in turn prodding him into offering a positive variant of freedom. When contextualized in this manner, individual freedom becomes “*that secure release and fulfilment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold associations with others: the power to be an individualized self making a distinctive contribution and enjoying its own way the fruits of association.*” (ibid.).

Dewey is offering a conception of freedom which locates the value of autonomous agency in becoming an agent capable of: (i) participating in first-order social practices with others, (ii) shaping those practices through conjoint action with one’s contemporaries, and (iii) transforming those practices in accordance with our practical reasoning on the proper balance of ethical ends within

democratic life. Under Dewey's view, association with others—community as a fact—is what makes individual distinction possible, and the value of self-determined action is to reciprocally develop in common action with one's contemporaries. In other words, autonomous agency develops against a backdrop of social relationships which imbue our contributions with moral significance. Our contemporaries supply us with the context necessary to express the value of our agency, and the social settings we inhabit in common are shaped by the contributions we make.

Ultimately, the social backdrop should enable individual agents to coordinate in ways that better themselves and resolve their commonly defined problems. Thus, we can argue with Jackson (2018) that Dewey's conception of positive freedom compromises "*the opportunity to control one's life within everyday social spheres, or, to direct one's development in the course of interaction with others.*" (Jackson, 2018: 13). Under this framing, the ideal of freedom acts as a means to evaluate how political and communal institutions impact on our self-development, urging us away from bifurcating our practical judgments between the social and the political realms. In other words, we cannot exercise individual freedom if our agency can only extend to matters of government; it must also be true of schoolyards, workplaces, and public forums (ibid.).

### 1.1.3. Growth as a democratic individual

Recontextualizing freedom within substantive considerations of structure and the social backdrop of agency enables Dewey to draw attention to the individual attitudes and habits of behaviour conducive to democratic association. Philosophically, a need arises to articulate an understanding of how the individual matures in their communal context. Dewey argues these flows through two stages:

- (1) Recognition that individual self-development rests on the concreteness of *individuality*, itself a capacity required to develop a modern self which is able to experience distinctive ways of "*feeling the impacts of the world*" through interaction with natural and social conditions (IO&N: 121).
- (2) The ascription of philosophical content regarding individuality with an aim to help shape its character, resulting in theories of *individualism*. The function of individualism in this sense is to provide normative guidance for serving the promotion of individuality (ibid: 85).

Dewey's aim is to articulate a *democratic individualism* which enables communities to cope with the demands of social pluralism and the fallibilistic nature of knowledge production (Jackson, 2018: 44). Dewey has given us a picture of individuality as arising from participation and reciprocal action within common activity. From his vantagepoint, central normative question of democratic

social organization is “that of securing the development of each constituent so that it serves to release and mature the other.” (F&C: 78-9).

Another way of phrasing this concern is by asking how social institutions can create opportunities for individuals’ self-development and opportunities to engage with the development of others. To achieve this, institutions should pay careful attention to the conditions individuals need to experience *growth*. Growth concerns how we develop distinctive powers of critical rationality along with unique talents idiosyncratic to our concrete personalities, thereby underpinning the content of democratic individualism (Jackson, 2018: 47).

Jackson helps to flesh out the function of growth-talk by analogy with the German literary tradition of bildungsroman. The typical arc of a *Bildung* work consists in the protagonist encountering challenges to their moral and spiritual sensibilities, typically during an adventure or in the throes of romance. Our protagonist confronts these challenges, and in doing so, must overcome their own moral and intellectual conceits. Such conceits may rest on overly fastidious stances on moral probity, or they may be the naïve endorsement of impossibly stringent perfectionist attitudes toward spiritual development—a *Bildung* inspired work will chronicle how the protagonist tempers themselves in overcoming this conceit (Bruford, 1975). Not unlike the tempering a protagonist undergoes in a bildungsroman, Jackson argues the function of growth in Deweyan democracy is to harmonize the individual’s interest in self-realization with the simultaneous development of her peers. Our thinking should become predicated on recognizing the uniqueness of an individual’s contribution to democratic society, and how she may contribute any talents to cultivate and enrich the “fruits of association” she will eventually come to enjoy with her compatriots.

Another virtue of the growth metaphor is to insinuate individual self-realization will follow an organic pathway, not a random nor capricious one. The capacity to grow from core experiences implies a greater development of agency to intervene fruitfully in one’s situation, in search of qualitative improvement of one’s condition. Thus, “*Growth, for Dewey, is an increased capacity for dynamic action. It is living in a richer more interesting environment*” (Misak, 2013: 132-3). An individual’s interest in exercising their agency in view of bettering their situation hinges, crucially, on the associations they hold with parents, peers, and significant others. That is, the individual’s growth is often interdependent with the flourishing of others. This raises stakes for us in both our formative identity and our agential capacities to cooperate in resolution of social and political problems (Festenstein, 2008: 103-4). Hence, an individual will best experience growth when they connect their own development to the needs and interests of others (Jackson, 2018: 48). It is quite conceivable that one could grow at cross-purposes, or even in a hostile manner, to others, yet to Dewey the

*“core idea is that my own growth is hampered or warped if it takes place at the expense of yours”*  
(Festenstein, 2008: 103-4).

An egalitarian impulse shines through Dewey’s argument connecting democratic individualism with ethical democracy. Growth implies interdependency on others, including a keen interest in how others grow in association with oneself. Since we are better off when we grow together, then growth implies a concern with cultivating the right social and political conditions. Of course, those social and political conditions must be democratic in nature; only a democratic social form can secure the means to harmonize and balance interdependent individual interests, needs, and flourishing. We must sincerely acknowledge, reflect on, and incorporate the plight of others into our collective problem-solving exercises to serve our own interests in growth (Jackson, 2018: 48). This is because, as Festenstein explains, *“my growth or flourishing is mutually interdependent with yours, and requires that you are able to exercise pragmatic intelligence in the making of collective decisions on the same footing as me.”* (Festenstein, 2008: 104). In short, growth insinuates we should aim to empower our peers out of a concern for our own growth, and this is how we will experience growth ourselves—by acting through strikes, marches, protests, electoral politics, and community action that force conversations on the conditions faced by those who lack power (Jackson, 2018: 186).

## 1.2. On the meaning of education in a democratic society

The political philosophy of education revolves around a central problem of how we ought to prepare individuals to instantiate the normative ideals associated with democratic citizenship (Gutmann, 1999; Macedo, 2000; Callan, 1997). Dewey’s theory of democracy aims at the development of democratic individuality, including a focus on which individual character traits enable an agent to contribute to the process of living together amidst uncertainty and social diversity. Dewey’s democratic individualism, too, possesses a series of lessons surrounding education and preparation for future living.

In this section, I cover vital lessons we can learn from further exegesis of Dewey’s thoughts on education. I start with Dewey’s observation on the prospective dimension of democratic education, that is, how an ethical focus on education should imply a forward-looking focus on an individual’s motivation to continue learning from their experiences.

We can pair this with a lesson surrounding scope we can derive from Dewey’s philosophy. Since the fundamental matter of education is enkindling and safeguarding a learner’s intrinsic motivation, we need to keep a broad notion of which institutions can contribute to, or detract from, one’s learner agency, implying a focus on non-schooling contexts is warranted.

Thirdly, we should keep Dewey's egalitarian and democratic commitments in clear view. Democratic education should enable us to exercise our learner agency in participating, shaping, and improving our social and political life. Dewey's thought gives us means to reflect on education's role in underpinning social and political cooperation under a democratic way of life, including goals to minimize the distortionary effects of hierarchy on collective decision making.

Finally, I discuss what philosophical implications these lessons carry in how we should deliberate over the proper ends of education in a democratic society. I then segue into core problems with Dewey's focus on the prospective character of educative experience and growth.

### 1.2.1 Education as preparation for future experience

Much like contemporary political philosophers of education, Dewey grants preparation is a core function education must play within democratic society. To fully realize the ethical value of democracy, individuals must have opportunities to experience growth. Growth itself is not capricious, so educators have the task of guiding learners toward morally and socially desirable pathways of self-realization.

Dewey is extremely keen to emphasize the forward-looking character of education. He prefers to cash this out by highlighting the element of continuity involved in having an educative experience. *"In a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience."* (E&E: 26). So, for example, when I learn that Parliament is the legislative body of the United Kingdom, it then opens the way to understanding how the legislative process works, along with an aim to clarify its democratic significance. To Dewey, the idea of preparing someone involves close attention to their present set of experience with a prospective attitude to future experiences. The aim of education is then to guide individuals toward fertile avenues of inquiry, and away from intellectual dead-ends or meandering lines of thought.

Experience itself is a 'double-barrelled' concept for Dewey, comprising of a primary and secondary phase that transitions the learner from felt problem to an active search for solutions (E&N: 18). Primary experience covers the non-cognitive background individuals normally inhabit in their day-to-day lives. When a problem arises within primary experience, we typically feel its effects in immediate and visceral ways—it is rarely apparent what exactly the problem is and what has caused it (ibid: 29). We become aware of this problem through a sense of dislocation or unease as we conduct our common affairs (Alexander, 2004: 251). This unease eventually transforms into a quality of significance when we recognize the problematic situation as presenting an imbalance between our current modes of action and our needs (Leonov, 2022: 14).

We transition between stages gradually, and there is no metaphorical ‘on’ or ‘off’ switches to categorically demarcate between them. This implies cognitive experiences—the active phase of inquiry—grow out of the non-cognitive backdrop of everyday life (*E&N*: 30). Experience functions as a gradient that culminates in a shift toward *secondary experience*. In the secondary phase, we will start to commonly engage in techniques of problem-solving. We will leverage definitions to test standpoints on the problem. We will engage in hypothetical reasoning. Thought will begin to take a methodical and systematic shape, more like the familiar forms of social and political philosophy with which we are well-acquainted.

Dewey’s insistence we ground our educational thinking in the present experience of learners is to reflect the temporal phases of experience. Good educational philosophy attends to how learner experience shifts gear between non-cognitive and cognitive phases, rather than solely stressing the importance of the end-product in possessing cognitive skills or the right dispositions toward information. The ‘preparatory’ aim is to provide the educator with a means to conceptualize how she will enable the smoothing of learning experiences from rudimentary ones to more complex and variegated experiences, without confusing matters or overloading the learner’s comprehension.

A large part of this smoothing is having control over the context of learning experiences. We can talk abstractly about educational ‘experiences’ in philosophical generalizations, but the fact is these experiences always happen somewhere tangible and concrete. Be it in a living room, a classroom, or on a fieldtrip. The environmental context one inhabits becomes the major resource with which to shape their educational experiences (*D&E*: 14-5). There is a significant difference between how one teaches about waterfalls in the carefully curated context of geography classroom, with the usage of textbooks, pictures, and diagrams, as compared to how they will go about managing student curiosity at the site of High Force waterfall in the Durham Dales. At the waterfall itself, our focus should shift from diagrams to the steps undertaken to prepare for, approach, and study the waterfall in a safe and constructive manner.

Dewey reserves scathing critiques for educational philosophies which evince an apparent insensitivity to context. An overbearing approach to education may end up cramping the learner’s experience or oversell the importance of form and substance, thereby declining to create new opportunities for the constructive exercise of learner agency. If I never get to experience a waterfall like High Force, it is unlikely the textbooks and diagrams will impart the proper means of approaching and preparing oneself for encounters with facets of the natural world. Given the apparent ubiquity of such a situation, Dewey laments “*he is lucky who does not find that in order to make progress, in order to go ahead intellectually, he does not have to unlearn much of what he was*

*learned in school.*" (E&E: 28-9). Bad habits inculcated through education tend to stick around for quite some time, and even worse, they tend to frustrate us in our well-meaning attempts to overcome our own shortcomings.

These malfunctioning habits need not be immediately transparent to the learner, such as being unable to execute a formula or solve a specific problem. They could manifest as a lack of self-confidence or a lack of interest in revisiting prior experiences of the subject matter. In other words, they could manifest attitudinally between the individual and their orientation toward future experience.

This is where Dewey makes his pivotal point about the relationship between growth and education: it is the intrinsic motivation to continue learning, to continue growing, which must be prioritized in educational thinking. The maintenance of constructive attitudes toward future learning experiences become vitally important for attending to individual growth "*for these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future. The most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning. If impetus in this direction is weakened instead of being intensified, something much more than mere lack of preparation takes place.*" (ibid: 29). Dewey enshrines this argument into the idea of collateral education. The 'collateral' being the motivational deposit that a mode of education should aim to leave, or negatively fails to leave, on the individual's formative attitudes. This implies the way I am taught is *at least* as important as what exactly I am taught. If I am taught in a deadening and discouraging way, the aspiration to continue developing myself on the subject matter is likely to be severely diminished—an active form of harm to my capacities as an agent.

We can find a simple example in pedagogical controversies over the appropriateness of grading and assessment regimes. Citing a slew of papers which demonstrate causation between standardized testing and lack of student motivation, we find Jackson concerned to show how grading regimes remove the incentives for students to develop and maintain internal motivation. Jackson argues institutional insensitivity to the extrinsic motivation involved in the single-minded pursuit of grade points incentivizes strategic behaviour. The strategic element often takes account of trade-offs between effort committed and grade attained, rationally tending toward the most cost-effective way to achieve a passable grade with the least effort (Jackson, 2018: 246). Students come to see effort in education as merely instrumental to achieving social rewards or avoiding sanctions, thus inhibiting how far they can develop a constructive, forward-looking attitude to the material in question (ibid: 251).

Jackson also offers an interesting hypothesis regarding how the structuring of pedagogy often mirrors undemocratic social structures. As structural inequalities widen and play a deeper part in ordinary life, educational assessment becomes a facsimile of the wage-labour system instead of promoting the development of dispositions, attitudes and relations between learners which bolster cooperative intellectual behaviour. The attitudes promoted by market normativity is consistent with the naturalization of structural inequalities and injustices, closing down some avenues and possibilities for students to dissent to their wider social circumstances in the workplace and labour market in the future (Jackson, 2018: 252-3).

To sum up this lesson from Dewey, educational thought that respects individual growth should aim at the cultivation and maintenance of intrinsic motivation to learn from future experiences. Education is a continuous process of smoothing the transition from simple to more complex experiences, moving us from rudimentary trappings of awareness of current circumstances to more rich and varied appreciation of the natural and social world we inhabit.

#### 1.2.2. Should we broaden the scope of education?

Context played an influential role in the preceding subsection. To make the best possible use of educative experiences, we need to pay close attention to where we get our education. This leads me to an exciting implication of Dewey's observations: if we take the prospective dimension of education seriously, we are forced to consider how everyday social institutions bolster or inhibit the desire to continue learning from circumstance as part of our educational thinking.

The novelty of this implication is forcing us to reconsider the scope of educational philosophy. When discussing preparation and education within democratic societies, it is extremely common to focus in on the school. There are good reasons for this, no doubt. The public schooling system is where the most visible constitutional and political clashes occur over issues of diversity, compulsion, and balancing of state, individual, and community interests (Gutmann, 1999). I do not wish to deny this. It is surely correct to hold up the school as a key site in how we should think about educating citizens within a democracy. However, Dewey's philosophy does us an invaluable service by emphasizing the school as a *special case of education* rather than the normal case, and here we pick up the idea that we should be examining other institutions, e.g., the workplace, as alternative sites where democratic education occurs.

What does it mean for schools to be a "special case" of education, and what exactly rides on it? Recall Dewey's emphasis on recognizing the democratic community as a fact. Individuals develop with each other *in medias res* of the institutions and practices they share. There is a need for the mature members of any society to initiate immature members into these practices. Teaching of



younger members the norms, habits, and appropriate dispositions for participation within the social milieu is what enables social reproduction and transformation over time (*D&E: 6*). In other words, we already have a baseline of educational experience that pervades through social life, occurring in the ordinary interactions of families, community groups, and purposeful associations such as workplaces.

In addition, we should remember that an environment should be carefully curated to help impart educative experiences. In fact, Dewey argues “*we never educate directly, but indirectly by the means of environment.*” (*ibid: 19*). We may supply appropriate educational contexts to aid learners in directing their growth’s trajectory, but we cannot directly condition them into ‘being educated’. We can bring someone to the classroom, or even transport them on a fieldtrip to High Force Waterfall, but we cannot force them to know about geography or how waterfalls tend to form.

Dewey’s argument continues by recognizing the complex nature of a democratic social environment. Perhaps in the past it was possible for immature members of a community to learn all they needed through organic interactions with their social environment, but with the advent of modern living conditions there comes a variety of institutions and practices operating at cross-purposes. In such a case, we do not want to leave matters of individual growth to chance. There is a need to gain a locus of institutional control over educational context by means of regulating the environment. This is the germ of thought from where we derive the idea of the school (*ibid.*).

It follows that schools provide a “*special social environment*” under the executive direction of educators, giving them the latitude to shape educational experience by means of classroom design. Dewey lists three functions of the school. Firstly, it simplifies and organizes the environment to better promote the development of certain ethical traits and not others; secondly, schools allow educators to design environments which accentuate desirable features of social life while minimizing pernicious influences; thirdly and as such, schools aim to minimize the influence of social class, racial disparities, gender inequalities, and other forms of irrelevant status distinctions which would otherwise colour the interactions of young people with their peers (*ibid: 22*).

Now, if we were to turn around the fact schools are a special social environment, we must acknowledge that educational experiences are not limited to the schooling environment. This follows for both formal and informal education. For instance, formal education had to shift away from schooling matters during the covid-19 pandemic. Alternative methods and means to encourage educational experiences had to be sought out, including increasing rates for those enrolled with personal tuition. Informally, many ordinary social institutions contribute to our

education, such as when a workplace offers us a training course, or perhaps when we share parenting tips with our families and friends.

Dewey's point demonstrates 'education' is a ubiquitous project in a democratic society. There is a philosophical need for educational thought to train a keen eye on matters of adult education, the informal ways people are educated, and the malleability of educational practice when dynamic to adverse circumstances. The wisdom of 'learning on the job' becomes less of a metaphor for how the workplace can be like a classroom, and more so a literal truth that individual training needs often transcend what one can achieve in less direct contexts. And in extreme cases as the pandemic shows, the bulk of a society's educational activity may even shrink to the size of a screen and gain the extremely convenient mobility of interfacing with one's laptop. The conceptual scope of education must remain usefully broad in democratic theory.

There is room for a broader conception of education within contemporary political philosophy. The lesson we glean from Dewey can help extend observations and arguments from other traditions of liberal democratic thought. One example is from Rawlsian political philosophy, through Rawls' considerations on the basic structure of a just society (2005). Firstly, Rawls hypothesizes that basic institutions play a role in determining the structural conditions for justice, something he refers to as considerations of 'background justice' (Rawls, 2005: 266-9). Even when there is a free and fair distribution of a certain social primary good, the sum of local individual interactions within a given structure may produce a tendency toward injustice (ibid: 267). So, for instance, the operation of a labour market might tend toward an oligopoly and stratified distribution of wealth, even when individuals keep to their duties of fairness and equality. Should this be the case, Rawls recommends we institute specialized institutions—regulators, ombudsmen, social security services—to maintain the background justice of working life (ibid). We have good reason to be thinking contextually about how the basic structure requires corrective institutions. Secondly, Rawls threads onto a Dewey-like line of reasoning when he reflects on the effects of basic institutions on individual character and habits. Democratic character is *"not fixed or given"*, so a theory of justice must tend to the formative elements of individual goals and motivations, not unlike Dewey's focus on democratic individualism (ibid: 269). Rawls opines *"everyone recognizes the institutional form of society affects its members and determines in large part the kind of persons they want to be as well as the kind of person they are."* (ibid.). As such, he recommends we be sensitive to the ways in which structural elements of a democratic society form and limit the aspirations, hopes, and ambitions of their members. After all, the maintenance of a democratic culture and social form often depends on how well the basic structure is able to shape, and be shaped, the relevant features of their members (ibid.). This includes their person, but also extends to their reasonable conceptions

of the good, or otherwise, the commitment to egalitarian norms to promote the right type of social ethos between people in their associations with one another.

I would hope, therefore, that egalitarian and political liberal philosophers concerned with education can find ample reason to endorse the arguments within this subsection. Education should be understood very broadly as applying to very many social and institutional environments, opening normative analysis and evaluation to cases outside of schools. We benefit from further deliberation into the character-shaping role of ordinary institutions because we can then consider how to leverage for their educative potential in sustaining a democratic, egalitarian social ethos.

### 1.2.3. Democracy as the necessary political and social conditions for a broadened idea of education

Now that we have understood the prospective character of education, along with knowing to examine non-schooling contexts, we can begin to link these arguments with Dewey's insistence on a democratic social order as a necessary condition for learner agency and growth. I want to elaborate on the point that a society lacking a democratic social culture—or democratic ethos—is likely to encourage character traits inimical to democratic individuality and thereby frustrate our attempts to apply our experiences to collective processes of inquiry.

Hilary Putnam (1992) gives an excellent summary explaining how Dewey's theory of democracy interlinks with his writings about growth and social inquiry. In sum, learner agency is furnished by democratic politics, and in turn, contributes to the improvement of democratic institutions and culture over time. Dewey's point, to Putnam's read, *"is that we don't know what our interests and needs are or what we are capable of until we actually engage in politics. A corollary of this view is that there can be no final answer to the question of how we should live, and therefore we should always leave it open to further discussion and experimentation. That is precisely why we need democracy."* (Putnam, 1992: 189). As far as we need democracy to learn what our interests and capabilities are, then democracy also requires we have the learner agency required for cooperating within open-ended inquiry on social and political topics. In Dewey's turn of phrase, we endorse a democratic way of life because it serves the end of releasing 'practical intelligence' to the end of resolving common problems; practical intelligence then enables us to go on experimenting and discussing how we should live, cooperate, and act together.

One way of grasping this is to further examine Putnam's contribution. Putnam juxtaposes Dewey's thoughts on democracy with elitist models of social management. In short, we could endorse a technocratic elite with the right type of qualifications to rule. All that would be required of us, as agents, is that we do our best to follow their recommendations and instantiate the substance

of their guidance (ibid: 188). To Putnam's reading of Dewey, this would be insufficient as an alternative. We need democracy, and the reasons penetrate down to the cognitive level of individual judgment.

Specifically, the reasons relate to the possibility of our cognitive capacities becoming warped or co-opted by hierarchical modes of political organization (ibid: 188-9). Even a competent technocratic element must, to a degree, prejudice the capabilities of the ordinary democratic citizen as insufficient to resolve their own problems. Without including ordinary people into the process of inquiry, the knowledge banked by elites and technocrats is likely to be radically incomplete or risk social irrelevance (*P&IP*: 364-5). Dewey does not dismiss the idea of competence in decision-making, nor is he hostile to the idea of experts and ordinary citizens sharing in a cooperative division of epistemic labour in a democratic setting (ibid: 365). What he does insist on, however, is the belief that *"most people possessed the relevant capacities"* to participate in democratic problem-solving, and that technocratic elites have often *"ignored the ways in which their status as elites tended to undermine their own claims to epistemic authority."* (Festenstein, 2008: 101-2).

We can elaborate on this point by referring to the ideal of growth that accompanies our learner agency. We can say that elitism and undesirable hierarchy promotes a warped form of growth that detracts from the democratic qualities of our individuality (ibid: 103). Warped growth is a possibility Dewey is keenly aware of. *"Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group."* (*D&E*: 88) Ergo, a band of thieves can 'educate' and provide opportunities for self-realization for their members, but it would not satisfy the 'social ends' required by democratic forms of growth (ibid; Hildreth, 2011: 35-6). By the nature of their associations, thieves must hide themselves from wider society to evade capture. Isolation from wider social networks and institutions strongly limits which ends the thieves can evaluate and realize. Misak summarizes Dewey's point here when she writes the education received by gang members would be *"partial and distorted," as their shared interests are not numerous and varied and they have an inevitably limited harmonious interplay with other groups. Democratic and liberal forms of association are much better, Dewey argues, as they maximize our abilities to expand our shared interests and to develop our society's possibilities"* (Misak, 2013: 137).

Festenstein likewise gives a good summary of what Dewey's argument implies:

*"...a condition of my growth is my being able to exercise pragmatic intelligence in shaping the individual and collective ends that govern me. In this way, my growth requires inclusion of your exercise of pragmatic intelligence in collective deliberations"*

*in which we both share. To pull the threads of this discussion together, then: inquiry as pragmatic intelligence is valued as a constitutive part of a life of growth.”*

(Festenstein, 2010: 11).

When we consider education, we need to be concerned with how individuals can grow in association with one another. To achieve this, we must be keen to avoid situations where an individual's growth can become cramped by their social and political conditions. After all, the regulative nature of the democratic ideal allows for us to clear space for education to take place. Hildreth argues we prize education so highly in a democracy *“for people to develop mutual interests and gain a sense of the broader consequences of social interactions.”* And as he wonderfully adds a flourish to cap the argument, greater sense of mutual interest serves the end of eliminating *“the artificial barriers between persons and different forms of experiences. This opens up greater possibilities for interaction, learning, and growth.”* (Hildreth, 2011: 37). Practically, to realize our need for democratic social and political conditions, we must be able to create ethical connections with others and mutually enrich one another's experiences (Jackson, 2018: 81).

#### 1.2.4. What are proper ends of a democratic education?

So far, I have discussed the temporal nature of learner agency and the broad scope of democratic education. This puts us in position to approach questions regarding the proper moral ends of education: how should we go about educating people while respecting their capacity to grow?

Dewey's answer is philosophically controversial. If we inquire about the proper end of education, his answer is 'more education'. This is concomitant to the proper end of growth being yet 'more growth' (*D&E*: 56). If it is true that education is a continual and ubiquitous project, then there is no other end to which education should be aiming at. One educative experience prepares the groundwork for the enjoyment of more educative experiences, complete with a fuller and richer quality for the learner. Another way of expressing the same point is point to the transactional framing wherein desired ends and means feedback on each other during education—present learner experiences is a source of material educators need to plot their next move in cultivating the right environment, for the sake of the learner's future interest in enjoying yet more educative experience (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

Before fully exploring the limits of this reasoning, it is worthwhile to fully appreciate its merits. One, Dewey's thought codifies the negative mission of educational thought. A derivation of ends as directed by the learner's own experiences enables Dewey to recommend educators avoid setting rigid aims that quash intrinsic motivation.

Secondly, Dewey establishes an analogical relationship between growth and education, as captured by the invocation of 'continuity'. It becomes easy to grasp how education is said to accentuate self-realization, or how institutions squander individual potential, when couched in this analytical device. Individual self-realization is about becoming a certain person and given the stress on the uniqueness of the individual, Dewey cannot logically afford to be too heavy-handed with the ascription of philosophical content. *Mutatis mutandis* for education. It is not easy to prescribe guidance for someone who has a qualitatively unique way of navigating the world, especially regarding what their educational interests should be. High levels of philosophical openness in both respects allows an individual to develop and assert their authentic interests (Putnam, 1992: 189).

Thirdly, Dewey's answer does seem to be capable of producing a level of guidance for pedagogical design. Suppose we wanted learners to explore botany. One method would be the creation of a communal garden where learners become responsible for seeding, soil maintenance, manipulation and regulation of PH and nutrients, etc. Students learn to relate their experience with the conditions of the garden, enabling them to manipulate the plant in experiments. The situations which occur because of the plant's growth allow them to reconstruct their experiences, enabling their development as learning subjects (Jackson, 2018: 248). This much planning is possible simply from considering the internal dimensions of educative experience. Conversely, if extrinsic rewards, such as grades, are set as the major motivation for learning botany, pedagogy risks reverting to mechanical action and uniformity. Motivated in this way, we may attempt to shoehorn the learner into passively scanning and noting information from catalogues of botanical facts. This harms their democratic individuality, by way of discouragement. It prevents the educator from drawing out any unique talents and encourages dependence on educational authority (ibid: 248-9).

### 1.3. Is the ideal of growth too indeterminate?

Dewey's conception of educational ends therefore carries *prima facie* merits. However, it is not free from controversy, especially when Dewey discourages externally imposed ends from the educative process. We can understand an 'externally-imposed' end as a goal whose normative force is taken to be independent of the learner's past, current, or future experiences. For example, we may want to instruct a student to recognize, and act on, external ends of cooperativeness and deference to seniority if they are being difficult to teach. From this perspective, critics of Dewey have raised important questions about the plausibility of educational ends which call for 'more education' or 'more growth'. What if an educator faces a situation where they need to impose external ends to motivate the student to do what is in her best interests? Worse yet, what if an educator needs to express a refrain to recalcitrant student to behave in morally or socially acceptable ways – what should they do then, if they are to respect growth?

This subsection explores of the *indeterminacy* objection to Dewey's ideal of individual growth. Simply put, critics of Deweyan educational thought have charged, with a measure of justification, that growth is insufficiently clear to usefully guide educators, especially when the social and individual interest in an agent's education pull apart. While I argue this objection is soluble because growth can be made determinate, it requires a thorough unpacking to fairly represent the depth and gravity of the challenge to the overall project of the thesis.

### 1.3.1. Hofstadter's original formulation

Of all articulations of this objection, Richard Hofstadter offers a precisising critique of Dewey's educational philosophy along these lines in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1964). Hofstadter's critique remains one of the more powerful variants of this objection, so his argument is an excellent way to frame and problematize Dewey's immanent view of educational ends.

Hofstadter starts by arguing the Deweyan conception of growth curtails the range of possible actions that both the educational theorist and educator can take to achieve desirable pedagogical outcomes (Hofstadter, 1964: 374-5). Enshrining growth as the central concept in a philosophy of education leads to prescriptions that strike Hofstadter as conceptually ambiguous, e.g., Dewey's dictum that there can be no end given to growth except for more growth. As we have already seen, this means the only proper end of education is yet more education. If we impose external ends, we may risk truncating the learner's internal motivation and cast them into a mould that cannot be distinctively their own. Hofstadter turns the table on Dewey with this point. Growth-centric reasoning implies constricting the practical latitude of the educator. How exactly is a teacher or a theorist supposed to draw out individuality without setting external goals? These goals, in being grounded in the best judgment of the educator in question, will not have been authored by the student, hence possessing an extrinsic character. Such goals are thus discouraged by an aversion to extrinsic ends in their potential to depress a learner's internal motivation.

Hofstadter notes this leaves us at an impasse. The educator turns to educational theory to learn, refine, and evaluate ideas on what they should be doing. Dewey does not seem to be offering practical advice that can be used to further the educator's interests in pedagogical design. Hofstadter, even more forcefully, argues the historical experience of progressive educators failing to institute growth-centric pedagogy shows how fatally ambiguous the growth ideal is (ibid: 377). Hofstadter's challenge cuts very deep. It directly challenges the pragmatic spirit of Dewey's thinking: if Dewey's refinement of the growth ideal is unable to be determinate enough for educators to act upon, it would fail on its own normative terms of improving educational practice.

### 1.3.2 From indeterminacy to necessity

After identifying the conceptual ambiguity in Dewey's thinking, Hofstadter moves into the most salient part of his critique. Constrained by the enigmatic dictates of growth, Dewey fails to sufficiently appreciate situations where the individual's interests and the wider societal interest in maintaining a liberal democratic order come into conflict.

*"The child, after all, might feel a natural interest in rebelling at some point or another; but it was impossible to impute to him a natural interest in the reconstruction of society or in having his mind "saturated" with the "spirit of service". During the Great Depression, the whole school of social reconstructionists tended to recognize quite candidly that this impulse was lacking; that the future good of society required that educators admit all education embodies a measure of indoctrination; and that external ends are inevitably imposed in the educational process." (ibid: 387).*

If Hofstadter is a bit too forceful in his rhetoric about the inevitability of indoctrination, we can find Nel Noddings registering the same objection into analytical moral philosophy in a more direct style: *"We know they [the students] must be social, but can the social be relied on to shape itself?"* (Noddings, 1998: 480). Imposition of educational ends from an external vantagepoint may not just be desirable in directing a learner's experience, it may be necessary to ensure educational outcomes cohere with a wider program of social justice.

This necessity-based objection, on the face of it, seems powerful because plausible. It is certainly conceivable that a child may feel like rebelling against educational authorities. The worry still retains a realistic character when the element of social dislocation and economic hardship is acknowledged – it is plausibly the case that a learner could develop asocial or antisocial dispositions in response to structurally adventitious circumstances. If true, this carries straightforward implications for Dewey's democratic individualism. Growth would license the manufacture of anti-democratic qualities in self-realization, thus jeopardizing the associational and ethical social fabric the ideal seeks to promote. If that is the case, then the objection undermines the current project's basic direction, and thus merits an immediate and thorough response.

### 1.3.3. Demandingness objections

The above objection can be modified into several demandingness objections. We need to consider whether a Deweyan conception of growth in educational agency asks too much, or too little, of learners, educators and other stakeholders such as parents. Hildreth fastens onto this and lays out the problem-space for us: *"In this sense, the more difficult question is whether Dewey*



*provides sufficient guidance for educators and citizens to determine their own ends. For instance, we still need to ask: Does Dewey's approach ask too much of students, parents, teachers, administrators, or the general public? If so, how much of Hofstadter's critique might still be salient?"* (Hildreth, 2011: 33).

There seems to be several ways to construe the demandingness objection. For instance,

(i) It may be that growth and Deweyan democracy asks *too much* of the cognitive, financial and temporal resources of parents, teachers and students, hence making growth-centred education pragmatically unrealistic. In this case, a Deweyan democrat would have to demonstrate that a theory of learner agency invoking growth is capable of allowing sufficient latitude for agents to pursue their localized goals.

(ii) We could also reverse the direction of argumentation here. Perhaps a focus on growth *does not demand enough* when it comes to the content of education, leaving the learner to drift morally and intellectually. This would be an offshoot of Hofstadter's rejection of growth-talk – the imposition of external ends helps to provide the necessary ethical sense and meaning for the learner to gain direction in their role as a student. To resolve this objection, then one is going to have to demonstrate that reasoning incorporating growth does not detract from recommending specifiable avenues for a learner's self-development.

(iii) In addition, demandingness could refer to how Deweyan democracy recommends we deal with matters of social pluralism. Here we could argue parents, schools, and communities have reasons to reject the argument so far on the grounds they are not able to reasonably endorse Deweyan democracy. One such example of this argument can be found in the work of Robert Talisse, who takes it in a political liberal direction. Talisse argues that Deweyan democracy is not sufficiently neutral with respect to competing conceptions of the good to pre-empt worries that it seeks to impose a particular conception of the good life onto unwilling participants. Liberal legitimacy relies on principles which can pass philosophical tests of reasonable rejectability and the Deweyan democratic position does not pass muster on this; as such, imposing Deweyan democratic strictures onto educators, teachers, and students would be tantamount to a form of oppression (Talisse, 2011).

#### 1.4. Responding to the critics: pragmatically reconstructing growth

A satisfactory response to these objections requires a more thorough examination of growth as a concept. I will be arguing growth is not only conceptually determinate, but to preserve the

pragmatic spirit of Dewey's argument, it also offers insightful and meaningful guidance for educators, educational theorists and, of course, political philosophers of education.

However, demonstrating growth can be determinate does require a level of pragmatic reconstruction on the concept. Dewey's writings are not in the analytic style now common to Anglophone moral and political philosophy. Important distinctions can sometimes remain implicit even if they are present somewhere in hearty corpus of texts Dewey produced. It will be worthwhile to start by tinkering with the concept of growth and then relating it more systematically to Dewey's wider epistemological and axiological concerns. In doing so, I hope to show growth helps us meaningfully distinguish when prospective experiences take on the modes of being educative, mis-educative, and plainly non-educative. If growth enables us to make those evaluative distinctions in applies cases, then we shall find it is capable of supplying determinate practical guidance contrary to Hofstadter's critique.

#### 1.4.1. Growth as a dual-aspect concept

My first distinction is between the epistemic and the ethical dimensions of an individual's growth. Commentators on Dewey often emphasize the need to fairly balance these two central elements of Dewey's political philosophy, as talk of one may inadvertently crowd out meaningful recognition of the other (Sleeper, 1960; Festenstein, 1997: 21-22). Speaking loosely, Dewey's democratic theory can be understood as presenting a theory of political judgment focussing on the problem-solving capabilities of a democracy (see: Festenstein 2019) and/or a theory of participatory democracy which emphasizes the ethical project of marrying together individual self-realization and substantive democratic politics (see: Jackson, 2018). The interpretation of growth in this chapter seeks to retain the wisdom of both interpretations for use in normative analysis.

We have already covered the ethical side of growth with preponderance of Dewey's ethical ideal of democratic life. It is worth stressing the social ontological element reflected by transforming it into one aspect of a conception of individual growth. To experience ethical growth, there is a reliance on mutual recognition between cooperating agents. The ethical ideal of democracy emphasises, 'as a fact', the community ties that individuals leverage in self-definition are themselves an achievement of a common project in promoting democratic culture. A certain moral sensibility is required by growth. Jackson refers to our moral sensibility here as a 'co-developmental' attitude toward one's contemporaries. It must be the case, to at least some extent, that individuals can imagine themselves contributing to furthering the educative experiences of another and to be educated by others (Jackson, 2018: 68). It is not enough to only embrace one's ability to self-realize;

the recognition implied by a co-developmental standpoint demands there be interplay between agents for them to experience growth in their ethical powers.

This leaves the epistemic aspect of growth to cash out in more detail. Doing so will be my original contribution to the Deweyan political and educational theory I have been textually relying upon. My contention is the epistemic facets of growth will help to clarify the apparent ambiguity of means and ends within Deweyan educational thinking.

#### 1.4.2. On the importance of an end-in-view

Underpinning the epistemic aspect of growth is the idea of an ‘end-in-view’, a recurring idea which crops up during Dewey’s work on education, valuation and ethics. Ends-in-view come across as slightly obscure on first read, so I elaborate on why Dewey develops the conception of an end-in-view and what the major features of ends-in-view are.

In *Theory of Valuation*, Dewey sets out to clarify an empirical understanding of value that coheres with his naturalistic and evolutionary commitments about the role of knowledge. To Dewey, value is desire-dependent, occurring when human agents actively engage with the natural and social world they are embedded within (*ToV*: 221). By desire, Dewey means something specific and idiosyncratic. Desire only arises when agents are shaken out of instinctual actions by a disequilibrium between their needs and their environmental conditions. Desire expresses itself as an absence of those needs. Desire in this sense has a curious implication for value, since we only engage in valuation: *“when there is something the matter, when there is some trouble to be done away with, some need, lack, or privation to be made good, some conflict of tendencies to be resolved by means of changing existing conditions.”* (ibid.). When human intellectual powers of description, prediction, causal speculation are applied to the satisfaction of desires, we attain correlative ends-in-view which contain the information necessary to guide the actor into attaining the resolution required to bring us back into equilibrium with our objective conditions (ibid.).

This enables us to draw distinctions between what is valued and what is found, on the pain of human efforts, valuable as a result of following our ends-in-view. From this perspective, Dewey criticizes psychological theories which lead to the categorical separation of means and ends. Dewey’s criticisms precise upon mentalistic forms of psychology for confusing affective-motor activities for “mere feelings” which cash out as mental states. Value, on this mentalistic understanding, becomes a relationship between objective conditions and possession of the right mental state, something Dewey criticizes for cutting out the contextual elements of valuation (ibid: 224-5). He also charges mentalistic psychology confuses two senses of enjoyment: the enjoyment

one gets as a result of exerting effort into bringing about a consequence, and enjoyment as gratification which may be more or less immediate and unrelated to effort (ibid: 224-5).

I do not want to get stuck in Dewey's disagreements with mentalistic psychology. It was worth stating in order to transition into how Dewey sees the relationship between ends and means. Whereas following mentalistic psychology suggests separation of ends and means on external/internal grounds, Dewey holds that ends and means are continuous with one another. This implies the notion of a-priori or final ends are unnecessary to explain instances of valuation. Using the example of a physician treating a patient, Dewey argues that the doctor has no need to rely on a fixed or a-priori understanding of healthiness. Instead, the focus is on restoring the patient back to health. This is the so-called end-in-view: a provisional aim which can be modified according to the information the doctor gleans from examining her patient's symptoms and medical history (ibid: 323). Since the remedy to the illness depends on a prior diagnosis of what the illness could be, the statement of the problem simultaneously forms a part of its solution: we cannot separate the prescription of medicine to a patient from the end-in-view of "restoring the patient back to health". The medical means to restore the patient back to health are constitutive of the end-in-view (Festenstein, 1997: 35). It is therefore neither feasible nor desirable to have an a-priori understanding of health as an end. General conceptions can be built up from empirical cases and investigations over time and frequency of illness (*ToV*: 232). Failure to realize the contingent and provisional status of ends-in-view will lead to deleterious consequences down the line: fixing one's habits of thought on an ultimate end will likely obscure how a remedy may have side-effects which require further treatment, or may cause complications – in that sense, the end-in-view's solution is typically bound up with a new problematic situation.

Now we have the theoretical context, we can analyse two components which constitute an end-in-view. The first is what Richardson helpfully terms a "context of action": the concrete situation where a problem rouses us into a valuation of our circumstances (Richardson, 1998: 110). Within a given context of action, we can expect to gather factual information about the situation at hand and an understanding of the possibilities which flow from a description of the situation, including causal possibilities, which promise to bring the problematic situation to a state of unification with our desire or interest (Festenstein, 1997: 34-5). This makes ends-in-view epistemic. The descriptive aspects of an end-in-view, including its causal possibilities and potential trajectories, are held in view as an intellectual operation, allowing costless manipulation of hypothetical conditions. However, when I act on my end-in-view and align the problematic situation with my interests, then the effect of following my ends-in-view has an existential or empirical nature (*ToV*: 234-5) Finally, I want to make clear a core aspect of ends-in-view that we cannot do without in the forthcoming discussion.

The efficiency of an end-in-view in unifying the empirical circumstances with our interests is what makes the difference between a good end-in-view and a bad end-in-view (ibid.).

#### 1.4.3. Ends-in-view and growth

Now that we grasp the idea of ends-in-view, we can analyse their relationship to growth. The relationship I will defend here is that during growth in expression of learner agency, ends-in-view help to regulate and appraise the courses of action undertaken by the learner, teaching staff, institutions, and other stakeholders concerned within the relevant context of action. I borrow from Hildreth's interpretation that "*Deweyan ends function as evaluative tools, allowing teachers, students and citizens to assess the ends for individual growth, vocational development, citizenship, and the general nature of education in a democratic society.*" (Hildreth, 2011: 34).

This move might seem odd if we recall Dewey's insistence on growth being the only proper end of growth and education being the proper end of education. Part of the charm with Dewey's understanding of learner agency is that growth is immanent to the individual's experiences. The immanent nature of growth is enough, according to Dewey, to impugn the idea of setting external ends to the educational process, since external ends pose a realistic risk of cramping or warping one's growth.

It must be asked, in this case, why are ends-in-view any different with respect to growth and agency? This is straightforward to answer. External ends clash with growth since their structure force growth toward a predetermined or imposed conclusion. However, ends-in-view do not suffer this problem. Their structure is isomorphic with growth. Growth is open-ended and continuous – what happens when one grows is a reconstruction of existing experiences, habits, and dispositions to better serve the learner's practical judgment in novel situations. An end-in-view shares these properties of openness and continuity. Ends-in-views are provisional depending on the circumstances and human interests which are contextually involved, this makes them open to modification by experiential feedback regarding whether they do actually manage to unify a situation with human needs, desires or interests (Festenstein, 1997: 35). This provides a *prima facie* reason to believe ends-in-view do not conflict with a growth-centred understanding of educational agency.

#### 1.4.4. Three modes of educational experience

To understand the relationship between all these constituent parts of learner agency, I shall examine the role of experience within the relationship between growth and ends-in-view. The epistemic function of ends-in-view are to evaluate different possibilities for learner growth. Growth in this epistemic sense "*represents learning experiences that open up (rather than foreclose)*

*opportunities for further growth. If a person gains a better sense of the meaning of experience and gains a greater sense of control over future experiences, they are better prepared to apply what they have learned flexibly in future situations. In other words, growth represents a form of learning that enables individuals to continue learning throughout their lives.” (Hildreth, 2011: 33).*

As Hildreth notes, this allows us to make qualitative distinctions between the type of experiences which promote growth (educative), detract from growth (mis-educative), or are plainly indifferent to growth (non-educative) (ibid: 33-4). Aside from non-educative experience which occurs as a result of routine or purely habitual action, one should expect ends-in-view to be correlative to different modes of experience by means of their efficiency – we should expect good ends-in-view to be correlative with the encouragement of educative experience and we should expect bad ends-in-view to be correlative with mis-educative experience. In any case, good ends-in-view should facilitate educative experiences which expand the opportunities for further growth. The individuals involved—learner and teacher—can derive some indication of whether future experiences that follow from this line of growth are likely educative or mis-educative (*E&E*: 23).

At this point, the discussion has been conducted entirely in the abstract to elaborate on the epistemic aspect of growth. To make the discussion less rarefied and give a brief demonstration of the ethical and epistemic aspect of growth in evaluating cases, I introduce examples to flesh out how the dual-aspect concept of growth can flag up potentially mis-educative experiences and how it illuminates educative experiences.

Firstly, I take a case to do with the education of the upper-class in the UK, in relationship to elite universities such as Cambridge. I show that despite providing the means for individual development and advancement, it is possible for elite schools to encourage the wrong type of growth and thus produce mis-educative experiences. I then turn to an example of an educative experience, though one that, somewhat paradoxically, comes from skipping school.

*Example 1: Can elite education be mis-educative?*

In the UK, a lot of currency is put on educating children so they can attain places at elite universities such as Oxbridge. While this is class-based in that 40% of students attending Cambridge had a parent who attended Oxbridge, there are less apparent aspects of injustice at play (Reay, 2017: 134). For instance, consider the experiences documented in an issue of *The Cambridge Student* from 2016 by Rachel Middleton. Middleton recounts a story of a server in a college dining hall called Maria. Despite Maria’s best efforts to engage students as she serves them food, she is often treated with coldness and indifference by them (Middleton, 2016). While Maria herself guesses this behaviour toward her is due to academic stress on part of the indifferent students,

Middleton argues part of the problem is that Cambridge, as an educational environment, encourages students to develop “*a self-perception of one’s own superiority or one’s exceptionalism*” (ibid.). This hardly stops at the dining hall, students display an arrogant disdain for Maria at other social forums on campus, such as bars, upon learning she does not attend Cambridge (ibid.).

The first thing I want to contend here is the experiences cultivated by the Cambridge environment are mis-educative ones. They encourage a warped form of growth and hence the promotion of anti-democratic character. Ethically, prior schooling and schooling in Cambridge hindered the development of democratic individuality precisely by encouraging a self-perception which is steeped in arrogance and a pathos of distance to those who are not of the right social station. This cultivated blindness toward the social and democratic needs of others warps the growth of those who act cold and insult Maria across various parts of the campus. As I shall discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, we have perfect case of what José Medina points out as epistemic vice. Epistemic vice tends to characterize the self-development of the privileged: these students, despite having access to one of the best universities in the world and having their self-development catered for, are not necessarily better off for it (Medina, 2012: 30-32). As Middleton reports, a social bubble forms around the Cambridge students, encouraging epistemic vices such as close-mindedness and arrogance towards the experiences of Maria (ibid: 39). This insensitivity and ignorance impinge on the ethical aspect of growth since it makes it harder for these students to change their attitudes and habits to incorporate Maria’s needs into their own interests in experiencing a supportive campus environment.

We should also account for the epistemic side of the ledger. Feelings of superiority and cold attitudes toward others do not form in a vacuum. They are the product of pedagogical and parental interaction with learners, which end up producing mis-educative experiences with correlative bad ends-in-view. Typically, this happens as a result of the curriculum or the parental input encouraging a false sense of certainty for learners from elite schools and upper-class backgrounds (Reay, 2017: 132-5). Even though pedagogical interventions to instill self-confidence and provide the appropriate type of social networks may help advance the interests of the individual learner in academic and vocational success, they can still count as bad ends-in-view. It is hard to imagine, even if well-intentioned, that instilling self-confidence in a way that inclines a student to marginalize and exclude the needs of other people contributes to opening further opportunities for growth. The ways in which teachers and parents can encourage a false sense of self-certainty and entitlement to ‘elite’ status encourages a false sense of completeness and security.

This leaves learners unable to appreciate the experiences of others, hindering their capacity to imagine and envisage ways to prevent the formation of bubbles that potentially disconnect students from the rest of the population. Lacking the experience and resources that others can bring, students exhibiting ignorance of others will be impaired when attempting engagement with collective action in the future, especially where it comes to attempting to coordinate to resist and resolve educational injustices.

*Example 2: Can skipping school be educative?*

To demonstrate an educative experience, I am going to focus on an unorthodox example. There are instances where despite skipping instances of formal education, one can have an educative experience from collateral education. My examples here are classroom strikes, specifically the recent climate strikes taking place across the world.

Classroom strikes are not necessarily educative experiences; however, I am going to claim that they can be. The Climate Change classroom strikes were such an example. Led by schoolchildren from around the world and spearheaded by activist Greta Thunberg, students from major countries such as Canada, the USA, the UK, and Germany walked out of their classrooms to protest collective inaction on climate change. This involved not going to school when they were supposed to, a fact which rankled at least one educational authority in the German Länder of North Rhine Westphalia. The Länder's government claimed the children's educational development was threatened by the lack of time in school, thus making the strikes unjustified in view of their responsibility to provide education (BBC, 2019). Essentially, North Rhine Westphalia's claim was that the children's growth was threatened by these strikes.

Does the North Rhine Westphalian authority's claim hold up to scrutiny? Probably not. One can claim these children were having educative experiences through protesting together against a common existential and generational threat. Ethically, it should be apparent that engaging in coordinated political action should bolster one's democratic individuality in the Deweyan sense. These strikes required a fairly high level of sophistication and co-organizing between schoolchildren to pull off. It also required a recognition of common interests shared by all of the cohort, with each individual striking taking part in a collective resistance against intergenerational, climate and structural injustices that all were facing. Going on a classroom strike so that one can go on a march exposes one to various concrete others who would otherwise have gone unmet, adding to the plurality and depth of experiences which can help to foster democratic individuality and participatory aspects of democratic life.



An interesting upshot of class strikes becomes clearer under reflections regarding the epistemic aspect of growth: suppose that a teacher acted entirely contrary to the demands of North Rhine Westphalia, encouraging children to walk out and otherwise attempting to aid them on the march, designing placards with them or helping to chair meetings. Despite encouraging the children not to be in school, that teacher or authority would be encouraging the epistemic aspect of growth. Their end-in-view may look like: do not intervene when the children walk out, at the cost of school attendance but for the end of letting them learn about political action. Here, the end-in-view demands little of the teacher; in fact, it authorizes her to formally do nothing at all when the children start to strike. Anything on top of that, such as designing placards or helping to coordinate meetings, is a bonus.

1.4.5. How does the dual-aspect concept of growth address the indeterminacy and demandingness objections?

What does the dual-aspect conception of growth and these examples tell us about the indeterminacy objection? Mainly that specifying the relevant end-in-view alleviates the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the usage of growth. When we put things within their proper context of action, specifying a description of the problem and the interests involved, we can evaluate courses of action and inaction provisionally. Staying within the given context is crucial. Hofstadter misses the epistemic role of ends-in-view within Dewey's philosophy surrounding growth. We do not contrive ends-in-view absent the problematic situation and then measure them with a yardstick. *"Instead, criteria are used to assess both current and proposed education goals, methods, and content."* (Hildreth, 2011: 38). Nothing about growth must lead to indeterminate ends and unhelpful guidance for practitioners. Educators should work with each other in sharing best practices on a local and national basis, likewise for educational theorists concerned with specific topics.

The demandingness objections may be provisionally met at this stage, though with less certainty. The hypothetical permissive educator in my second example hints at why the first demandingness objection may not be devastating for growth: sometimes we can satisfy the demands of growth by relinquishing or scaling back pedagogical control. Sometimes, letting learners coalesce with one another can yield educative experiences which will spur growth.

However, I take the point this example is not exhaustive of possibilities and is quite atypical. Nevertheless, the first example of elite schools shows we do not necessarily want to be throwing arbitrary levels of resources and attention toward learners. Sometimes, to avoid producing mis-educative experiences, we will need to set limits on aspirations and expectations which come at the expense of others. This may involve interventions to correct students on their social attitudes

towards others, it may involve traditional sanctions for anti-social behaviour, and it may involve urging restraint on the wishes of parents who otherwise might fuel these unrealistic expectations. In short, growth sometimes may demand more of us; it may also demand less. Demandingness will depend on the problem which contextualizes the situation. It does not force educators into a straitjacket of trying to action and micro-monitor every outcome.

The first example is also instructive of locating the burden for change. Teachers sometimes may be able to do little in terms of pedagogical action to rescue a situation for its growth. Learners who have cultivated ignorance about the needs of others will be tough to reform via classroom techniques and ends-in-view associated with them. It may be up to the state to provide for the appropriate socio-economic and structural conditions to relieve the burden on educators and educational institutions. If educators, learners, and stakeholders cannot gain support, they can attempt to utilize collective institutions like Teachers Unions and pressure groups. This can be seen as an attempt to influence the demandingness of the environment by attempting to affect political change. Such would not guarantee success. Sometimes a teacher or parent's group will be snookered due to the objective conditions of the pedagogical and political environment. This implies that other actors, such as local schooling districts, states, and private entities work on formulating and executing ends-in-view which will enable faculty and stakeholders to grow as educators. It does not impugn using the growth concept, as such.

Finally, I must address the liberal pluralist interpretation of the demandingness objection. Robert Talisse (2011) wishes to demonstrate that Dewey's thought would not be capable of becoming an object of reasonable agreement, hence state endorsement would be tantamount to repression (Talisse, 2011: 515). In Talisse's view, the reliance on growth is especially problematic: it presents a conception of the human good which various dissenting groups could have ample reason to reject. We should suppose value disagreement is permanent in a democratic society. Thus, we find him summarizing his point with *"In so far as the Deweyan democrats seek to reconstruct the whole of human association so that it is directed towards realizing their own conception of flourishing, they seek to create social and political institutions that are explicitly designed to cultivate norms and realize civic ideals that their fellow citizens could reasonably reject."* (ibid: 514-5). Impressing the Deweyan ideal of growth, whether through directly schools or obliquely through the powers of ordinary social institutions, would oppress the dissenters who are well within their rights, as free and equal citizens, to demand a suitably public justification for any such policies the Deweyan wishes to enact (ibid: 515).

I cannot sketch a full critique of Talisse's position here due to the constraints of space. However, there are two pressing questions: (i) Is Talisse's position stable on its own terms? And (ii) is this a pressing objection for the modified understanding of growth presented within this chapter?

If we take (i), we may gesture to arguments that challenge the interpretation of how Deweyan democracy fits into political liberal reasoning. A good example here is Joshua Forstenzer's (2017) supposition that Deweyan democracy is not a comprehensive theory of the good, but simply a thin theory of the good. That is, a focus on learner agency and growth regulates our pragmatic thoughts on how to secure the attitudes and habits necessary for a democratic problem solving. Under this response, growth loses connotations suggesting a full-blooded doctrinal interpretation of what is good in life. Instead, Forstenzer argues: *"Growth therefore does not consist in the furthering of pre-established ends or life goals; it consists in the development of certain capacities that it is rational to want to possess given the fact that intelligently solving problems is necessary, whatever other ultimate goals groups or agents may wish to pursue."* (Forstenzer, 2017: 564). On those ultimate goals, Deweyan democracy is properly agnostic. It is up to agents and their groups to pursue those purposes. Textually, this fits with my interpretation of Dewey's ideal of growth and democracy. Growth aims at 'more growth', in the sense it directs our attention to the requirements of democratic character. Growth aims character formation toward future cooperation in ethical and epistemic terms, with democracy being the regulative ideal that gestures toward the need to maintain inclusive and egalitarian conditions for collective decision-making to proceed (ibid: 565).

We may also consider, with (ii), how deep Talisse's argument cuts against the account given within this chapter. As above, I have disambiguated Dewey's account of democracy, and modified his theory of growth to better understand how learner agency helps to bolster democratic life. The ethical component of growth recommends we reflect and act on a responsiveness to the plight and interests of others whose lives are bound up with our own. The epistemic component presents an account of how agents leverage 'ends-in-view' in pragmatic thought. Context and practical latitude are emphasized for agents to experiment and revise their plan of action. Talisse sees a programmatic and doctrinal element to Dewey's theory of democratic life that fixes the political mandate for basic institutions in a determinate way (Rondel, 2018: 108-109); I am not attempting to offer this. I am offering an account which hangs together questions of democratic problem-solving, the individual character conducive to the process of democratic inquiry, and how learner agency operates through broader institutional means than simply schools.

With regard to the two above points on growth, a helpful analogy can be made to Rawls' notion of the two moral powers. When Rawls focuses on social cooperation, he argues a democratic

theory will make use of a conception of the person. On Rawls' account of political liberalism, this conception of the person must be political—any theoretical content attributed must respect basic presumptions of freedom and equality of every individual member under a system of social cooperation (Rawls, 2005: 18-19). This leads Rawls to posit that a political conception of the person attributes two moral powers to each individual, representing their status as free agents:

1. A capacity for a sense of justice, including a sense of how to comprehend and deploy conceptions of justice in pursuit of fair social cooperation
2. A capacity to formulate, revise, and pursue a conception of the good (ibid.)

My claim here is that my reconstruction of growth is analogous to Rawls' use of the moral powers. The ethical facet of our growth requires that we develop a form of democratic and social solidarity, which coheres with the first moral power: the capacity for a sense of justice. In addition, the epistemic facet of our growth requires we are able to formulate prized ends-in-view as a minimum requirement of our social cooperation, which would imply a capacity to formulate, revise, and pursue individual conceptions of the good as per Rawls' second moral power. Growth helps to adumbrate on the complementary relationship between individuality and social cooperation, in much the same way the Rawls' political conception of the person seeks to do so. Therefore, by leveraging this analogy, I am able to highlight the possibility that there are appropriate tools within the Deweyan framework to obviate Talisse's critique: the analogy implies growth would be compatible with anti-perfectionist thinking on the requisite minimum possession of the two moral powers for a system of social and political cooperation.

#### 1.4.6. How does the dual-aspect concept of growth answer the needs-must objection?

These examples do not suffice to show the needs-must objection is mistaken. It may still be the case that the social interest and natural interest will come apart during the course of a learner's growth, necessitating an imposition of an external social end to which the learner's development must conform. This objection can only be rebuked if we specify that growth itself is best construed as a normative concept, rather than the descriptive one Hofstadter sometimes takes it to be.

The normativity of growth comes from recognizing that any growth-talk has an "ecological" affinity with experience-talk (Heilbronn, 2018: 305). Since the epistemic aspect of growth involves the evaluation of educational experiences according to their efficiency as ends-in-views, growth relates to the quality of educative experiences as opposed to mis-educative experiences. If growth were not a normative concept, any experience, regardless of its quality, could be mistaken for an educative one (ibid: 306). Since growth is a normative concept, it points us toward the desirability of

various lines of growth we could pursue in given contexts of action. Hook states part of desirable patterns of growth is about encouraging the correct social, moral, and individual dispositions which *“excludes growths in prejudice, arbitrariness, hate, invidious prestige, power and status, and even that miscellany of knowledge which burdens a mind not in training for a quiz show.”* (Hook, 1959: 1014).

Here, the importance of educative experience and good ends-in-view goes a long way to defusing Hofstadter’s objection. It is not that we must set an external end which has to be recognized as an “adult end” imposed on the child’s growth. It is that we must be sure to fully make room for an idea of the social good with regards to the learner’s growth and agency. On the ethical side of growth, Jackson’s idea of a co-developmental form of recognition between individuals provides an ontological basis for questions of the social good (Jackson, 2018: 80). On the epistemic aspect, the dilemma is not so much a matter of setting “external”, “adult” or “collective” ends which demand conformity from the learner. The dilemma becomes constructing socially desirable contexts of action and ends-in-view which enables us to provide educative experience.

Importantly, the social good which defines a social end need not be an “externally” imposed concept which is transposed onto educational contexts. Educators, students, stakeholders and theorists can deliberate over the appropriate courses of actions to ensure the right lines of growth which feed into the democratic needs for citizenship and cultivation of intelligent political judgement; likewise, they can participate in educational experiments such as laboratory schooling or participate in wider community politics to “co-construct” their idea of the social good which composes the descriptive component of any ends-in-views (Hildreth, 2011: 44). The normative nature of growth requires inclusion and transformative elements toward inclusivity, reasonability, and equality, as implied by Hook’s non-exhaustive list, to feature in any ends-in-view which can produce educative experience as opposed to mis-educative experiences.

## Conclusion

To conclude this first chapter, I have presented an account of educational—or learner—agency that enables individuals to (i) experience growth in a Deweyan sense, and (ii) contribute, shape, and transform the ordinary social institutions that govern them and in turn shape their development as an agent capable of significant moral and epistemic development. Dewey’s educational theory supplements our understanding of how democratic life relies on a project of democratic education, by directing us to consider the continuity of educational experiences, that educational life occurs over a broad spectrum of institutions that contextualize educational

experience, and that certain political and social conditions are necessary features of the educative fabric that enables a democracy to wield its problem-solving powers.

However, I could not achieve this with textual support alone. I had to engage in significant reconstruction of Dewey's theory of growth to demonstrate its relevance and viability to the contemporary political philosophy of education. Essentially, I modified the ideal by specifying a dual-aspect interpretation. We grow ethically, because more responsive to the interests and needs of others, and epistemically, because agents learn how to formulate, revise, and execute 'ends-in-view' that are able to resolve problems on the local scale. Ends-in-view function as both means to achieve a goal, but also constitute and thus help instantiate the desired solution. In doing so, I have provided a basis that can help render Dewey's instructions on the importance of growth more determinate, and more helpful, to educators and students who otherwise may have reservations about how much, or how little, Deweyan democracy implies of their agency.

To signpost what awaits us in the coming chapters, it will be instructive to consider what the basic moves in this chapter imply for the wider argument in the thesis that we should devote more attention to the educative potential of non-school institutions. So, as one means of linking to the wider point, I will be exploring potential contexts of interest later on in the thesis. Chapter 3 discusses parenting. Chapter 4 discusses the workplace. Chapter 5 explores public cultural institutions. To an extent, these sites of education contain particular and local features which need to be disaggregated and analysed in conjunction with (i) the theory of growth and agency constructed in this chapter and (ii) more specific political philosophical material that clarifies the values typically thought to be at stake for a democratic society in these areas. Keeping these methodological steps in mind will allow me to focus the Deweyan lens on these areas of interest to good effect, while reciprocally contributing to ongoing debates on the democratic significance of these institutions. Ideally speaking, I want to demonstrate that each of these institutions plays an invaluable role in furthering our education, through enriching our agency and our ties to others, and thus merit greater inclusion in normative theory on how a democracy should go about educating its members.

More immediately, the epistemic features of our learner agency warrant more theoretical attention. If we are concerned about 'cramping' or 'distorting' effects of hierarchy and elitism on our cognitive lives, then we should seek to better understand how those processes occur and how we may seek to prevent them. To that end, I move onto drawing links with the Deweyan view articulated in this chapter with recent research into the phenomenon and causes of epistemic injustice in the second chapter. By situating Dewey within epistemic injustice research, we can

further probe the effects of social positionality, epistemic forms of vice and resistance, and contemplate how institutions can be subject to epistemic improvement in spite of the distortionary effects we commonly find.

## Chapter 2: How does the Deweyan help to identify and diagnose epistemic injustice?

The Deweyan conception of learner agency and growth draws attention to how social institutions can stunt, warp, and arrest the development of agency for their participants. We require a negative account of how ordinary social institutions can frustrate our growth. We also require an account capacious enough to cover the deleterious epistemic effects that social injustice, inequality, and unjust hierarchy exerts onto processes of democratic problem-solving and self-governance.

To achieve this, I am proposing to put Deweyan democratic theory into greater conversation with epistemic injustice. Primarily, this chapter is a chance to register core concepts from recent research into epistemic injustice into the thesis' conceptual vocabulary for application in later chapters. Of particular interest, epistemic injustice provides a way to understand the role of social positionality in effecting the production and transmission of knowledge, along with a normative framework which allows us to diagnose unjust harms, cramping, or warping of an agent's ability to develop their epistemic capacities. In turn, this generates exclusion from the problem-solving machinery of a democratic society, endangering the social and political conditions necessary to secure learner agency.

Firstly, I do reconstructive work to clarify the epistemological underpinnings of Deweyan democratic theory. Knowing is an interactive process where human agents intelligently interact within, hedge against, and grapple with their environmental conditions. As a result, cognitive activity makes problems more determinate, soluble, and amenable to further experimental inquiry. We inquire as a community, contextualizing our intellectual labour in the social and institutional dimensions of our knowledge production practices.

Underneath these propositions about the purposive context of cognitive labour, there is a theoretically rich account of social inquiry we can further unpack from Chapter 1's discussion of how democratic institutions contribute to learner agency. Democratic institutions facilitate the articulation of problematic situations into determinate problems and enable citizens to experimentally coordinate their epistemic practices in search of a resolution to pressing social problems. Social inequalities of rank and cultural distinction typically frustrate and erode the social basis that grounds collective problem-solving; hence the proper ends of social inquiry and social reform are often coextensive to a Deweyan democrat. With help from this democratic experimentalist framing, I articulate three norms of social inquiry which help to identify deleterious social influence on knowledge-production: fallibilism, publicity, and epistemic inclusion.



With means to identify epistemic dysfunction within institutions, I turn my attention to diagnostic matters. How does epistemic dysfunction work to detract from our epistemic agency? Here, a Deweyan experimentalist benefits by incorporating insights and concepts from epistemic injustice, along with the epistemology of ignorance. I examine Fricker's contributions in testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, along with Medina's work on normatively connecting these cases of epistemic injustice to matters of an individual's social and ethical attitudes, such as epistemic virtue and vice.

Along with borrowing from these areas of adjacent research, I hope to add explanatory and normative value by triangulating matters of agency within education, epistemic injustice, and active ignorance. In particular, I hope to provide an explanation of how the presence of epistemic injustice can distort the agential and problem-solving capacities of a democratic society. A further end in view is to relate this to how our learner agency can become cramped when social institutions are inattentive to growth. Normatively, I aim to show that by triangulating these three subjects, we can start to inquire into how various modes of ignorance relate to an institution's potential for democratic and epistemic improvement.

## 2.1. Expanding the Deweyan view of social inquiry

To open the chapter, I reconstruct a pragmatist-inspired conception of social inquiry. I outline a role for democratic institutions assuming special importance for enabling epistemic improvement. The virtue of a pragmatist framing is in adumbrating explicit connections between a democratic social form and the prospects for successful inquiry into the social world, through its understanding of how democratic culture fosters an experimentalist spirit among situated inquirers.

I begin with a brief interpretation of Dewey and related secondary commentary on the epistemological elements of a pragmatist conception of social inquiry. Following this, I follow Elizabeth Anderson in framing Deweyan-inspired views of social inquiry from an 'institutional' and democratic experimentalist epistemological vantagepoint. A Deweyan experimentalist perspective requires us to identify and dissolve distortionary inequalities within culture, making the success conditions for pro-democratic social reform and social inquiry intimately intertwined. This allows me to articulate three key epistemic norms institutions hold in view to identify the distortionary effects of social inequality upon the epistemic agency of participants.

### 2.1.1. Expanding on the role of social inquiry

Pragmatists make no categorical distinction concerning inquiry into the natural and social worlds. As Dewey helpfully explains, both natural and social investigations concern the 'existential conditions' of human life and the ability to human communities to meet needs (*LTOI*: 482). Human

beings are agents who measure their actions intelligently, in response to changes in their existential conditions. While Dewey grants it is true natural inquiry has advanced quicker than social inquiry, he diagnoses shortcomings in the ability of social institutions to connect matters of fact and general ideas, rather than argue from an epistemological dichotomy between natural and social objects (ibid: 505).

Since humans are actors rather than spectators, pragmatism offers a dynamic and instrumentalist account of social epistemology. To my reading, there are two general epistemological phases featured within a Deweyan interpretation that help to substantiate its focus on dynamism.

- (1) We have the utilization of a '**denotative-empirical**' method as coined by Thomas Alexander. In the beginning phases of inquiry, it is up to agents to denote and define the problem. If we recall Dewey's thoughts on cognitive experience as outlined in [§1.2.1](#), inquiry begins with a pervasive sense of unease that correlates with the problematic qualities of a situation. Agents then attempt to denote what is 'disclosed' to them within their experience without prejudicing inquiry or reifying experiences into unquestionable presuppositions (Alexander, 2004).

Through denotative analytic work, problematic situations become transformed into determinate problems. Problems do not come to us ready-made; it is already a feat of substantive intellectual work to carve out a problem-space for intellectual work to successfully proceed (*LTOI*). The successful statement of a problem has immense epistemological value since it provides a directive signal to inquirers regarding where to look and what their attention should be drawn toward. It also provides the intellectual material needed in the production of invaluable ends-in-view. As established in [§1.4.2](#), the statement of a problem should contribute toward suggesting where the solution will lie. A problematic situation is one where we sense a privation between human needs and our environment. A clear problem statement therefore functions to sharply delimit the scope of future inquiry with the end-in-view to 'unify' the situation between human need and environmental conditions.

This leads us to,

- (2) The **experimental** phase of inquiry. Now possessing a thoroughgoing denotative grasp of 'existential conditions', agents can formulate hypotheses and general explanatory ideas with the intention of experimental testing. Experimentation helps to check and verify whether functional relationships between general ideas and routine manipulations of the natural

environment obtain determinate consequences over space and time. This allows certain hypotheses to warrant more epistemic value than others (Hildebrand, 2005: 353).

An emphasis on experimental inquiry is the *raison d'être* of pragmatist epistemological thought. Hildreth (2009) represents the pragmatist position with excellent brevity when he argues *“the process of experimental inquiry provides a means to check and revise our initial diagnoses and to disclose taken-for-granted assumptions. Even more importantly, inquiry involves taking action. The consequences of actions allow us to see new aspects of problems and progressively wider avenues of inquiry.”* (Hildreth, 2009: 794-5). In other words, experimentation has a self-correcting tendency toward continual improvement. It encourages us to unsettle any rigid or fixed general ideas, which otherwise may take on an unthinking and subterranean quality in our cognition. Experimentation helps to prevent intellectual stultification, safeguarding the growth of our learner agency over time (ibid: 796). It also provides new pathways for future inquirers to specialize and improve on existing bodies of knowledge, enabling knowledge production to benefit from long-term social contribution (ibid: 781).

In sum, core epistemological concepts receive a highly conative framing. Beliefs become rules for coordinating future action, *“As we are within the world primarily as actors and only secondarily as thinkers, cognitive knowledge itself is seen as one special form of action”* (Martela, 2015: 540). This action-oriented view leads to a particular emphasis on the agential and institutional aspects of human knowledge production, and a series of substantive interpretations on the nature of proper social outcomes. In the following section, I probe the general interplay between agential and institutional aspects of knowing under this pragmatist framing of inquiry.

### 2.1.2 Deweyan experimentalism, institutions, and social inequality

Pragmatist social epistemology emphasizes the centrality of doing and acting with fellow inquirers. In doing so, it invites conceptual reflection on the prerequisite social and political conditions for the successful exercise of our epistemic agency (Hildreth, 2009: 789-90). It is true epistemic agency may be an opportunity concept, analytically speaking; however, its social epistemological value lies in executive action in resolution of social problems. Being able to cooperatively *exercise* one's capacities to produce, reconstruct, and improve extant bodies of knowledge is the *sine qua non* of coming to know about social world (*P&IP*: 365-6).

Here, we can use recent research into 'Deweyan experimentalism' as a general framing for the interlinkages between inquiry, political culture, and agency (see: Forstenzer, 2019; Zamora, 2017; Hildreth, 2009). An experimentalist position encourages us to view democratic culture as a highly effective medium for the distribution of power to inquire about the social world and therefore

to exercise one's epistemic agency. Democratic societies have the inherent potential to be intelligently organized, including the apportionment of social power, with an end-in-view to ameliorating the consequences of collectively recognized problems.

Maintaining the associative layer of democracy is argued to be uniquely demanding in both the intensity and extent of epistemic feedback required to mitigate the influence of undesirable power dynamics on an individual's epistemic development (Hildreth, 2009: 789-790). The associative layer of democracy is what I referred to in [§1.1](#) as 'democracy as a way of life' – the horizontal ethical and epistemic relationships between democratic citizens, carried out within the bounds of commonly recognized public institutions. A good example is found Zamora's suggestion that experimentalism demands an intentional restructuring of social life, as to promote the spread of conceptual innovation, willingness to engage in epistemic challenge, and the inculcation of desirable epistemic norms into participants (Zamora, 2017: 308). An experimentalist viewpoint should therefore aim to furnish the democratic theorist with an ample normative toolkit to identify deleterious social processes that frustrate the development and exercise of epistemic agency, since they are practically intertwined. This may, e.g., cover subject matter such as techniques of propaganda and purposeful obfuscation of social knowledge by powerful interest groups (Pottle, 2022).

Democratic experimentalist arguments draw especial attention to the social and organizational preconditions for effective problem-solving to occur. So far, we have discussed the dispositional prerequisites, centring upon individual agents, implied by a democratic interpretation of learner agency in [§1.2](#). It was argued basic social institutions had obligations to safeguard and expand an individual's desire to continue learning in forward-looking and social-political terms. Furthermore, it was suggested democratic institutions play an infrastructural or 'background' role in producing a well-educated democratic citizen body. In recognition of this, I shall take this opportunity to foreground social inquiry's relationship to democratic culture. This should further develop our understanding of epistemic agency: it will help to clearly substantiate the analytical links between one's growth as a learner in its broad sense and democratic institutions.

If we focus on the organizational dimension, Anderson provides us with an excellent 'institutional epistemological' account of democratic societies in her seminal article, *The Epistemology of Democracy* (2006). Anderson develops a promising variant of the experimentalist argument, emphasizing the role of democratic institutions in putting 'talk' and 'vote' feedback mechanisms to effective use. The ability of democratic social and political organization to weave together information pooled from constant public deliberation and periodic elections enable

governments to capitalize on the benefits of epistemic diversity (Anderson, 2006: 8). *“On Dewey’s model, votes and talk reinforce one another, the votes helping to insure that government officials take citizens’ verbal feedback seriously, the talk helping to define and articulate the message conveyed by votes”* (ibid: 14). Democratic states successfully piece together a diversity of standpoints and available situated knowledge to rigorously evaluate the consequences of policymaking processes on the public, both at the overall national level and the local level (ibid.).

Anderson cautions us against holding too stringent an idea of ‘institution’. It is true we have specifiable institutions such as the press and interest groups who provide invaluable work in the dissemination and circulation of knowledge around the public sphere. However, for pragmatic purposes, we should endorse a more capacious understanding to fully respect the central contributions of culture. Sometimes formal legal and political changes are insufficient to resolve blockages that cut deep into the beating heart of associative democracy: social inclusion and participation (ibid: 14). Since culture is the wellspring of habits, attitudes, and the patterning of social epistemic activity, social arrangements must be subject to the experimental method too. This means if social arrangements were to be arbitrarily bracketed from unfettered inquiry, owing to convention or forms of dogmatism, then individuals *“will not be prepared to take the untoward consequences of current habits, or policies following ancient principles, as evidence disconfirming their claim to practical success.”* (ibid.) As such, any action needed to resolve these problems will be severely confounded by the lack of openness toward feedback.

Dewey himself held a ambivalent attitude toward the institutional prospects for social inquiry. We are now able to interpret his misgivings about social inquiry as stemming from this wider point surrounding the constitutive relationship between favourable social conditions and good epistemic functioning. Dewey’s critique of conventional epistemology was often quasi-genealogical in nature. Dewey critiqued the segregation of knowledge into either the ‘practical’ or the purely ‘theoretical’ as parasitic on more primordial political matters of social class and hierarchy. In tracing epistemic dislocation back to Hellenistic culture around the time of Plato, Dewey can discern some permanent genealogical conditions for segregating modes of education, and therefore ways of knowing, into the contemporary categories of ‘liberal arts’ as opposed to ‘industrial technique’:

*“The separation of liberal education from professional and industrial education goes back to the time of the Greeks, and was formulated expressly on the basis of a division of classes into those who had to labor for a living and those who were relieved from this necessity. The conception that liberal education, adapted to men in the latter class, is intrinsically higher than the servile training given to the latter class reflected the fact that one class was free and*

*the other servile in its social status. The latter class labored not only for its own subsistence, but also for the means which enabled the superior class to live without personally engaging in occupations taking almost all the time and not of a nature to engage or reward intelligence.” (D&E: 259-260)*

In the above excerpt, we can exchange ‘education’ for ‘knowledge’ without losing Dewey’s thesis. The higher, theoretical forms of knowing are associated with the deliberations and activities of the higher social class. Even though the social and cultural reproduction of these activities necessarily depend on the labour of the lower social classes, prior social distinctions of rank and status structures the general cognition of leisured classes. Having no pressing reason to inquire about the social preconditions of knowledge due to the lack of epistemic challenge, these classes will tend toward spectatorship standpoints regarding theoretical matters. Of course, this does not negate the destabilizing effects of social inequality. When the political consequences of social rank and hierarchy became apparent, Dewey alleges *“The Greeks were induced to philosophize by the increasing failure of their traditional customs and beliefs to regulate life. Thus they were led to criticize custom adversely and to look for some other source of authority in life and belief. Since they desired a rational standard for the latter, and had identified with experience the customs which had proved unsatisfactory supports, they were led to a flat opposition of reason and experience.”* (ibid, 284-5).

Therefore, the Deweyan experimentalist will argue the epistemological consequences of social inequality can be so great that questions of social reform should occupy the highest level of philosophical concern and provide an explanation of why these concerns are bracketed from philosophical discussion. Nevertheless, if following the experimental method in social organization is essential to fostering a self-corrective tendency toward concurrent epistemic and social improvement, then severe shortfalls in the diversity of available knowledge or purposive sabotage of democratic epistemological processes may, *ceteris paribus*, initiate a vicious cycle of epistemic and social failure. Political action to obfuscate detection and articulation of any untoward consequences will sustain pre-existing institutional maladjustment to unjust circumstances. Hence, we find Deweyan experimentalists linking, *inter alia*, epistemic stagnation to the positive feedback hypothesized to hold between anthropogenic climate change and increasing economic inequality (Forstenzer, 2019: 9-10). To solve our social problems, the first order of the day is to clean our collective house: we must seek to foster a cultural situation amenable to the lives and knowledge of socially marginalized groups through the reform of core social and political institutions.

## 2.2. Three criteria to safeguard epistemic improvement

In this subsection, I provide a set of working criteria codified within three norms of social inquiry. These norms can be used to help identify malignant social influence on institutionalized epistemic practices. In the above discussion, three recurring ideas are either explicitly or implicitly relevant for further normative reflection. These are the norms of *fallibilism*, *publicity*, and *inclusion*. I cover each in the stated order, giving them an analytical unpacking with reference to the central ideal of growth.

### 2.2.1. Fallibilism

Open-ended inquiry is central to the pragmatist epistemological tradition. Everything needs to be 'on the table' and subject to potential revision, as the threat of substantive contradiction and mistake is always a live possibility (Tarrant & Thiele, 2016: 58-9). In other words, best practice is governed by a stringent norm of *fallibilism*.

Within a political democracy, the presumption of fallibility becomes a key procedural and organizational norm. Political parties, voting procedures, protests, and interest groups become means of generating feedback to evaluate policies in their framing as potential rules for collective action (Anderson, 2006: 14-5). If democratic machinery is to provide satisfactory resolutions to problems, it must open itself up to epistemic contest on how we can forecast the probability of a policy intervention's success and how we go about evaluating eventual policy outcomes.

To say everything needs to be on the table is not to call for 'anything goes'. Bracketing irrelevant information and making judicious use of presuppositions enable inquiry to proceed smoothly and not be caught in the tedium of continually re-establishing basic points contained within the public discussion. The point, rather, is to prevent certain substantive conceptions, ideas, or presuppositions becoming caught in the stream of social inertia and precluding contestation.

Implied by the above, the presumption of fallibility ranges over first-order knowledge of social facts and through to value judgments. Fact and value may be operationally distinguishable, but there is no strong epistemological gap affecting their function within social problem-solving (Putnam, 2004). An institutional commitment to open inquiry requires values and ends are interpreted as functional hypotheses, to be evaluated against the broadly felt consequences of acting upon them and revised when further information indicates a need for improvement (Festenstein, 2019: 228-9).

This may sound fairly abstract, but Dewey is keen to hammer home the social and political consequences which may be involved. General ideas of social organization can be carried along by

inertia and feed into political hierarchy, typically for the benefit of an elite social group and at the expense of others (*D&EA*: 220). For example, Dewey's key political philosophical battle was to dispute the relevance of nineteenth century liberal individualist doctrine. This doctrine asserted the self-sufficiency and ontological independence of the individual from her local community context. This, *inter alia*, led to a strong focus on negative liberty and a stringent set of prohibitions on state action, even when required to track the growing pains of political-economic modernization (*IO&N*).

Dewey's point here is not that doctrines of rugged individualism are incorrect when investigated on a-priori grounds. In fact, we find him attempting to preserve the anti-authoritarian impulses in the Victorian-era doctrine for pluralist ends elsewhere (*L&SA*). Dewey's more fine-grained observation is to note rugged individualism dominated American political thought, to the point of obscuring the practical judgment of state officials, politicians, and large sections of the public. The real consequence Dewey wishes to impart here is that when social ideas and values are bracketed from inquiry, this often contributes to frustrating necessary social reforms. In context of Dewey's argument with nineteenth century liberalism, he was writing amid World War 2 and the Great Depression (though his writings about liberalism long predated and proceeded this historical episode). Changes in the 'existential conditions' of social life were not followed up with a concurrent improvement of the individualist ideal, and thus the state foundered in its lack of epistemic capacity to respond to the staggering human misery constitutive of the economic crisis.

### 2.2.2. Publicity

Publicity is another crucial norm. The experimental method requires contribution to a public pool of knowledge, along with standardized means of communicating information between differently situated individuals. To Dewey's view, the publicity of information is constitutive part of knowing altogether. *"Record and communication are indispensable to knowledge. Knowledge cooped up in a private consciousness is a myth, and knowledge of social phenomena is peculiarly dependent upon dissemination, for only by distribution can such knowledge be either obtained or tested."* (*P&IP*: 345-6).

Publicity is a necessarily complex epistemic norm. Fallibility requires that ideas, values, and social facts be open to substantive challenge. A focus on publicity illuminates the organizational terrain wherein ideas, values, and social facts gain currency as viable epistemic resources. Knowledge must be, in some way, pooled together and disseminated for public exploitation. In political democracy, publicity is instantiated by the mass media, public broadcasting, and parts of the public education system including educational programming (Gutmann, 1999: 246). These



institutions act to disseminate knowledge and allow for a discernible public opinion to form over time.

Dewey himself displays scepticism surrounding the formation of public opinion through established institutions. He has a keen sense of the power dynamics inherent in the formation of cognitive attitudes. Modern political democracies must constantly check their legitimacy against the wishes of those who they govern, thus providing an incentive to misrepresent information for the protection of social hierarchy. *“The smoothest road to control of political conduct is by control of opinion. As long as interests of pecuniary profit are powerful, and a public has not located and identified itself, those who have this interest will have an unresisted motive for tampering with the springs of political action in all that affects them.”* (P&IP: 348-9). As far as the epistemic landscape is tilted toward those with political-economic power, Dewey cautions we should be wary of endorsing deflationary understandings of what constitutes ‘public opinion’ or political ‘common sense’. It is inevitable that public opinion becomes epistemically faulty absent the quality check of an experimental method within public communications. In its stead, powerful agents can leverage their public authority to improperly sanctify and therefore depoliticize key points of discussion (ibid: 320-2).

One interesting upshot is suggested by Pottle’s recent attempt to link Dewey’s critique of publicity with the resurgence of interest in propagandic technique: distortions in the public communication are primarily social, and not linguistic, in nature (Pottle, 2022: 1520). Methods of formulating and disseminating knowledge are constitutive formative conditions any ‘public opinion’, rather than merely chasing a set of fixed preferences or commonly held ideas. Hence, rather than simply requiring a standard of dissemination, a norm of publicity should serve more critical ends (Pottle, 2022: 1520; P&IP: 338-9).

### 2.2.3. Inclusion

At worst, an atmosphere of ‘mutual suspicion’ may form as a defensive response to communicative lacunae between different social groups. A functioning system of public communication can only do so much; it cannot patch up severe dislocations between social identities and groups through discursive means alone. We therefore retain ample motivation to leverage a norm of *inclusion* to reduce epistemic distance between differentiated groups.

As per Anderson’s interpretation of Dewey, a focus on epistemic inclusion implies a simultaneous comprehension of epistemic diversity. Democracies successfully harness the wide variety of standpoints and perspectives to piece together social experience, define problems, and act efficaciously upon their knowledge. Inclusion aims to draw heterogenous groups together, hence

facilitating the breakdown of social barriers. The proper end-in-view here is an attempted reconciliation in response to any social fault-lines distorting knowledge production, meaning democratic social inquiry aims at the sympathetic formulation of shared social and ethical interests (*P&IP*: 326-7).

Festenstein provides an instructive and incisive interpretation, arguing epistemic inclusion is crucial to Dewey's democratic ideal on both a constitutive and instrumental level. I argued in [§1.1.3](#) that each individual provides a positive epistemic resource to contribute to the self-development of others. Since each individual is embedded in a complex set of social roles, a focus on inclusion encourages a positive recognition of the value of social pluralism in generating an adequately capacious social cognition. Consequently, organizing social institutions on epistemological frames which deny or subvert inclusiveness undermines the value of democratic participation at a fundamental level of legitimacy (Festenstein, 2019: 231). In other words, epistemic inclusion is vital if a democracy is to make good on its promises of equal and fair representation of citizen voice, making it a core plank of democratic legitimacy in general terms (Anderson, 2006: 14).

The instrumental value of inclusion lies in the facilitation of the denotative and experimental stages of social inquiry. The social epistemic landscape should provide a public space for civil society groups to amalgamate different standpoints and allow for free discussion, with the aim of deciphering the situated knowledge often inextricably tied up with one's social positionality (*ibid*: 14-15). When deciphering is successful, inclusion enables agents to boost their comprehension and provide a fuller appreciation for the consequences of collective (in)action. An epistemically inclusive regime which encourages practices of testimony, adequate representation, and broad public consultation can better anticipate signals of caution when the negative impacts of public policymaking have deleterious impact on the livelihoods of different social groups (Fuerstein, 2021: 91). It enables, as Rondel puts it, use to hear the 'cries of the wounded' if we get it wrong when acting upon on a social ideal (Rondel, 2018: 135).

Inclusion should apply both to agents and epistemic resources. Agents bring their perspectives and their ways of inquiring into the social world to the table. Quite often, exclusionary practices will be one step removed from the formal prohibition of an individual or group from participation. Instead, we should expect various forms of prejudice and power politics to aim at the hasty or perfunctory discrediting of epistemically relevant habits, methods, or styles in an effort to preserve rigidly fixed ideas.

### 2.3. Putting Deweyan experimentalism into conversation with epistemic injustice

The three criteria aim to fix our attention to the right places. We can begin to identify epistemically unjust practices within institutions negatively, noting how social and political action evince a disregard for these three norms. However, these criteria apply primarily to govern the meso-level features of social inquiry. They do not, in themselves, provide a convincing *diagnostic* account of how unjust epistemic processes work. To stay true to the central insight of Deweyan pragmatism, any definition of social epistemic problems should be concurrent with the development of a convincing aetiology to explain epistemic failure.

In this section, I argue Deweyan pragmatism and recent research on epistemic injustice make for excellent bedfellows in this regard. In some ways, this should be unsurprising. Pottle comments that the Deweyan conception of social inquiry is readily understandable as a forerunner of contemporary epistemic injustice paradigms, seemingly anticipating the latter through a focus on matters of organization shaping understandings of social knowledge and epistemic authority (Pottle, 2022: 1521). Indeed, we find Deweyan-inspired scholarship through the work of major contributors such as José Medina, Elizabeth Anderson, and Shannon Sullivan. In recognition of the shared interests in understanding epistemic injustice's impact on democratic organization, my approach is constructive in nature.

I aim to situate the Deweyan view of growth and social inquiry within recent research, borrowing core distinctions and modes of categorization. This will involve highlighting areas of significant similarity between extant work and my own account, however, the value-added from this exercise is to gain the theoretical tools needed to describe and disaggregate epistemically faulty organization with finer granularity. The thesis benefits from this conversation by becoming more determinate and specifiable: vocabularies about social inquiry, democratic institutions, and growth receive an accompanying negative account to diagnose epistemically dysfunctional practice.

#### 2.3.1. How is epistemic agency understood in epistemic injustice research?

Epistemic injustice refers to a body of research in social epistemology in response to concerns raised by Fricker's landmark and titular book, *Epistemic Injustice: The Power and Ethics of Knowing* (2007). The concept furnishes the researcher with an analytical lens to identify and diagnose harms we suffer in our capacity as knowers (Fricker, 2007). Epistemic harms operate through doxastic interaction between two or more people, most obviously exemplified through the practice of testimony: to circulate knowledge and come to know of some or other fact, we need to engage in the reporting and exchange of information through testimony (ibid: 18). If testimony goes wrong due to the unfair exclusion of speakers or hearers due to prejudice or irrelevant reasons

centring or social identity, we may have a case of epistemic injustice on our hands (Kidd, Medina, & Pohlhaus Jr., 2013: 3).

Epistemic injustice and the Deweyan approach both narrow their scope to matters of epistemic agency. The identification of epistemic injustice should be tracking any harms done to the epistemic capacities of individual agents in both schemes. While I have discussed some potential harms to epistemic agency, Pohlhaus Jr. provides a tripartite typology to organize the modes of epistemically unjust harm.

- (1) Epistemic injustice can harm individuals in their role as knowers, such as when testimony is discarded for racist reasons.
- (2) Epistemic injustice can cause *epistemic dysfunction* by derailing or malforming social inquiry.
- (3) Epistemic injustice can marginalize bodies of knowledge through institutional practice, with Pohlhaus Jr. giving an excellent example of school curricula being structured to maintain silence on certain hot-button issues (Pohlhaus Jr., 2013: 13).

The tripartite scheme helps to locate epistemic harm in relationship to ordinary social practices. In concurrence with the Deweyan view, epistemic injustice theorists argue we always exercise our epistemic agency in concert with others to achieve socially valuable ends (Fricker, 2007: 60-61). The three levels of harm identified are to individual agents, to the patterns of interaction between agents, and the institutional mechanisms which underwrite the smooth functioning of epistemic practices over time and space.

As mentioned above, for epistemic harm to become epistemic injustices, any such harm must exhibit prejudicial or stereotypical representations of inquirers which violate the ethical responsibilities we hold in our conduct toward interlocutors (ibid: 41). This helps to exclude cases of epistemic bad luck where harm occurs with no significant salience to matters of liability or misconduct. By focusing on prejudicial thinking and stereotype threat, Fricker is able to articulate the parent cases of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

### 2.3.2. The parent cases of epistemic injustice

#### 2.3.2.1. *What are testimonial injustices?*

Testimony is a core epistemic practice. When I need to communicate knowledge or receive information, I will need to engage in testimony with another person regarding what we know. Testimony is so integral to the social epistemic landscape, affecting both the transmission and production of knowledge, that Fricker refers to testimonial injustice as the 'parent case' of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007: 60-61). Testimonial injustice occurs when an individual is excluded from

giving, receiving, or evaluating testimony on irrelevant grounds, typically because of the influence of prejudice and stereotype threat. I.e., reasons whose force relies on tropes embedded within sexist, racist, and classist understandings of the social world.

For instance, Diane Reay introduces a working-class migrant mother called Josie in her ethnographic study, *Miseducation: Inequality, Education, and the Working Classes* (2017). Josie's sons often struggle in school, and she regularly fails to solicit help from teachers when she seeks advice. Teachers rarely take Josie seriously, despite her requests being reasonable: she requests more homework and extra tuition to cope with her son's learning difficulties. Instead, teachers often understand Josie's requests as being pushy and aggressive, causing friction between them (Reay, 2017: 72). As Reay goes on to explain, the most immediate problems are habits and mannerisms. Josie's working-class background disposes her to react in certain ways when confronted with a problem. This is likewise true of the teachers, who are more likely to be university educated. This leads to communicative friction, with the requests left unresolved by the time of Reay's publication.

Fricker's idea of testimonial injustice can help to analyse the epistemic significance of cases like Josie's according to social position. What is pertinent about Josie's example is the assignation of a *credibility deficit* as a result of teachers being unable to properly bracket her mannerisms in listening to her requests. A credibility deficit occurs when speakers are accorded less credibility than warranted by a situation (Fricker, 2007: 24-5). To constitute a testimonial injustice, the attribution of a credibility deficit needs to either disregard legitimate markers of credibility or revolve around irrelevant features of the speaker's social identity.

Hence, in Josie's case we can distinguish two irrelevant markers for a credibility deficit. Firstly, Josie's identity as working-class. Secondly, her identity as a woman. These two identity markers will often interact to produce a stereotype of the aggressive and irrational working-class mother, whose presence often elicits humour or a move to stall the conversation rather than engage seriously. After all, Josie's position as the mother of the family should give her some level of credibility when she evaluates her sons' engagement and motivation toward schoolwork, as she is in close proximity and familiarity to make these judgments. However, teachers cognize Josie's behaviour through stereotypical frames before they are willing to engage with Josie's request, hence they subject her to testimonial injustice.

An inverse form of testimonial injustice may occur when a credibility excess is wrongly attributed to a speaker. This would mean a speaker is granted more credibility for their testimony than warranted by the situation at hand. Medina argues credibility excesses constitute an injustice

when (a) their assignation rides on the irrelevant social attributes of a speaker and (b) the testimony given perpetuates harm to a victim and the speaker concurrently (Medina, 2012: 56).

Stipulation (b) is often disputed. Fricker observes it is unclear to see how someone is perceptibly harmed by being apportioned more credibility than they would otherwise get (Fricker, 2007: 21-22). Medina offers a contextualist argument in response, pointing to the location of 'credibility economy' within broader trends of social injustice. Under conditions of social inequality, we should expect the assignation of credibility deficits and excesses to be couched in zero-sum testimonial exchanges. That is to say, the assignation of a credibility excess for one speaker often comes at the expense of a credibility deficit for another speaker (Medina, 2012: 67).

We should prefer Medina's case, as it more acutely explains the contribution of social inequality. Both Medina and Fricker make use of an example of the testimony of Mayella Ewell from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Mayella is the centre of rape accusations against a black man, Tom Robinson. The allegations are false, though the jury convicts Robinson, due to Mayella's testimony against him. In the social context of the Antebellum South, the value of testimony tracks racial hierarchy: the word of a white woman against a black man generates a credibility excess for the woman, and a deficit for the man (ibid.). Mayella can therefore escape her own contradictions and visible confusion when giving testimony, while Tom suffers from testifying the act was consensual. It is simply unthinkable to the white section of the audience that a white woman would consent to relations with a black man under the South's system of racist norms.

We know that Tom is eventually harmed by the credibility deficit. Medina presents a compelling case that Mayella is also harmed. Mayella suffers from harm because she has to smother her testimony to protect her father's standing within the community, since he is the true perpetrator of sexual assault against her (Medina, 2012: 65). Since the cultural context is highly patriarchal, Mayella is likely to face a reprisal if she testifies accurately. By laying blame at the feet of Robinson, she can protect her father by exploiting the racist hierarchy. However, testimonial smothering perpetuates harm, since the fact of Robinson's conviction (or not) ultimately will not stop her father from further abuse.

#### *2.3.2.2 What are hermeneutical injustices?*

In contrast to testimony's focus on agential interaction, Fricker utilizes the concept of hermeneutical injustice to evaluate the intelligibility of core epistemic resources such as concepts and knowledge. To exercise our epistemic agency, we must have the tools necessary for interpreting events in a way that makes good sense of ourselves and the world around us (Fricker, 2007: 154). In cases where we lack the conceptual tools to do so, there is a risk that a hermeneutical lacuna will

develop between ourselves and the resource whose import we fail to understand. Under conditions of social injustice, the social experience of marginalized individuals is likely to be construed as unintelligible and therefore obscure the transmission of knowledge required by social inquiry. In other words, we would have a case of hermeneutical injustice on our hands.

Hermeneutical injustice can affect both knowledge on the object level and at the level of the agent's social cognition. If an individual is unable to interpret and understand how to use core social concepts, it is likely their comprehension and ability to discern core features of the world will be significantly diminished. Without core concepts and heuristics to make the world intelligible, triangulation between an agent, what she knows, and the circumstances she inhabits becomes fraught with confusion.

To take an example, activists representing the LGBTQIA+ community often call attention to the presence of significant hermeneutical injustices within the UK education system. Homophobic and transphobic bullying is extremely commonplace in British schools, targeting both students and members of staff (Todd, 2016). While the most obvious manifestation of homophobic bullying involves physical and emotional violence, it also carries a set of distinctly epistemic harms. Individuals subjected to bullying are discouraged from exploring their formative identity at crucial life stages, thus rendering parts of their social experience unintelligible (Fricker & Jenkins, 2017: 273-4).

Schools try to correct this hermeneutical lacuna, though it largely persists. It is still entirely possible for children to complete formal schooling without having an adequate grasp on identities such as 'gay man', 'lesbian', 'bisexual', or 'transgender man/woman'. These identities help to hermeneutically stabilize an individual's experience into readily communicable self-knowledge. It also enables the formation of community ties to spread between fellow LGBTQIA+ people. Being able to correctly attribute these concepts to oneself is often the difference between acceptance and misery.

One key effect of hermeneutical injustice is an increase in the likelihood of communicative frustration between agents. Imagine a student needs to consult her parents and teachers on homophobic bullying and why exactly she is being targeted. If she lacks an adequate basis for self-knowledge and an appropriate conceptual vocabulary, it will be much harder to accurately explain the motivations for the bullying, and hence much harder for guardians to safeguard her (ibid: 268-9). Communicative frustration becomes especially wounding when it erodes an individual's epistemic self-confidence, discouraging and disheartening her from engaging in self-reflection and action to better situate her claims (Fricker, 2007: 170). In a worst-case scenario, an unclear or confused

explanation of bullying patterns may cause teachers and parents to disengage from the matter at hand, leaving the victim vulnerable to further hermeneutical lacunae.

Like our discussion of testimonial injustice and structural racism, hermeneutical injustice also aims to probe social structures involved in disseminating knowledge. Hermeneutical injustices carry definite consequences for individual agents, though the mechanics should focus on explaining bad practice in pooling and publicly coding epistemic resources into a common stock (Fricker, 2007: 162). For members of socially dominant groups, drawing from and contributing to the overall pool of social knowledge is largely taken for granted. Marginalized groups have more difficult prospects in accessing both sides of the ledger. Political and social institutions can be used to manufacture and reinforce a culture of silence or exclusion against targeted groups, such as Poland's recent turn toward LGBT-free zones. Often, these patterns will be parasitic on long-term fault lines of historical injustice. Consequently, marginal communities will find it hard to draw upon social knowledge for their own purposes. They will also find it difficult to contribute concepts and knowledge to the common stock, resulting in decreases of their overall representation within the social cognition of differently situated groups. This is what separates hermeneutical injustice, based on historical axes of oppression, from cases of epistemic bad luck *"to the extent that gaps in the hermeneutical resource are due to the systematic, socially coerced marginalization of members of nondominant groups from positions of symbolic production."* (Zamora, 2017: 301-2).

### 2.3.3. How does situated knowledge factor into epistemic injustices?

In [§2.2](#), I briefly gestured to the situated nature of knowledge under a democratic experimentalist framing. I declined to unpack the idea at that point of the argument, though it is crucial in grasping how the structural valences of epistemic injustice interact with other means of social exclusion (Medina, 2012). Further exposition will help to fully evaluate the significance of situated knowledge for the prospects of social inquiry.

Pragmatists and theorists working within epistemic injustice both share a core epistemological assumption regarding the context of knowledge: there will be a correlative relationship between epistemic practices and non-epistemic social practices, such as those involved in politics (Alcoff, 2007: 46). Like Dewey's genealogical story in [§2.1.2](#), how individuals interact within non-epistemic social practices will prime the framing, bounding, and production of any knowledge aiming to inform participants of the core workings and features of their shared activity. When contextualized within a social backdrop rich with social exclusion, politically marginalized communities possess *"a general marginality from social power and a lack of alienation from*



*everyday materiality*” which represents itself both in the social relationships between them and other social groups, and also in their knowledge (ibid.).

Clarissa Hayward provides us with a good example within educational contexts. In her *De-Facing Power* (2000), Hayward sketches a comparative ethnographic study of two schools with divergent social-economic and racial circumstances. One school is situated in an affluent, predominantly white area; the other is situated in predominantly black, socioeconomically deprived area. The difference in structural position is crucial for Hayward’s central argument: the real demands of the local environment upon educators, such as crime and student safety concerns, heavily constrain the cognitive response of the teachers in the deprived school (Hayward, 2000: 52-3). Adverse structural circumstances outside the school force the hand of educators into preferring disciplinarian forms of regimentation inside the classroom walls. Ergo, the epistemic practices inside the school correlate to the structural situation of the school itself and shape how knowledge is selected for teaching.

As implied by Hayward’s study, situatedness very rarely implies epistemic practices are contextualized within harmonious social relationships. The deprived school often must manage the various exogenous pressures on student wellbeing and safety flowing from the deprived local environment, resulting in a social epistemic environment where teacher authority and immediate obedience is highly valued and imposed against a backdrop of a student body with a high proportion of behavioural and compliance issues (ibid: 55). Tensions often emerge from ways marginal groups must navigate and track the political and social intention of more dominant groups, implying divergent bodies of knowledge will form.

This process is made possible by what Medina refers to as epistemic friction between groups. Epistemic friction feeds into situational differences between knowledge production practices, along with varying social and political content (Medina, 2012: 50). This is particularly potent in the case of race. The work of Charles Mills provides an excellent example of how epistemic friction relates to differences in social positionality. As Mills explains, it is often the case that white subjects develop, transmit, and reinforce epistemologies that are codified according to a racially constituted view of the social world. These epistemologies of race allow for the codification of ignorance, about the workings of the social and natural world, into a set of fixed norms and assumptions. When white agents reflect and deliberate on their knowledge, said set of assumptions and epistemic norms will tend to obscure how the actions of other white agents, their major social authorities, and their normative mandates for institutional action are predicated on cognitive attitudes that track the division of the world into racial categories (Mills, 2007: 15). One

consequence is white agents and institutions are especially liable to produce and promote falsities about social mechanisms and the social-political history of racial politics. When these falsities or conceits are challenged, then we can expect white ignorance to display considerable fragility: epistemic friction between white agents who promote racialized frameworks of the world's constitution, and the counterclaims of black inquirers will tend to encourage a form of intellectual defensiveness on the part of white subjects. To these agents, fragility protects a colour-blind ideological assumption: the world has 'gotten over' race, despite the racialized categorization and taxonomy of the world's population according to racist epistemologies (ibid: 28-9). Meanwhile, the black inquirer must figure out ways to navigate white society's negative appraisal of their epistemic agency, and any deleterious effects on the cognition of majority group. Nonetheless, a greater proximity to this racially coded epistemology allows black agents to potentially take advantage of the 'invisible' status they occupy in a white imaginary, conferring some strategic benefits (Medina, 2012: 190).

#### 2.3.4. Epistemic virtue and epistemic vice

Along with greater proximity, Medina goes on to argue marginalized communities are more likely to see the spread of *epistemic virtue* among their members. This confers further epistemic advantage. To overcome commonly felt problems, intellectual character traits such as humility, open-mindedness, and curiosity will be required of participants within inquiry (ibid: 23). Circumventing structurally unjust situations requires marginalized individuals to cooperate in good faith and collectively organize in viable epistemic institutions, encouraging an egalitarian quality of epistemic practice. Situated epistemic institutions, such as black feminist activist organizations, help to build up knowledge of racist processes while encouraging the norms of fallibility, publicity, and inclusion when investigating structural racism (Collins, 2017: 116-7).

On the other hand, we should expect socially dominant groups to be especially susceptible to epistemic vices that contribute to bad epistemic practice. Medina argues epistemic vices are especially deleterious for social inquiry because they affect individual cognition in a pervasive and holistic manner. Epistemic vices "*are composed of attitudinal structures that permeate one's entire cognitive life: they involve attitudes toward oneself and others in testimonial exchanges, attitudes toward the evidence available and one's assessment of it, and so on.*" (Medina, 2012: 31). A mirror image of virtue, a putative list of vices would include arrogance, close-mindedness, and a form of intellectual apathy toward the natural and social world. In Mill's arguments, close-mindedness forms in response to evidence demonstrating the salience of race in social organization as a form of white ignorance. Both Mills and Medina argue subjects afflicted by white ignorance often fail to seriously

engage with black interlocutors, resulting in the development of a colourblind ideology that blocks the resolution of social dislocation (Mills, 2007; Medina, 2013).

#### 2.4. How does the Deweyan view help to diagnose epistemic injustice?

Medina and Mills' interventions demonstrate the explanatory value of having an *epistemology of ignorance* for substantiating theories of epistemic injustice. In this next section, I elaborate on Medina's conception of active ignorance and relate it to matters of education. While Medina's account is useful in highlighting how active forms of ignorance affect both object-level and meta-level cognitive attitudes, it does not cover the influence of second-order ignorance in sustaining substantively ignorant epistemic practices. In turn, I argue the Deweyan conception of social inquiry and epistemic agency developed through [§1.2-4](#) and [§2.1](#) proves valuable in providing a pragmatically grounded account of second-order ignorance in institutional settings. It does so by extending a second-order analysis of ignorance to an institutional plane, rather than staying at the level of agents. I shall take a case study in vocational education to motivate my claims about substantive ignorance, and then close by arguing for the Deweyan view's relevance and explanatory power in purview of the example.

##### 2.4.1. Medina's active ignorance as applied to education

Under my interpretation, the core normative purpose of Medina's research into epistemic injustice is to highlight epistemic vice, to combat the incidence and potency of active ignorance. Active ignorance is defined by Medina as *"an ignorance that occurs with the active participation of the subject and with a battery of defense mechanisms, [it is] an ignorance that is not easy to undo and correct, for this requires retraining – the reconfiguration of epistemic attitudes and habits – as well as social change"* (Medina, 2012: 39). The qualification of 'active' denotes the tendency for ignorant subjects to resist attempted correction, in large part thanks to the efficacy of the defence mechanisms Medina gestures toward. Any assignation of epistemic vice, under this scheme, functions to demarcate the most visible and operative components of an actively ignorant subject. If active ignorance is left unchecked in social practices, then it will enter a mutually sustaining relationship with an epistemically unjust social process. E.g., the irrelevant marginalization of testimony and unjustified exclusions of alternative bodies of knowledge enables actively ignorant subjects to avoid having to face epistemic tension (ibid: 23-4).

Since this form of ignorance is 'recalcitrant, it often provides motivation for subjects to double-down on blind spots in their social cognition. Blind spots typically concern subjects that revolve around socio-political division, hence obscuring the actual consequences of political action. In the example of race, we can return to Mills' and Medina's focus on white ignorance. Active

ignorance often showcases its ability to negatively affect the openness and responsiveness of white agents toward bodies of knowledge and black social experience of racial oppression (Mills, 2007: 32-33). This does not necessarily need to culminate in explicit forms of racial animus. It may simply culminate as a post-racial narrative surrounding colourblind societies, i.e., the idea society has moved past race as a salient political divide. Racialization is as salient as ever in explaining unjust social structures. As such, active ignorance can be attributed to agents who do not sufficiently engage in hermeneutical interaction or testimonial exchanges with black communities, leading to perfunctory rejection of valuable social critique (ibid: 28-9). Ignorance to black epistemologies may encourage further obfuscation of the social and political landscape, up to the level of rejection of being labelled as 'white', along with the corresponding ignorance toward their relatively advantageous position in structures of racial domination.

Active ignorance qua white ignorance can be traced to UK educational institutions. Bain (2018) provides a historical critique of how British institutions, including education, have resisted epistemic challenge from post-colonial and minority communities. The colonial past is often obscured by various lock-and-key procedures within public administration, including the strict archival and destruction of incriminating historical evidence (Bain, 2018: 15). Bain's work extends this culture of administrative silence to the politics of higher education, through the curriculum. She notes students have begun to protest canonical choices of reading, which is alleged to skew in favour of some intellectual schools and contribute to the invisibility of alternatives (ibid.). Bain notes white ignorance is so resistant to correct in these cases that it may cause activists to strategically smother their claims away from nominating the problem as 'white ignorance', as to avoid any cultural and political backlash (ibid.).

Battles over the composition and selection of the curriculum hold immense importance for how schools navigate diversity and social pluralism. On the one hand, the choice of curricula needs to satisfy key norms of epistemic and social inclusion for education to promote social justice. On the other, there is a practical need to maintain a form of momentum in one's educational growth, since pedagogy is often a core method of positively and constructively exercising discursive forms of power in pursuit of a competent citizen body (Hayward, 2012). Given these two stakes, it remains imperative active ignorance be tackled both at the technical level of curriculum design and the anticipated ethical influence the curriculum is expected to have upon learners.

To summarize, active ignorance acts as a key bridge between the causal conditions and harmful effects of epistemic injustice within educational practice. The chilling effect experienced by one group of agents may deter them from explicating problems articulated under their own

epistemological frameworks, depriving would-be participants within social inquiry from valuable aetiological information in how epistemic agency is harmed.

#### 2.4.2. What is the best way, educationally speaking, to resist ignorance?

Ben Kotzee (2013) provides a solid example of framing together issues of educational injustice on the one hand and epistemic injustice on the other. I will first cover Kotzee's application of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, then turn to his philosophical motivation.

Kotzee's core concern is similar to this chapter's. The harms of social inequality within the educational process must be partially treated with an epistemic approach. Speaking of racially, gendered, and class-disadvantaged students, Kotzee argues "*It is not just that members of these groups are materially disadvantaged; they are not believed and are not accorded a voice.*" (Kotzee, 2013: 342). The presence of epistemic injustice in schools often proves detrimental to the social epistemic division of labour by (a) questioning the credibility markers of disadvantaged students unjustly and thus wrongly devaluing their voices, and (b) discouraging or outright excluding students from participating in decision-making contexts as future adults (ibid: 344).

Kotzee understands testimonial injustice in line with Fricker's formulation. The harm of testimonial injustice in education is captured by the social consequences in how disadvantaged subjects become disempowered by hearers for reasons that do not track credibility markers. The primary harm suffered is having not being believed. This opens up "*the possibility that the number of potential contributors to the cognitive division of labor will go unrecognized (as in when women, or black people, or poor people are systematically excluded from science, politics, the media, or public service).*" (ibid.). Secondary harms can then occur in the realm of economics and politics, as lacking credibility will often make an individual subject to other material harms. This, as a whole, diminishes the epistemic quality of public life, as a lack of credibility is likely to breed distrust and a jealous stance to what one does or does not know.

The harm for hermeneutical injustice works in much the same way, though it centres on the possession of a common conceptual language to articulate and forward one's social interests. Disadvantaged students are more likely to be barred from any questions of school governance, and Kotzee once again hypothesizes the long-term consequences are likely to be a diminishing of any bonds of social trust that are necessary to conceive a society that runs along a cooperative division of knowing and transferring knowledge (ibid.).

Of course, educational injustice is an umbrella term which covers both the primary harms of one's voice being diminished and what lack of opportunities or outcomes (e.g., lack of opportunity

for desirable jobs) fall out of this unjust primary epistemic state. Kotzee must then specify how the distribution of epistemic injustice can be comprehended theoretically. He does this by pointing to the distinction between epistemic justice and epistemic injustice, each of which corresponds with a distributional principle for *“who should be educated to know what”* (ibid: 345). Epistemic justice is satisfied when one is informed of what one has a right to know (ibid.). By contrast, epistemic injustice can pertain to the distribution of knowledge when someone is (1) put in a position where one cannot know about what one has a right to know and (2) being put into a position where one is wrong about something they should be correct on. *“These correspond, roughly, to being kept ignorant and to being lied to.”* (ibid.).

Kotzee starts to appraise ignorance’s role when he talks about the widespread condition of being kept ignorant. Being kept ignorant could conceivably contravene both conditions (1) and (2) above, since one is often simultaneously kept ignorant by being allowed to hold a falsehood and put into a bad position for spotting any mistakes. Importantly, marginalized students being kept ignorant captures a distributional epistemic injustice *“in terms of the poor being “kept in the dark” by not being equipped with even the basic education that an adult needs to work and to function productively as a citizen. Certainly, the most serious problems — the problems that the worst off in society face — are of this sort, especially when this lack of education goes hand in hand with another problem, that of epistemic injustice.”* (ibid: 346.) Kotzee sees a significant role for epistemic injustice concepts in helping to articulate, identify, and propose some remedies to educational policy which keeps students in the dark and unable to articulate their concerns into a common conceptual vocabulary to their better off peers.

In addition, Kotzee wants to target the epistemic vices that correlate with holding a more advantaged educational position. For example, he is keen to tackle a culture of snobbery at elite school institutions such as elite secondaries, Oxbridge, or the Ivy League as also flagged up by the thesis [§1.4.4](#) (ibid: 347). We can identify snobbery with corresponding epistemic vices such as close-mindedness and arrogance. One is being a snob when one displays a close-mindedness to a peer’s contributions based on crucial social characteristics. This typically leads to arrogance, or the condition of being unable to reorient one’s thinking. To tackle hermeneutical injustice which encourages these corresponding vices, we need to utilize *“the best critical political education that we can muster.”* for disadvantaged students, and an inculcation of epistemic virtues of cooperation and humility for more advantaged students (ibid.).

#### *2.4.2.1 Some limitations*

Kotzee's argument can be criticized in two primary ways. Firstly, I want to draw attention to the conceptual limitations imposed by his first-order framing of education as a form of inculcating knowledge. Secondly, I want to draw attention to how this prior bounding of 'education' pulls against a full comprehension of the scale and depth of structural epistemic injustice in the UK education system—school-level solutions to epistemic injustice will likely not remedy the problems. I take a case study with vocational education to demonstrate the need for a deepening and widening of our theoretical vocabulary.

Kotzee's argument centres around placing the epistemic aspect of agency as primary to education. Education may have both epistemic and non-epistemic benefits for the individual, but the main purpose is to inculcate knowledge and skills (ibid: 345). Furthermore, education is cast at a first-order level. Topics like metacognition or reflections on how education can progress a learner's overall direction of growth are not part of Kotzee's suggestions for how we see education functioning within the argument.

This is necessary to motivate Kotzee's thesis, since he is querying the theoretical import of non-epistemic aspects of education's value to us. In particular, Kotzee wants to demonstrate that when we conceive of education as primarily epistemic—dealing with first-order knowledge—concerns about education become a matter of ensuring that students are given the knowledge and skills necessary for epistemic efficiency. On this point, he takes aim at Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift's conception of educational equality which gives greater room to the desirable personal consequences (e.g., better and more interesting jobs) that follow from having better educational qualifications (Brighouse & Swift, 2006). To Brighouse and Swift's non-epistemic consequentialism, education can be conceived as a 'positional good' that regulates access to scarce yet desirable personal goods, such as careers or general life-chances. As a positional good, education regulates the rank order of candidates who wish to receive a scarce good. Our position in the queue is an archetypal example; in the field of education, the argument is that educational credentials help to determine one's relative chances in scarce labour market goods.

One core implication of conceiving education in Brighouse and Swift's non-epistemic, positional way is that levelling down may be permissible. That is, it may be permissible to limit the opportunities of more advantaged students to widen the range of opportunities held by disadvantaged students (ibid: 472). Kotzee wishes, above all, to deny this implication. Education is not had, primarily, to boost anyone's chances in the labour market or the credential race for desirable professional jobs, or admissions for good university places. To Kotzee, education is about

knowledge and how we transfer knowledge from one person to another. When we cast education in this way, we can see that suggestions of levelling down will (a) risk lowering the skill and knowledge ceiling of the best students, and thus (b) inhibit the overall epistemic functioning of crucial national knowledge institutions like scientific research or the arts sector.

However, as I have demonstrated in [§1.2](#), education is not simply about inculcating knowledge nor—to Kotzee’s credit—is it solely about access to positional goods such as exam grades or degrees. Education is a process of preparing a learner for future educational experiences without imposing ends alien to her motivations. Democratic social institutions contribute by furthering our interests in growth and participating in, shaping, and transforming the institutions that shape our lives. Under this alternative interpretation, one can wonder whether Kotzee’s case says too little about the problems epistemic injustice are likely to have on our learner agency.

True, this alternative broad conception of education would not provide an unequivocal case to endorse Brighouse and Swift’s construal of educational equality. That is not what I am pointing out. As Kotzee suggests, they do need at least *some* way to understand the problems of unequal educational outcomes in epistemic terms. I agree with Kotzee that epistemic injustice provides a theoretical vocabulary to do just that.

#### 2.4.3. The institutional and structural basis of epistemic injustice in UK education

Rather, I have doubts whether Kotzee’s usage of epistemic injustice is robust enough to give us an accurate diagnosis of the problem. Like Brighouse and Swift mean to point out – educational concerns intersect with wider structural ones, e.g., the distribution of outcomes and life chances when disaggregated by educational attainment. This means that education inevitably retains crucial non-epistemic goods which parents, teachers, and students pursue. And these non-epistemic features are not incidental to how education is practiced or what education ‘really is’; they are long-term structural features of how education works in the UK.

The structural nature of the problem is easy to trace with a few examples. The British education system suffers from class-based determination of outcomes like desirable careers, extending to the distribution of positional goods like degrees and credentials. Green and Kynaston (2019) point to the existence of education-to-vocation pipelines that disaggregate empirically along social class fault-lines. Those who attended fee-paying schools account for the current plurality of journalists, legal professionals, and MPs (Green & Kynaston, 2019: 1-5). And when we break down who attends fee-paying secondaries, we find that it is overwhelmingly tilted toward the better-off (ibid: 6-7).



This is structural: it is a permanent feature of the British education system that patterns outcomes over the span of generations. Since the inception of the Education Act 1944, class-based determination of outcomes, including attainment, has been a defining factor of the British educational structure. We no longer have a wide adoption of the 11+ examination which filtered school applications by standardized ability, though we retain significant hallmarks from a system that largely caters to class-based expectations of student development (Reay, 2017). Subsequent rounds of social reform, according to one sociologist of education, have merely served to frame the problem in a new light of talent and native ability, rather than attempting to engage in a wholehearted or meaningful set of reforms that adjust for working-class knowledge. Consequently, policymakers devalue these epistemologies and skills (Ball, 2012).

#### *2.4.3.1 Vocational education: an example*

Nowhere is this exemplified better than vocational education. Vocational education refers to educational policy which is based around entry to a certain type of occupation, typically those associated with tradesmen or self-employed technicians who engage in mechanics, crafting, or skilled blue-collar labour. This type of education is periodically presented to integrate and motivate working-class learners to engage with the knowledge and skills they are most likely to want to cultivate for their upcoming working lives (Stewart, 2021).

In practice, this integration rarely happens. Diane Reay (2017) takes an interview with a pair of schoolchildren called Ricky and Shianne. Both come from working-class backgrounds and suffer from a dislocation between their self-conception as a formally enrolled school student and the informal educational activities they undertake outside of the school. Noteworthy is they both dislike formal schooling and express alienation. Shianne prefers her time at the local Air Force cadets to school, as she gets to explore fighter jets. Ricky prefers to do woodworking on his own, since in school they are likely to enforce an unchallenging level of learning on him. There is a marked mismatch between the desire to engage in practical learning and the formal schooling trajectories of these two children (Reay, 2017: 150).

The way Reay characterizes and works through the problem is extremely instructive for what may be going wrong. Educational systems very rarely adjust to working-class voice, and in Kotzee's phrase, they are 'kept in the dark' by schools about what their options are. But being 'kept in the dark' here signifies a specific form of epistemic exclusion, one that is not best captured by a first-order understanding of education as an inculcation of knowledge. Rather, *"Working-class educational activities occur through diverse forms that are not immediately identified by, let alone incorporated into, the formal education system."* (ibid). In a remarkably Deweyan way, Reay argues it

is due to an institutional failure “*to respect and value working class knowledge has resulted in the invidious divide between vocational and academic knowledge.*” (ibid.).

So, the problem is neither adequately characterizable as being lied to nor wholly as being kept in the dark. Epistemic injustice within vocational education rests on a more structural mode of epistemic exclusion, wherein working-class epistemologies are sharply diminished and bracketed from the formal education. This leads to a further deficit in publicity – this knowledge is kept dark by institutions and is unable to be thrown into the overall epistemic resource. Furthermore, it leads to obvious consequences for policymakers not embracing presumptions of fallibility as strongly as they should. Vocational education has not been meaningfully improved and is often deployed to intercept criticisms that a government is insensitive to the inequalities between working-class and middle-class children. Indeed, this is not incidental to education; it is what education is *actually* like in the experience of marginalized students.

The educational structure as a whole seems to promote ignorance of the epistemic practices involved in vocational and working-class modes of knowledge. As Anderson (2012) reminds us, a structural problem requires a structural solution for means of proportionality and appropriate scale to the gravity of the problem we are looking at (Anderson, 2012). For epistemic injustices like those suffered by those who want to engage in vocational education and end up with a second-class system of education instead, the problem is much different from being kept in first-order ignorance; it is a more subtle form of epistemic exclusion that occurs at the institutional and the organizational level.

#### 2.4.4. Meta-ignorance, or second order ignorance

‘First order’ ignorance concerns ignorance toward specifiable aspects of our own, or another’s, social experience. For example, one can easily make a mistake on the data surrounding vocational education. Mistakes could concern job prospects, how many children enter vocational education, from what class backgrounds those children tend to come from, and whether it has a discernible effect on patterns of social injustice. In sum, errors in comprehending, explaining, and sometimes in failing to situate social facts in a social aetiology will count as object-level ignorance (Medina, 2013: 44-5).

By contrast, Medina offers us a second order interpretation of ignorance he refers to as *meta-ignorance*. Whereas first order ignorance targets objects of knowledge, meta-ignorance involves faults in one’s cognitive attitudes which contravene norms of epistemic improvement. In the case of vocational education, a policymaker that does not attentively pay heed to the social causation of the disparity between vocational/academic knowledge may be meta-ignorant if (a) they

fail to analytically acknowledge the presence of fixed value-judgments and social ends within their diagnostic analysis, thus making them unavailable for inquiry. As a result, policymakers may (b) fail to sense, identify, or acknowledge historical injustices play an active role in excluding working class epistemologies from questions of educational reform (ibid.).

In being meta-ignorant, one necessarily holds first-order ignorance to the social world. Medina explains the problem begins with object-level ignorance of the causal conditions of injustices that shape our practices. This may become meta-ignorance to the extent that the subject fails to display “critical openness” to the possibility of social scrutiny (ibid: 48). I.e., the necessary condition for meta-ignorance is object level ignorance. The sufficient condition is the lack of critical openness to epistemic challenge. Assuming both conditions hold, we have a meta-ignorant subject.

Per the norm of fallibility, a lack of critical openness signals a grave defect of epistemic practice. Simply put, a lack of critical openness precludes epistemic feedback, by inhibiting beneficial epistemic friction. If the issue is the exclusion of working-class epistemologies, a lack of fallibility in this regard acts to protect object-level ignorance of how working-class people relate to the education system to begin with. Meta-blindness is instrumental to the reproduction of active ignorance and epistemic such as snobbery, thereby hardening attitudes and threatening the democratic social relationships that epistemic practices thrive upon.

Meta-blindness, at root, concerns wholesale blind spots in social cognition. Medina gives a powerful summary of the first-person experience of meta-blindness. *“Those who are meta-blind are blind to their own blindness, insensitive to their own insensitivity: they are insensitive to the cultural blind spots that they have inherited and they recirculate; they are incapable of acknowledging the presuppositions and consequences of blinding themselves...”*<sup>1</sup> (ibid: 45). Those afflicted by meta-blindness have no recourse for their first-order ignorance. There is little room for epistemic growth to take place. Epistemic improvement is hampered with the obfuscation of an appropriate set of ends-in-view. Medina concludes somewhat ominously when he states *“Meta-blindness can, therefore, be defined as the inability to recognize and acknowledge one’s limitations and blind spots.”* (ibid.).

## 2.5. What the Deweyan view adds: A substantive view of meta-ignorance

Medina’s reading of meta-ignorance suffices for the active level. However, he declines to examine the institutional dimensions of meta-ignorance. When he does return to institutional

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<sup>1</sup> In Medina’s original formulation (2013), he cautions wisely against overvaluing “blindness”, as we can perceive social distinctions with other senses than just our vision. Though I use “blindness” more metaphorically than Medina does, this caution is worth keeping in mind.

matters, such as extending his analysis to the criminal justice system, Medina's focus is still on analysing the interactive processes between incarcerated people and wardens, as individuated epistemic agents (Medina, 2021). This leaves a lacuna between the institutional dimensions of epistemic injustice and meta-ignorance. Reay's examples show meta-blindness affects entire systems of social inquiry, not just their component inquirers. With some further exposition, the Deweyan view expounded in this chapter can comfortably fill this gap without conflicting with Medina's analysis.

To begin, we need more fine-grained distinctions in expected types of ignorance. El-Kassar provides us with a helpful tripartite typology of ignorance:

- (1) **Propositional:** ignorance is the lack of justified true belief. It concerns individual cases of belief which rest upon false content.
- (2) **Active:** ignorance is a set of "*actively upheld false outlooks*", consisting of propositional, attitudinal, and habitual elements which help to feed cognitive dysfunctions toward evidence.
- (3) **Substantive:** ignorance can refer to substantive epistemic practices involving the efficacy of institutional mechanisms, transcending analysis that stops at individual habits, attitudes, and propositional content. (El Kassar, 2018: 301).

Medina's reading of meta-ignorance belongs to the active category. It targets the individual cognitive attitudes and habits involved in knowing. By contrast, I am alleging we need a substantive conception of meta-ignorance. I shall now argue the Deweyan view, with its focus on institutional epistemology and experimentalism, is uniquely suited to this task.

Firstly, on the view developed in this chapter, second-order thought is integral to social inquiry. Deweyan pragmatism allows us to formulate distinctions between different modes of institutional cognitive behaviour. For example, Emmanuel Renault articulates an analytical distinction between the cognitive and *cognitional* elements of social inquiry from Dewey's work. Cognitive thought tracks truth-values of particular facts and the pragmatic utility of concepts, such as 'race' or 'class'. Cognitional thought refers to inquiry which exerts intellectual work onto pre-cognitive experiences which disclose problematic qualities to us, as per [§2.1.1](#). We may experience cognitional thought when we sense incompleteness within our existing bodies of knowledge, alerting us to the need to construct better knowledge, sharper instruments of inquiry, or new epistemic procedures with the aim of overcoming defects of social epistemic organization (Renault, 2020: 191-3). Without fostering second order thinking, the key norm of fallibility is at risk, meaning the process of continual epistemic revision would become prohibitively challenging.

Another way of putting this point is to frame it around questions of knowledge production (Zamora, 2017: 307). All social groups have a need to refine their knowledge production practices for the purpose of updating knowledge, publicizing discoveries, and incorporating added information codified in alternative bodies of knowledge (Zamora, 2020: 164-5). Avoiding institutional meta-ignorance is vital in maintaining free and public communication between different social groups. In Zamora's words, marginalized publics benefit from social inquiry instantiating a 'collective learning process' where epistemically faulty cultural and social institutions are probed for whether they contribute to blockages. Where a blockage is present, it may lead to dominant social groups wounding the self-confidence of weaker ones through process of hermeneutical exclusion (Zamora, 2017: 308-9).

Where second order knowledge is threatened by substantive meta-ignorance, epistemic injustices will likely confuse institutional responses to social problems. In such cases, democratic social institutions will often need to engage in conceptual innovation to restore clarity of focus. A Deweyan experimentalist view can help to improve on current understandings of conceptual innovation, since the argument suggests we ought to foreground the prospects for hermeneutical improvement in our contemporary social and political contexts (ibid: 300). This is as opposed to Fricker's equal opportunity model of hermeneutical improvement, which Zamora critiques for revolving around fostering hermeneutically inclusive climates where marginalized groups attempt to formulate concepts and tools in innovative ways, primarily through awareness raising activities (Fricker, 2007: 170). Zamora grants hermeneutically inclusive climates are necessary for conceptual improvement, though would fall short in guaranteeing epistemic empowerment to an appropriate degree.

To return to Dewey, meta-ignorant institutions that house epistemic practices may become hermeneutically stultified. One instance is inertial tendencies that maintain a faulty organizational culture, e.g., the industrial workplace ([§4](#)). Due to the presence of the leisure-labour class distinction outlined in [§2.1.2](#), those subject to mundane working conditions will likely suffer reduced epistemic capacity to engage in conceptual innovation. If these groups inhabit social institutions which militate against epistemic self-confidence and creativity, enough to discourage conceptual innovation, then it is unlikely they will be able to reliably signal their problems in an intelligible manner, leading to a lack of publicity of their social experiences. With a lack of publicity, any attempt experimental inquiry proceeds in a lopsided manner unlikely to resolve either the epistemic or existential conditions of the problematic cultural hierarchy.

An interesting upshot from Dewey and Zamora's claims is that socially dominant groups will often experience distortions in their methods of conceptual innovation. Since their culture lacks epistemic feedback from those who are subject to the mundane work keeping their lives running smoothly, dominant groups experience an increasingly 'autonomous' culture they have diminishing opportunities to exert control over (Zamora, 2017: 304).

Dewey puts the point as such,

*"Lack of the free and equitable intercourse which springs from a variety of shared interests makes intellectual stimulation unbalanced. Diversity of stimulation means novelty, and novelty means challenge to thought. The more activity is restricted to a few definite lines—as it is when there are rigid class lines preventing adequate interplay of experiences—the more action needs to become routine on the part of the class at disadvantage, and capricious, aimless, and explosive on the part of the class having the materially fortunate position" (D&E: 90).*

In other words, substantive meta-ignorance discourages novelty of thought, through reducing the opportunities for current practice to be challenged. The lack of epistemic challenge here may engender a broader social reaction to prevent corrective epistemic or social action. One such example is the controversy surrounding the 2021 report from the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities. The 2021 report was widely criticized for its propensity to downplay the influence of racism and a refusal to fairly consider the role of schools and teachers in helping to publicize alternative bodies of knowledge through the curriculum (Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities, 2021). The Commission was able to exploit moral panic over primary and secondary schools promoting critical race theory to dispute the suggestion that schools should broach topics of racial disparities in social outcomes at all (Trilling, 2020).

Through the denial that experimental policies may be desirable at all, we see very clearly what danger meta-ignorance poses to democratic institutions. In blinding us to the epistemic dysfunction of our social practices, we lose valuable opportunities to experiment with novel solutions to permanent and vexing problems. Consequently, epistemic injustice and meta-ignorance forces us to forgo opportunities to reform our existential social conditions, and with it, we lose substantial capacity to promote learner agency and growth.

## Conclusion

In conclusion of this chapter, I have triangulated three key areas of interest—Deweyan experimentalism, epistemic injustice, and epistemology of ignorance—to help articulate a negative account of how social institutions can detract from our development as democratic individuals and

learning agents. I have made significant connections between these three areas of social epistemology, demonstrating that a conjunction of these viewpoints is able to supply a means to both identify and diagnose when our epistemic agency is at risk of being truncated by the presence of epistemic injustice.

I started by providing further philosophical development of how our learner agency has both social and political epistemological implications in [§1.4](#). Deweyan experimentalism, as developed by Anderson, I argued, provides a convincing account of how a democratic society's focus on social inquiry supports its problem-solving capabilities. I further supplemented Anderson's account by drawing our attention to Dewey's famous argument that epistemological distortions often ride along with undemocratic social distortions of hierarchy and class-based divisions. I then set out three institutional epistemic norms to identify areas in which institutions could stand to engage in a process of epistemic improvement: fallibility, publicity, and epistemic inclusion.

Dewey and Anderson provide us with a positive account of how democracies utilize collective intelligence to improve social and political conditions. For a negative account of how institutions can detract from the social and political conditions required for growth, I argued greater focus on epistemic injustice would be able to provide a necessary competent such an account. Epistemic injustice, I argued, aided our comprehension of how social positionality shapes knowledge-production practices. Furthermore, Fricker's gives us appropriate diagnostic tools to evaluate knowledge-production practices for any harms generated against our epistemic agency. Medina's work alerts us to the attitudinal dimensions of epistemic virtue and vice.

On Medina's account of epistemic injustice, vices feed into a broader state of active ignorance. To combat the effects of epistemic injustice on democratic education, we therefore need to devise strategies to combat active ignorance in educational contexts. I explored Ben Kotzee's attempt to transpose Fricker's core concepts of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice onto educational settings, but found Kotzee's account incomplete, as it does not thoroughly account for the structural nature of epistemic injustice in UK educational contexts. I amended Kotzee's argument by providing structural context, along with an example on vocational education.

We needed to broaden and deepen our conception of ignorance in order to reflect the distinction between first-order and second-order ignorance. When I made these necessary amendments, I suggested a Deweyan experimentalist view helps keep us alert to second-order ignorance paving the way for institutional epistemic rot. This was not as thorough as I hoped it would be, though it suggests a path forward for educational and political philosophers who are

concerned with institutions as learning process or learning environments for democratic problem-solving.

From here, we can utilize the concepts and concerns contained in this chapter in the second half of the thesis on applied contexts. For example, in the next chapter ([§3](#)), I discuss parenting. I am keen to show how matters of epistemic improvement and epistemic injustice apply to our reflects on how parenting provides an educative process. Likewise, when we look forward to the fourth chapter on our working lives ([§4](#)), I will be arguing epistemic injustice becomes instrumental in reflecting on how workplace 'epistemic' culture either supports an self-correcting organizational culture, or how epistemic culture can go wrong, often taking the organizational culture of a workplace down with it. In chapter 5, I argue public cultural institutions should help the public to resist the epistemic and historical marginalization of minority knowledge and histories ([§5](#)).



## Part II: Investigations into three applied non-school contexts

In Part II, I turn our attention to specific, non-schooling contexts where education occurs. I apply the theoretical resources developed in Part I to interrogate three non-school institutions. In Chapter 3, I consider the role of parenting. Educational experiences begin at home, and parents play a key role in preparing us for social cooperation and contribution. In Chapter 4, I examine workplaces. Work has been a longstanding focus for democratic educationalists, including Dewey. I re-examine some core arguments from Mill and Dewey, before linking to contemporary research on the philosophy of organizations. Finally, I discuss the role of public culture in Chapter 5. Museums, galleries, and public forums allow us a unique opportunity of autodidactic education guided by professionals. In turn, these public cultural institutions allow us to grow in ethical, epistemic, and even aesthetic terms.

## Chapter 3: What is the educative role of parents in a democratic society?

Our family home is the earliest and most intimate site of education we will encounter. Our parents are responsible for quite a lot: teaching us how to walk, teaching us how to talk (including how *not* to talk), and introducing us to the natural and social world that acts as both the foreground and background of our lives. If we are concerned with non-schooling educational institutions and their impact on agency and growth, parenting, along with the family home, seems a logical starting point for inquiry.

Parents and families are often assumed to play a crucial role in ethically socializing their children and preparing them for social and intellectual cooperation. Less attention, however, has been devoted to how the attitudes, capacities, and agency of adults are shaped by assuming the role of parent. The broadened scope of education as established in [§1.2.2](#) implies that parents will encounter situations where their growth may be bolstered or frustrated in discharging their daily duties, along with how their agency may be warped or hindered in their dealings with other institutions, most importantly schools.

Oddly, Dewey himself does not appear to have very much to say about the education parents receive, especially relative to how children benefit from responsive parenting. Despite this, Dewey holds that the ideal home sets the normative standards that all other institutions concerned with child education should recognize and follow. This exegetical puzzle therefore occupies my attention in the first section of the chapter: what does Dewey imply about parents? What can explain his silence? And importantly, what does his relative silence imply for the contemporary Deweyan democratic theorist?

Deweyan democrats must provide an account of how parenting adds value to our educational life. Fortunately, moral and political philosophy into the nature of the parent-child relationship can help to define what, educationally, is at stake in matters of parenting. In the second section, I turn to connecting Dewey with broad perfectionist interpretations of parenting, as exemplified in Brighouse & Swift's family values approach, and Timothy Fowler's project view of parenting. I clarify how Deweyan democrats align with broad perfectionism about parenting, then turn to the nominated frameworks. I argue (a) Brighouse and Swift's relational approach adds much needed detail to how the family bonds itself is educative for parents, and (b) that Fowler's project view helpfully tidies up how parents can relate their parenthood to enrich their broader plan of life.

Dewey highlights another dimension other than relational: how parents are responsible for transitioning the child from the home to the wider community. Here, too, we should be alert to how schools can frustrate or bolster the learner agency of parents. After clarifying the mechanisms of parent influence over schooling, I suggest we put a theoretical premium on exploring the powerlessness felt by disadvantaged parents who get less value out of both formal and informal mechanisms of influence. I take a case study from school choice politics, showing informal modes of powerlessness and epistemic exclusion ([§2.3—5](#)) combine to hinder the growth of working-class parents. After this, I anticipate one potential objections from ‘bad choosing’ habits, and then conclude by clarifying the role of cultural capital in sustaining this mis-educative problem-space.

### 3.1. What is the role of the family home in a Deweyan democratic theory?

The home occupies a central place in Dewey’s theory of democracy. It acts as the normative bedrock of a democratic way of life. The home is so central that Dewey argues the ideal home can offer action-guiding ideals that other social institutions can, and should, aspire to promote. As children, we typically start our lives in our homes. Our parents and guardians are responsible for the early years education we get, covering how to communicate effectively, how to treat other people respectfully, and the development of basic cognitive skills to accept or reject crucial information with which we are presented.

The domestic home’s centrality to a flourishing democracy is not an accident of circumstance according to Dewey. Dewey argues the modern industrial system has grown from a complex disaggregation of functions toward corporate organizations and away from domestic subsistence activity. Previously, productive functions were organically vested into the domestic nexus of the pre-industrial household. For example, clothes were often sewn at home. Food was sourced at home through allotments, or from the wider village community. The autarkic domestic home acted as hub of human activity where there was *“always something which really needed to be done, and a real necessity that each member of the household should do his own part faithfully and in cooperation with others. Personalities which became effective in action were bred and tested in the medium of action.”* (S&S: 7-8).

Since subsistence, productive, and child-rearing activities were muddled in the home environment, this became the primary cradle for nurturing an individual’s personality and capacities. The time spent contributing to their family home thus provided the bulk of opportunities for self-realization, endowing participating adults and children with concrete sense of social contribution. The industrial system eventually disaggregated and specialized the productive and subsistence functions of the home into new types of contractual relationships between households. In a likewise

fashion, Dewey stands at the historical precipice for the transfer of educational functions to and from home, to universal forms of state schooling. Dewey does not stand in the way of progress here; he argues we should welcome further 'generalizing' and 'abstracting' of household education to schooling contexts.

Consequently, Dewey holds that a wise educational reformer should seek to 'generalize' and 'abstract' ethical lessons from the ideal home. This assumption leads to one of Dewey's most famous remarks, that "*what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.*" (Ibid: 5). At the very least, this passage hints that Dewey attaches a foundational ethical role to family homes. An emphasis on social cooperation, the wisdom of parental authority, and benevolence exhibited by the wisest parents should be understood to highlight the appropriate ethical lessons educationalists and pedagogues seek to enact and nurture in their associations with children through the school (Greenwalt, 2021: 359).

To my read, Dewey is aiming to provide a formal test of universalizability for how we, as adults, should treat children. The often disciplinarian and indifferent treatment of children common to Dewey's era would not morally suffice and we should read this as his target (*E&E*). Intimidating a child into compliance is not what the best and wisest parent would do. It is unlikely to establish bonds of trust and an understanding of legitimate authority. Hence it follows from this standard that the teacher should not be coercing the child either. The wisest parent will wish for her child to come to a concrete sense of individuality, and therefore acts to nurture the child's nascent capacities. The teacher must therefore also be concerned with the child's individual development and not merely the formal measures of her intellectual capacity, such as testing or grades.

Under this interpretation, the home environment becomes a means for preparing for a child's first educational experiences. Ethically consistent treatment of the child is imperative to their growth. In the ideal home, Dewey argues the child can derive genuinely educative experiences through entering into conversation and cooperation with her parents and siblings, with activities revolving around common domestic concerns. "*If we take an example from an ideal home, where the parent is intelligent enough to recognize what is best for the child, and is able to supply what is needed, we find the child learning through the social converse and constitution of the family.*" (*S&S*: 23-24). When we invite children to help with dinner, we will help her to understand the appropriate measurements and correct any misconceptions. The child is an active and curious participant in the happenings of the home. Her parent can transform the child's inquisitiveness into stable routines,

productive habits, and formulate the responsibilities which help the child develop her basic social, linguistic, and cognitive skills.

The home helps to develop the basic educational capacities of the child. However, the organic nature of the household prevents it from becoming specialized around the growth of the child. This fact limits how far parents can leverage the home to promote educative experience for their children. *“Moreover, the occupations and relationships of the home environment are not specially selected for the growth of the child; the main object is something else, and what the child can get out of them is incidental. Hence the need of a school.”* (Ibid: 24-5). The aims of the home and the school are simply different. The domestic environment is for the wellbeing and free association of family members. By contrast, we have already seen Dewey is keen to reserve a role for the ideal school in minimizing undesirable contingencies from a child’s ethical and cognitive development. Growth is central to democratic fellowship; the environment of the home brackets a focus on growth to preserve its other ends.

An ideal home should therefore ‘open outward’ to other public spaces in accordance of the child’s interest in growing. Other social institutions and agents become relevant, such as extended family, peer groups, and schools. In discharging the duty to open the home outward, the parent is responsible for introducing the child to the whole community in a face-to-face manner, a fact which takes on much practical and theoretical lifting since Dewey simultaneously holds *“Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.”* because we cannot transcend the value of face-to-face association in helping along our moral and social development (*P&IP*: 368).

As an anodyne example, Dewey remarks the wisest parent will often take the child out to shared public space, such as a walk in the local park. *“The life of the child would extend out of doors to the garden, surrounding fields, and forests. He would have his excursions, his walks and talks, in which the larger world out of doors would open to him.”* (*S&S*: 24). The child learns the routine and encounters novel places on walks with her parents. The parent, more crucially, will also want the child to explore the park as a form of integrating with the community. The child, e.g., should be able to form friendships when mingling with other children.

Schools assist parents in the process of ‘opening up’ the household. Firstly, schools provide a space designed around the growth of children, ensuring the child can form an idea of sharing a wider community with dependable adults and other children. Moreover, schools can accommodate larger number of children than family homes can. Schools therefore provide a release valve for social pressures inside the home, ensuring that families are not hemmed into repressive or authoritarian habits to cope with the increasing educational demands of child-rearing (*CTfy*: 66). The democratic

purpose of the ideal school is in becoming the first major institutional point of contact for widening the child's horizons. When schools successfully perform this ideal role, they complement the parental role in providing opportunities for the child to realize her unique talents and individuality (S&S: 24).

### 3.1.2. Where are the parents within Dewey's writings?

Dewey conceives of the ideal home as a cradle for the democratic individual's first trappings of agency. It plays a crucial, irreplaceable role in fostering social cooperation and ethical development between people. Logically, these claims should imply a vital role for parents and guardians in fostering the habits and attitudes central to maintaining a democratic social form. It is troubling that despite the implication that parents are vital for nurturing and improving democratic character, Dewey himself provides no systematic or rigorously developed insights on the parental role, nor the relationship between parenting and democracy as a way of life (Sikandar, 2015: 196).

In a recent study, Kyle Greenwalt (2021) summarizes our dilemma when he states: *"strangely, despite Dewey's desire to "familiarize" social relations and the rightful importance he places on the necessary continuity of experience between home and school, he is at the same time oddly silent about the primacy of parental relations in a child's life"* (ibid: 361-2). When Dewey does find it prudent to analyse the relationship between adults and children, it is typically in the context of generic learning activities, e.g., learning to play with a ball (ibid.). This is quite odd, considering deviating from standards set by the ideal home would result in undesirable consequences, up to the point of "destroying" democracy. This is unlikely to be an error on Dewey's part given the severity of the consequence, yet Dewey's thought carries an air of paradox if we consider a large part of the home environment is shrouded away from our reflections for how we should enrich individual experience and democratic life.

Greenwalt's observations occur in the context of Dewey's historical influence on American home-schooling movements. During home-schooling, the educative role of the parent is exaggerated. The parent must adopt a dual status of both the parent and the formal teacher responsible for a child's educational growth. Under this description, home-schooling may brush up uncomfortably against Dewey's insistence that the ideal home 'opens out' into the wider community and public schools. However, since we are having to account for the missing parent in Dewey's thought, any such argument to be had over home-schooling's benefits becomes an interpretive exercise of how parental agency fits into judgments over the proper balance of values: the child's wellbeing; their interest in education; and claims of parental dissent from formal public schooling systems, in pursuit of what they perceive as the child's best interests (ibid.).

Additionally, Greenwalt offers a feminist hypothesis to explain Dewey's apparent omission of the parent's influence over the child. For example, he references Susan Laird's critique (1988) of Dewey. Laird emphasizes the practical consequences of Dewey's silence: it allows for patriarchal authority to stand unchallenged in his writings on the nature of family life, while egalitarian social relationships are demanded within schools and other social contexts (Laird, 1988: 1999). Greenwalt himself endorses this hypothesis, arguing for a critical look at the gendered assumptions underlying Deweyan pragmatism will clear up Dewey's omission of family ties from his ethical commitments to equality and self-realization (Greenwalt, 2021: 362). In his writings on the family, Dewey is alleged to insufficiently differentiate the family from other institutions, with Greenwalt suggesting "*Such lines suggest that Dewey might put too much attention on environment and situation, and not enough on human relationality — particularly as centered in the family.*" (ibid: 365).

While I agree with subjecting Dewey's writings to further critical scrutiny in this way, Greenwalt simultaneously downplays how far Deweyan democratic theory can explain the ethical distinctiveness of the family tie (ibid.). It may be true, as Greenwalt claims, that Dewey's own blind spot originates in privileging environmental factors over the familial relationship itself. However, Dewey does think the relationship itself is subject to normative appraisal. Dewey does hold hope that we can improve how we parent, as part of a general programme for social and ethical improvement. Dewey argues parenting should become more pragmatically guided through the application of knowledge from the 'human' or social sciences (*P&IP*: 359). I accept this observation is not definitive. However, this point does suggest a measure of exegetical tension in reading Dewey's silence on the parental role as implying an exemption from the ethical aspirations of his democratic creed.

If we think of Dewey as committed to the proposition that parenting practices should be subject to aspirational judgments, this generates a warrant for ameliorative improvement, in much the same way educationalists are expected to improve their own teaching practices within schools. If we were to develop a fuller understanding of how parents themselves both contribute and draw from a democratic society, then we can begin to identify, diagnose, and recommend solutions to problems which hinder the growth of adults in their capacity as parents.

I offer three reasons to prefer this interpretation to Greenwalt's. Firstly, contemporary political and moral philosophy into the nature of the parenting provides ample resources for the Deweyan democrat. Relying on this research may help us better connect issues of child development, parental investment, and the social consequences of parenting into action-guiding moral frameworks. Research into the ethics of the parent-child bond often illuminates the moral

contours in play when evaluating unequal trends in school enrolment, educational achievement, and the distribution of educational injustices which curtail both a parent and child's ability to flourish (e.g., Clayton, Mason, Swift & Wareham, 2021). In other words, contemporary political philosophy is providing an excellent opportunity for Deweyan democrats to articulate the educational interdependencies between the home and the school.

Secondly, Deweyan democratic theory cannot continue to treat the parent as absent. If Deweyan democracy seeks to articulate and defend an ideal of a truly educative social form, then clarifying the role of parents is a theoretical necessity. The parent, or caregiver, is the agent responsible for the child's most intimate formative experiences, which constitutes their earliest education. In Dewey's framework of the ideal home and school, the parent plays a key role in orchestrating the child's transition into the greater community she becomes a participating member of. This is vindicated by empirical research that demonstrates the early years household environment exerts significant influence on a child's cognitive, academic, and social development (Siraj & Mayo, 2014: 129).

Thirdly, parents themselves are not merely informal teachers; they are also individuals whose interest in growth and agency must be acknowledged and safeguarded. Parents learn a great deal from their relationship with their children, both about the child and about themselves. Additionally, the caregiving role parents assume implies any harm to the parent's agency carries a double-edged effect of simultaneously damaging the child's interest in developing their own learner agency. This is far from an abstract hypothetical: disadvantaged parents are often disempowered when they attempt to further their children's interests within other social institutions, especially schools. Deweyan democratic theory must speak to these parents and attempt to articulate their concerns, which may otherwise be left silent.

### 3.1.3. Another theoretical reconstruction? Proposing a way forward on parenting

There are two analytically separate threads implied by our previous discussion. Firstly, a Deweyan democratic account of parenting needs to address the relational aspects of parenting, per Greenwalt's argument. Parenting is an inherently educative relationship to engage in, for both parents and children. We have seen how children are able to derive educational experiences from participating; we now require an account that makes clear how parents derive educative experiences from their role as guardians to children. In this respect, adults need to develop adequate knowledge of their child, their home environment, and themselves to grow in their capacity as parents.



Secondly, we should pay attention to how other institutions can support or hinder parents in the process of opening the home outward to the wider community. Parents are expected to exercise their practical intelligence with increasingly fine-grained judgments in how best to prepare the child for school, including which schools are likely to be suitable for the child to begin with. This entails parents will encounter formal educational bureaucracies, where the difference between smooth and shoddy operation can often make or break the ability of parents to function as effective guardians of their children's best interests.

So, the two dimensions we will cover in the remainder of the chapter are: (1) the educative qualities of the parent-child bond itself when we focus in on parents, and (2) the way the relationship between parents and other ordinary institutions, primarily schools, has educational consequences for the parent's agency.

### 3.2. How does the parent-child bond provide educative experiences for parents?

In this section, I delve into the educational implications of the parent-child bond. Here, I focus only on what the relational elements between parent and child should provide in terms of educative experience for the participating adults. Even though I focus on parents, the lessons should be generalizable to anyone who assumes an intensive caretaking role for children.

I primarily examine broad perfectionist arguments commonly found in the contemporary ethics of parent-child relationships. My argument is we have a plausible case for reading Deweyan democratic theory as aligned, in focus, with a broad perfectionist position. To achieve this, I will be drawing extensively on the relationship goods approach of Brighouse and Swift, and the project view of parenting from Fowler. Unpacking the broadly perfectionist commitments outlined by these authors gives us a good basis for sketching how the parent-child bonds contributes educative experiences to the parent, along with the child.

#### 3.2.1. What is perfectionism, and how does it relate to parenting?

We start with a caveat. Perfectionism lacks an uncontroversial definition. Conventionally, the concept is associated with a heterogeneous group of liberal and non-liberal moralists, ranging from the Hellenistic tradition of Aristotelian virtue ethics to contemporary comprehensive liberalism (Hurka, 1996: 3). Under the conventional interpretation, perfectionist thought aims to provide a moral framework to guide individuals in their pursuit of moral, aesthetic, and cultural excellences. Perfectionism enshrines human powers of rational reflection and practical judgment as the

cornerstone of how to live in a virtuous manner, thereby theoretically and practically connecting the core concerns of rationality, human perfectibility, and self-realization (ibid: 6).

We may wonder if the conventional interpretation is helpful to apply in the context of parenting. For example, Timothy Fowler argues the above interpretation would be too narrow for our purposes as democratic theorists or liberal political philosophers. It is true that linking the exercise of rational judgment to desirable habits of character does reflect some situations parents find themselves in, such as the need to encourage intellectual curiosity in a young child through reading. However, the conventionalist tends to put a philosophical premium on the idea of telos, or an overarching ethical purpose that limits the possible range of individual experiments in living (Fowler, 2020: 68). If we endorsed this type of perfectionism, we would certainly fall afoul of objections from pluralism as outlined in [§1.4.5](#).

Instead, Fowler proposes we adopt a broad conception of what perfectionism entails. A broader perfectionist stance applies to the justifications we invoke to evaluate current parenting practices. Any preferences we have in favour of a social institution over another, e.g., parents or a state-run system of orphanages, should be subject to evaluative judgments on their probable consequences, viz. whether they stand to make our lives go better or worse. Furthermore, the broad perfectionist argues the content of evaluative judgments in terms of 'better' and 'worse' corresponds with the measurements and precepts of our best available ethical theories (ibid: 68-9).

When applied to parenting, the broad perfectionist aspires to provide theoretical methods to resolve problems involving parental authority and matters of family wellbeing. If all social institutions are open to moral appraisal, why should parenting be exempt? E.g., someone proposes a communal child-rearing system would lead to higher levels of child wellbeing than the two-parent family. A broad perfectionist would then, as Brighouse and Swift do with their own contribution, provide a moral framework capable of clarifying and balancing the goods of parent-child relationships in both proposed systems (Brighouse & Swift, 2014a). A broad perfectionist may also seek to provide descriptions, key distinctions, and evaluative frameworks to judge whether children's lives go better when we account for differences in how adults parent them, including whether the parent inducts the child into value-laden or religiously committed ways of living (Fowler, 2020: 122-3).

### 3.2.2. Was Dewey a broad perfectionist about parenting?

A key strength of broad perfectionism lies in its ability to describe, explain, and evaluate the value of parenting for both the parent and the child. A Deweyan democrat has *prima facie* reasons to find the broad perfectionist stance promising, since both set out to clarify how parent-child

relationships enable parents to develop their agential capacities, cultivate personal autonomy, and exercise an opportunity for increased wellbeing. Like Deweyan democratic theory, broad perfectionism holds the parent is actively involved in a process of growing through engaging in the bond, through taking responsibility for forwarding a child's interests.

My claim is that we should understand Deweyan democratic theory and broad perfectionism as aligned with one another<sup>2</sup>. For one, they share consonant moral goals. Indeed, we find Dewey himself repeatedly stressing the role of parents in guiding the formation of their children's ethical and intellectual character. In an address to would-be teachers in 'Those who aspire to the profession of teaching' (1938), Dewey remarks the parent and the teacher both share a fundamental role in "*promoting the mental and moral life which is healthy and balanced*" for young people (TWA: 31). Furthermore, in a related piece on 'Character training for youth' (1934), Dewey argues the attitude of parents and the quality of the domestic household exert considerable educative influence on the character of all involved. These considerations are so crucial that even "*the best conscious instruction is effective in the degree in which it harmonizes with the cumulative result of all these unconscious forces.*" (CTfY: 65).

As previously suggested in [§3.1.2](#), Dewey reserves theoretical room for aspirational judgments in the hope of improving parenting practices. He does not want to leave the consequences of parenting to chance; he is quite optimistic, in fact, of how contact with our best available ethical, educational, and psychological theories can help to improve a parent's experiences of educating their children. This puts him in line with Fowler's interpretation of broad perfectionism. Thus, we can find him arguing in favour of "*better education of parents would be a large element in bringing about better moral education of children and youth.*" (ibid: 67). He is also concerned to highlight the lag between our best ethical theories and current parental practice, which we can spot when he argues "*there are still multitudes of parents who have not had the most rudimentary contact with the new knowledge and who are totally unaware of the influences that are most powerfully affecting the moral fibre of their children.*" (ibid.). In other words, providing parents with greater means to rationally reflect on the consequences of their agency should help to improve the quality of their interaction with children.

Of course, Dewey's concerns mostly revolve around children's education. However, we should not assume he is *solely* concerned with children. Parents are not simply a means to the end

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<sup>2</sup> As a corollary to the argument in [§1.4.5](#) regarding Talisse's objection to growth and anti-perfectionism (pp. 48-49), it is best to understand the Deweyan view here as aligned with a particular type of 'soft' perfectionism about parenting, which is nonetheless compatible with anti-perfectionist principles that rest on a constitutional level.

of child development. Their agency is a crucial ethical good, and parenting is a uniquely demanding activity for a parent's educational powers. In a further talk entitled "The classroom teacher" (1924), Dewey shows considerable sympathy for the challenge of parenting in an industrial age. He notes parents are expected to engage in educational heavy lifting, requiring networks of epistemic and practical improvement to form between parents. *"Parents too often start out having to take and train their own children as if nobody had ever done it before. There is some improvement now, but, after all, how much experience goes unrecorded and unutilized that might be rendered available for others. (TCT: 108).* There is emphasis here on the epistemic agency of parents. Their experiences provide valuable clues and suggestions for improving the practice of other parents, and one way to improve current parenting practice is to encourage a further sharing of experiences, helping to alleviate the concerns and anxieties of new parents.

My point is to demonstrate Dewey does mean to scrutinize the parent-child bond to our best available theories. He does this primarily to evaluate whether parenting styles enriches the lives of parents and children, in much the same way as the broad perfectionist intends to do so. Dewey's targeted moral content is, of course, that of growth and enriched experience. If we are concerned with the character formation and improvement of parental practice, then it should be for the development of the democratic individuality Dewey prizes throughout his writings. A final quote from 'Individualism: Old and New' (1930) will suffice to highlight the general ends in play here. *"To gain an integrated individuality, each of us needs to cultivate his own garden. But there is no fence about this garden: it is no sharply marked-off enclosure. Our garden is the world, in the angle at which it touches our own manner of being."* (IO&N: 122-3).

This is not to reduce the adult's role to simply that of a parent. Parenting is doubtlessly important and possesses unique moral properties (Greenwalt, 2021: 361). However, it does not exhaust our identity as democratic individual. Parents do, however, function as an idealized role model for professionals who deal with children. Here, we are to engage in an imaginative of the *best* and the *wisest* parents when deliberating on how we should treat children. When read in conjunction with the above content on aspirational judgments and improvement, we should read Dewey and broad perfectionism as holding different framings for a similar set of core concerns for how parenting can benefit from contact with ethical theory and vice-versa.

### 3.2.3. What are the limitations of a broad perfectionist position on parenting?

As we saw in discussion of Talisse's objection to Deweyan democracy in [§1.4.5](#), comprehensive ethical stances can often carry problems related to democratic legitimacy. Invoking state power in pursuit of a comprehensive ethical theory of what is better or worse for individuals

could be tantamount to wrongly coercing those people or suppressing the fact of reasonable disagreement on matters of value and Weltanschauung (Larmore, 1999: 613). Reacting to this criticism, a school of thought has developed to promote anti-perfectionism within parenting practice, arguing we should refrain from using our position of authority over children to impose, or enrol, them into believing a controversial philosophical viewpoint.

A good example of a robustly anti-perfectionist stance on parenting comes from the work of Matthew Clayton<sup>3</sup>. Clayton argues for a public reason requirement on parenting activities, i.e., parents should avoid ‘enrolling’ (inducting) their children into comprehensive philosophical and religious commitments without a sufficiently neutral set of public justifications for doing so (Clayton, 2006: 93). Clayton reaches this conclusion by reasoning from analogy: the state is bound by a public reason requirement because our relationship to the state is (1) involuntary, (2) suffused with coercive power, and (3) carries profound effects on the wellbeing and agency of those involved. *Mutatis mutandis* for parenting—it is involuntary for children, often coercive, and profoundly character-shaping—according to Clayton’s analogy (ibid: 93). We suffer harms of disrespect for our epistemic and moral capacities when the state violates public reason requirements. Should the state impose a particular conception of the good life, then it denigrates our capacities to become self-authenticating sources of moral claims and ends (Franklin-Hall, 2019: 374). And so, Clayton concludes the latent moral and epistemic powers of the child would be violated in much the same way if parents acted like a perfectionist state (Clayton, 2006: 99-100).

Both the perfectionist and anti-perfectionist share a concern with the prospective autonomy of the child. However, the content of ‘autonomy’ is scheme-relative. ‘Political’ autonomy to a strongly Rawlsian scholar such as Clayton plays a functional role in underpinning the salience of public reason. The ambit of the anti-perfectionist understanding of autonomy concerns the legitimacy of a liberal democratic state responsible for adjudicating competing ethical claims in a pluralistic society (Neufeld, 2020: 36-7). Autonomy to a broad perfectionist does relate back to legitimacy in a certain sense, though not one equivalent to the parental anti-perfectionist. Rather, the perfectionist conception of personal autonomy directly serves a component part of comprehensively liberal political morality that prizes the ability for individuals to live authentically, or life their lives as directed ‘from within’ (Brighouse, 2000: 69).

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<sup>3</sup> I do not claim Clayton’s stance is representative of anti-perfectionist positions on parenting. However, if one is looking for a robust anti-perfectionism to contrast with broad perfectionism, then Clayton’s contribution provides a powerful juxtaposition for the purposes of reflection.

The structure of justification diverges between the broad perfectionist and anti-perfectionist in predictable ways. Deweyan democratic theory is aligned with the broad perfectionist position more so than anti-perfectionism about parenting. This means any critiques of broad perfectionism are likely to be transferable to Deweyan democratic theory, which means further addressing the anti-perfectionist's concern over an overbearing state or parent.

We should not take Dewey's remarks to insinuate a role for a busybody state that wants to indoctrinate or coerce parents into a social scientific plan. Respect for a parent's capacity to grow implies we see their activities as requiring practical affordances, both ethical and epistemic, so parents can engage with other professionals, e.g., teachers, in exchanging knowledge and skills that reinforce a sense of good practice. Parents already do form associations in civil society, to further their interests and circulate knowledge of dealing with other bodies such as schools (Shuffelton, 2020).

Nor does Dewey want to imply parents have an unlimited or arbitrary authority over their children. Respect for growth implies a co-development between the parent and the child, in a way that supports the development of democratic social relationships. Enjoyment of the parent and the child's bond ties both constitutively to one another's growth. Just in this case, the parent takes on an extra ethical and intellectual burden in view of the child's nascent capacities. To further this end, the parent should be sensitive to the growing competence of the child throughout their development: an educative relationship implies an ability to readjust their methods to better suit the ethical situation between them and the child. A Deweyan democrat has good reason, from commitments to experimentalism, to push back against the public reason requirement that anti-perfectionists desire to regulate how parents deal with children (Festenstein, 2010: 25-6).

### 3.3. How can broad perfectionism supplement a Deweyan democratic account of parenting? Considerations on two plausible perfectionisms

The broad perfectionist has a broader spectrum of ends in mind compared to the Deweyan democrat's focus on growth and learner agency. Nonetheless, insights from two plausible accounts of broad perfectionism can help to further enrich our understanding of how parental practices further our interests in learner agency and growth.

Firstly, I will explore Brighouse and Swift's relationship goods approach. My reasoning here springboards from Greenwalt's observation that Deweyan democratic theory needs further resources to evaluate the relational elements which make parent-child bond morally distinctive. Brighouse and Swift's account provides a relational understanding in the same sense, and I will register their argument to the thesis' vocabulary.

Secondly, I turn to Fowler's project view of parenting. This helps to supplement both the aspirational and relational element by clarifying the inherent educational qualities of parenting. Fowler's view prioritizes the parent's intrinsic motivation, seeking to describe how our role as a parent provides an opportunity to enrich our overall plan of life.

### 3.3.1. Insights from the relational approach

Brighthouse and Swift (2014a) ground their view of parenting on a fundamental intuition about the nature of wellbeing. A good life is lived in association with other people, whether it be with our neighbours, our close friends, our romantic partners, or families (Brighthouse & Swift, 2014a: 87-88). Special relationships promote individual wellbeing and self-esteem. When we associate with special others, we gain the ethical benefits of interpersonal reciprocity. So, e.g., when my mother came out of retirement to work emergency nursing shifts during the pandemic at the local hospital, I was able to take pride in her commitment. If I should get my Ph. D, my mother will likewise be able to share pride in my commitment. Our interest in special, reciprocal relationships is very strong, so much so that Brighthouse and Swift conclude "*a life without such relationships, or in which they all fail, is usually an unsuccessful life. If there are exceptions, there are not many.*" (Ibid: 88).

Special relationships have corresponding *relationship goods* conferred on participants. In family relationships, relationship goods such as affection, an elevated level of sensitivity and emotional responsiveness, and remarkable levels of trust are conferred on both parents and children (Brighthouse & Swift, 2014b: 14-15). To register this point into Deweyan terms, relationship goods represent shared ethical qualities which characterize a loving family bond. Should the parent disown the child, or vice-versa, then these relationship goods will become inaccessible to specifiable parents and children.

To Brighthouse and Swift, the parent-child relationship is non-fungible. We cannot exchange it like-for-like with another special relationship. Non-fungibility extends to the relationship goods conferred by the pursuit of parent-child relationships. It would be wrong of me to expect the same attentiveness and unconditional trust of my spouse as I could reasonably expect of my child (Brighthouse & Swift, 2014a: 88-89). Parent-child relationships are therefore properly *sui generis* in nature. The parent assumes unique responsibilities that she would be unable to undertake in other areas of life.

Concerning those special responsibilities, the pursuit of relationship goods helps to signify a child's immediate and prospective needs. Brighthouse and Swift choose to ground the value of the family relationship in the child's interests. For the sake of context, here are the moral interests that Brighthouse and Swift discern by considering the unique situation of childhood:

- (1) Any goods needed to ensure healthy *physical* development, such as healthcare, food, and shelter
- (2) Education and socialization necessary for facilitating *cognitive* development, with an end-in-view for developing the minimum critical skills necessary for autonomous choice.
- (3) Education and socialization necessary for facilitating *emotional* development, with an end-in-view for forming healthy and sustainable relationships with others.
- (4) Education and socialization necessary for *moral* development, with an end-in-view to becoming a person responsive to the basic needs and rights of others.
- (5) Means and conditions needed to ensure the child may enjoy the intrinsically valuable goods of their childhood (Brighouse and Swift, 2014a: 64)<sup>4</sup>.

Brighouse and Swift analyse these interests according to whether they fall into the category of a wellbeing or an agency right. Wellbeing rights impose duties on parents to ensure the child can enjoy intrinsically valuable experiences associated with childhood, thereby representing interest 5. Agency rights impose duties to further the interests related to the child's healthy and normal development, representing interests 1-4 (ibid: 61-62).

Both set of rights and corresponding duties carry educational consequences. The parent has a need to develop knowledge of the child and contextual knowledge of the environmental nuances that could affect the child's wellbeing, safety, and growth to discharge her special obligations to her child's interests. For example, a safe and warm home environment is crucial to satisfying all the child interests above<sup>5</sup>. The parent will need to appreciate and learn how vulnerable young children are in an environment that is otherwise safe for adults. Young children have an unfortunate habit of endangering themselves, such as when they stick metal cutlery into electrical sockets. Parents must learn to compensate for the child's nascent practical reasoning and risk assessment skills to keep them out of harm's way (Hannan & Leland, 2018: 371; Brighouse & Swift, 2014b: 14-15).

To ensure the parent can adapt the child's environment and respond immediately to their emotional state, we assume the parent enters a fiduciary role with respect to the child's five interests (Brighouse & Swift, 2014a: 59-60). Paternalistic authority derives from the fiduciary relationship, enabling the parent to legitimately exert considerable executive direction over the child's activities and relationships in early life. However, Clayton's point that children do not enter

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<sup>4</sup> Brighouse and Swift offer this list to aid analytic separations between child's interests. Of course, the practical satisfaction of these interests will likely involve heavy overlap and interrelationships.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to imply disadvantaged parents who cannot afford to keep the house warm are doing wrong; they deserve more support. Brighouse and Swift reserve their scrutiny for those who engage in abuse or neglect.



families voluntarily and are extremely susceptible to influence is pertinent. Children's interests also act to limit the scope of paternalistic authority, in recognition of this vulnerability and inability to articulate clear reasons. E.g., while a parent can dictate a child's friends earlier in life, they will be less able to claim legitimacy for regulating their child's friendships in their teens.

Despite the parent assuming a fiduciary role, Brighthouse and Swift hold the parent retains a non-fiduciary interest in assuming special responsibilities for a child (Brighthouse & Swift, 2014a: 92). Here is another source of educative experience. Acting as the fiduciary agent for the child provides *sui generis* opportunities for the parent to experience growth. In particular, the parent will need to reflect on her parenting style, along with her general approach to solving problems inside and outside of the family home. There is also an epistemic benefit here: the uniqueness of parenting activities should allow the parent access to a considerable resource for adding to, and revising, her self-knowledge in much the same way being parented allows the child to form and revise self-knowledge as she navigates her own cultural situation (Sarajlic, 2020: 49-50).

### 3.3.2. Insights from the project view

Fowler's project view is straightforward. Fowler conceives of parenting as a project adults undertake and therefore gain rights of discretion over how they cultivate this project. A project view of parenting is ethically underwritten by "*the general moral principle that we have a right to initiate projects using our own powers and abilities so long as these projects do not harm others, and that our ability to initiate and continue such projects is central to our flourishing*" (Fowler, 2020: 107). Commitment to a project allows for a sense of authorship to develop, and we are rewarded by seeing our efforts coming to fruition as a result of our attentiveness and careful contributions.

To retain the value of authorship, we are entitled to negative rights of non-interference and positive rights to opportunities needed to initiate projects. A parent's agency would be undermined by a busybody state that constantly dictated the proper interactions shared their children (ibid: 107). However, there are limitations on what the parent may claim as part of the authorship involved in their project, based on the need to avoid serious harm to the child (ibid: 133).

Positively, Fowler notes parenting is a unique opportunity to exercise our social, moral, emotional, and intellectual powers. This is not to say the exercise of our agency is the only reason to value parenting. Instead, Fowler correctly supposes there are multiple good reasons to want the opportunity to parent. Since a project view supports the exercise of agency in concordance with the ideal of personal autonomy, the opportunity to parent, rather than the specific aims involved with parenting, becomes paramount to grasping the project view. "*There are many morally permissible*

*reasons to want to become parents and a person's interest in agency means the reasons why they choose to procreate are, at least in large part, up to them."* (ibid: 107).

The project view is therefore able to separate two independently standing normative questions. Firstly, how to ground a particular relationship between a specifiable parent and child. Secondly, how to balance the claims that a child's interests and a parent's interests make on one another, which we have already seen is bound by a standard of preventing serious harm.

On the first point, Fowler advances an interesting analogy between the project of having a child and being the artist of a particular painting. Fowler argues *"If I paint a picture then I gain rights to that picture. By being its author I have rights of control over this book. In the case of procreation and parenting, this view gives a person rights to the very child that their plans and actions have created."* (ibid: 108). Projects are non-fungible: the educative value of undertaking a project in painting is destroyed when I attempt to substitute my own painting with someone else's, even if that other painting is much better than my own. Any sacrifices and efforts made by the parent are hers alone, which gives them a sufficient claim to ground their moral claims to their particular child, rather than alternative ways of distributing parental rights and interests.

Fowler's justification for the project view can be registered to more Deweyan vocabulary. Firstly, it helps to clarify parenting having intrinsic motivations to learn and experiment. If parenting is a project in the same way as an artwork, then the accompanying intrinsic motivation to complete it should follow. Parenting contributes to the learner agency of the participating, through providing them with a project with a distinct set of aims, objectives, and ends. Unlike other projects, parenting is unique in how strenuous it is in global terms. That is, the parent's exercise of agency toward maintaining a healthy family bond will tax their social, epistemic, emotional, and ethical capacities in a holistic manner. We can therefore expect both epistemic and moral growth from parenting when conceived as a project, since part of engaging with a project is having the freedom to adapt and direct one's project according to our best available knowledge. Much like a painting or another project like brewing one's own beer in the garage, parenting is likely to provide an opportunity to develop habits out of useful experiences, say in calming down a child, and encourages experiments in how to meet the child's needs.

### 3.4. Parenting between the home and the school

Now that we have explored the educative landscape presented by the parent-child relationship, we can start to consider what affects the growth of parents in the process of 'opening up' the home to the wider community.

Linking parental agency to socio-cultural contexts outside of the home is not a new idea. Reporting on their recent findings on how parental activities extend outside of the family home, Siraj and Mayo (2014) write “*It is now widely recognized that parents not only provide a substantial amount of the actual proximal processes, they also influence children’s proximal processes outside of the family context, by purposefully managing and regulating their access to other socio-cultural contexts, such as (pre-)schools, peers and community, or extra-curricular activities...*” (Siraj & Mayo, 2014: 213). Their observations support Dewey’s observations about a moral nexus between the parent’s management of the home and their input into the activities of the school. Here, we can recall that parents have a need to exercise her best judgment and discretion in regulating the child’s peer groups and access to other adults—such as doctors and teachers—whose contribution to her flourishing could not be adequately supplied by the parent alone.

Dewey’s focus is on the way the child navigates this nexus between the home and the school. By contrast, I am proposing we focus on the nexus from the view of parents. Parents interact with schools in pursuit of certain educational goods to fulfil their fiduciary duties. These goods relate to the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes that both educators and parents judge as in the interest of a child’s interests in developing a sense of agency and their wellbeing (Brighouse, Loeb, Ladd & Swift, 2018: 19-21). When parents interact with schoolteachers and administrators, they will also need to use a considerable stock of knowledge, interpersonal skills, and moral attitudes necessary for effective communication over the child’s needs.

Parents seek these educational goods as a means of exerting control over the child’s progress in school, *inter alia*. We should understand ‘progress’ understood broadly. It could stretch from the act of choosing a pre-school to parents actively involving themselves in school governance through parent associations or school boards. The motivation for parental involvement is similarly broad in range. Ethnographic evidence throws up an admixture of pro-egalitarian motivations to engage in the governance of schools for the betterment of the local area, to antagonistic behaviour which accentuates social competition between children for places in desirable post-secondary institutions (Reay, 2017: 138-9).

Harry Brighouse (2000) offers a helpful way to further analyse parental influence. Firstly, parents engage with mechanisms that give them *direct* influence over school policies. For example, parental pressure groups impress the voice of parents into the ear of school leaders, e.g., when it comes to the matter of opting-out from standardized testing regimes (Stitzlein, 2020). Parents also take advantage of *indirect* mechanisms that allow them to obliquely express approval or disapproval to a school’s administration. For example, a district that puts a premium on school choice, through

voucher or free schools, enables parents to vote with their feet. When a critical mass of parents refuses to consider a school within a choice-based system, it sends a signal to the school that an urgent improvement in their operation and practices are necessary to boost enrolment numbers (Brighouse, 2000: 55).

Significant normative controversy has accompanied a better understanding of parental influence over schools. One area is that of school choice mechanisms, such as the aforementioned example of voucher systems or systems which emulate market mechanisms. Elizabeth Anderson (1993) holds school choice mechanisms fail to provide for desirable forms of parental interaction with schools. In specific, indirect mechanisms associated with school choice do not allow parents from diverse backgrounds to collate and review their preferences over school composition and policy. Indirect mechanisms only allow for expression in dichotomous terms, such as register with a particular school or register elsewhere. In a Deweyan-inspired argument, Anderson posits a shift to more direct mechanisms, such as democratic control over the internal governance of schools, should allow parents more sway over the process of designing school rules and admissions procedures (Anderson, 1993: 162-163). Anderson's argument has produced a rebuke from Brighouse, who holds that school governance should not be about democratic procedures; a school is there to ensure a child is able to develop certain skills, attitudes, and knowledge. If we take development, or growth, to be the paramount series of ends that a school aims at, then Brighouse correctly surmises "*there is no guarantee that democratic governance will do better with respect to these values than a choice-driven system.*" (Brighouse, 2000: 56-7).

It is not my intention to relitigate this dispute over whether we should prefer direct or indirect mechanisms of parental control. I am simply using it as an example of the controversy that accompanies discussions of parental involvement in education. Instead, I want to spend the remainder of this chapter exploring the case of parents who lack the means to engage with both indirect and direct mechanisms effectively. After all, the threat to growth is much starker and more obvious when institutions fail to support the development of our agency altogether.

#### 3.4.1. Some shortcomings of parental influence mechanisms: distributive and visibility

Both direct and indirect mechanisms tend to favour parents with the necessary social and cultural resources on hand to exploit their benefits. However, we know that parents who suffer from disadvantages are much less likely to possess the requisite social and cultural capital than parents from more affluent backgrounds (Reay, 2017: 121). Instead, this paucity of resources is likely to result in these parents losing out, as the administrative salience and social expectations of parental engagement with these mechanisms tends to increase (Reay & Ball, 1997: 89).

As a result, the transition between the home and the school can be a rough process for those parents who lack standing. As Amy Shuffelton notes, this means “*public schools have generally preserved inequitable power relations rather than changed them, and this happens in part because of parental resistance to reforms that they believe to be detrimental to the interests of the child*” (Shuffelton, 2020: 320). In other words, the prior inequality of parental influence tends to reinforce the negative effects that lock some parents out of exercising direct influence over school procedures.

Inegalitarian dynamics extend to efforts to procure vital educational goods, shaping how parents utilize the mechanisms of influence in pursuit of their ends. Diane Reay writes “*Material resources, educational knowledge, parents’ own educational experiences and the amount of domestic and educational support parents, and in particular mothers, had access to, add up to an important class difference that impacted on their relationship with their children’s education and the texture of their involvement in schooling.*” (Reay, 2017: 72). Previously outlined in greater detail in [§2.4.2.1](#), we know that education often has a positional nature with respect to other desirable goods, such as careers. The positional nature of education often compounds the inequalities of outcomes which stem from the differences in parental influence and power. Recent explosions in private tuition markets of maths, English, and science teaching are an example of how conferring educational goods tends to produce deeper disadvantage for other children unable to solicit private tuition (Booth, 2022).

Political and educational philosophers have responded to the above distributive problem by circumscribing the ethical limits of parental agency over education. We can find Brighouse and Swift arguing there is no general right to confer advantages onto one’s children. However, advantages which occur as a by-product of parents acting to procure relationship and educational goods for their children would be justifiable (Brighouse & Swift, 2014a: 126-7). Piano recital lessons may further my child’s prospects in competitive terms, such as admissions to a prestigious selective secondary school; however, it would be reasonable to think piano recital genuinely contributes to her wellbeing, in providing her with the joys of music (Swift, 2003: 10). Elsewhere, Brighouse argues in favour of reforms to school choice policies to promote equality between differently situated households. For example, quotas to increase socio-economic and ethnic heterogeneity, and a ban on fees which serve to top-up the value of going to well-resourced schools (Brighouse, 2000: 184).

Along with distributive problems, there are also inequalities in the discursive visibility of better off and worse off parents. Brighouse and Swift further explain that political philosophy focusing on parental interests often skews toward the claims of parents with ‘above average’ levels

of socio-economic status. Dissent, opting out, and entitlements to act in ways that outright contravene egalitarian norms become dominant discussions in how parents relate to education. Of course, this lack of visibility for disadvantaged parents is wrong; the desire to benefit one's child is universal, so a satisfactory theory must speak to the situation of disadvantaged parents too (Brighouse & Swift, 2014a: 123-4).

The relative invisibility of disadvantaged parents is further compounded through the effects of epistemic injustice on disadvantaged parents. Exposure to testimonial injustice from staff and administration can lead to a discouraging effect on whether parents will continue to push for their interests when they meet with an obstacle (Reay, 2017: 73-74). Parents from disadvantaged backgrounds express extreme negative affects when pushed on the subject. Furthermore, these parents often find themselves unable to piece together the wider social significance of their educational experiences owing to emotional qualities such as fear, trepidation, and alienation, suggesting the presence of hermeneutical injustice (*ibid.*)

Alternatively, Shuffelton argues we can make theoretical gains by observing how better-off parents often seek to cultivate democratic ways of exerting influence over the school. Scrutinizing the experience of these parents may yield important insights for those concerned with how the balance of power works between households and schools (Shuffelton, 2020: 320). Ethnography does suggest some parents are motivated by egalitarian concerns to better their local school, so Shuffelton's suggestion does have some plausibility. However, Reay's study finds ethnographic evidence of various inegalitarian behaviour and social attitudes among other parents. In particular, we should be concerned about the presence of psychological defence mechanisms and various forms of epistemic vice that can often serve a role in morally sanitizing the consequences of winning competitions for educational goods (Reay, 2017: 165). The cases are equivocal as a result.

3.4.2. How can powerlessness help explain the presence of epistemic injustice in parent-school interactions?

Instead of probing the psyche of well-intentioned parents, I want to suggest we should refocus our normative thinking altogether. Our focus should be on growth and how institutions, such as schools, can detract from the epistemic and ethical growth of parents. When we reflect on the obstacles to growth presented by the educational landscape, then we should be considering the institutional means to empower disadvantaged parents in developing and exercising their learner agency.

Secondly, since the inequalities in the pursuit for educational goods intertwine with issues of epistemic injustice and social positionality, a focus on empowerment implies a simultaneous focus

on the *powerlessness* faced by disadvantaged parents who end up marginalized by their interactions with schools. After all, it is not as if these parents are usually silent about their children's interests; it is that their agency is often minimized and frustrated by current procedures in sensitive areas such as special educational needs (ibid: 74). As we saw with Josie's case in [§2.3.2.1](#), when disadvantaged parents do attempt to exercise their agency, they often lack the dispositions and habits necessary to resist epistemic injustice within their dialogues with school staff.

To better understand powerlessness, we can draw upon Elizabeth Anderson's work on the topic (2010). Anderson elaborates on powerlessness as *"the condition of being unable to influence one's situation and the world around oneself because others deny one meaningful opportunities to participate in the decision making of the institutions – especially the state – under which one lives with others."* (Anderson, 2010: 14). In many cases, we see parents being denied the means participate within school processes at all. Disadvantaged parents often suffer an inability to leverage the direct and indirect mechanisms of parental influence over schools as a result, hence Reay's comment about the different 'textures' of parental involvement in schooling.

Anderson further distinguishes between two modes of powerlessness we should account for: formal and informal. Formal powerlessness occurs when parents lack a legal, administrative, or otherwise institutional entitlement to participate in decision-making and influence mechanisms. Disadvantaged parents are not powerlessness in a formal sense. If anything, the opportunities for formal empowerment have multiplied since the 1970s, through the system-wide adoption of choice and accountability mechanisms in the US, UK, and New Zealand (Brighouse, 2000: 23). This would imply that the opportunities for formal empowerment have increased over time, so this is unlikely to be the area where the problem lies.

We should consider situations where agents become informally powerless next. Instances of informal powerlessness occur when a parent cannot contribute to school processes, because not sufficiently respected by others. Consequently, their viewpoints and interests become epistemically excluded from consideration in governance matters. All things equal, disadvantaged parents are at risk of having their contributions locked out of the consultation and feedback process. As Anderson explains, informal powerlessness rides on hierarchies of status and social esteem, diminishing an agent's ability to gain enough currency to fully participate in collective decision-making processes (Anderson, 2010: 14). Informal powerless is likely to be predominant when analysing parental influence: disadvantaged parents often find themselves unable to garner sufficient respect from teachers and other parents, owing to the salience of significant identity prejudice that revolves around the confluence of gender, racial identity, and one's social class.

Impetus to discard a parent's judgment on irrelevant grounds fits in with a wider culture of disrespect for the agency of disadvantaged parents (Reay, 2017: 166). Working-class and ethnic minority parents often become subject to forms of identity prejudice, making them subjects of epistemic injustices. Forms of prejudice often expands from targeting certain set of parents to cover a wide range of associated characteristics and locations, including schools where working-class children are concentrated, for avoidance. In the vocabulary of epistemic injustice, we would explain that confluence of the culture of disrespect and the operation of informal powerlessness encourages the development of epistemic vices, such as close-mindedness, in some teachers, administrators, and better-off parents.

Along with vice, there is considerable epistemic friction generated by the powerless condition of disadvantaged parents and children in education. Reay describes the ethical tension occurring when well-off parents try to negotiate the need for educational success on one hand, and an aspirational vision of a fair society on the other. To Reay's view, the tension is driven by a warranted fear of failure: children who fail academically fall behind in the positional order for desirable outcomes and life-chances (ibid: 150). Here, epistemic friction occurs when parents become acutely aware of what their structural position implies for the influence they need to exert over the educational process. Knowing that this will often imply negative consequences for the fortune of other parents can cause negative affect, such as anxiety. As Reay quotes one parent navigating this dilemma, "*if anything I am more anxious – before, I worried enough about not knowing what was going on, now I worry because I know far too much.*" (ibid: 173).

Informal powerlessness has much explanatory value when we examine how disadvantaged parents fail to interface with mechanisms of influence. To take an example, one of the most common criticisms of school choice mechanisms is a lack of fit with working-class parents. A lack of fit here refers to the norms and habits of judging their children's interests. School choice mechanisms work indirectly, requiring high levels of cognitive engagement and weighting of options according to first preference. Working-class parents largely do not pore over quantitative league table data to support fine-grained comparative judgments regarding opportunity cost of one school or another (Exley, 2013).

Instead, Exley notes "*Working-class parents who refuse to engage with school choice and who do not share the same educational values as their more affluent counterparts are viewed as failing to undertake the responsibilities that 'good parenting' requires.*" (ibid: 77-8). The inadequacy of the mechanism to include the knowledge and skills of working-class parents is muscled out by a competing interpretation that serves to exclude those parents from contributing to epistemic



improvement. Instead, we see a cultural hardening, of disrespect to these parents, as described by Reay's work on how parents navigate the demands of the educational system. So, not only does the focus on school choice fail to resolve the inability of disadvantaged parents to exercise influence over their children's education, but it also makes them vulnerable to further forms of epistemic and ethical exclusion from schooling processes.

#### 3.4.3. A potential objection and response

Here, one may think I have gone too quickly in painting school choice mechanisms as a defective means of promoting learner agency. A system of school choice that conforms to the standards of growth and epistemic inclusion should be possible. What contemporary school choice policy lacks is crucial nuance, such as greater emphasis on public education and the training of parents to make more effective choices. *Ceteris paribus*, greater training on effective choice should enable parents to take advantage of their formal opportunities much better. One could argue on this point that "*Poor choosing should be relegated to a problem at the margins of the system with sufficiently aggressive regulation of, and public education about, choice.*" (Brighouse, 2000: 194).

With a focus on informal powerlessness, there is good reason to doubt whether this response would get to the heart of the problem. Firstly, there have been earnest attempts to address how disadvantaged parents choose from a range of options. Exley's study (2013) takes a case study of government provided choice advisory. Under this scheme, a parent is allocated a choice advisor, who is responsible for helping the parent to collate, analyse, and evaluate the options they have. It is possible this is what Brighouse senses is inadequate about current practice, though choice advisory in many ways went beyond breaking down quantitative data into a readily digestible form for choice (Exley, 2013: 86-87).

Furthermore, even when the state established advisory agencies whose mandate is to help parents choose effectively among options, both parents and the advisors typically account for the structural barriers for whose children go to which school (ibid: 84-86). Even if disadvantaged parents were to function as expected, they would be unlikely to gain any of their first choices. Again, despite a formal expansion of opportunities to reflect on the choices available, the actual value of parental influence is likely to be extremely low if the school is in an affluent catchment area.

The above intimates the problem is not an entrenched pattern of poor choosing, as much a case of the desired mechanism serving to inadvertently marginalized the bodies and habits of knowledge collected by working-class parents. We should be incredibly careful in situations such as this, as we do not want to misattribute a structural problem for a psychological one that resides with the individual agent (Khader, 2011: 55-56). Formal mechanisms of parental influence are often

unwelcome prospects for disadvantaged parents, since they demand a blend of ‘hot’ knowledge of reputations, authority, and affect with ‘cold’ knowledge associated with quantitative analysis of school league tables or performance metrics (Exley, 2013: 89-90). Many disadvantaged parents lack the self-confidence in their judgment and epistemic resources to process the meaning of cold knowledge as effectively as they can with hot knowledge (Reay, 2017: 74). In that case, disadvantaged parents often do what they can with the knowledge available to them—the institutional mechanism fails to provide more information in a meaningful way, which further undermines parental capacities to exercise their learner agency in ways deemed up to standard (ibid.).

We can give the above explanation more credibility if we probe the non-cognitive mechanisms which support the transmission of (dis)advantage. Non-cognitive mechanisms play a key role in how epistemic agency is cultivated by individuals in conjunction with their school and family environment. Clayton, Mason, Swift & Wareham (2021) point to significant overlap between cultural reproduction and the reproduction of advantages and disadvantages. To explain this overlap, they leverage the idea of unequal holdings in social and cultural capital. Practically, this means when parents do act to influence schools in pursuit of their children’s interests, the effect will often be to produce a school composition reflecting the demographic characteristics of their parents. A large part of this is explainable with reference to the transmission of non-cognitive norms, habits, and dispositions which enable (a) more opportunities to provide educative experiences and (b) impart the right emotional dispositions for discerning and capitalizing on educational opportunities (Clayton, Mason, Swift, & Wareham, 2021: 830-1).

For example, when we examine how school composition—the demographic makeup of students, parents, and teachers—relates to the transmission of advantage, we have good empirical reasons to suppose social and cultural capital transmission explains a large part in why crucial agential qualities, such as self-confidence and ability to communicate effectively with others, are so unequally distributed between well to do and disadvantaged groups of parents (ibid.). Higher levels of cultural capital can discourage dropping out rates across the school, while lower levels of cultural capital position often associate with higher level of misbehaviour and dropping out (ibid.).

#### 3.4.4. Does cultural capital play a role?

While I do not have the space to fully elaborate on the role of cultural and social capital, it is worth briefly sketching out how it relates to informal powerlessness. Political philosophers working on parent-school interactions have begun to outline its importance (e.g., Brighouse & Swift, 2014a),

and hopefully relating it to informal powerlessness provides a fruitful direction for any future research into parental influence.

In current context, cultural capital is important to explaining how parents transmit preferences, tastes, linguistic styles, mannerisms, etc. to their children. Children can then use cultural capital to smooth out access to desirable positions and goods, such as greater levels of educational attainment and better luck with interviews for desirable careers (Brighthouse & Swift, 2014a: 29). Cultural capital possession blends into a wider system of expressive and social displays, serving what Bourdieu refers to as a habitus, or otherwise “*system of durable and transposable dispositions*” (Bourdieu, 1990: 53-55). Children socialized by parents and teachers who display the right type of cultural capital will gain a habitus which is highly attuned to the need to achieve highly in education. Since these dispositions are transposable, they can be put to work in later life, especially as a parent who is able to display an active motivation and constructive attitude to their child’s educational experience. Circulation and transposition of cultural capital enables children and parents to convert their achievements, qualifications, and social networks into other forms of capital, such as income and professional standing. Understanding cultural capital, therefore, helps to explain how educational institutions reproduce and consolidate inequalities of outcome according to predictable social cleaves, such as race and class (Bourdieu, 1986).

A return to Reay’s research and the case of Josie will provide an excellent example of how cultural capital interlocks with matters of epistemic exclusion and informal powerlessness ([§2.3.2.1](#)) In Josie’s case, the identity prejudice she suffers at the hand of teachers contains racialized, gendered, and class-based tropes. In the eyes of school staff, she adopts an aggressive and irrational posture to parent-teacher dialogue, which cashes out in the idea of the pushy working-class mother. Despite this, Josie’s concerns are perfectly reasonable—her son has special educational needs which are left unidentified by teachers until too late. If we apply cultural capital reasoning to this example, we should say that Josie’s habitus is not suited to formal talk with her son’s teacher. The teacher is likely to be a university graduate, bundled with expectations of how ‘good’ parents will tend to react to adversity. Since Josie’s habitus was formed in a way that deprives her of key cultural capital, such as the ability to recognize and negotiate social ritual with authorities who hold expertise, she is more likely to fall into the condition of informal powerlessness.

## Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I have laid the groundwork for a Deweyan democratic account of how parenting contributes to the education of parents. I argued Dewey’s thinking, along with Kyle Greenwalt’s timely critique of Dewey’s relative silence on parenting, leads us to untangle two axes of

normative concern: the relationship between parents and children, and the relationship between parents and other social institutions like the school. I found Greenwalt's critique did have merit in flagging the need for more careful attention into the relational aspects of the parent-child bond but tempered the critique by arguing that Deweyan democrats have good reason to pursue Dewey's existing, yet rare, suggestions on the topic of parenting.

Dewey held aspirations for how best practices in psychology, ethics, and social theory could improve how parents interacted with children, and how parents flourished in their role as caretakers. He therefore aligns well with recent perfectionist theories of parent-child relationships. Deweyan democratic theory can benefit from greater conversation with broad perfectionist theories, as Brighthouse & Swift's relational approach can help to specify some educational properties that occur inherent to the relationship itself. Tim Fowler's project view also adds to our comprehension by fleshing out what intrinsically motivating properties are present in parenting when conceived of as a project.

Finally, I turned my attention to how a parent's learner agency is affected by her dealings outside of the home environment. Parents are not just responsible for the child's home; they must open the home outward to the wider community on behalf of the child. I took the example of the school as the most important. Here, parents can exert both indirect and direct influence on school decision-making procedures. Despite this, disadvantaged parents may lack the requisite power and agency to engage with either direct or indirect mechanisms. I called attention to the role of powerlessness through exploring the work of Anderson and applying lessons from Part I of the thesis. Informal powerlessness often confounds well-meaning policy interventions on behalf of disadvantage parents, inadvertently contributing to epistemic exclusion and frustrating growth.

## Chapter 4: How should the workplace contribute to our learner agency and growth?

Work, and the institution of wage labour, has long occupied an ambivalent place in the imagination of democratic theorists. One influential line of argument from J.S. Mill envisions the workplace acting as an embryonic space for the development of social cooperation, practical reasoning, and a sense of community within productive life. This ‘democratic educationalist’ school lauds civic prospects engendered by meaningful work, arguing in favour of industrial reform to promote democratic workplace arrangements. Despite work’s latent moral potential, modern democracies have, for the most part, been unable to guarantee meaningful work to a substantial share of their working population. As such, the democratic educationalist argument itself has come under scrutiny as a result, found wanting in both descriptive and normative terms.

In this chapter, I revisit the argument from democratic education from the Deweyan perspective developed through Part I of the thesis. The democratic educationalist gives us valuable insights into how democratic reform of workplaces can help to alleviate damage to our educational capacities. I begin by briefly unpacking the educationalist argument, covering its development from Mill to Pateman, and the problems associated with its much-debated spill-over thesis.

After identifying the shortcomings associated with the spill-over thesis, I move into unpacking Dewey’s own version of the democratic educationalist argument. Dewey’s critique comes from an economic democratic position which situates his critique of work within inequalities of relative socio-economic position and social status. Dewey argues industrial workplaces often distorted the growth of both workers and entrepreneurs, stultifying learner agency and encouraging an ‘inhumane’ intelligence that detracts from the ethical ties required by growth. I argue Dewey’s critical posture in work can help us to better conceive how undemocratic social conditions affect the aim of encouraging democratic character.

One fair question is whether Dewey’s philosophy of work remains relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I move onto establishing links between the Deweyan conception of growth and more contemporary research into the ethical and epistemic problems associated with large-scale employers. I outline four problems of interests presented by contemporary critiques of mainstream forms of workplace organization. Firstly, many workers lack self-direction. Secondly, workplace hierarchies often distort the ethical and epistemic ties that underpin democratic problem-solving. Thirdly, workplaces may develop faulty epistemic cultures. Fourth, workplaces often contribute to

structural injustice, raising questions about how workplace organization often discourages the undertaking of political responsibility for collectively generated harms.

With these problems laid out, I return to Dewey's philosophy of work for his positive thoughts on work. Dewey offers us two ways to reframe work in processual terms: occupation and vocation. Within the latter notion of vocation, I argue Dewey offers us a rich philosophical device to consider how working life should aid the development of democratic individuality in the face of the four problems above. Vocation is separable from issues of remuneration and instead emphasizes a worker's ties to other social identities, discouraging one-dimensionality. Simultaneously, vocation points to other institutions—such as trade unions—which push back against dangers associated with workplace hierarchies. Furthermore, we can begin to examine the pragmatic implications of changing workspaces and of resistance in the workplace by covert means. Finally, I consider and rebut an objection from pluralism which flags up the potentially elitist nature of conceiving work under this Deweyan interpretation.

#### 4.1. The Argument from Democratic Education Revisited

To open the chapter, it will be helpful to situate the Deweyan theory within a general tradition of liberal democratic thought on the workplace's educative potential. Such arguments traditionally advocate for the democratization of working conditions, and in doing so, they flag up the social potential for workers to develop, hone, and exercise their practical, emotional, and civic skills in a cooperative workplace environment.

##### 4.1.1. The Argument from Democratic Education

Frega, Herzog & Neuhäuser (2019) helpfully define “arguments from democratic education” as workplace reform arguments that focus on “*considerations of civic virtue and the need to build habits of democratic decision making among citizens...*” Hence, “*The workplace is the most important social space for adult individuals to spend large parts of their lives, hence, it can, potentially, provide “an education in the management of collective affairs that is difficult to parallel elsewhere.”*” (Frega, Herzog & Neuhäuser, 2019: 11). The argument specifies the educational qualities of working life in a democratic society. Work is uniquely intensive in the time required by work activities (the traditional full-time shift pattern in the UK is 38 hours a week) and the demandingness of the complex coordination between workers, management, stakeholders, and clients to engage. Against current modes of hierarchical and top-down organization, democratic educationalists argue work should be organized and distributed in a way that promotes the development of pro-democratic habits and attitudes.

Democratic educationalism allows us to frame the achievement of four analytically distinct goods of work. Ghaeus and Herzog (2016) enumerate these goods as (i) excellence, (ii) social contribution, (iii) community, and (iv) social recognition (Ghaeus & Herzog, 2016: 71). The democratic educationalist knits together these four goods while advocating for workplace reform. Take, for instance, J. S. Mill's famous argument for cooperative firms in the *Principles of Political Economy*. Increased control over workplaces originates in a growing sense of social and political recognition between working-class people, leading to the greater realization of common interests (iv). Mutual recognition between workers engenders a sense of meaningfully contributing to a project greater than oneself, as exemplified by labour and radicalist movements (ii). Intrinsic motivation then becomes easier to come by, fuelling the sustenance of community in working life (iii). In the end, as Mill eloquently and famously puts it, cooperative work enables "*the conversation of each human being's daily occupation into a school of the social sympathies and the practical intelligence*" (Mill, 2004: 202). Or, if you like, the shared cultivation of excellence in our ethical and epistemic capacities through pursuing common workplace projects (i).

Not every democratic educationalist argument will follow the form of Mill's argument, though the general argument remains a rich vein of insight for those working within deliberative and participatory democratic theory (Frega, Herzog & Neuhäuser, 2019). A general idea that workplaces could, in principle, become something like a school of social cooperation and practical judgment retains contemporary significance. In the UK, we have seen a post-industrial drift to work that focuses on care, information exchange, and service. Correspondingly, we tend to put a premium value on a worker's flexibility, her cognitive skills, and greater capacity to deal with emotional labour. In short, we should not expect the democratic educationalist argument to have lost its motivating factor over time. The argument is still capable of speaking to how we understand and organize our working lives in contemporary times.

#### 4.1.2. Democratic character and the spill-over effect

More recent research within the democratic educationalist paradigm has stressed the development of transferable civic skills, or 'democratic character', that transpose between the workplace and processes associated with political democracy. O'Neill isolates the precis of the educationalist move: "*The operative idea here is that the habits of vigorous and active engagement in real-world affairs that can be nurtured in a democratic or participatory workplace environment are such as to be uniquely well-suited to a life of broader democratic participation.*" (O'Neill, 2008: 42-43). This is also known as the 'spillover thesis'—the idea that workplace democratization can help to precipitate a fuller realization of political and civic democracy, in part by providing individuals with relevant transferable competencies (Pateman, 1970). If my workplace requires I exercise my ethical

and epistemic capacities to help manage common affairs then, *ceteris paribus*, I should be in a better position to exercise the same capacities when deliberating over how I should vote, how I engage with a political party, or perhaps in my role as part of a civil society group such as a charity.

Building on Mill's original argument, Carole Pateman (1970) further specifies the spill-over thesis rests on the possibility of learning the competencies and habits necessary for effective participation in multiple spheres of life within the workplace. While Mill was confident the cooperative workplace would lead to moral improvement of individual workers, Pateman stresses worker participation within the workplace possesses an intrinsically political dimension (Pateman, 1970: 47). A democratic workplace can give workers an experience of political processes, collective decision-making, and the exercise of voice within one of the most influential contexts they regularly inhabit (*ibid.*). Lower-level participation should be enabled by expanding democratic control over processes which immediately impact workers on a shop floor. We should also think of the higher-level operational functions of the workplace (e.g. managerial and executive functions) as being an important source of education for workers: "*For education in this sense higher level participation would seem to be required, for only participation at this level could give the individual experience in the management of collective affairs in industry and insight into the relationship between decisions taken in the enterprise and their impact on the wider social and political environment.*" (*ibid.*: 74). Having practices of democratic control over both lower-level and higher-level workplace functions should, *ceteris paribus*, give one the necessary practice and experience to train one for democratic life both inside and outside of the workplace.

Of course, a lot rides on the *ceteris paribus* clause in this argument. It is an open, empirical question whether civic skills and habits really do exhibit a spillover effect from the workplace to wider political life all things considered. Evidence to this date has been a mixed bag, indicating inconclusive experimental results (Frega, Herzog & Neuhäuser, 2019: 73). This is by no means fatal for the democratic educationalist case since we cannot say either way with sufficient confidence. Some empirical evidence provides positive support for the thesis, indicating increased civic awareness and participation from cooperative staff (Greenberg, Grunberg, & Daniel, 1996). By contrast, the primary caution against the spillover thesis is a call for greater explanatory sensitivity toward the elements of organizational structure and culture within firms. Examining the shortcomings of the spillover thesis, Carter (2006) and Coutinho (2016) both stress the relevance of exogenous and endogenous facts about firms. The market circumstances and internal nuance of given firms will often imply constraints on which goods of work can be achieved at a given point in time. Significant contextual questions are raised for would-be reformer relying on a spill-over thesis: how is expertise internally distributed? Does the given distribution of competence cause intra-firm



conflict? (Carter, 2006: 423-4) What category of work are we examining, and where is the firm located in the broader political economy? (Coutinho, 2016: 138-40).

Johnson and Orr (2017) attempt to respond to the spillover thesis' empirical shortcomings by qualifying the democratic educationalist argument. In particular, they see a role for a general theory, predicated on capabilities theory, in providing for regulative principles of 'institutional design'. To their argument, the capabilities approach can provide more fine-grained details on how workplaces enable or disable the agential capacities of their participating workers. With greater institutional specificity, the educationalist gains necessary explanatory latitude to obviate the inconclusive read from the spillover effect (Johnson & Orr, 2017: 236-7). Johnson and Orr simultaneously argue for a greater specificity in how we formulate our normative goals regarding work. Sharper normative theorizing is likely to yield large gains in comprehending how learning processes already present within workplaces can be exploited for pro-democratic ends:

*"...worker education in a broad sense is an explicit, direct, first-order aim embodied in specific educational practices. The process by which participation in workplace decision-making might be extended to conventional civic and political engagement becomes significantly less mysterious. And the sorts of obstacles to that process also become rather obvious. If, following Dewey, our commitment to democracy consists in "faith" in the capacity of ordinary men and women to govern themselves, the task becomes one of identifying and sustaining conditions necessary for them to realize that capacity." (ibid: 247).*

The allusion to Dewey is timely and relevant, even though Johnson and Orr prefer to outline connections between the capabilities approach and governance of the commons, through Sen and Ostrom's work. While I respect it is not their intention to pursue Dewey's insights here, I do think they miss an opportunity to capitalize on Deweyan philosophy. As I shall be arguing, Deweyan democratic theory can likewise help clarify the integral relationship between increased workplace education and greater democratic flourishing elsewhere. After all, we converge on the key methodological point I have been arguing within the thesis so far: if we are concerned with how the educational power of any specific institution serves the end of greater freedom, then we must attend to the practical conditions which serve to enable or hinder growth.

By relying on the Deweyan-inspired theory of growth, I hope to make an original and productive contribution to our understanding of the democratic educationalist argument. Firstly, I provide a negative understanding of how workplace practices detract from the growth of our learner agency. I explore Dewey's philosophy of work, especially its critical phase. Dewey's critical view of

work further specifies the purchase of workplace environments and activities on individual character, thus linking the arguments about growth in [§1.2—3](#). Secondly, I draw upon resources in contemporary political and organizational theory to specify four determinate problems for work and growth: (i) lack of self-direction, (ii) distortionary hierarchies, (iii) faulty epistemic culture, and (iv) unclear lines of workplace responsibility for structurally generated injustices. Thirdly, I relate Dewey's positive conception of work to suggest points of focus for the democratic educationalist in full view of these problems.

#### 4.1.3. A brief qualification on 'working life'

Before we move on, it is worth noting that we are not necessarily limited to the workplace when discussing the educative potential of working life. We may also include adjacent institutions such as trade unions. Trade unionism has played a vital historical role widening working-class access to technical, academic, and political forms of education through the organization of adult education, including through working men's clubs and mechanics' institutes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Rose, 2010).

### 4.2. Exploring Dewey's critique of work

In this section, I elaborate on Dewey's critique of the workplace. I start by locating Dewey's thinking on work to his wider advocacy for industrial democracy, providing an adequate problem-space to work with. Secondly, I examine Dewey's negative view on industrial work. I lean on the work of Renault, who clarifies Dewey holds two exclusive, yet overlapping, critiques of work. One of these threads of critique, what Renault terms 'formative effects', approximates the thesis' theoretical arguments concerning educative experience, institutional environments, and growth in Chapter 1. After clarifying the link, I move onto setting out specific problems in the following section.

#### 4.2.1. A statement of problematic situation

Just as with Mill and Pateman, Dewey believes the intensity and intimacy of productive life exerts a large measure of influence over the ethical, cognitive, and metacognitive habits of the working person. In a familiar turn of phrase, we find Dewey arguing "*Every occupation leaves its impress on individual character and modifies the outlook on life of those who carry it on. No one questions this fact as respects wage-earners tied to the machine, or business men who devote themselves to pecuniary manipulations.*" (IO&N: 117). Given working patterns are hypothesized to be a large determinant of the distribution of pro-democratic social attitudes, then we should evaluate working arrangements for their implications on our growth and capacities to engage in social cooperation. Work, like any other activity that channels our activity into productive outlets, counts as an educative context that deserves theoretical and normative attention (DeWeese-Boyd, 2015).

We can observe from Dewey's description of work that labour is distributed unevenly, both in terms of opportunities to exercise agency and in relative socio-economic status associated with some jobs and not others. A distinction between economic and workplace democracy is therefore pertinent (Grady, 1990: 146). Indeed, the institution of work, nor the firm, is not the sole target of Dewey's critique; it is properly political-economic, because Dewey wishes to advance a systematic critique of the industrial system on democratic experimentalist grounds (*EBNS*: 170). In his short article *The Economic Basis for the New Society* (1939), Dewey takes aim at the system of industrial production that restricts the expansion of productive capacity and discourages institutional reflexivity (*ibid.*). To Dewey, the working classes who are least equipped to handle the problems of productive capacity are expected to internalize the costs, while idle sentimentality rules the roost in the upper echelons, mirroring the social positionality thesis forwarded in [§2.3.3](#).

These economic democratic concerns motivate Dewey's critique of industrial working conditions. Dewey pushes the notion of self-development and juxtaposes it to his contemporary industrial state of affairs. Central is an ethical contention that not enough social progress has been made to promote self-realization, leaving a great proportion of the population either to "*find themselves*" or to "*educate themselves for what they can best do in work which is socially useful and such as to give free play in development of themselves*" (*F&C*: 169). Despite the negative framing, Dewey is implicitly arguing that work can become edifying, with the necessary conditions being (i) free development of one's talents, and (ii) the social utility of any work done. In other words, Dewey holds a conception that emphasizes goods of work such as community, autonomy, dignity, and social recognition.

On this point, Westbrook (1992) helpfully contextualizes Dewey's ethical influences from social Christianity and early socialist movements. These movements tended to criticize the growth of wage labour relationships as threatening the dignity of self-directed labour and the autonomy of the labouring person to control his own economic fate (Westbrook, 1992: 404-5). According to these critiques, the institution of a pecuniary system encourages habits inimical to growth, such as suspicion of one's contemporaries and resignation to economic circumstances one lacks control over. As Westbrook goes on to explain, Dewey remained pessimistic about the opportunities to promote the democratization of industrial work within such a socio-economic system. A division of people into socio-economic class, broken down along occupational lines, subordinated the ideals of individual agency, social cooperation, and the full enjoyment of social life, to the machinations of propertied groups in sustaining an unjust division of labour (*ibid*: 406-7).

The remedy for this situation, to Dewey's mind, is a regime of intelligent social and industrial planning. Dewey's philosophical remarks around means and ends ([§1.4.2](#)) are extremely crucial to distinguish his call for continuous social planning, rather than a centrally planned society as seen within the early development of the USSR. Dewey wishes to decentre the productionist ethic—focused on output—and substitute a humanistic ideal focused on furthering a democratic social form. When Dewey reframes the problem in this way, he surmises the goal of industry is “*the production of human beings. To this end, the production of goods is intermediary and auxiliary.*” (EBNS: 170). When the problem of production is understood in this alternative manner, it gives Dewey the requisite theoretical room to claim that capital goods, technology, and the development of human capital are properly understood as means to a greater end: a socio-economic system that is capable of marrying freedom of occupation and substantive, relational equality between participating workers (ibid.). In other words, Dewey sets out the problem-space for reflecting on the potential of a system of industrial planning, including the institution of work, for encouraging more robust linkages between working environments and a democratic way of living.

#### 4.2.2. The critical conception of work

Against this systemic backdrop, Dewey is able to advance his critical analysis of workplace conditions. As we have discussed, Dewey is primarily interested in how current inequalities of status and relative social position affect the chances of self-realization between different socio-economic groups. Industrial workplaces were argued to not serve the ends of supporting an individual's growth; in fact, Dewey argued throughout his career that the organization of work most likely produced mis-educative experiences for both the working class and the industrialist class.

Thus, we find the claim “*Every occupation leaves its impress on individual character and modifies the outlook on life of those who carry it on. No one questions this fact as respects wage-earners tied to the machine, or business men who devote themselves to pecuniary manipulations.*” (IO&N: 117). ‘Being tied to the machine’ implies workers lack workplace autonomy, instead being bound to a one-sided relationship with her equipment. Dewey means to point out the fact industrial environments often subjected working people to routinized, rote tasks they had no interest in learning more about (EBNS). Entrepreneurial or industrialist classes were not immune to the distortionary effects of stratification either. Their position encouraged the development of a calculating, ‘inhumane’ intelligence. What makes the tendency inhumane is the one-dimensional instrumentalization of colleagues, employees, and business partners as a mere means to the end of maximizing profit, thus the eroding social conditions required for democratic co-development to occur (Renault, 2017: 239).

Readers may have two reservations at this point. Firstly, talk of ‘industrial’ working environments may seem outdated to contemporary readers, leading to worries surrounding the applicability of Dewey’s critique to more contemporary working patterns. However, we should keep in mind the current distribution of interesting and well-esteemed work is still strongly structured along class-occupational class—increasingly educational attainment—lines (Kwok, 2020: 363). Dewey’s focus is suitably general, as to cover both the blue-collar worker of the early industrial era and, e.g., the harried contemporary service worker who plays an integral part in ensuring the smooth running of a four-star hotel.

Secondly, the reader may worry that Dewey’s points surrounding education are being elided with a critique of work as such. Could the problem be that those in deadening jobs lacked educational opportunities to begin with? As I have been pointing out, Dewey’s conception of educational experience and the centre of his critiques apply on a generic level. It intends to cover problems experienced by service, blue-collar, and even skilled cognitive workers. Hence, the critique should not disaggregate along prior matters of educational opportunities. Harðarson succinctly captures this point when he concludes: *“His argument was meant to apply to all sorts of work because, in his view, equality and local control were important everywhere.”* (Harðarson, 2018: 11).

#### *4.2.2.1 Renault’s development of the critical conception*

The critical orientation of Dewey’s philosophy of work has been elaborated upon by Emmanuel Renault (2017). Renault’s central contention is that Dewey’s critique of work can be understood by two distinct frames of reference. We can find one strand that attempts to formulate critiques of working conditions from materials provided by the experience of working people. To Renault, the objective of this first strand *“is to elaborate a model of social critique that could address the problems met in the working experience itself and workers’ claims concerning the transformation of the actual industrial organization.”* (Renault, 2017: 290). Workers will advance ethical claims to the goods of work such as happiness, workplace autonomy, and social recognition which feature in their political mobilization against ill-treatment by employers and the state. It should then be possible to infer normatively binding expectations their demands place on fellow workers, states, and employers. Using this experiential approach, the social theorist can evaluate the means for realizing and properly distributing these goods among working people.

Secondly, we have a more familiar ‘formative effects’ approach. Under this frame of reference, the qualities of workplace experience become the subject of the critique rather than its source (ibid: 294). Renault’s appeal to ‘formative effects’ is best thought of as one way to summarize the general line of critique taken up in this thesis as a whole: workplace institutions will tend to

generate certain educative, non-educative, or mis-educative effects upon the experience of participants. As we have seen, this ecological focus allows social theorists to raise aetiological questions surrounding the democratic quality of social processes involved within work and anticipate likely spillover effects on the character of workers, not unlike Pateman's argument. As an extreme example, Dewey argues a dull blue-collar workplace environment may pose an increased risk of individuals developing pathological coping mechanisms, such as alcoholism and problematic gambling, as attempts in venting steam or nullifying chronic occupational pain (D&E: 213).

Renault's argument clarifies the role of 'character' as invoked by the general educationalist argument about work. In effect, Renault is claiming there are two operative senses of 'character' that vary based on which frame of reference we choose to ground our critique in. If we choose the experiential frame of reference, then references to 'character' are to be understood as claims about the ability of current working patterns in failing to provide for an individual's growth (Renault 2017: 291-2). By contrast, in the formative effects frame we are concerned with 'character' as signifying the need to re-design work to encourage democratic habits and virtues of character, which support the development and extension of associative democratic relationships inside and outside of work. If we fail to attend to reforming the workplace in purview of its mis-educative tendencies, Renault notes "*the result is that democracy will remain impossible as long as the working experience remains for the majority a learning process of mechanical repetition and unintelligent obedience*" (ibid: 294-5).

I concentrate on the second reading of 'character' in Renault's formulation, per the commitments of the thesis in Chapter 1. This should not be seen as a rebuke to Renault's argument to treat the two strands of critique as complimentary. He grants "*the impacts on individual character and on social and political organization outside of work retroactively affect the work experience itself, both of the two types of critique of work cannot but be intertwined.*" (ibid: 296). We are likely to implicitly cover the theoretical ground presented by both modes of criticism. Renault does a valuable service in pointing to the need for carefully circumscribing one's claims and purposes about the role of 'democratic character' in educationalist arguments like Dewey's, Mill's, or Pateman's. Renault is using Dewey's critiques to remind us of the pragmatic, problem-solving orientation of Dewey's thought, consonant with Johnson and Orr's call for greater specificity on workplace educational practice. Hence, we should be explicit about the frame of reference we choose here, since the choice will generate divergent diagnoses for how we go about achieving work that serves a democratic way of life.

### 4.3. How does work detract from our growth?

Now that we have deployed Dewey's critical conception of work and linked it with the wider commitments of the thesis, it will be useful to put Deweyan democratic theory into greater conversation with recent philosophical research into work, organizations, and structural injustice. After this, I will elaborate on a positive conception of work inspired by Dewey that can provide philosophical devices to help guide our normative thinking about the educational problems elaborated on in this section.

Firstly, I outline the most crucial problem for growth: (i) lack of self-direction at work. Secondly, I turn my attention to problems associated organizational hierarchy (ii) to plug the gap in specificity identified by Carter, Coutinho, and Johnson & Orr. Thirdly, I draw heavily on work of Lisa Herzog to understand the epistemic consequences of mis-educative workplace environments on an organization's (iii) epistemic culture. Fourth, mis-educative epistemic and organizational culture confounds the responsible exercise of our learner agency. Workplaces often generate harms that contribute to structural injustice indicated by Herzog, Young, and Dewey. This raises questions about the appropriate type of responsibility we should encourage to ameliorate workplace-generated injustices (iv).

#### 4.3.1. Lack of self-direction in work

Perhaps the most central problem indicated by Dewey's thinking is the lack of self-direction that occurs within firms. Dewey's comments about the development of a worker being tied to her machine or a businessman developing an 'inhumane' intelligence ultimately critiques how industrial-era work undermines the capacity to develop and exercise the epistemic and moral elements of our learner agency.

Lisa Herzog (2018) takes a similar approach when tackling contemporary ethical issues presented by large organizations, especially large employers. Herzog argues many employees often experience a lack of ethical and epistemic self-direction, as if they were merely cogs within a wider institutional machine. They are responsible for ensuring the machine is able to function but lack executive direction over the ends the machinery works for, and how the machine's operation can adapt to suit their needs. A lack of self-direction, as Herzog explains, tends to be associated with large-scale organizations who have massive annual intakes and turnover of employees (Herzog, 2018: 1-5). Workplace organizations, especially at gargantuan scale, can contribute to a lacking sense of self-direction and autonomy at work, corresponding to a sense of powerlessness to influence the outcomes of one's daily activities in work (ibid: 4). In other words, Dewey's diagnoses still seem relevant today.

According to the Deweyan ideal of learner growth, workplace environments should support the development and exercise of morally responsive and epistemically sound agency. Herzog advances a similar case, arguing workplaces and organizations provide *scaffolding* for first-order practices that individual workers cooperate within. Workplace organizations provide scaffolding primarily by providing spaces, such as offices, and practices, such as team-working, to situate their workers into a common project. A common project can then be regulated with normative mechanisms like rules, heuristics of judgment, and cultural understandings (ibid: 36). Since everyone benefits from a workplace organization that supports morally and epistemically responsive agency, Herzog argues all share a duty to help provide and maintain scaffolding necessary for functional, desirable workplace environments. In a statement that tracks almost perfectly with Festenstein's summary of growth and social inquiry in [§1.2.3](#), Herzog argues "*there is a web of crosswise relations: we have a responsibility to maintain our own agency, but also to help others maintain theirs. We have a moral right to receive such support from others, but they also have such rights on us.*" (ibid: 41).

Often, this does not happen. In practice, most workplaces are ambivalent on whether they support or frustrate the development and exercise of individual agency, in both epistemic and moral terms. There seem to be at least two analytically distinct dimensions in play. Firstly, the likelihood of finding oneself in a workplace that does not support learner agency seems associated with background facts about the worker themselves, such as skill levels and collective bargaining power. Secondly, even when one is in a desirable position for autonomous work, they still face threats of one-dimensionality and moral indifference from how certain forms of work educates them to take on an amoral professional identity.

As Kwok (2020) explains in a recent piece on workplace autonomy, the distribution of self-directed work is heavily skewed between those with greater and lower level of marketable skills. Skill possession or lack thereof tends to explain inequalities in opportunity for autonomously directed work more so than the type of work, e.g., clerical or blue-collar labour (Kwok, 2020: 360). Furthermore, when workers have more bargaining power through collective mechanisms, e.g., trade unions, they tend to enjoy higher levels of autonomy in their workplace and vice-versa for lower levels of autonomy and a lack of bargaining power (ibid: 360-1). Inequalities in the distribution of opportunities for workplace autonomy seems to have widened and deepened over recent years, with lower-skilled workers at much greater risk of deskilling, along with the corresponding lack of autonomy (ibid: 361).



Kwok further explains that inequalities in the distribution of autonomous work tends to imply an unjust distribution, *inter alia*, of central educational goods such as intrinsic motivation and desirable social, civic, and political character traits. Writing about higher-skilled workers, “*Their work is more motivating, which cultivates in them a better sense of self-worth and self-esteem and equips them with better civic and political capacities; they experience better psychological states at work, and they are more satisfied with the central activity of their everyday life*” (ibid: 361). In other words, higher skilled workers are more likely to experience the workplace as a boon to their self-development, and more likely to enjoy an environment that supports the exercise of their learner agency. A highly unequal distribution of autonomous work poses a thorny problem for maintaining the social and political conditions necessary for an associative democracy. As Jackson explains, both epistemic and ethical growth is at risk for lower skilled workers: “*workers’ self-government is arrested when they must merely execute the will of another, and that it is senseless for society to exclude the wisdom of those actually engaged in an activity from influencing the methods and aims of the activity.*” (Jackson, 2014: 118).

This is not to imply higher-skilled workers do not face any obstacles for their growth at work. Here, we get to the second dimension, what Herzog labels as cases of *déformation professionnelle*. Essentially, this means higher-skilled workers may encounter workplace environments that wrongly foster a one-dimensional identification between one’s person and the workplace role they inhabit. Ideally, this should not occur. Identification with one’s work is crucial to underpinning a sense of self-development and self-realization that we want workplaces to provide (Herzog, 2018: 176). However, a lack of separation between professional and personal life can become problematic. *Déformation professionnelle* represents a type of mis-educative process occurring within the workplace that cramps an individual’s growth and encourages faulty modes of identification with one’s social contribution through labour (ibid: 197).

Herzog examines two cases relevant to our discussion. Firstly, total identification with one’s professional role. If one is employed by a morally responsible and epistemically well-ordered firm, then there should be no problem. Where one is employed by an amoral, immoral, and/or epistemically faulty firm, then one is at a greater risk of developing a correspondingly faulty identification with what they do. Secondly, a strong bifurcation of one’s professional identity that they take off and put on like a ‘coat’, orbiting around discussions of private and public presentation of identity.

The educational consequences total identification are fairly straightforward: it cramps epistemic and moral development. On the epistemic side, Herzog notes “*Strong identification with*

*one's role may also lead to epistemic obstacles to the re-evaluation of one's role and its imperatives. If one 'sees' everything from the perspective of one's role, one loses access to an independent point of view.*" (ibid). In more organizational terms, the hindrance posed to epistemic growth is likely to militate against the epistemic improvement of faulty workplace practices ([§2.2](#)). Morally, the same problem applies. Too strong of an identification with our work can numb us to the ethical consequences of our individual and collective undertakings. This is especially noteworthy in workplaces where there is a culture of disregard and amoral action, which one of Herzog's interviewees asserts is true of financial services (ibid).

On the other hand, an individual may strongly separate their workplace and non-work identity. Once we get back home, we attempt to bracket whatever we were doing at work, as if it were a coat we put on and take off. The danger here is wear-and-tear. The coat will eventually degrade over time; the same can be said of our capacity to respond to moral problems. One becomes tired, habituated, or resigned to faulty workplace practice. In the end, this could lead to forms of excuse-making or rationalizations about what unjust processes one contributes to through their workplaces. As Herzog herself argues: *"Moral agency, however, requires not only a clear-eyed view of the moral matters at stake, but also the motivation to act upon the conclusions one arrives at. The 'coat' model can create additional dangers for moral agency because it can deprive those who adopt it of the motivational resources to speak up and act against moral wrongs."* (ibid: 181). If I am tired, resigned, and defeated by work, then the danger is very much that taking the coat model seriously will reduce my intrinsic motivation to better myself, my circumstances, and the condition of those who my workplace contributions indirectly effects.

#### 4.3.2. Dangers associated with workplace hierarchy

As we discussed above, relative position in the labour market matters for distribution of autonomous work. Relative status within workplace organizations also matters. We must pay attention to what hierarchies we find and how this interacts with the organizational culture. Recalling the ethical warnings about hierarchy cramping growth in [§1.2.3](#) and further caution surrounding the epistemically distortionary nature of hierarchies in [§2.1.2](#), we have ample reason to evaluate workplace hierarchies as a potential cause of mis-educative experiences.

There are two levels of workplace hierarchy we should be aware of. Formal hierarchy tracks positions and roles codified by workplace structures; hence they are person-independent in nature as we are concerned with the office and not the employee as such (Coutinho, 2016: 25). For example, schools and colleges typically have formal hierarchies between support, academic, and managerial staff who claim different prerogatives and rank within the same organization. Secondly,

we have informal hierarchies. These hierarchies are 'person-dependent', meaning focus shifts to the particular employee rather than their office as such (ibid). Informal hierarchy works through processes of norm creation, deference rituals between better-equipped and worse-equipped staff, and social facts about interpersonal authority within workplaces. A teacher who retains significant seniority within a school or a college may create an informal hierarchy regardless of her formal position, should her authority into how the school runs be considered extremely valuable or non-negotiable by other agents (ibid.).

Workplace hierarchies can cause immediate problems for how a firm educates its members. For instance, formal hierarchy plays a large role in explaining the power dynamics which produce acute vulnerability of lower-skilled, lower-earning employees to their employer's rules, expectations, and power to leverage formal sanctions such as the sack, thus contributing to the lack of self-direction they experience. While not all rules are powerplays in this sense, Anderson (2017) argues formal hierarchy is often unregulated by law and leaves the employer with arbitrary levels of power to influence the employee's behaviour, appearance, and habits. Such micro-management ranges from requiring dress codes with little basis, to violations of privacy in and outside work, and even extending to potentially discriminatory action like prohibiting same-sex relationships. To what extent an employer can demand compliance is dependent on where one lives and the content of one's legal code on employer-employee contractual relationships (Anderson, 2017: 36). In areas where legal codes lapse, there is little limit. Wage theft, capricious firing, and coercing employees into unsafe or unsanitary conditions are common consequences of unregulated formal hierarchy. Needless to say, the social and political conditions needed to promote a democratic social culture are often undermined.

Formal hierarchy can often compound lack of self-direction and limit the voice of workers who occupy the lower rungs of a firm's ladder. When the offices at the top of the ladder start to impose their will or desired pace of work for those at the bottom, this often prevents epistemic and ethical cooperation from occurring. Under pressure from the top, support and clerical staff will often prefer to not transmit crucial pieces of information further up the hierarchy (Herzog, 2018: 133-4). One example is given by Herzog and Zacka's ethnographic work on organizational life (2017). Herzog and Zacka give an example of front-line social workers having to protect their autonomy against formal processes of target-setting, micromanagement, and performance management from the top of their command hierarchy. Since social work is particularly intensive for the time and trust needed between a social worker and their client, targets of time and caseload completion can often encourage frontline staff to withhold knowledge for fear of formal sanction. This is not to evade work; rather, it is integral to ensuring there will be enough time to establish rapport with clients.

However, concealment becomes very rational within this circumstance (Herzog & Zacka, 2017: 769). Consequently, the overall pool of knowledge and epistemic resources is diminished in quantity. A lack of publicity (§2.2.2) of what one knows will frustrate attempts to make constructive changes to how staff coordinate their actions. In other words, the social effects of formal hierarchy can confound the possibilities for epistemic improvement.

We should be sensitive to contract and its nuances when we examine formal hierarchy. Different firms leverage different contractual situations for their employees, and it may not always be obvious when a formal hierarchy begins and ends. For example, independent contracting work in food delivery and taxi services such as Uber and Uber Eats often present themselves as offering a lack of hierarchy and full autonomy for the independent contractor. While such companies do not explicitly rely on sanctions to compel workers to act as desired, they simply substitute the formal dynamic of rule-follow and punishment for disobedience, they leverage incentives instead (Herzog, 2018: 96). Incentives allow such companies to influence the dispositions and habits of their contractors by offering more work at ‘surge hours’ and design the app around nudging the contractor to act at this peak. Psychological framing tricks help to incentivize the behaviour Uber want to see, and the relationship can only go one way with independent contracting hierarchies. There will be no negotiations over incentive levels and payoffs – exit is the only option (Schieber, 2017).

Informal hierarchy is more insidious and banal. It is often constant over democratic and non-democratic workplace form, since it is grounded in sociological facts about how workers share knowledge, accumulate resources, and attribute authority to one another *in medias res*. Accumulation of knowledge and resources is often driven by matters of specialization in the firm’s division of labour and time-constraints on employees being able to draw and contribute knowledge to their workplace (Rousseau & Rivero, 2003: 121). One concerning implication is the social backlash that accompanies disturbing or challenging those who benefit from informal hierarchy. Those who hold more knowledge or authority are much more able to play on the defensive and impose their will onto those at the bottom of informal hierarchies, to the point of fatally derailing much needed reforms to best available practice (Harrison and Freeman, 2004: 50). Desired changes and transformations in an organization’s culture may simply not be possible when entrenched informal hierarchies wish to maintain the status quo ante. Any epistemic or moral problems are likely to intensify, rather than improve, as long as the organization lacks a suitable mechanism to prevent organizational degeneration (Carter, 2006)

#### 4.3.3. Effect of hierarchy on epistemic culture

To further specify how workplaces often contribute to a lack of self-direction, we can draw on Herzog's recent work on the role of organizational culture and how it interlinks with the dangers posed by hierarchical workplaces which fail to regulate their informal and formal hierarchies.

Of particular interest to our thoughts on the educational implications of workplace arrangements is Herzog's idea of an organization's *epistemic culture*. From her discussion, an epistemic culture concerns the informal, sociological aspects of how knowledge is created, distributed, pooled, and shared within a given organizational structure (Herzog, 2018: 134). When formal workplaces structures fail to nullify the negative effects of hierarchy and a lack of self-direction on our growth, we can consider improving epistemic culture. To this end, we should encourage the lateral flow of information and the respect for an agent's epistemic necessary for epistemic inclusion in the broader task of improving the workplace ([§2.2.3](#)). A positive epistemic culture will ensure *"employees receive all relevant information about the wider context of what they do; they are taken seriously as bearers of knowledge and share all functionally and morally relevant knowledge."* (ibid: 135). A positive epistemic culture supports the growth of epistemic agency by helping to promote bonds of trust, respect for each other in our capacities as knowers, and by making moral questions explicitly relevant to practical judgment about what one, one's team, or one's firm is causing when engaged in work activity (ibid).

By contrast, workplace hierarchy tends to produce mis-educative effects through a cultivating negative epistemic culture. In a malfunctioning epistemic culture *"employees receive no information about the wider context of what they do and are not taken seriously as bearers of knowledge. They are pressurized into processing information quickly, without asking critical questions."* (ibid: 134). Conditions are likely to detract from the development of the epistemic and ethical aspects of our learner agency under a negative epistemic culture. Particularly pertinent is cases of epistemic injustice—when workers have their concerns dismissed based on their formal rank, we may have a case of testimonial injustice ([§2.3.2.1](#)). Within Herzog's description, a faulty epistemic culture is unlikely to give affected workers sufficient access to hermeneutical resources to mount effective complaints about their workplace experiences ([§2.3.2.2](#)) Negative epistemic cultures will tend to undermine the institutional bonds which underwrite collective problem-solving in the workplace (ibid). This is especially true of trust, since *"Trust, however, is notoriously difficult to establish in social relations that are hierarchical and hence pervaded by one-sided dependencies. In such settings, it can be very tempting to act strategically rather than with the openness that is required for trust."* (ibid: 135). That is, frontline workers will continue to practice strategies of avoidance and concealment of information with higher management, and higher management will

respond with greater urgency to micromanage and impose discipline from above. In these cases, management is typically unwilling to reconsider the ends of workplace culture or needs of their workers ([§2.2.1](#)).

To Herzog, it is important not to strongly juxtapose organizational interests and moral agency. Negative epistemic cultures tend to be self-destructive, but their causes are hypothesized to be strongly influenced by illusions of competence fed by both informal and formal hierarchies: *“human beings tend to be overly optimistic about their own knowledge, and they tend to jump all too easily from the premise that they are in a position of power to the conclusion that they must also be in a position of superior knowledge.”* (ibid: 137). Here, we have a reason to be concerned about the spread of epistemic vices, such as close-mindedness and arrogance ([§2.3.4](#)). The problem then becomes reconfiguring the micro-politics of the workplace to make clear where one’s competence begins and where it ends, ideally by flattening hierarchies and encouraging a great lateral transmission of knowledge, skills, and attitudes which are needed to encourage all ranks to exercise their epistemic agency in a responsible manner (ibid: 137-8).

#### 4.3.4. Unclear responsibility for workplace-generated injustices

As Dewey’s contextualization shows, the problem of work extends into the structure of the political economy at large. As Herzog helps us to understand, the scale at which large employers act and interact with other parts of democratic society is often gargantuan. In such a situation, another problem occurs for where responsibility lies for (a) unjust outcomes which are externalized onto others, and (b) unjust outcomes which denigrate the development of epistemic culture, self-directed work, and a functioning organization.

Large parts of the problem originate in the structural nature of the outcomes generated by workplace activity, especially regarding their relationship to global problems such as anthropogenic climate change, or local problems such as decreased quality of public services. A key fulcrum is the causal overdetermination of problematic outcomes. That is, a difficulty to identify whose contribution makes an efficient cause and whose contribution could be bracketed in cause-effect analyses of the problem (Nutti, 2019: 185). This holds across firms, in the case of multiple large emitters contributing to global emissions output, and also inside firms where employers can be puzzled over how their actions produces determinate outcomes that can be linked to (a) moral or (b) political problems in other sectors of a given society. Organizational complexity often goes hand in hand with an opaque view of how one’s actions are contributing to shared problems. In the end, this obscures who is responsible within the workplace, and for what they are even responsible for (*Ethics*: 503). As Herzog summarizes: *“one of the great dangers of organizations is that they can*

*enlist large numbers of individuals in morally problematic activities, while keeping them at a distance from the consequences, so that they do not feel responsible for them and therefore do not question the orders they receive.*" (Herzog, 2018: 114). In Deweyan vocabulary, the sum of consequences would be a meta-ignorant institution which lacks the feedback needed for self-correction ([§2.4–5](#)).

Young's work on social connection and responsibility can help provide guidance in instances of causal overdetermination. We can see this clearly when Young argues "*My responsibility is essentially shared with others because the harms are produced by many of us acting together within accepted institutions and practices, and because it is not possible for any of us to identify just what in our own actions results in which aspects of the injustice that particular individuals suffer.*" (Young, 2011: 110). Where causal overdetermination makes liability-based reasoning insufficient to the scale and complexity of structural injustices, we should attempt to recalibrate our understanding of responsibility to focus more on the background conditions of injustice. For instance, we might want to probe how the workplace embeds into global markets that prioritize competition over ecological conservation; we may want to probe specific organizations for malfunctioning epistemic cultures; or how management cultures quite generally enable amoral or immoral behaviours that sum up to produce undesirable consequences. Our thinking about responsibility, when faced with this type of causal overdetermination and background enablement, should aim to unsettle our complacency or inertial tendencies to minimize structural conditions (ibid: 107).

Young's thoughts on responsibilities are initially attractive for a Deweyan democratic perspective. If we are unclear about the relationship between individuals input and collective output, then it makes sense to step back and encourage greater reflection on what workplaces, trade unions, and other workplace-adjacent groups may do to resolve the problem. As Nussbaum notes in the foreword to *Young's Responsibility for Justice*, Young's political interpretation on shared responsibility for structural injustice contains imperatives for citizens to cooperate in prevent social and epistemic injustices, near to the Deweyan ideal of associative democracy. "*The imperative of political responsibility consists in watching these institutions, monitoring their effects to make sure they are not grossly harmful, and maintaining organized public space where such watching and monitoring can occur and citizens can speak publicly and support one another in their efforts to prevent suffering.*" (Nussbaum, 2011: xv) To Young, responsibility should be forward-looking, in the same sense Deweyan democrats should think of epistemic improvement, aiming to offer prospective resolutions to problems and cutting into the ways structural injustice distort the political and social conditions required for collective problem-solving.

Young's political conception of responsibility has noteworthy implications we should note. Firstly, since the framework aims to be forward-looking, then blame and resentment politics are out of place and counterproductive (ibid: 117-8). Secondly, since it is not possible to determine who contributes to what outcome, we should presume everyone shares responsibility to improve the unjust outcome, including that of the victims. This is by no means blaming the victims on Young's part – rather, their contribution is valuable because they are uniquely placed to communicate insights that may help to resolve structural problem, so Young's argument is not unlike the observations on epistemic advantages of the marginalized adumbrated in §2.3.4 (ibid: 149). Practically, this implies workers victimized by employers or faulty organizational culture should become key contributors to the conversation on improvement. Thirdly, universally shared responsibility implies that only collective action can discharge responsibility for structural injustice; bargaining power, trade unions, and cooperative work become key ingredients. Finally, we should utilize four 'parameters' of reasoning about structural injustice to inform us of what we, individually, could do to contribute to collective problem-solving. Parameters include who holds power, how this translates to privilege, any social and political interests involved, and the ability for individuals to draw on resources held in collective institutions (ibid: 124; Nuti, 2019: 185).

Young's conception of political responsibility is insightful when reflecting on how workplace organization comports with the massive scale at which large employers operate. However, it may not be as sensitive to issues of relative position and power as it should be. Alasia Nuti (2019) argues Young's thoughts on responsibilities founder in erring away from attributing liability to specific agents and groups. To Nuti, *"precisely because of their inherent capacity to influence structural processes, the contributions of certain agents (such as states) to such structures have effects that are profound and tangible."* (Nuti, 2019: 187-8). Of these actors, which we could point to massive firms and employers who contribute to global emissions or in-work poverty through low wages, the largest and longest-living will accrue a 'structural debt' representing their historical contribution to sustaining structural injustice (ibid: 188). While Young does instruct individuals to reflect on their power and privileges accrued from one's social position, she cannot offer an account that apportion responsibility fairly once we take into account matters of structural debt and differences in capacity to intervene in structurally unjust processes (ibid: 189).

Nuti's intervention is significant in directing our attention to matters of structural position and ability. Victimized workers are often not able to effect transformative change. Meanwhile, massive firms and employers can leverage market and political power to pressure lawmakers to alter the rules of the game, such as contracting nuances, laws surrounding industrial action and unionization, or who picks up the bill to deal with structural problems generated as a by-product of



increased economic activity. We should expect workers impacted by these problems do not share as much political responsibility as their employers do to remedy the situation. In this sense, we can apportion a fair amount of liability to engender change with employers. *“Since the injustice is structural in nature, they should do so not simply by changing their attitudes but by engaging with others (e.g., calling out similarly positioned persons) and, especially, participating in or organising collective actions.”* (ibid: 190). So, for example, we should demand, blame, and criticize employers for resisting unionization, avoiding negotiation with concerned workers and communities, and for denying lower-skilled workers an effective opportunity to find experience through their work.

#### 4.4. Dewey’s positive conception of work: the strive for vocations

With the problems laid out before us, we can re-consult Dewey’s philosophy of work for his positive conception of how work should support our learner agency. From the above analysis, a positive conception of work should seek to provide an interpretation of (i) why we work; (ii) how work can promote democratic individuality (iii) guidance on how to challenge the effects of malfunctioning hierarchies; and (iv) be sensitive to potential justificatory problems arising from pluralism and freedom of occupation.

##### 4.4.1. Why do we work?

Within Dewey’s social, educational, and political philosophy, work plays a vital role in driving problem-solving in the areas of cultural and social needs. Dewey starts, however, at a material level. We work because *“men have had to work in order to live.”* (S&S: 94-5). In the process of working to satisfy our needs, we come to greater knowledge of how our conjoint activity can affect the world around us. Our action becomes more productive in procuring food, warmth, and shelter, while our practical judgment becomes more acute and efficient as it adjusts to new circumstances (ibid.). Consequently, our needs often evolve in their complexity and number as our labour becomes more effective and definite. We may always need warmth, food, and shelter, but questions surrounding the standards of housing, the distribution and entitlements to food, and appropriate design of warm homes are both materially and culturally bound. What work provides is a rich tapestry of culturally relevant and existential needs whose standards for satisfactions we judge against the human development enabled by a democratic way of life.

On this view, work is not an individualistic transaction between a self-sufficient labourer and employer in need of labour-power. To work is to cooperate with our peers, community, and kin to manage common affairs and work to satisfy common needs. As such, Dewey’s conception of work, like Herzog’s, starts at the level of workers contextualized within organizations (Winkelman, 2016: 307). Organization, especially democratic, is key to the formation and negotiation of common needs

that can be actioned by shared productive activity. Organized labour also allows us to translate these general needs into concrete, specific ends to which our activities aim. Concreteness here means an organization's aims will be relative to the function it was designed to execute. For example, the concrete end of Microsoft is to design, produce, and sell electronic devices on the market, such as the Surface laptop I am typing on. However, growth in the production and consumption of goods is associated with the general ends of affluence, quality of life, and economic growth. Microsoft does not aim to satisfy these generalized ends, but their more concrete ends of designing and selling electronics contributes to all three general ends of production.

#### 4.4.2. How can work promote democratic individuality?

Work helps to satisfy, galvanize, and refine our needs to more complex states. Dewey introduces further observations to explain the individual significance of self-directed work, and the relationship between one's work and wider facets of the democratic social culture we inhabit.

Firstly, we should be aware of how work provides us with an *occupation*. Here, the sense of 'occupation' is determined by its relationship with our attention and activities, as opposed to 'occupation' in the sense of holding a particular job. So, for Dewey, work should enable us to fix our attention and interest on tasks or projects. Once the agent becomes occupied in this way, then the organization of work can allow us the time and practice necessary to gain a sense of proficiency over the task that keeps us occupied (*D&E*: 316-7). A core consideration here is how occupation links in with learner agency: if we are concerned to learn within an occupation, we must engage in it. A feedback loop then occurs where greater occupation with a task feeds a greater interest and mastery over that task (*ibid*: 320). To Dewey, we come to the most efficacious and practical learning while we are actively on the job.

More substantively, Dewey offers up a crucial concept of *vocation* to cash out how an individual's working life interlinks with the other identity roles she adopts as a democratic agent. Once again, Dewey relies on an unorthodox conception of vocation, one that is distinct from holding down a job or even enjoying a career based around a particular line of work. Still, there should be an underlying sense of identification with the tasks one tends to work with. In holding to this interpretation of vocation, Dewey wants to resist the 'coat' model as cautioned against by Herzog: we should not erect strong distinctions between our identity-roles at work and our wider commitments as members of families, communities, and nations. A vocation must enable an individual to find significance in their work, rather than acting as a coat they can take off arbitrarily. *"A vocation means nothing but such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish, and also useful to his*

*associates.*” (ibid). Here, we can see vocation has no necessary connection with remuneration or wage labour. Regardless of wage or salary, what matters is to highlight how work enables us to engage our individual talents toward common, communal projects that benefit ourselves, our contemporaries, and future generations (ibid: 329). Dewey’s ameliorative concept of vocation is supportive of his broader ideals about educational growth. As Higgins summarizes, “*Education is not a preparation for vocations; vocations themselves are (more or less) educative, preparing us for more complex vocations, wider experience, and a richer life.*” (Higgins, 2005: 450).

Vocations help to knit together our occupations into a web of individual significance. Dewey likens a vocation to having a rough “sketch map” of our working lives enriching our individual capacities. Vocations help to illuminate pathways of individual development and future possibilities for how we can develop, use, and refine skills (*D&E*: 321). Sketching this rough map places demands on our epistemic agency. Individual development is rarely smooth or untroubled. Confusion or hesitation are common problems for questions of what we want to do, and who we want to be in relationship to our work. A vocation requires individuals collect, collate, and process relevant information about their capacities against an ‘axis of concern’ within contexts of workplace activity (Higgins, 2005: 446). Referring to one’s vocational life as a sketch map “*acts as both magnet to attract and as glue to hold*” relevant information together into a coherent, purposive frame of reference to link our activities to our aspirations and self-realization (*D&E*: 319). In effect, vocations enable us to make more accurate judgments about what our work efforts can realistically achieve and what they cannot in purview of our growth (Higgins, 2005: 446).

An example here is a conversation I had with a taxi driver after one shift of gruelling thesis work. The taxi driver—I did not get his name—expressed an interest in pursuing further and adult education in mechanics and maintenance. He was curious about how his vehicle worked and how, if possible, he should go about solving mechanical problems with his taxi. His vocation of driving people from one location to another allows him to identify the mechanics, maintenance, and operation of the taxi as one possible axis of concern. An interest in those topics is educationally sparked and held together by his identification as a taxi driver who provides a valuable social service in making sure people should get to where they need to be—gaining the educational resources necessary for knowing how to better care for his vehicle will help him master his craft and also benefits his future customers.

As insinuated by my example, vocational life also places ethical and social demands on our learner agency. A rough sketch map is rough because it is incomplete and should not seek to strongly determine one’s occupations and vocation. Rather, the roughness of the developmental

mapping allows the individual prerogative to cultivate her own interests as a form of self-discovery or self-development through freedom of her occupation and vocation. An inevitable part of this is, as Herzog argued, part of coming to terms with pursuing self-development within modern workplace organizations is learning to perceive, evaluate, and act on the ethical qualities presented by the output and circumstances of one's work. We often need self-direction to learn more about our ethical reactions, the wider public interests implied by the nature of our work such as the taxi's drivers service in ferrying people, and how our working lives can harmonize with social projects and aims to improve general human and ecological conditions (Winkelman, 2016: 308).

#### 4.4.3. Pushing back against distortionary hierarchy: the dangers of vocationalism

Vocations help to underwrite our abilities to engage in self-directed work and thus provide a valuable resource for reconsidering work and growth. Vocations also have further practical implications for how we should resist and overcome malfunctioning workplace hierarchies.

Dewey wants to draw our attention to the dangers associated with what Micari (2003) terms *vocationalism*. As distinguished from a vocation, 'vocationalism' refers to the potential for social and epistemic culture surrounding work to turn one-dimensional. Training and education become a matter to simply get a job, not to develop one's talents and interests in their tasks (Micari, 2003). Prized values of working life become associated with technical values such as efficiency, productivity, and other abstract market ends. When the upper rungs of a formal workplace hierarchy become influenced by vocationalism, they are likely to take a functionalist and formalistic understanding of their employees. They will attempt to regulate how employees exercise their agency through micro-management techniques. A barista can be strongly tied to her cash register, an administrative assistant tied to screen monitoring software, and a factory worker can be dedicated to solely producing the widgets she is responsible for (*D&E*: 317). While highly skilled workers have a right of resource here, the voice required for lower skilled workers to push back against vocationalist directives from management is often severely lacking (Kwok, 2020: 363).

If the danger of vocationalism is encouraging executive and senior level management to push a one-dimensional form and understanding of work onto the lower rungs, then it seems a proper understanding of work that educationally supports an associative democratic society needs to account for (i) appropriate levels of workplace resistance to vocationalist norms; (ii) emphasize the conditionality of workplace space and the freedom this should entail for workers; and (iii) encourage links with other community institutions, such as trade unions, build bargaining power for lower skilled workers as flagged up by Kwok's arguments about collective action correlating with higher workplace autonomy ([§4.3.1](#)).

#### 4.4.3.1 Resistance

To return to epistemic culture, strategic behaviour between employees often distorts the lateral and horizontal communication of knowledge, as lower positioned workers will be inclined to conceal what they know. We have seen how workers often feel the need to resist contributing to the epistemic and ethical culture of their organization. Under what conditions is this permitted under considerations of growth?

Strategic behaviour and concealment of information may serve ethical ends, albeit indirectly. Returning to Herzog and Zacka's example of social workers and resistance, we should note that the concealment and strategic evasion of management was ultimately done to provide the time and attention necessary to support vulnerable clients; thus when the nature of someone's work requires they have to establish a trusting or safeguarding bond with another person, it may be permissible to engage in workplace resistance to further the vocational interest in service. As Dower puts it in discussing Thomas Carlyle's view of work, we should make an allowance for the wisdom contained in the statement: "*a man's job is not merely making a living or a fortune, but his main channel of service to others.*" (Dower, 1950: 46). If hierarchies pressure a worker to provide bad or substandard service, especially to vulnerable client, resistance may be justifiable on *pro tanto* grounds.

We should also allow leeway for workers to push back against hierarchy through expressing their distrust or disapproval through performative or covert means (Scott, 1987). There can be no fixed lines here, for it is often unclear where voting with one's feet on the job and sabotaging the organization's culture come apart in practice. Nevertheless, one heuristic here would be whether the employee's act carries long-term consequences for the functional capacities of the workplace in question. For instance, playing 'bullshit bingo' during a meeting, where one implicitly criticizes the reliance on management jargon and platitudes, should be fine; it does not carry long-term and structural consequences on service provision. By contrast, signing off the wrong name or someone else's name on inferior quality work, like Capt. Yossarian signing a pseudonymous name 'Washington Irving' on reports, sabotages the organization's ability to self-improve and to institute better conditions in turn (Heller, 2004). There may also be strong ethical reasons to resist by covert means. For example, if a social worker or welfare administrator was concealing information about a vulnerable client to shield them from an unfair or disproportionate sanction from the organization, then this may be justifiable as an exception to the norm.

#### 4.4.2.2 Conditionality

Dewey's thoughts on occupation and vocation are framed in processual terms. Conceptually, this would seem to mean a workplace can be said to form around the process of being occupied with a task and engaging in vocational activity, not necessarily tied to any office, shop floor, or particular place.

Dewey himself offers up further something to consider on this point. Dewey anticipates discussions of remote working and working from home patterns when he points out that "*some things which are remote in space and time from a living creature, especially a human creature, may form his environment even more truly than some of the things close to him. The things with which a man varies are his genuine environment.*" (D&E: 15). So, our thoughts on how the workplace can cultivate learner agency should be sensitive to different modes of working. The shift of working patterns toward remote and WFH regimes during the covid-19 pandemic should be a stark reminder that our workplace environments are not static, and in fact, issues in work may follow us back home.

Elaborating on Dewey's observation, Higgins refers to the case of office workers who have an agreement to work from home. She conducts her workplace activities through communications technology like emails, instant messaging, and we may add Zoom and Microsoft Teams to this list (Higgins, 2005: 446-7). In engaging with work from a remote location, she may be physically separated from her colleagues yet able to contact them instantaneously, enabling coordination through large spatiotemporal gaps. Her 'true' workplace environment concerns these activities, coordinates, and communications and not necessarily the interior of her home (ibid). If she closes her laptop and drinks a beer on the clock, she has all but 'exited' her workplace.

This highlights the conditionality of workspaces, and the possibility of modifying the medium in which employees coordinate with each other. Options for where and how one works should be encouraged as means to promote self-directed work; after all, some people do better in the office owing to the nature of their work, and some people may suffer in an office environment that their work has no obvious or concrete relationship to, for example a programmer who can engage with cloud working from home. It may also function as a crucial signal for the improvement of an organizational or office culture. If everyone has a choice—where possible—on where they work from, an employer could be forced to improve their epistemic culture, or offer incentives, to get people back into the office.

Of course, this cannot be uniformly mandated. The nature of some jobs prevents them from being done remotely. For example, care work for the elderly requires help with physical and emotional problems for vulnerable people, which requires staff to be present and ready to intervene directly in

the organization. Where the nature of work does not permit working from alternative spaces, then we should move onto alternative means of trying to influence an employer's organizational culture.

#### *4.4.2.3 Creating links with other institutions*

Reformulating the idea of vocation, as opposed to vocationalism, underscores the importance of drawing relationships between someone's work, their learner agency, and their community context. As another means of resisting distortionary hierarchies, workers should be able to link with other institutions adjacent to the workplace.

Our job is not the only identity we claim as members of a democratic society. As Dewey notes, a democratic society has a robust pluralism of identity-roles and occupational roles that an individual can expect to play. I am a teacher and Ph. D student, but I am also a member of civic society groups, someone's son, and member of peer groups. As far as vocationalist workplaces encourage a one-dimensional mode of development, then employers act to corrode a robust social pluralism (*D&E*: 317). In that sense, we can see Dewey's understanding of vocation as indicting the need to safeguard against the tendency for workplace environments to reduce someone's varied activities and identity-roles down to merely what they do. We should encourage workers to create links between themselves and other institutions *"so that the scientific inquirer shall not be merely the scientist, the teacher merely the pedagogue, the clergyman merely one who wears the cloth, and so on."* (ibid: 317-318). Fortunately, the other community ties implied by a democratic individuality can provide us with means of thinking around the problem. One aspect is providing instrumental value in empowering workers against employers. Various professional, worker, and political institutions help to deal with employers on behalf of employees. If employees lack a voice in the workplace, then we might want to encourage legal reforms to mandate structures which promote collective bargaining and encourage a drive toward greater levels of unionization in the private sector (Anderson, 2017: 68-70).

One problem here may be the adversarial or coercive relationship that follows from increased unionization. Unions are often associated with industrial strife and breakdowns of communications between workers, employers, the state, and the public. Secondly, unions often develop sophisticated formal and informal hierarchies themselves, which can contribute to powerlessness between union leadership and membership. We should keep these limitations in mind. Tempering these criticisms, we should refer to Quijoux, who points out that unionization offers workers effective power to influence the informal aspects of hierarchy within the workplace: *"Nevertheless, it [trade unionism] appears to be the creator of other democratic mechanisms such as*

*sociological democratization of the leadership and various forms of control by the workers. Although less formal, these are no less effective.”* (Quijoux, 2020: 436; 447).

To further quell worries we should bear two important points in mind. Firstly, resistance can contribute to maintaining democratic social and political conditions, so industrial strife is not necessarily negative in nature. Secondly, work-adjacent institutions have played a historical educative role for workers and their families. Part of this is intrinsic to the experience of collectively organizing and coordinating one’s interests with likeminded peers, and another part is the role that trade union and labour-focused institutions have played linking their membership to adult education politics and institutions. Unions, mechanics institutions, and even aspirational socialist/social democratic movements helped to gain evening and further education classes for their membership. This need not be related solely to their trade; unions and adjacent institutions helped to spread classics of literature, cultural milestones, and science to their regular members (Harrison, 1994).

#### 4.4.3. Anticipating an objection

There are two objections I consider closing the chapter. In making a philosophical distinction between vocations and less meaningful forms of work, I might be implicitly endorsing an elitist form of thinking in how people contribute through their work. Rejecting the ‘coat’ model may be problematic if elitist.

Elaborating on this intuition, Kwok argues Gallie’s (2007) research on job satisfaction provides crucial context that could underscore an objection about the distribution of autonomous work, and by extension our current focus of vocations:

*“If people give priority to their family lives, jobs that offer responsibility and skill development may be an undesirable source of strain. They may prefer undemanding jobs, while their self-development may be better served through their non-work lives. Alternatively people may prefer work that provides relatively high income even though it does little for their skill development, since it provides them with the resources to make better use of their leisure.”* (Gallie, 2007: 7-8).

Too rigorous an interpretation of growth may cut against social pluralism, by enrolling workers into lifestyles and ways of working that they have no interest in engaging. What exactly is wrong with doing one’s shift and taking off their occupation like the coat model says?

There are two ways to respond here. Firstly, Kwok argues that Gallie’s thoughts only applies when we attempt to set a threshold for meaningfulness rather than being concerned about the distribution of opportunities for meaningful work. Highly skilled workers can already evaluate and



choose between an effective set of options, so the coat model makes sense. However, in lower skilled work, changes for self-development are slim, which robs people of an effective opportunity they can deliberate upon (Kwok, 2020: 363).

Aside from distributional concerns surrounding equal opportunities for vocational work, there is also a moral hazard involved in indifference to one's workplace environment. It may be true one has a better chance for self-development outside of work than in work, but a faulty or malfunctioning epistemic culture is likely to erode the basis for the exercise of morally responsible agency. A proliferation of rationalizations and excuse-making may be the implication here, detracting from the ability for organizations to reform their epistemic culture and clean up their act.

An interesting counter may run like this: since unjust outcomes from my work are causally overdetermined, then why am I held liable to clean up the act? It is unclear how much responsibility I could hold in such a situation, since it does not matter what I do (Glover, 1975). I may simply choose to pursue activism in other forms of life where the link between action and consequence is more concrete. While this would be a rational reaction to overdetermination, it would rub awkwardly against the need to develop a culture of political responsibility. The workplace is a very high-impact institution in generating structural injustices. My refusal to contribute to epistemic improvement may imply an unjust burden placed onto someone else as a result. Workers who have a tangible role in reproducing emissions, in-work poverty, a lack of heating or shelter, all hold a responsibility to have a clear-eyed moral view of what they are doing owing to the points raised by Herzog and Nuti.

## Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I have re-examined the argument from democratic education as it pertains our working lives. The Deweyan view of growth offered by the thesis contributes to our understanding of the educationalist argument by (a) allowing greater specification of how current practice poses problems for the formative powers of current workplace environments, and (b) in providing a positive conception of work that provides normative guidance to individuals for ameliorating said problems.

Firstly, I unpacked the educationalist argument through engagement with Mill and Pateman's thought. While the general line of argument is consonant with the wider arguments of the thesis surrounding growth and the institutional basis for educational experience, it has noteworthy shortcomings. Empirical evidence is mixed on whether a 'spill-over' between workplace habits and civic habits can be observed. Turning to the recent work of Johnson & Orr, I argued that

educationalist theory should concern itself with further exploring the nuances of workplace practice to obviate the inconclusive read of the spill-over effect.

I offered Dewey's philosophy of work as a potential resource to achieve this goal. I examined Dewey's critical view of work, linking it to the currents within the wider educationalist argument. Dewey's view of industrial work encourages a systemic focus on economic democratization, with workplace democratization being implied in view of achieving democratic social conditions. Industrial work did not meaningfully allow for the development of learner agency, damaging our collective capacity for industrial coordination and planning toward humane ends. I delved into the work of Renault at this point, specifying how Dewey's use of 'character' in his arguments implies two separate modes of critique, one of which being the focal point of the thesis' contribution.

To allay any worries about Dewey's contemporary relevance, I spent the next chapter engaging with more recent contributions to political and organizational theory. Through conversation with the work of Herzog, Kwok, Young, and Nuti, I was able to outline four contemporary problems with workplaces that the democratic educationalist should focus upon for their implications about growth: lack of self-direction, the effects of workplace hierarchies, negative epistemic culture, and unclear lines of responsibility for structural injustices generated by workplace cooperation.

Finally, I offered Dewey's positive conception of working. Dewey recasts work in processual terms, noting how we should view 'occupation' and having a 'vocation' as supporting our learner agency and capacities to contribute to democratic social inquiry. The notion of vocation is particularly rich, offering normative guidance on how to resist the influence of the four problems adumbrated above. A vocation enables an individual to relate their epistemic and ethical capacities to their productive life, explaining how work contributes to growth. Vocation also exposes the shortcomings of one-dimensionality and workplace hierarchy, encouraging us to build democratic ties both within and outside of the workplace in search of improvement. Finally, I considered a potential objection that a positive conception of democratic work may be elitist, because imposes obligations on unwilling workers. I argued the capacity for ethically and epistemically responsible agency implies workers should have a clear-eyed view of their potential contributions to structurally unjust processes and do have stakes in contributing to improvement.

## Chapter 5. What is the educative value of public cultural institutions within a democratic society?

In this concluding chapter, I explore the role of public cultural institutions in helping to support a democratic way of life. Public cultural institutions (PCIs) can be understood as museums, galleries, libraries, and other institutions that help to promote and cultivate a public culture. PCIs are highly visible to the public and usually very well-attended throughout the year. Museums, libraries, and galleries benefit diverse cross-sections of the public, including visitors, tourists, permanent residents, and citizens themselves.

This chapter has two objectives. The first is to revisit debates in contemporary political philosophy surrounding public culture, with the purpose of accurately capturing the educative value played by PCIs. To this end, I introduce three possible views of public culture that can help to philosophically ground the educational warrant for PCIs in liberal and democratic values. These three views are anti-perfectionism, perfectionism, and civic (or liberal) nationalism. I tease out the merits of these three views, along with key limitations they all possess in their conception of public culture.

The second objective is to attempt to remedy those limitations through further application of Deweyan political philosophy to questions surrounding public culture. I achieve this by further developing the role of PCIs to cover aesthetic and epistemic dimensions of our learner agency. Dewey's theory of democracy, along with my own theoretical innovations, helps to better foreground the epistemic value PCIs can contribute to the process of communicating ideas in a free and dynamic manner. PCIs support the epistemic aspects of growth by helping us to resist cultural marginalization by promoting counter-histories in association with oppressed groups. Dewey's view also extends to the aesthetic aspect of public cultural communication. I argue the Deweyan view can enable us to construct an understanding of art that is simultaneously wide enough to cover access to excellent art and to cover funding for popular art as integral to the mission of arts-based PCIs, rather than say the value of popular art is parasitic on, or on a totally different field of evaluation from, the value of higher art.

I open the chapter by defining public cultural institutions, through engagement with adult educationalist research for the reader's convenience. After this, I take a guiding example of a PCI in the National Railroad Museum located in Ohio, USA. This museum is a part of a wider trend of curation which attempts to raise collective conscience over the legacy of slavery on the social and political development of the contemporary USA, making it an ideal test case for how different theories of public culture would parse and articulate its educative value. In the second section, I unpack the three

possible views from existing liberal political philosophy on public culture. I examine anti-perfectionism, under both a public goods and cultural structural approach; perfectionism, in both an edificatory and aspirational view; and civic nationalism. I explore the merits of each view, along with the limitations of the arguments they advance on the value of public culture in a democratic society. Finally, I turn to the Deweyan view in the third section, outlining the positive role public culture, and by extension, PCIs play in ensuring the free and dynamic communication of ideas. I finish by reflecting on the role of art, popular art, and public culture.

### 5.1. What are public cultural institutions?

The introduction listed three major forms of PCIs. Libraries, museums, and galleries. Taylor (2010) gives us a good, short statement of what links these institutional forms. *“Although quite diverse in their holdings, these places are linked together as institutions that focus on collecting, preserving, and/or presenting a body of knowledge (e.g., manuscripts, artifacts, documents, animals, plants, natural or historical landmarks) that is socially and culturally valued by a particular community.”* (Taylor, 2010: 5-6). The functions enumerated are diverse and not always simultaneously present between cases. For an example, one would expect many functions to be present in a museum. The mission statement of museums is to preserve, archive, communicate, and curate knowledge. Not so much for a concert in a town centre—here, only the performance is visible to the public and much of the stage building will have been orchestrated in a mixture of private and semi-private spaces.

Taylor argues the educational purpose of cultural institutions is to enable cognitive change among their clientele. This may amount to simply learning added information about a given subject, though this should accommodate for challenging and modifying the pre-existing perspectives of its visitors. Visitors who interact with museums and galleries will negotiate an understanding with the exhibits on offer, and by proxy the curator is able to leverage educational influence. The hope is that the visitors have their perspectives challenged, their minds changed, or their curiosities enkindled by the encounter (ibid.).

While the purpose of the PCI itself, seeking out cognitive change is not necessarily the motivation for the visitor. Some visitors will doubtless be looking for educational material; however, it is possible that other visitors may visit to kill an afternoon, having no particular purpose in mind. Practically, this implies cultural institutions cannot become sites of learning analogous to schools – cultural institutions instead present an all-purpose environment whose construction is guided by a broad mission statement of values and pedagogical objectives (Heimlich and Horr, 2010).

### 5.1.1. What does it mean for a cultural institution to be 'public'?

It is worthwhile clarifying what the predicate of 'public' signifies. One reason for its inclusion is strategic. It is to exclude private institutions from consideration. While the category should include York's National Rail Museum, it should also remain indifferent to private chartered trains which recreate historically important journeys. 'Public' means to denote the institutions that come under some measure of political governance. Hence, 'public' cultural institutions are more amenable to democratic social and political influence, whether directly or indirectly through subventions, and remain readily accessible to the general population.

There is another, more important facet. As will become clear later in the chapter, the debate surrounding arts funding within liberal political philosophy rests on a controversy surrounding the proper valuation(s) of 'public culture' as an ethical good. One can understand these concerns as growing out of the role of the social matrix in buttressing the shared cultural and normative fabric necessary for the maintenance of a liberal democratic culture (Mulhall and Swift, 1992: 14-15). All three views investigated here can be construed as attempts to explain the normative values which play a guiding role in how we should go about achieving a suitably democratic public culture.

PCIs should embody and extend the core values, beliefs, and historical understanding latent in public culture over time and between spaces. So, e.g., galleries will house artwork that has achieved significant national or international repute for a wide variety of visitors, both resident and non-resident, past and present, to appreciate. The Tate Modern in London focuses on contemporary and modern art, seeking to realize values of (a) universal access to modern art and (b) critical engagement with artwork of the past and the present day to further promote diversity within artistry (Tate Vision, 2020: 4). Many other PCIs weave public cultural values into their operations in similar ways, though they will tailor their mission statements and practice together to align with their own specializations.

### 5.1.2. The Railroad Museum: an example

It will be useful to consult a case study. This will help to clarify the above discussion and provide an example for reference later in the chapter. I propose we look at the Railroad Freedom Centre in Ohio, USA. The Railroad Freedom Centre is a museum centred on transmitting knowledge of slavery to the public, spending much of its time curating the routes and methods fugitive slaves used to evade capture in the American Midwest.

There are two unique things about the Railroad museum. The first is its wider social mission. The second is its main exhibit. The museum is part of a global "sites of conscience" initiative aiming to expand awareness of marginalized groups through curation. As of 2019, the initiative has over 290 member institutions (Sitesofconscience.org, 2019). I refer to projects like the Railroad museum as

‘museums of collective conscience’ to reflect this. Museums of collective conscience highlight features of a nation’s political history that carry far-reaching social consequences. The Railroad museum highlights the living conditions and routes used to escape slavery. By providing this service, it is hoped museums of collective conscience can raise awareness about past injustice and provide the groundwork for greater collective participation in recognizing, discussing, and planning how we should go about tackling systemic racism.

The main exhibit is the museum’s reconstructed slave-pen, its most noteworthy feature. The pen is a faithful recreation of the living conditions of slaves. The architectural design, the interior complete with bars and chains, even the soundscape of the pen, have been curated to mimic accurate historical conditions. In providing a facsimile slave-pen to look around and experience, the museum hopes to raise awareness of “*the participation of regional and local individuals and institutions in the slave trade, describing how the Midwest fit into the wider system*” with its visitors (Railroad Freedom Centre, 2006).

### 5.1.3. Some Deweyan observations on the Railroad Museum

Curators of the Railroad clearly intend cognitive change. The goal of transmitting and properly framing a body of knowledge is central to its mission statement. The unique value offered by the Railroad is how the design of its main exhibition allows visitors to learn in a sympathetic manner and affords an opportunity to experience historically approximate conditions. Knowledge is transmitted by the curation of the slave-pen, rather than solely dictated through lectures, or provided audiotapes.

The knowledge embodied in the slave pen transmits information to visitors within a free-choice learning environment. Here, visitors are given free reign around the designed environment. Visitors will learn from the experience according to the museum’s mission statement, but the visitor’s free interaction with the cultural artifact should produce intrinsic desire to learn more about the historical circumstances (Parrish, 2010: 87-88). The purpose of free interaction here is to allow different learners, all with different contextual motivations and styles, to all benefit from the curated exhibition instead of forcing a one fits all solution that risks alienating sections of the public (Heimlich & Horr, 2010: 57). Curating environments with this aim allow for PCIs to tap into the intrinsic motivation crucial to their visitors’ learner agency ([§1.2.1](#)). Free interaction is one salient desideratum for PCI design from a Deweyan educational perspective. The curator uses the pen’s open design to establish a co-developmental learning bond with visitors. Visitors themselves are at liberty to experiment with the sights, sounds, and atmosphere of the slave-pen as they encounter it, while the curator is responsible for the environmental context and any other background. Curators adjust the

pen for the visitor as they see fit and the visitor plays a role in actively feeding back their own judgments about the exhibition, thus allowing the PCI to maintain standards of quality.

Cognitive change is certainly important. However, we should not take it as a sufficient condition for adult education purposes. Affective change, the ability to change one's sentiments or emotional attitudes, is another condition which PCI design should recognize. We should understand talk about cognitive change holistically, as cognitive-affective change. PCI curators take on an aesthetic task, trying to leverage the environment to impart the right type of emotional tenor. For example, in the case of the Railroad the authenticity of the pen gives the exhibition considerable emotional gravitas. As such, visitors interacting with the pen are often induced into silence and carefully considered whispers. In all, PCI design must consider the full political, ethical, and intellectual meaning behind exhibitions to enrich the educational experiences of their visitors.

### 5.1.3. A brief caveat: what about the internet?

By leaning on libraries, galleries, and museums, one may argue my focus seems old-fashioned and out of touch. For one, my account does not engage with digital forms of public cultural outreach. An example here would be a lack of consideration for the internet's role in providing virtual space for public cultural activities. I must bracket these concerns for the purposes of the chapter. I do see potential merit to including the internet into our discussion of PCIs. However, it would take a thesis in itself to fully and fairly unpack the implications of digital and online platforms (e.g., Twitter) in constructing and detracting from a shared public culture. Thorny questions would arise from the outset. E.g., are these online platforms properly 'public' in the above sense? Are they private market entities? How does virtual delivery alter our conception of public cultural space? I have therefore chosen to bracket the internet and digital technology.

## 5.2. Three possible views of PCIs

Now that we understand what PCIs are and their educational purposes, I can elaborate on three candidate views from existing political philosophy surrounding public culture. These will be anti-perfectionism, perfectionism, and civic (or liberal) nationalism. All offer normative values which may help to provide democratic accounts of public culture and PCIs.

I offer a typology before we begin. This will hopefully give the reader a preview into the analysis to occur within the rest of the section.

### A Typology of the three views

- (1) Anti-perfectionism:** the state should only act to support public culture, and therefore public cultural institutions, when an appropriately *neutral justification* can be derived from the

normative considerations of liberal legitimacy/public reason (Rawls, 1995). Under this reasoning, two options typically emerge:

**(a) Public goods approach:** An appropriately neutral justification is when public culture, and therefore public cultural institutions, is conceived of as a non-excludable, non-rivalrous good everyone has reason to rationally value.

**(b) Cultural structural approach:** An appropriately neutral justification is when public cultural support underwrites the meaningfulness of free choices within a cultural structure, which adds cultural context to the choices we evaluate (Dworkin, 1985).

**(2) Perfectionism:** the state should support public culture, and therefore public cultural institutions, if that support will lead to securing or expanding the wellbeing of the citizen body. Within this, two options typically emerge:

**(a) Edificatory perfectionism:** well-being is understood as having moral implications under the rubric of personal autonomy. Public culture should support the development of autonomous capacities and discourage choices which are morally unsound (Raz, 2003)

**(b) Aspirational perfectionism:** well-being is understood as a collective property of a citizen body, best formulated in terms of the social bases of self-respect. Public culture should therefore enable the liberal polity to achieve elevated levels of warranted self-respect (Kramer, 2017)

**(3) Civic Nationalism:** the state should support public culture, and therefore, public cultural institutions if that support will promote the political integration of citizens under a common cultural identity capable of supporting the stability of a democratic national identity (Miller, 1996).



### 5.2.1. Anti-perfectionism and public culture

We start with anti-perfectionism. Firstly, I do preliminary work in mapping out the justificatory mechanics of the anti-perfectionist approach, especially its focus on state neutrality. Secondly, I untangle two plausible rationales for anti-perfectionist public cultural institutions: the public goods approach and the cultural structural approach. I will explore these with reference to the example of the Railroad Museum.

Underlying the anti-perfectionist position is a commitment to state neutrality. State neutrality should be understood as implying a neutrality of justification (Kramer, 2017). By neutrality of justification, it is meant all citizens are owed a justification for coercive forms of politicking, in terms that cannot be reasonably rejected by them (Rawls, 1995). We can contrast with neutrality of effect: the consequences of government action should remain neutral between different conceptions of the good (Quong, 2010: 18). Neutrality of effect is unworkable, as it would be virtually impossible to verify all relevant consequences of government action will be neutral in advance of policy implementation. Neutrality of justification therefore provides a more workable basis, as policies and laws need only have a justification independent of particular conceptions of the good life (Kramer, 2017: 13).

A measure of ambiguity exists regarding whether anti-perfectionism applies solely to constitutional matters or to all matters of state policy. On the constitutional view, the constraints of state neutrality are applicable to constitutional essentials, including the structure of government and basic freedoms guaranteed to individuals, such as liberty of occupation and freedom of movement (Rawls, 1993: 230). These constraints apply at a high level of abstraction, and do not in themselves imply particular policy goals. Policy goals that are justifiable with respect to a reasonable conception of the good life can still be enacted by citizens further down the legislative chain, through unanimity or majority procedures (Claassen, 2013: 282-83).

The alternative view sees neutrality constraints as applying to all levels of law-making. We start with the observation that taxation is coercively levied to apportion money to policy execution. Now, within political liberal strictures any coercive manoeuvres of one political group against another necessitates political justification for those actions (Quong, 2010: 2), and political justification must be neutral in its basis, all policymaking therefore ought to be subject to neutrality restrictions (ibid: 258). If we take, e.g., arts funding, then so long as this is state supported through taxation, the strict anti-perfectionist will insist on a neutral justification for its continuing to raise and distribute money to the arts (Kramer, 2017: 54; 347).

For the purposes of this chapter, I will primarily mean the broader, stricter form of anti-perfectionism. If the anti-perfectionist could argue a majority or unanimity procedure is sufficient for

public cultural institutions, it would become more difficult to make suitably fine-grained comparisons with other philosophical positions.

#### *5.2.1.1. Implications for public cultural support*

When construed narrowly, neutrality of justification affects public funding for arts in two ways. Firstly, public arts funding cannot be justified in terms of intrinsic and aesthetic values, such as artistic excellence. To justify public arts through excellence would be to suppose a thick moral, or aesthetic, viewpoint regarding the worthiness of the artwork in question. That is to say, 'excellence' references moral or aesthetic standards that would be reasonably rejectable under a condition of social and cultural pluralism (Rawls, 1971: 326).

The second implication is public arts funding cannot be justified unless consistent with justice. If state funding of the arts either serve the requirements of (i) promoting free and equal citizenship, or (ii) completing commitments to social and distributive justice then such subventions may be justifiable to the anti-perfectionist. Thicker justifications that appeal to external ethical standards, even if not excellence or other intrinsic properties, will be difficult to justify given the reasonable disagreement over what constitutes art and how to value art.

This leaves anti-perfectionists who wish to defend state support of cultural products and services with an uphill battle to balance a commitment to public support of the arts with their philosophical commitments to state neutrality. As we will see in the next subsection, there are two broad approaches anti-perfectionists have tried to take. One is to explore the idea that public support of art provides for a public good. The second, advocated by Dworkin, is to say cultural institutions substantiate a "cultural structure" which enables free choice between different reasonable ways of living, and thus can be understood as providing the cultural groundwork for meaningful choice in the face of social diversity.

#### *5.2.2.2. Public goods approach*

A public good is any good which has the properties of being (i) non-excludable and (ii) non-rivalrous. I.e., people cannot be prevented from accessing a public good and their being used by one person does not preclude usage by another (Claassen, 2013: 271). An example of a public good, which is also a public cultural good, would be a fireworks display: there is no way from stopping people in nearby proximity from watching the sky, and my enjoyment of the fireworks does not detract from your own ability to enjoy the spectacle.

The rationale behind this justification is in its ability to meet first order preferences without presuming any thicker criteria for desirability. A justification predicated on public goods would not

generate controversies in this manner, as it can be seen as merely a technical matter of working out a price for what people collectively value but cannot attain through individual action (Dworkin, 1985: 223-4).

When applied to the Railroad case, it would be likewise difficult to make a case for its public value via the public goods approach. It is not a good that is non-rivalrous and non-excludable. General admission is ticketed at a market price. Still, what if the museum was open free to the public? In that case, we should turn to a wider interpretation provided by Dworkin. When the state provides funding for museums, it invests into the public good of democratic culture and, by extension, other public cultural institutions may be subclassified under the public good of democratic culture (ibid, 226).

Unfortunately, Dworkin gives two convincing reasons why the public goods approach cannot provide a sufficient justification for the support of democratic culture. The first is time-lag. A democratic culture has an exceedingly long timeframe to provide a return to taxpayers. Those who contribute first to its maintenance are less likely to see benefits than their descendants. For the initial generation of contributors, there would be a lack of incentive to agree to fund museums or exhibits that they may not get to enjoy (ibid). Secondly, we should be aware of conceptual indeterminacy. Unlike other archetypal public goods such as communications and national defence spending, culture is a polysemous concept: it is not clear whether any definition of the concept would provide enough analytical clarity for operational use. This means rationally estimating the spending necessary for maintaining democratic culture would be exceedingly difficult (ibid.).

#### *5.2.1.2. Cultural structural approach*

Dworkin explores an alternative justification to balance a commitment to state neutrality with state support of public culture. Dworkin posits a hypothetical *cultural structure* which undergirds the context of free choice within a liberal democratic society (ibid: 229-30). The purpose of a public cultural structure is to allow citizens to make meaningful choices, since they will need to draw on existing cultural resources, leitmotifs, and embedded values to choose between reasonable conceptions of the good.

Dworkin, having rejected the public goods argument, begins by shifting the locus of analysis to the community's needs rather than individual preferences. We may not be able to coordinate first-order preferences in view of funding democratic culture, but we nonetheless retain legitimate collective interests in the maintenance of a cultural structure as such (ibid.). Funding for a cultural structure in a liberal democracy helps to bolster commitments to free and equal citizenship, as far as it enables the flourishing or debasement of different ways of life, and thus different reasonable conceptions of the good.

State action that targets the cultural structure will modify the *context of choice* provided by the social matrix of a pluralistic democracy. Often, we find our projects are dependent on the existence of a certain type of social and political settlement to be possible. Here, we do not simply mean causal possibility. More strongly, we mean whether these projects can become meaningful within an individual's plan of life. For projects to be meaningful within a diverse cultural setting, we require interpretive resources and conventions made available by a robust cultural structure. It is here that Dworkin thinks he has ascertained the relationship between neutrality and the public value of democratic culture: we all want to author and purpose our plan of life. A core component is having the lay of the land concerning the values and traditions we are a part of, or may want to be part of, when we reflect on our purposes. The cultural structure plays an integral role in supporting our considered judgments on value, without imposing specific content on which choices are valuable (Ibid: 233). As Kymlicka summarizes in a review of Dworkin's argument, "*In short, cultural structures are valuable, not in and of themselves, but because it is only through having a rich cultural structure that people can become aware of the options available to them.*" (Kymlicka, 2004: 118). This allows Dworkin to avoid invoking perfectionistic premisses – his account blends into liberal accounts of legitimacy that stress the normative priority of respect for reasonable pluralism. As far as PCIs are publicly accessible nodes within a broader cultural structure, then we should apportion public funding to their expansion and maintenance.

When considering the Railroad museum, the cultural structural view initially makes a good deal of sense. Museums of collective conscience enrich the context of choice, as they communicate information about collective culture and history, including the historical problems that have led to the enactment of necessary social and political reforms. The purpose of museums of collective conscience is to encourage reflection and recognition of anti-racist causes, promoting bonds of recognition and respect for freedom and equality between people. Museums of collective conscience can provide intellectual support to a wealth of reasonable conceptions of the good and provide the means for the public to re-examine the political and social history of the cultural structure itself.

This is not to insinuate the idea of cultural structure is without any problems. Kymlicka (2004) rightly points out, as suggestive as the idea happens to be, it is unclear how many cultural structures can be said to exist at any given moment within a pluralistic social form. Is there one cultural structure which subsumes any subcultural identities, or are there multiple cultural structures whose memberships we must actively navigate, including any possible conflicts? If there are multiple cultural structures, it becomes unclear how membership within a cultural structure works. We are all born within a cultural structure insofar we have a native cultural context. Are we able to navigate between distinct cultural structures, or are we bound to our native one by linguistic and ethnic constraints?

And finally, if we are restricted in our ability to successfully navigate between cultural structures, does this mean these structures constrain our choices alongside expanding them? (Kymlicka, 2004: 119-20). This would complicate Dworkin's explanation, since the maintenance of public culture would require intricate discussions of threats to the context of choice that arise from maintaining one cultural structure, even at the expense of another.

In all, there are reasons to be sympathetic to the cultural structure argument. It remains one of the most creative attempts to find a place for public cultural support while maintaining a commitment to state neutrality. The conceptual ambiguity highlighted by Kymlicka, however, does throw up further concerns about subsumed cultures discussed later in the chapter.

### 5.2.2. Perfectionism and public culture

There are two plausible interpretations of the perfectionist account. Borrowing from Matthew Kramer's recent distinction, I have decided to present both an edificatory perfectionist and aspirational perfectionist view (Kramer, 2017). According to the edificatory view, state support of public cultural institutions is warranted to the extent these institutions provide for citizen well-being. Under the aspirational view citizen well-being is a desirable by-product effect; the justification works through a need to ensure public cultural institutions support a collective sense of warranted self-esteem among the citizen body.

#### 5.2.2.1 Edificatory perfectionism and public culture

According to the edificatory perfectionist, a liberal state must safeguard the well-being of citizens. To discharge this safeguarding duty, the state must act in ways that further the ideal of personal autonomy. Autonomy is understood as the exercise of a capacity to self-direct or self-author one's life (Raz, 2003: 369-70). The edificatory perfectionist aims to expand the option-sets held by citizens, but crucially, the value of autonomy demands increased availability of morally sound option-sets (ibid: 381). In directing citizens this way, edificatory perfectionist policies will focus on the substantive value of activities, ideals, and ways of life nested within 'metaphysical' claims about human flourishing (Quong, 2010: 46). Rebuking the anti-perfectionist position that a reliance on substantive doctrines in government encapsulates disrespect for citizens, an edificatory perfectionist will counterclaim the liberal state best respects citizens when it takes their cognitive limitations and revisability of their sincerely held beliefs seriously (Wall, 2014).

In *The Morality of Freedom* (2003), Raz advocates a form of edificatory perfectionism. To secure well-being, the state must respect and further the interests of citizens to exercise their agency as framed by the ideal of personal autonomy (Raz, 2003: 369-70). This is not a universal principle: owing to the way our societies have developed within modernity, autonomy is both a fact of life and

an ideal to be strived for (ibid). To ensure citizens can keep up with their increasingly liquid and changing social matrix, and endorse it, the state should actively promote their autonomy.

The conditions which fall out of this are:

- (i) The state must enable the background conditions for autonomous choice. Choice itself will not suffice, as coercion of circumstances can cause a dearth of choice or a paralysis of choice. Likewise, one cannot force someone to be autonomous, only provide the background conditions.
- (ii) The state must focus on the cultivation of an inner life capable of giving rise to autonomous choice. This includes the capacity for imagination, appropriate emotions, and the cognitive capacities which cash out the meaningfulness of choices made.
- (iii) Finally, the state ought to provide an adequate range of options for citizens to choose from. Adequacy can be achieved with a provision to provide morally sound options, as the value of autonomy is not respected by ways of life inconsistent with human flourishing (ibid: 407-8).

Raz departs with the anti-perfectionist understanding of pluralism when he commits himself to condition (iii). Here, Raz argues non-interference serves autonomy and not the other way around (ibid: 410). As far as we think the capacity for autonomous agency is morally valuable, everyone should have a reason to want to become autonomous agents as a matter of their positive freedom (ibid: 409).

Furthermore, considering condition (i), we are committed to providing any background conditions for autonomous choice. Non-interference would be insufficient to guarantee everyone can become autonomous—as above, a capacity is empty when we are unable to exercise it. One cannot make autonomous choices without an adequate set of options, so the state has a legitimate reach well beyond guaranteeing non-interference. Given the liquidity and fluctuations of modern life on our personal identities, our capacity to sustain and reorient our projects may imply a role for the state to guide and directing processes of social change to safeguard our personal autonomy (ibid: 411).

The most controversial aspect is the notion of moral adequacy within the argument. Autonomy is not valuable when used in pursuit of repugnant options. It is consistent with such options, but if we value autonomy as a constitutive component of a good life, there is no reason to protect bad options for the sake of autonomous choosing (ibid: 417). To defuse worries that this permits paternalistic or overbearing statecraft, Raz argues the dissuasion of bad options is no concern. If we assume the state cannot reliably discriminate between good and bad options, then the state has no authority over these matters at all (ibid: 412). Minimization of bad options also does not carry much

significance in a world marked by deep value pluralism, as there will be plenty of meaningful options to choose from (ibid). Finally, it is worthwhile to note the perfectionist position is not committed to manipulative or coercive forms of policymaking. Aside from the aforementioned reasons, Kramer adds the edificatory position does not necessarily rely on overt forms of influencing citizens. There can simply be different forms of subsidy and usage of expressive powers of the state to edify some options sets over others (Kramer, 2017: 346-9).

#### *5.2.2.2 Implications of edificatory perfectionism for public cultural support*

Whereas the anti-perfectionist needs to find a neutral ground of justification which would not be reasonably rejectable on a liberal understanding of citizenship, the edificatory perfectionist can claim artistic and cultural services are justifiable on grounds of securing wellbeing for all citizens (ibid.).

Per condition (i), public arts support plays a role in providing the conditions for autonomy. Public cultural institutions, such as the Railroad Museum, provide a backdrop for citizens to make choices about what they value. To have a grasp on why, we can reference the guidance in condition (ii), the development of cognitive and imaginative capacities. Public cultural institutions should seek to provide events, exhibitions, and curations which encourage the edification of existing visitor preferences. (iii) In other words, public cultural institutions should provide *worthwhile* events and curations.

The devil in the detail is a conjunction of conditions (ii) and (iii). The condition that we should provide worthwhile options through public subventions for PCIs often converts itself to a condition that we should seek to provide excellent options in the arts (ibid.). I assume this is to avoid what Raz terms incommensurability: the evaluation that of two options, neither is better than the other, nor are they of equal value (Raz, 2003: 325). Different forms of artistry could be incommensurable, but it is difficult for the state to tend to the background conditions if they do not permit comparisons. Excellence then allows for edification by fixing the meaning of what counts as a 'worthwhile' option. According to the edificatory perfectionist subsidies should flow to PCIs that offer to expand opportunities for citizens to attend high cultural events. There is no need to make them attend these events or manipulate them into it. Only the opportunity to uplift oneself should be made available (ibid: 407).

There can be two level to the perfectionist's desired subventions. One is to encourage the availability of worthwhile options, which would imply incentives for the production and curation of said options. Production wise, Kramer thinks edificatory views best suit the usage of prize and competition models to promote excellence, thus increasing the chances of promoting the right type of edification (Kramer, 2017: 346-9). The second part is the opportunity for citizens to access these

types of curations. These general subsidies may simply go toward a lower average price of admission, or they might be some form of free disbursement of activities paid for by the public purse. If one wants to visit the Railroad Museum to edify their cognitive skills, that would be fine; likewise, if one wanted to go to the opera that night instead to edify their aesthetic skills.

The edificatory position is not without faults. While the edificatory position can avoid charges of paternalism, Kramer raises a different worry. Firstly, instead of the citizen-centric worry about disrespect for one's autonomous status posed by criticisms surrounding paternalism, Kramer examines government-centric reasons for why an overbearing or mollycoddling policy may be morally unsound.

Kramer alleges we should understand government-centric obligations as culminating in an ethic of self-restraint (Kramer, 2017: 277). It should be a widespread norm of public service not to overstep the boundaries of one's authority, otherwise it insinuates moral weakness on behalf of officials (ibid: 262-3). Overbearingness is a revealed weakness of officials trying to goad a certain reaction from citizens to demonstrate state legitimacy when, in fact, these reactions are not relevant to the legitimacy of the system (Billingham and Taylor, 2018: 68). Governments should seek to respect the capacity of adult citizens to refine and uplift themselves. If they do not, they evince what Kramer refers to as a *quidnunc*—busybody--mentality. Government action imbued with a *quidnunc* mentality will incur costs to the moral integrity of the system of a whole, resultant of the tenuous moral stature revealed by busybody action (Kramer, 2017: 265).

Kramer argues the edificatory perfectionist will evince a *quidnunc* mentality when they appeal to excellence, or otherwise to appraise the moral worthiness of some cultural option sets over others. There is no fixed conceptual boundary between the excellence one would find in a good game of football and the excellence one finds in a work of art. Excellence ranges over multiple domains of activity and works toward a public function (ibid: 382). In this sense, trying to leverage excellence to refine a citizen's taste assumes their preferred activities are not capable of being edifying and devalues their capacities to seek autonomous development on their own terms.

#### *5.2.2.3 Aspirational perfectionism and public culture*

Kramer offers aspirational perfectionism as an alternative. Aspirational perfectionism distinguishes itself from other perfectionist theories by grounding itself in matters of justice, i.e., it is not derived from a substantive theory of the good life. This ensures the aspirational perfectionist is not acting with a *quidnunc* mentality, as every citizen would have adequate political reason to comply with the requirements of justice.



To make this move, Kramer focuses on Rawlsian primary goods. Primary goods being goods that every reasonable citizen is supposed to want, whatever their particular ends are (Rawls, 1971: 79). In other words, primary goods represent all-purpose goods. Among the typically accepted primary goods, Rawls lists the “social bases of self-respect” as something citizens will need to pursue their goals with the confidence and vigour needed of a liberal democratic citizenship (Rawls, 2001: 59). Kramer argues the social bases of self-respect are not *distribuenda*—one cannot apportion and distribute the conditions necessary for self-respect directly (Kramer, 2017: 328).

Kramer bases his argument on the necessary upkeep for the social bases of self-respect. Kramer gives the mission statement as such: “*an aspirational-perfectionist system of governance seeks to promote the incidence of the primary natural good of warranted self-respect for each citizen*” (ibid: 341). This has distributive implications for cultivating the social bases of self-respect, because it requires participation within public culture ensures self-respect is felt by citizens.

There is a further qualification in place. As perfectionists, aspirational perfectionists will claim self-respect is an objective quality of the social system of cooperation (ibid: 367). One can experience self-respect in a variety of ways, but as far as the concept can be applied to a system of social cooperation, we should stipulate that self-respect must be *warranted* to contribute to the social conditions required for collective recognitions of pride (ibid.).

The concept of ‘warranted’ does a fair bit of lifting. To have a warranted sense of self-respect, substantive ethical evaluation of one’s activities is necessary (Billingham and Taylor, 2018: 73). It is supposed to be an objective quality. In other words, perceived self-respect that tracks something which is trivial, unimportant, or false would not count toward Kramer’s conception (Kramer, 2017: 367). We may imagine a tyrannical regime that goes around painting grass a more vivid shade of green in every public park. This country may experience gains in perceived self-respect from having the greenest grass when compared to its neighbours, but painting grass green is no achievement at all. Cultivating the grass in parks to a healthy green is the actual achievement which may allow for the development of warranted self-respect.

Warranted self-respect seeks to track actual achievement, and to do this, it must invoke standards of excellence that gravitate away from typical neutralist understandings of justice. This is what gives aspirational perfectionism its pride of place within families of perfectionist thought. However, aspirational perfectionism is distinctive from the edificationist position to the extent that it does not follow edicts to safeguard and expand well-being via autonomy promoting policy. As far as autonomy expands concomitantly with the cognitive-affective uplift of citizens, it is a by-product effect

of aspirational perfectionist policy and not the bottom-line which justification moves toward (ibid: 350-1).

Expenditure from subventions and subsidies ought to flow to the public, as to ensure the producers of excellent artistic and cultural achievements have an audience to work toward. If the audience is too restricted or too limited, those with the potential to produce excellent work will be disincentivized in their endeavours. Instead, ensuring the public can access cultural excellence via public cultural institutions provides a boon in confidence to those creators. This, according to Kramer's reasoning, would lead to a reciprocal relationship of production and cultural consumption. "*In other words, the effect on the members of the public is sought for the sake of the resultant effect on the practitioners of the arts—composers, authors, playwrights, painters, sculptors, musicians, actors, and so forth—whose creative striving will be vitalized.*" (ibid, 351).

Aspirational perfectionism is a new mode of thinking about the value of public culture, and it presents a robust account of the place of excellence. However, there are concerns about the desirability of aspirational perfectionism.

I highlight two charges that aspirational perfectionism is problematic. The first is that aspirational perfectionism is internally incoherent on the relationship between primary goods and warranted self-respect. The second is aspirational perfectionism's insistence on excellence and warranted self-respect may inadvertently set the scene for elitist approaches to public culture.

Starting with the first problem, it is instructive to consult Billingham and Taylor's review (2018) of Kramer's position. While they are sympathetic to aspirational perfectionism, they doubt warranted self-respect is derivable from the social primary good of the social bases of self-respect. While self-respect is a natural primary good, *warranted* self-respect does not seem to be one (Billingham and Taylor, 2018: 75). They reason that since warranted self-respect purports to track actual and objectively valuable achievements, then this requires a thick theory of the good, as opposed to a thin theory of the good that would be compatible with tenets of justice. However, if this is the case, then warranted self-esteem cannot be a primary good *ex hypothesi*: it can no longer be grounded in a thin conception of what is needed by everyone to pursue their diverse purposes (ibid.).

Billingham and Taylor also demonstrate further downstream consequences. 'Excellence', in the substantive sense, is used as a standard to apportion funding. While Kramer tries to pre-empt concerns by rightly pointing out that excellence is to an extent domain-relative, i.e., excellence has different manifestations between different spheres of activities, it is unclear where domain-specific thresholds of quality are supposed to lie. Would lower league football receive subventions because of

the potential to produce premier league players and teams? It is not clear. Kramer, at this point, is happy to appeal to the role of expertise in determining excellence in domain specific endeavours (Kramer, 2017: 396). This is a sensible attempt at a solution. Those with the most intimate knowledge of the domain have a better grasp over what counts as the highest tier of achievement within it. However, as Billingham and Taylor point out, this really puts the aspirational perfectionist back to square one in requiring a thick conception of the good—expertise is contentious, even within cultural activity, so it is unclear who would count as an expert, and why that licenses them to effectively direct public money under the pretence of a primary goods principle (Billingham and Taylor, 2018: 77). At worst, this opens the door to an elitist conception of what cultural activity is worthwhile, albeit a qualified elite. We already have reasons to reject this suggest per the argument that technocratic elites lack epistemic authority [§1.2.3](#) – even a qualified cultural elite cannot claim sufficient epistemic authority to exclude competing claims from those embedded in the first-order cultural practices under evaluation.

### 5.2.3. Civic nationalism and public culture

We come to our third possible view, that of the civic nationalist. Civic nationalists envision public culture as part of the institutional support necessary to ground equal relationships between citizens, non-citizen residents, and new arrivals. To achieve this, public culture should support two primary values. The first is stability of the nation as the site of democratic politics. The second is the integration of citizens into the national domestic context. Should public culture fail to provide for either of these two values, key social relationships of trust and solidarity may be weakened.

#### 5.2.3.1 Civic nationalism and public cultural identity

In a pluralistic society, citizens will inhabit multiple identities simultaneously ([§4.4.3](#)). We are family members, teachers, researchers, and members of our local communities. We are also assigned a national identity – I am British and furthermore would be able to identify as English. The civic nationalist will argue my nationality plays a positive role in morally negotiating the different commitments implied by my myriad identity roles, providing a common point of reference and a sense of cultural distinctiveness I share with any compatriots (Lenard, 2021: 162).

The distinctiveness of nationality is a sticking point for the civic nationalist. My Britishness is unlike my membership of the University of York. It is even unlike belonging to my hometown of Darlington. Miller (1995) gives us a helpful roadmap to clear up how nationality is separable from other identity commitments. When referring to a nationality, we mean to speak of “*a community (1) constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment, (2) extended in history, (3) active in character, (4) connected to a particular territory, and (5) marked off from other communities by its distinct public*

*culture*” (Miller, 1995: 27). Here, it seems (5) stands out as demarcating a national identity from other communities—public culture helps to make the difference.

What, specifically, does public culture help to achieve for the civic nationalist? Miller helpfully explains that people born into the same territory do not usually think of themselves as total strangers or having been thrown together by accident or chance. There is *“a sense that the people belong together by virtue of the characteristics that they share. It is not so easy, however, to pin down precisely what this entails.”* (ibid: 25). Miller is wisely reluctant to give a substantive account of these characteristics, emphasizing that the civic nationalist thinks belonging to a common culture takes precedent over claims of ethnicity, race, or native status (ibid.). Much of Miller’s account of public culture is negative. We are told public culture is not monolithic in nature. Any common culture that nationality provides must have some room or harmony with at least some private cultural identities (ibid: 26). Furthermore, we are told that public culture does not set expectations on every individual to display equal levels of commitment, belief, or buy in to the idea of the nation – nationality is not uniform in its demands on our agency (ibid.).

Hibbert (2008) offers a good way to frame the positive aspect of the civic nationalist account from Miller. *“While members need not agree with their fellow members on moral matters, they must feel the sense of ethical attachment that is rooted in their relationship, which requires politically promoting its salience.”* (Hibbert, 2008: 175). This involves a ‘soft-communitarian’ interpretation of public culture, where what matters is the ethical regard of each citizen to one another, rather than an explicit agreement or compact. The ethical relationships needed here must be substantive enough to motivate common political goals and aims, e.g., redistribution and the welfare state (ibid.).

The major political goals Miller wishes his conception of nationality to support is citizen compliance and support for the rule of law and democratic self-government (Miller, 1995: 26). A public culture, to Miller’s civic nationalism, helps to support a liberal national culture to take root between people. Part of this is cognitive in nature, requiring a belief in the value of democratic institutions, but also extends to micro-social interactions that characterize an associative or ethical democracy, including *“broadly shared social norms about appropriate public behaviour, such as queueing or filling in tax forms.”* (Moore, 2021: 194). These associative bonds require substantial horizontal trust between citizens, and to keep the symbolic aspect of the nation ethically and politically distinct there needs to be some element of vertical trust between citizens and democratic national institutions (Lenard, 2021: 156-157).

More recent accounts have disaggregated the role of public culture even further than Miller. Lenard (2021) offers a partial remapping of public culture. Firstly, around cultural norms and practices

which have place-specific properties. E.g., the British may self-organize into queues while Americans typically will not. Secondly, cultural ‘modes of public and political interaction’ help to provide a frame of reference for political and public-facing activity. Her example here is the distinctive *Frenchness* of disenfranchised second and first gen immigrations rioting against the state treating them unequally to white French citizens in 2005. The public rancour of a riot is understood by the public as a signature of French protesting, thus incorporating the youths into a wider French political culture that makes their protest part of a public culture (Lenard, 2021: 162). Finally, culturally inflected values that help to provide a level of internal coherence over a nation’s ethical self-understanding, so e.g., the British focus on toleration or the American emphasis on being a land of pluralism and opportunity (ibid: 162-3).

#### *5.2.3.2 Civic nationalism and public cultural institutions*

While Miller and his commentators offer an account of national public culture, there is less attention given to what ends public cultural institutions should aim at in their supportive role. Miller does give a hint when discussing a hypothetical disintegration of national bonds. Speaking of non-elites who will lose out from their position in a global marketplace, he comments “*First, they will no longer have ready access to a rich common culture of the kind that is still available in most European and other Western states through publicly funded television stations, museums and art galleries, educational programmes, and the like.*” (Miller, 1995: 187). Much like Dworkin’s cultural structural approach, PCIs are there to disseminate and make available common culture which substantiates individual choices.

By contrast with Dworkin’s anti-perfectionism, we should expect the civic nationalist does not put a premium on state neutrality. As mentioned before, the ‘soft-communitarian’ approach seeks to utilize a prior basis for ethical recognition between citizens that motivates them to pursue certain politics. William Galston summarizes this aptly. “*The generalization of liberal neutrality is neither necessary nor wise. To the extent that we accept a shared citizenship, we have something important in common—a set of political institutions and of principles that underlie them. What we share, beyond all our differences, provides the basis for a civic education valid across the boundaries of difference.*” (Galston, 1989: 93). This corresponds to Miller’s own normative statements on the justificatory basis for civic education, though Miller is careful to note that a national conversation can easily be around revising the national self-understanding and should take some care to accommodate minority needs (Miller, 1995: 181).

Taking the example of the Railroad Museum once more, we can imagine sympathetically how the civic nationalist should value museums of collective conscience as a PCI. It represents a crucial

moment of shared history for Americans, since the relationship between the state and slaveholding society has been integral to the development of American political history and culture. The Railroad museum also seeks to impart the knowledge and affect necessary for a community with shared sentiments and beliefs in anti-racism, abolitionism, and black history. True, it does so in a fairly critical way by highlighting a flaw in national history, however, the civic nationalist should welcome critical narratives if they allow national minorities to express and integrate their own stories into the common cultural understand (ibid.).

### *5.2.3.3 Limitations of civic nationalism*

Civic nationalism represents an attractive possibility for liberals seeking to substantiate the educational role of PCIs. There is one overarching problem that muddies the water. Margaret Moore (2021) points out the boundaries of the national public culture and smaller ‘private cultures’ is underdetermined by Miller and Lenard’s relational approach to nationality (Moore, 2021: 194). They are both hesitant to put down any necessary and sufficient conditions for membership within the public culture, preferring to talk about revisability and the duty to include diverse private cultural members. However, Moore points out that Miller and Lenard both rely on an unspecified threshold of shared beliefs and attachments individuals must have as a ‘buy in’ for shared national public culture. These thresholds are quite tenuous, especially given the empirical relationship between individuals and communities tends to be amorphous and resists a clear specification of belongingness (ibid: 196-7).

With an unclear threshold for inclusion, it becomes hard for PCIs to determine what is required of them to contribute to a common public culture. The Railroad Museum could sensibly say that slavery is an integral part of the nation’s history, with slaves and their ancestors being American. What about exhibits and museums that are composed of outsider cultural activities, perhaps a war exhibition for Korea, or for the Vietnam war? Would the PCI include the perspectives of the Vietcong soldiers as much as the American ones? Would we omit the Vietcong perspectives entirely? How do Vietnamese Americans fit into the national story or not? Without a solid threshold, the civic nationalist is left vaguely gesturing to greater epistemic inclusion ([§2.2.3](#)) but finding that it simultaneously poses a dilemma in watering down the distinctiveness of national public culture.

## *5.3. The Value of Public Cultural Institutions to the Deweyan View*

We now come to the Deweyan view. Under the Deweyan view, PCIs should play a core role in enriching the epistemic and aesthetic resources that individuals and groups can call upon. I focus especially on the role of public culture in forwarding the epistemic aspect of our learner agency: public culture helps to support the free distribution and dynamism of ideas that can be clarified, used, and

acted upon in processes of social inquiry. PCIs support our epistemic capacities by helping us to resist tendencies toward the marginalization and collective forgetting of core cultural knowledge. In addition, a unique capacity of PCIs is providing us an opportunity to reflect about the aesthetic dimension of our ordinary lives and shared projects. By briefly examining some of Dewey's aesthetic thoughts in *Art as Experience*, I shall argue the aesthetic dimension of our experience is shot through with both epistemic and moral salience. The contribution of PCIs to their support of our aesthetic lives is thus worth elaborating on.

Within these analyses, I can tackle thorny issues arising in [§5.2](#). Firstly, the epistemic aspect of PCIs can illuminate Dworkin's cultural structure metaphor and give it a practical upshot in representing cultures that may be on the margins of public culture. Secondly, it can explain the moral salience of a common cultural background between citizens to supplement the merits of the nationalist account. Finally, the admission of popular aesthetics allows one to appreciate where the perfectionists may be wise to point to warranted self-respect and wellbeing but makes clear that excellence is not a necessary aim in securing either through PCIs.

#### 5.3.1. Public cultural institutions and epistemic growth

Public cultural institutions strongly relate to the epistemic aspect of growth. Given our definition in [§5.1](#) focussed on the role of PCIs in handling knowledge and engendering cognitive change, we can surmise their value is partly located in their ability to disseminate, frame, and provide dynamism in available ideas. This has a moral upshot to the extent growth implies the availability of ideas conducive to democratic problem-solving and democratic individualism. How can public cultural institutions help to support a democratic public culture through their relationship to bodies of knowledge?

In *Politics and Culture* (1932), Dewey notes the primary epistemic role for public culture within democratic life is helping to guarantee the circulation of cultural ideas, e.g., the artistic merit of the human body, on a free and unfettered basis among the population (*P&C*: 41-2). This implies a strong presumption against any form of legal censorship. We should take this as a necessary condition. For sufficiency, Dewey notes the fluid and free exchange of ideas requires "*a certain background of common experiences and of common desires to bring about this free distribution of knowledge.*" (ibid.). Absence of censorship would alone not recognize the barriers to free dissemination of ideas wrought by non-ideal conditions.

It will be wise to consider these non-ideal conditions. Firstly, there are social conditions which may cause ordinary people to lack the motivation, energy, or time to devote much attention to ideas within mainstream culture. Maybe one cannot get time off work to pursue other ends [§4.3.2](#). Secondly,

existing social stratification may militate against the free distribution of ideas by encouraging the development of epistemic vices of snobbishness, elitism, and jealousy toward cultural symbolism [§2.3.4](#). If communication is to occur across and between different social groups, then we require a positive ideal of free distribution when it comes to ensuring individuals can access relevant bodies of knowledge.

In addition to free distribution, a public culture requires institutional machinery that provides for dynamism and replenishment of ideas in the overall epistemic resource (ibid: 42-3). Culture, above all, is a complex of different social pressures whose tendencies originate in the habits we form in association with one another (*F&C*: 71). Public culture itself can be expected to move with the fluctuations of human interaction in transaction with the natural and social world (ibid: 68-71). Public cultural institutions such as libraries, galleries, museums, etc. provide “*the external means of a very general development of culture.*” by aiding the uptake and deliberation of ideas, acting nodes in a wider network of knowledge transmission (*P&C*: 42).

We can therefore understand these conditions—free distribution and dynamism of ideas—to constitute a formal set of criteria to evaluate the vitality of public culture.

The formal conditions above clarify the *functional* aspects of how public culture, and PCIs, support epistemic life in a democratic social form. The next step is to consider how PCIs may best perform these functions. This is in line with general Deweyan thoughts on epistemic improvement as outlined in [§2.2](#), because the current emphasis on PCIs is undertaken for the sake of normative optimization. Normative optimization in this sense concerns how institutional environments aid self-development (Stroud, 2006: 102). And, of course, self-development in the current context should be cashed out according to the ideal of individual growth and learner agency.

It is best to start with a problem-centric approach as advocated throughout the thesis. The constraints to free distribution may involve unjust power dynamics and stratification. These dynamics may impinge on institutional design by educators located within public cultural institutions. Indeed, the Railroad Museum is premised on drawing attention to such problems and their longevity. Since institutional design is undertaken *in medias res* of contemporary socio-political problems, it makes sense for the Deweyan democrat to focus on the stickier processual problems whose elimination will contribute to the epistemic improvement of public culture as a whole (Weber, 2010).

The major problems posed for epistemic improvement and public culture are the historical legacies of various forms of cultural elitism that limit circulation and dynamism. Practically, this cashes out into two interrelated worries. The first is the distributional problems brought by past



marginalization of certain groups along racial, class, and gendered lines. The marginal experiences of these groups may not be sufficiently represented by an existing stock of ideas owing to these dynamics. Secondly, there is a more generalized form of elitism present in assumptions surrounding who is and is not fit for 'high' cultural activities, thus limiting the mission of PCIs to wealthy and well-educated patrons who serve as cultural insiders (*P&C*). I will talk about this second part in the upcoming section on aesthetics.

#### *5.3.1.2. Marginalization*

Concerning the danger of marginalization, I will take two major examples to elaborate on. The first is LGBTQIA+ history. The second is the legacy of imperial Britain. Both examples highlight positive roles for public cultural institutions to play in the epistemic life of a democratic society. Firstly, as institutions where marginal histories are unearthed, protected, and disseminated in the context of pluralism. Secondly, PCIs can provide a proactive role in public disputes surrounding historical problems.

A common problem surrounding the public preservation of knowledge is that it can be lost. While this can happen due to exogenous shocks such as social upheaval during a time of crisis, there is a large socio-political component in how bodies of knowledge from certain vantagepoints can be filtered, washed out, and suppressed through the sum effects of epistemic injustice. This means attempts to retrieve marginalized bodies of knowledge will become very resource intensive, especially relative to the knowledge retrieval practices associated with dominant, majority groups.

This is best seen in context of marginalized groups and initiatives to promote their histories through public cultural initiatives. LGBTQIA+ history and black history initiatives function as excellent examples<sup>6</sup>. These two initiatives cover communities which have been historically marginalized over a timespan of centuries within Western nations, and only recently have we experienced a (partial) legal thawing of civil rights. Despite this, these problems are contemporary in nature. Both LGBTQIA+ communities and black communities face systemic barriers to epistemic representation and security of their bodies of knowledge.

Given their historically unequal footing in democratic societies, there are extra costs imposed on the dissemination of marginalized bodies of knowledge. A positive role for public cultural institutions is to counteract this epistemically unjust dynamic through devoting their energies to excavation and proactive presentation of such knowledge. For example, the repeal of Section 28 of

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to imply they are entirely separate struggles. Of course, vectors of oppression between blackness and queerness will typically intersect. This provides reason for extra institutional caution when public culture represents LGBTQIA+ struggles through primarily white frames of reference.

the Local Government Act 1988 enabled museums and public forums to turn their attention to reversing the trend of avoidance on Britain's historical relationship to LGBTQIA+ communities (Hayward, 2015: 93-4). Subsequent guidance published in the wake of the Section 28 repeal has allowed PCIs to take an active role in educating the public through special events such as Pride weekends, or by integrating LGBTQIA+ histories into city-wide exhibits in local museums (ibid.). The tentative success of these initiatives suggest public cultural institutions can play a positive role in helping citizens to grow in tandem with one another.

This is likewise the thinking behind the Railroad Museum and museums of collective conscience. The recreation of slave living conditions preserves information about the way slaves lived, died, and resisted under an unjust political society. Given the subsequent industrial development of the Midwest and Southern USA, this information may have been under threat of active collective forgetfulness. Forgetfulness here is not to be understood as a natural or automatic process wrought by time itself; it is a process intimately shaped by how structural determinants of power pick out the epistemic winners and losers of conventional histories. PCIs can play an invaluable role counteracting this if they promote what Nuti refers to as *counter-memory*. For example, if we recall Charles Mills' work outlined in [§2.3.3](#), the point was that colourblind conceptions of racial history and relationships distort collective memory into the realities of structural racism and colonial government by perpetuating epistemic injustice. Counter-memory is a countervailing intellectual process where scholars, museum curators, and artist-activists should raise genealogical questions about the development of dominant historical narratives and internal cultural self-understanding (such as colour-blindness). As Nuti argues, "*By retrieving those aspects of the past that are silenced in the daily reproduction of domestic and international politics and rewriting the official histories in a way that brings to the forefront its deliberately neglected elements, counter-memory aims to remodel the present social (and international) imagination.*" (Nuti, 2019: 174-5). By putting slavery and fugitive slave life at the heart of the American historical narrative, museums of collective conscience, then, show how marginal bodies of knowledge can be creatively reconstructed and disseminated to the public to foster counter-memory and raise further awareness of historical injustice.

Secondly, the epistemic aspect of growth is instructive in giving PCIs an active role in public disputes over marginalization. Since the epistemic aspect of growth demands attention to ends-in-view of a given democratic problem, PCIs can serve citizens by providing a level of qualified expertise over bodies of knowledge. Take, for example, controversies surrounding the removal of colonial era statues in the UK and US in spring-summer 2020. Removal of these statues by protesters ignited a public debate resulting in an expansion of protest criminalization. The concomitant public debate largely centred around the discursive and educational significance of these monuments. Claims

emerged for caution in removing the statues without a strongly forward-looking strategy for decolonization of wider social structures (Ypi, 2020). On the other hand, claims were advanced that leaving the monuments standing imposed a selective, colonial interpretation of statecraft (Alimsinya Atuire, 2020: 460-461).

My claim here is public cultural institutions can provide crucial context and epistemic resources which may otherwise prove costly to marginalized communities. A focus on growth, however, does not imply an adjudicating role for public cultural institutions in making one decision or other on behalf of the public. Nor does it imply an executive role in settling the matter, lest we fall into problems with the epistemic division of labour within public culture. Rather, PCIs should be encouraged to provide a secure public space for marginalized groups to organize, formulate, and curate their knowledge. One recurring suggestion from the statue debate is for museums to rehouse statues and allow their meaning to be scrutinized in proper context with their colonial past (ibid). Likewise, museums and libraries can be invited by local authorities to change the curation of statues where they stand to further contextualize the statue with past facts of historical injustice. Any public-facing placards or information can be modified to include fuller historical context on controversial figures (Grierson & Gayle, 2021).

Another role may be the promotion and funding of training for certain types of museum educators. Part of the dynamism that the Deweyan desires out of public culture requires a stance on interpretive resources available to the citizen body in public cultural institutions. For example, museum educators have developed a paradigm known as *critical museum pedagogy* to help enhance the design of curated environments and public spaces. Critical museum pedagogy recommends PCI educators look to provide exhibitions which contain a politicized view of contemporary problems, without simply dictating an interpretation to visitors. This is to counteract what Mayo and Borg identify as hegemonic interpretations of often unjust historical events and figures, something analogous to cases of institutional hermeneutical injustice as exploded in [§2.3—5](#) (Mayo and Borg, 2010: 37-39). To be sure, critical museum pedagogy is simply one of many approaches PCIs can take toward pedagogy. The point is not that funding should solely flow to critical museum pedagogues, but rather there is a fruitful and vibrant field of expertise existing within PCIs that should be nurtured.

#### *5.3.1.3. Implications for the anti-perfectionist*

Let us now return to the anti-perfectionist position on cultural structure ([§5.2.1.2](#)). Dworkin's position on the value of public culture means public-funding of PCIs must rest on their contribution to the context of choice. Their primary contribution being the suffusion of meaning to choices between different ways of life. This should, in itself, not be an issue for the Deweyan democrat. It is similar to the implications drawn above. What should worry the Deweyan democrat is more the anti-

perfectionist's tendency toward avoiding matters of content in preference to structure in cultural matters.

To explain what I mean, recall Kymlicka's points on ambiguities within the cultural structure metaphor ([§5.2.1.2](#)). It is unclear whether there exists an overarching cultural structure which presents a univocal plane of meaning, or whether multiple cultural structures exist in a given society. In Kymlicka's eyes, cultural structures exist in a context of multiculturalism, and thus group membership becomes a central concern in normative questions surrounding the metaphor. One such concern is whether membership of one cultural structure can preclude membership in another, thereby limiting an individual's overall option-set within this context of choice.

At this point, we should refer back to the previous subsection's discussion of marginalization within existing societies. This can be understood to divide the cultural fortunes of different groups, leading to diversions of cultural structure. The suggestion there may be multiple cultural structures, containing a diverse selection of ways of life, demands reflection on the conditions of maintaining and strengthening pluralism. It is unlikely different cultural structures exist on equal footing in terms of power.

True, Dworkin does provide suggestions that may help. First, we focus on preservation. Maintaining a meaningful context of choice requires public cultural institutions to collective and archive a rich stock of projects for the community to access (Dworkin, 1985: 321-2). Secondly, Dworkin argues we need to develop a tradition of innovation around art to restrain sources of cultural stagnation, such as snobbery surrounding high art, or not being attentive to the threat of commodification in lowering standards (*ibid.*). The first mechanism, preservation, is necessary. It parallels the view defended in this section, in its focus on the free distribution of ideas. The sufficient conditions for guaranteeing free distribution wider and involve positive commitments to learner agency and growth. It is unclear whether preservation nor innovation could account for the politicized, democratic commitment to excavating, protecting, and arguing in favour of marginal historical initiatives.

At this point, the anti-perfectionist may argue there is wiggle room for PCIs to play such a proactive role in their understanding. As Margaret Kohn points out of Rawls' anti-perfectionism, cultural spaces may receive funding in accordance with distributive justice if they promote the right-type of 'political values' (Kohn, 2020: 1104). In Rawlsian terms, we can expect these political values to revolve around basic freedoms and the moral equality of persons. This would place cultural spending at the constitutional level if funding were to flow at all, and one may dispute that discretionary spending on culture should be supported by the state when it is capable of being delivered by the

market. As such, the political values pathway is not easy to navigate. It is partly why Dworkin is fairly creative in seeking ways to stretch the conceptual limitations of neutrality to begin with. So, we are back to square one. However, the anti-perfectionist may lean on the Deweyan view here. This is because the Deweyan ideal of growth mandates self-development be understood as a form of co-development, it is able to anchor itself as a relevant political value that supports a pro-democratic public culture. Therefore, some measure of compromise can be made to bring Dworkin's cultural structural view and the Deweyan view closer together in a mutually beneficial way.

#### *5.3.1.4. Implications for the civic nationalist*

Both the Deweyan and the civic nationalist appeal to the necessity of a common background for public culture ([§5.2.3.1](#)). The nationalist position differs in its understanding of the value of a pre-political form of relational familiarity being essential to this common background. The soft-communitarian approach of Miller and Lenard requires citizens be able to recognize what nationality distinctively adds to their other identity roles.

The civic nationalist may be morally ambivalent about PCIs engaging in promoting counter-memory. This is because on the one hand, civic nationalists need PCIs to contribute to an overarching civic frame of reference for national self-understanding, and on the other the difficulties of being able to mark off the public culture from other private cultures that cannot be politically activated by national politics. The value of counter-memory initiatives could become conditional under this interpretation, depending on whether the counter-memory initiative does promote a national bond rather than presenting a 'special interest' of a private cultural group.

The civic nationalist has a common background of pre-political relationships in mind when she thinks of constructing the national project, while the Deweyan has a more abstract characterization of common experience as keeping people bound together. According to the Deweyan, a democratic society is distinguished by a deep, wide-ranging pluralism of civic identity. Citizens move between different identity roles, occupational domains, cultural media, and cannot be presumed *ex ante* to hold civically similar identities (*D&E*: 316-7). By contrast, the civic nationalist requires this assumption to vindicate the soft-communitarianism of Lenard and Miller's approach.

In the Deweyan view, there is no pressing need to inquire about the boundary between a nationally active public culture and 'other' private cultures. It is enough to consider what experiences different groups share in common and can communicate through PCIs. Ethical ties should develop as a result of greater communicative bonds and cooperation through these PCIs. What makes these ethical ties distinctive should be immanent to the process of democratic social inquiry and the norm of epistemic inclusion – agents will have to continually revisit how they understand their national

distinctiveness, how it can be improved, and when and where it should be distanced from in pursuit of other normative values.

In addition, if democratic social inquiry is where citizens hash out their self-understandings and revise them, then we do not need to inquire into judgments about place-specific norms and motifs as suggested by Lenard ([§5.2.3.1](#)). It may be true that the French have a tendency toward direct action in their politics, but there is a thin line between endorsing these general place-specific depictions of national cultural distinctiveness and national stereotypes which contribute to structural epistemic injustice. For instance, we may say the UK and the US are cast as rigorously pluralistic societies and lands of opportunity as part of their self-image, but how far do these interpretations obfuscate the historical and structural dimensions of injustice in these national contexts? We need only refer back to Bain's claims about colonial Britain for one example ([§2.4.1](#)). For another example, claims about the distinctiveness of American commitments to diversity and economic opportunity would need to be educationally qualified the anti-racist points raised by collective museums of conscience, at the very least.

### 5.3.2. The aesthetic role of PCIs

Communication of ideas between different cultural groups is not just epistemic; these ideas, and their mode of expression, will also possess aesthetic dimensions. For Dewey, art and the aesthetic desire for richer modes of human experience are a common motivation for different groups to share their common experiences and to experiment with new perspectives. Art also provides for a form of communicative understanding that goes beyond speech. Disclosing artistic experience through music, imaginary, and movements may allow cross-cultural communication to occur without necessarily involving shared linguistic symbols (*AaE*: 338). This makes aesthetic experience indispensable in the face of deep pluralism. Throughout the chapter, the value of art and its relationship to public culture has underwritten the controversies of public funding. It is of prime importance to set out an understanding of aesthetic experience that weaves together the public cultural value of art, the role of aesthetic experience, and how public cultural institutions can play a positive role in buttressing democratic public culture through them.

The Railroad Museum provides a good example to start with. As emphasized at the start of this chapter, the key exhibition is not solely designed to communicate cognitive information surrounding slave living conditions. The pen also provides a sense of gravitas and authenticity that visitors ought to pick upon. The attention to detail is so great that markings have been reproduced on the pen; the aesthetics of struggle and resistance are preserved by the exhibition, primarily to evoke a sense of immersion and sympathy between visitors and the message conveyed by the exhibit's curated environment. The visitors typically respond in turn with silence, creating a hushed atmosphere

with connotations of utmost seriousness. In other words, it is designed to cultivate an aesthetic experience along with a cognitive one.

#### *5.3.2.1. Dewey on Aesthetic Experience and Art*

Now that we have a grasp on what it means for PCIs to cultivate aesthetic experience, let us consider the philosophical aspects behind aesthetic experience. To achieve this, I will give an extremely brief synopsis of relevant parts of Dewey's *Art as Experience*. I do not claim to give anything resembling a competent exegesis. Instead, I set out this brief synopsis for an understanding of the role of art within a democratic society.

Dewey's writings on art can be seen as a culmination of his concerns with how experience is formed within the social matrix, rather than being antecedent to it. The aesthetic dimension of our experiences constitutes one of the fullest modalities of interaction between the citizen and her environment. The mechanics behind Dewey's aesthetics are extremely complex, and I admit readily that I only intend to capture the part of them relevant to the current discussion in the chapter. To start with, Dewey's account of aesthetics is distinct from conventional views in terms of (a) its pragmatic motivation and (b) its process-driven orientation toward aesthetic analysis.

Dewey targets what he terms the 'museum conception of art' as the problem motivating his analysis. The museum conception often presents valuable art as possessing immutable qualities. These qualities, such as excellence, should be explained internally to the artwork itself to provide an account of its value (ibid.). Art, as an achievement, then gains a self-contained valuation which is separate from the social and communal circumstances of its creation. This creates an air of distance between excellent works of art and ordinary social life. Our aesthetic lives play out separately from the cultural and historical development of art forms, because "*when what he knows as art is relegated to the museum and gallery, the unconquerable impulse towards experiences enjoyable in themselves finds such outlet as the daily environment provides.*" (ibid: 12). We prefer popular culture because we are able to easily access and evaluate it, whereas for finer art we are usually ill-equipped.

Dewey alleges the museum conception, having separated the development of fine art from community, transmutes a metaphysical account of artistic quality into a socio-political divide. Museums which house art appraised as 'high' or 'fine' are often designed to strongly stand out from the places they are based within. These museums become the 'beauty parlour' of civilization, presenting warped interpretations of national history, rather than active sites of learning and aesthetic experience for the ordinary person, whose aesthetic life is increasingly neglected in the realms of architecture and the craftsmanship associated with working (ibid: 346). Since 'fine' or

'excellent' art is increasingly cordoned off from social life, the result of this dynamic is the impoverishment of popular forms of art, as they focus increasingly on instant gratification. Fine art remains inaccessible to cultural outsiders, and opportunities to contribute to the aesthetic features of everyone's common experience are passed up.

Dewey's move here is to reconceive art as a process-driven activity. His aesthetic analysis is perhaps the most striking, and controversial, aspect of Dewey's aesthetics. A strongly process metaphysics is utilized in order to explain aesthetic experience as constituted by interactions between artist and the environmental qualities she calls upon when crafting. This does not involve reduction to essential qualities of excellence but is explained through a series of spatiotemporal concepts such as rhythm (ibid: 62-3). The interaction of rhythm with both aesthetic form and the substance which characterizes an artwork allows for intelligent manipulation of pre-existing materials into new modes of action (e.g., sculpting or painting). This situates the artist as an agent seeking to complete a series of movements which carries her from primordial forms of intellectual curiosity to full blown artistic expression through music, paintings, dance, film, etc.

Since artistry is an intelligent process involving manipulation of material, Dewey emphasizes the contribution of spatiotemporal harmonies, tactile feedback, and experimental inquiry in helping to explain the artist's vocation. The artist's social context also plays a key part in the process of creation. The social matrix is an invaluable source of imaginative and material resources from which to develop her visions around, such as the craftsmanship and cultural motifs impressed onto pottery (ibid: 365). The theoretical upshot from these claims is that all art has a common set of cognitive and non-cognitive background conditions. These common conditions hold regardless of whether we class an artwork as popular or fine art, thus contextualizing artistry within the conditions of growth. This goes some way to erasing the essentialist interpretation of art as possessing self-contained, sublime qualities underlying the museum conception.

#### *5.3.2.2. Implications for perfectionist thought*

It is not necessary to go any further into the process aesthetics Dewey provides. The focus on overcoming the museum conception is productive to understand the distinction between the Deweyan position and the two perfectionist views on public culture and PCIs.

Starting with the edificatory view, the perfectionist seeks to provide opportunities for citizens to access high art. As clarified in [§5.2.2.1](#), the interest is in securing a background of meaningful, morally sound options. The view advanced by this chapter agrees with this much. Excellent art should



be more readily available to citizens<sup>7</sup>. This commitment is integral to ensuring fine artistry can be experienced by the public at all (*P&C*).

The disagreement between the edificatory perfectionist and the Deweyan springs from the focus on excellence, especially whether excellence is capable of being the lodestar criterion for assessing the contribution of art to wellbeing. There is a distinct danger that a priority on excellence may encourage a devaluation of popular art within democratic life. Worse yet, it may go to feeding existing patterns of elitisms that encourage a separation between artworks and ordinary life per the museum conception.

We should be extremely wary of elitism, especially a general social attitude that some cultural groups possess inherent aptitude for the arts, and that the majority of people do not. This form of elitism anchors itself around the ability for aesthetically apt individuals to produce excellent art. Dewey sees it as a mainstay of aesthetic thought since the Hellenistic period in ancient philosophy. Much like his argument on the genealogical origins of epistemological dichotomies in [§2.1.2](#), Dewey hypothesizes this separation between sublime art and popular forms of aesthetic enjoyment probably originates in a more primordial socio-historical distinction between free leisure classes and mostly unfree productive classes (*AaE*: 252).

To the Deweyan, the solution is not to deny the value of high and fine art to a democratic society. Dewey's aesthetics led us to recontextualize these forms of art in their socio-political backdrop. The solution is to find a proper place for PCIs with respect to popular art and aesthetic excellence with the aim to avoid elitism. For instance, popular art is incredibly diverse. If we want to understand the implications of aesthetic experience for democratic society, then it is a wise idea to start with the complexity presented by popular art. This includes pointing out the contribution of cinema, hip-hop, and other forms of artistry which may often be absent from aesthetic discourse (Shusterman, 1995). These forms of art are often overlooked by national conceptions of excellent art, since they do not fit into extrinsic standards. This is not to imply subcultures do not exist around either cinema or hip-hop, merely that their appreciation tends to be "alternative" or "niche" in ways that reinforce separation from 'truly' excellent or sublime art. Attempts to understand the democratic value of art by strict reference to such extrinsic standards therefore carries the risk of minimizing the achievements of popular artistry (*ibid*). This can carry especially problematic implications in the case of artforms which develop in minority communities. For example, Pope discusses the class-based and

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<sup>7</sup> Again, it is worth stressing that if the Deweyan view were perfectionist on the matter of public cultural institutions, it would be of a particular kind of perfectionism, capable of analogy with Rawls' use of the two moral powers (see: [§1.4.5](#)). The Deweyan view can therefore be properly distinguished from both the edificatory and aspirational perfectionist positions on the value of public culture.

racialized ways of the ways which aestheticians have understood jazz music and hip-hop as an inferior form of expression (Pope, 2011).

Given the danger this rejection poses for reinstating the museum conception, and thus hardening subcultural divides around elitist premises, we should therefore reject the idea excellence serves as the guiding light for public cultural institutions. The upshot is the edificatory perfectionist will have to re-evaluate their position on PCIs expanding autonomy through a focus on excellent artwork.

The aspirational perfectionist has quite a different view on the relationship between artistic excellence and democratic life. Excellent achievements in the domain of the arts contribute to high levels of warranted self-esteem among the citizen body. Public funding for the production of excellent artists and their works then helps to secure the primary good of the social bases of self-respect.

To refer back to the limitations of the position in [§5.2.2.3](#), aspirational perfectionism's focus on aesthetic excellence causes mischief in evaluating where public money ought to flow. This is due to the attempted understanding of excellence in a more pluralistic manner than the edificationist. The self-imposed limitation of official self-restraint obliges Kramer to look for mechanics to adjudicate excellence without state officials imposing a monistic view of excellence. Kramer's solution was to appeal to the role of embedded cultural experts in evaluating excellence in cultural achievements, as these experts can be expected to best judge 'excellence' (Kramer, 2017: 396).

Billingham and Taylor's critique can be understood as highlighting the indeterminacy of excellence claims where a conceptual move has been made to restrict 'excellence' to domain-specific achievements. On the bottom-line of the debate, it is unclear who is to be selected as a domain-specific expert for evaluative purposes.

Furthermore, Kramer's aspirational perfectionism is a work of ideal theory, seeking to explain the justifiability of perfectionist policies along Rawlsian grounds. The indeterminacy of expertise claims seems to also have implications in non-ideal terms. Let us reflect on the uncertainty behind selecting for cultural expertise. The major reason I can adduce is contestation of cultural authority. Subcultural claims may be advanced to challenge conventional forms of authority within cultural domains.

Within the Deweyan view, it is already recognized this may occur ([§1.2.3](#)). Pope and Shusterman's focus on jazz and hip-hop are examples of alternative artforms that exist in a context of cultural politicking. Jazz and hip-hop are often racialized in production and public presentation. Kramer's aspirational perfectionism would have a hard time dealing with these forms of cultural

politics – do we select for experts within the domain of *musical achievement*? Or do we select from *hip-hop* and *jazz* domains? On both levels, we can expect a high level of contestation about what even counts as the domain, but more fundamentally, what counts as an excellent manifestation of the artwork in question.

Whichever level of achievement the aspirational perfectionist chooses, the problem of elitism is a worry for public culture in an aspirational perfectionist understanding. If we choose the general domain of musical achievement, it is plausible established expertise militates against newer, more popular forms of art like hip-hop. In a domain-specific interpretation, purists and established actors may fail to recognize the value of avant-garde artworks. It therefore seems much safer if ‘excellence’ is not used as the major criterion for apportioning public funding to public cultural institutions past. It certainly has its place in incentivizing production, as Kramer rightly points out, but the distributive consequences are too severe to permit. Instead, we should fall back on the need to encourage aesthetic experience along the precepts of individual growth and the development of more inclusive cultural communications, which contextualizes excellence within a wider field of democratic social and political considerations.

## Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I have argued public cultural institutions offer epistemic and aesthetic value in supporting a democratic society. While they already play a formal role in providing interactive and free-form education to the public, they can further aid the development of democratic individuality by promoting communication between different groups within a pluralistic society, mainly by ensuring the smooth exchange of ideas and artistic experiences. On the one hand, our epistemic agency is boosted by engaging with public cultural institutions. Public cultural institutions should help to curate and organize marginalized bodies of knowledge, such as black and LGBTQIA+ histories. In doing so, they help to resist the threat of epistemic exclusion by promoting counter-memory initiatives ([§2.2.3](#)), and also provide a forum where these bodies of knowledge can develop free from unjust and undue social pressure ([§2.3.3](#)).

PCIs should also play a role in enriching our aesthetic lives, since Dewey points out art is vital to cross-cultural communications. Public culture is buttressed by a lively culture of artistic achievement, in both ‘fine’ and popular terms. Dewey’s aesthetics help us to see the problems when museums are used as a repository for symbols and artwork associated with a higher, more civilized culture: our imagination is dulled, as art is separated from ordinary life, and with a dulled imagination, we miss opportunities to design beautiful architecture, workplaces, and crafts which can be shared by all in common. I argued for a greater role for popular art in particular, calling

attention to how perfectionist stances may fail to deal with problems that arise from cultural and aesthetic elitism.

I have also provided a systematic overview of how anti-perfectionists, perfectionists, and civic nationalists evaluate the role of public culture in supporting a democratic society. In doing so, I have adopted a selective focus onto particular theorists, like Raz, Dworkin, and Kramer. Future research into PCIs from advocates of these positions would ideally take a more general, as opposed to specific, approach; I found it helpful to examine specific authors as there had been little work into the role of public cultural institutions, and careful textual engagement provided the necessary concepts and arguments (e.g., cultural structure) to articulate possible views.

Nonetheless, I have examined and evaluated the strengths and limitations of these three views. All share considerable convergence with some core concerns of the thesis, allowing us to glean considerable insight into the role of public culture in supporting an individual's capacity to evaluate and act upon the cultural options which make give their lives significance. In particular, Dworkin's cultural structural approach gestures to the democratic cultural conditions needed to fully realize the value of one's agency, Kramer's aspirational perfectionism attempts to articulate a proper division of labour for expertise and democratic politics in appraising cultural excellence ([§1.2.3](#)), and Miller's civic nationalism attempts to find commonalities in a pluralistic society by appealing to nationality ([§4.3.3](#)). While I found all three had problems which prevented them from fully realizing the value of public culture and PCIs, they give significant insights into the nature of public culture. I have tried to be ecumenical in my approach as far as possible.

## Conclusion of thesis

The thesis has explored the nature, scope, and value of education within a democratic way of life. It has provided a Deweyan democratic account of learner agency and growth in non-schooling contexts. I have argued for greater attention to how ordinary social institutions contribute to our educational lives, through a normative focus on self-realization, collective problem-solving, and growth. Paying heed to these ideals is of great practical significance when we attend to the transformative and problem-solving qualities we expect an ethical democracy to exhibit. I have also critiqued the ability of these institutions in truncating or warping how we grow. In essence, I have provided both the positive and negative means for a full account of how a democratic society educates, and miseducates, its members through its everyday social life, thus filling a lacuna within the political philosophy of education into non-school institutions.

## Summary of thesis

I structured the thesis into two parts. Part I comprised of two chapters. Chapter 1 set out to construct a Deweyan democratic account of learner agency. In doing so, I was able to advance arguments to clarify the appropriate understandings of core concepts such as 'education' and 'democracy'. Moreover, I was able to make the core moves of the thesis' wider argument about the educational capabilities of a democratic form of life: schools are a special case of education, not the exhaustive or sole case we should be concerned about. Underpinning my normative thinking was a Deweyan-inspired reading of positive freedom and democracy as a way of life.

Under this Deweyan framework, I was able to suggest the educational role of democratic social institutions should be to provide educative experiences in a way that (1) safeguards the intrinsic motivation to continue learning from new experiences and (2) enable the individual to grow. Upon reconstructive work, Dewey's ideal of growth was found to imply a greater sense of ethical interconnectedness with the fates of other people and greater mastery of producing the ends-in-view necessary to link present educational experiences to future problem-solving contexts. I defended the ideal of growth from potential objections from normative indeterminacy, necessity of ethical imposition onto learners, and from Talisse's pluralistic objections to Deweyan democratic theory. I found the indeterminacy argument can be satisfied by reconstructing growth in a more determinate form; the necessity argument is defused when we highlight the contribution of educators to educational self-development; and suggested we could obviate Talisse's argument.

In Chapter 2, I elaborated both a positive and negative account of how learner agency should (and should not be) safeguarded by institutional norms. My positive account elaborated on Dewey and Anderson's contributions to institutional epistemology, allowing me to articulate three

key norms of social inquiry that aid epistemic improvement: fallibilism, publicity, and epistemic inclusion. Negatively, I argued a developed understanding of pragmatist institutional epistemology obliges us to tend to the role social and political inequalities play in sustaining epistemically unjust circumstances.

The chapter attempted to triangulate Deweyan pragmatism, epistemic injustice, and the epistemology of ignorance to construct its negative account. I argued research into epistemic injustice helps to provide a normative-aetiological understanding of how our epistemic agency is curtailed by dysfunctional institutional practice. I registered Fricker's work on the parent cases of epistemic injustice and Medina's work linking epistemic injustice to the attitudes and character of actively ignorant subjects into the thesis' conceptual vocabulary. I then warned Deweyan democrats should be extremely concerned by the presence of epistemic injustice in diminishing educational experience. Piggybacking off the work of Kotzee and Medina, I further argued we needed tools to appreciate the structural and meta-cognitive dimensions of epistemic injustice, as meta-ignorance within social institutions precludes their epistemic improvement.

In Part II, I moved onto three non-school contexts where I could apply the conceptual, normative, and theoretical resources developed in Chapters 1 & 2. I focused on parenting, working, and public cultural institutions. These cases were chosen to illustrate how widely concerns about democratic character and education extends over political philosophical thought.

In Chapter 3, I queried a lacuna in Deweyan democratic thought on the educative experiences associated with parenting. While Dewey accounts for children's education within the context of parenting, I agreed with Greenwalt that Dewey does not say very much about parental growth. However, he does suggest two axes of concern: the parent-child relationship and the process parents undertaken of 'opening out' the home into the wider community. For the first dimension, I turned to work in the ethics of the parent-child relationship, as Greenwalt's critique of Dewey suggests we need to focus on relational elements. For that end, I explored and registered Brighouse & Swift's relational view to the language of learner agency and growth. The same treatment was extended to Fowler's project view to make sense of the motivational elements involved in parenting. For the second dimension, I set out an understanding of parental influence mechanisms from Brighouse and Anderson, then suggested we should focus on the plight of powerless parents who are more likely to suffer from a lack of influence, because of institutionally generated harms to their ethical and epistemic agency.

In Chapter 4, I examined the workplace. The democratic educationalist argument running from Mill, to Dewey, to Pateman needed further nuance into the nature and structuring of

workplace organization, especially hierarchy. As such, I unpacked Dewey's critique of work along educational lines, then related it back to democratic character formation. Seeking to head off concerns about Dewey's continued relevance, I explored the work of Lisa Herzog to diagnose four educational problems with modern workplaces: (i) lack of self-direction, (ii) workplace hierarchies, (iii) negative epistemic culture, and (iv) unclear responsibility for structural injustices. More textual work with Dewey unearthed the ideas of occupation and vocation, strongly linking matters of self-realization through working activity to matters of learner agency and growth. With this new philosophical device at hand, I explored the limits of workplace resistance, the role of work-adjacent institutions in protecting social pluralism and addressed a hypothetical argument from pluralism.

In Chapter 5, I turned my focus to public culture and public cultural institutions (PCIs). PCIs have unique pedagogical properties which make them ideal sites for non-school education, including free interaction and a wide latitude for environmental design. I presented three views of public culture from existing research that could justify funding for PCIs: anti-perfectionism, perfectionism, and civic nationalism. I found none offered a complete account that could justify state funding for PCIs without running into significant problems: the anti-perfectionist struggles to untangle the notion of cultural structure(s); the perfectionists struggle to specify who has cultural authority to decide matters of excellence; civic nationalists struggle to explain the pre-political elements of shared public culture. I offered an ecumenical position predicated on the epistemic and aesthetic contribution public culture makes to our learner agency. PCIs should aid us in efforts to resist epistemic marginalization, promote inclusion of minority histories, and encourage counter-memory; on the other hand, PCIs should help ensure access to art for aesthetic experience, but also be judicious with the inclusion of popular forms of art to help counteract the dead hand of cultural elitism.

### [Suggestions for future research](#)

One suggestion for expanding the research within the thesis is to expand normative thinking to more non-school contexts. In scheduled feedback sessions, Alasia Nuti suggested that the Deweyan approach could be applied to more varied cases. Some suggestions outlined were educational effects of life in the military and education within prisons. While I have chosen to stay with more conventional institutions for the sake of illustration, Nuti's suggestion was right on the mark. Military hierarchies, education that occurs in prisons, interactions between the citizen and the administrative state, and perhaps even the educational implications of political discussion through internet platforms—Facebook and Twitter—should be amenable to the general theoretical direction endorsed within Chapters 1 & 2.

Another would be to contextualize the core argument about learner agency and basic institutions into targeted reflections on educational policy and political advocacy. For example, my theoretical contributions indicate the possibility of a political theory of lifelong learning, or a political theory of adult education. A theory of lifelong, or adult, education would help to substantially fill the lacuna between school and non-school contexts that motivates the current thesis. My applied cases in Chapters 3-5 largely avoided the intricacies of educational policymaking for the concerned areas. However, this would be a viable avenue for others better placed within the academic division of labour. One hypothetical example would be a rigorous evaluation of the proposal for a lifelong education service funded by the state, such as in Melissa Benn's *Life Lessons: The Case for a National Education Service* (2018). There is likewise no shortage of adult educationalist research on the salience and workings of education outside of schools. Political philosophers could draw upon such work to further enrich our understanding of democracy, education, and non-school learning environments (Jarvis, 2011).

Thirdly, the thesis implicitly invokes 20<sup>th</sup> century and modernist approaches to conceiving education as a process, along with the ethical aim of cultivating in truly educative society through social and political action. Historically, there is a wealth of material running through several political traditions waiting to be collated and further interrogated for their wisdom on these matters. In particular, due to the constraints of space and time, I would have liked to explore the historical context into working-class, radicalist, and trade union organizations contributing to the education of their members. Delving into the educational history of adult educational movements may unearth philosophical resources to clarify the genealogical and contextual elements of normative arguments like Dewey's. It may therefore be wise to open up engagement with historical sources, e.g., R. H. Tawney, to sketch concrete connections to further inspirational material.

Finally, one could elaborate on the political nuances of the theory of learner agency and the threats to individual self-realization in Chapter 1 & 2. One feasible way to achieve this would be greater cross-pollination with critical theory in education. Underlying the thesis' educational focus on democratic institutions and self-realization is a series of reflections regarding political and social power. This is apparent when we reflect on social inequality curtailing the learning experiences of disadvantaged agents. I am imagining further development in association with critical pedagogy and critical theory would help to further foreground the argument about powerlessness within educational contexts, as gestured to in Chapter 3's discussion of disadvantaged parents. To add plausibility to the suggestion, there are many documented similarities between the thought of Paulo Freire and Dewey on the role of education in enabling democratic self-government for the disadvantaged (Freire, 2002; Betz, 1992; Beckett, 2013). Scrutinizing the observations here about



powerlessness, epistemic marginalization, and the political and social conditions for democracy from a critical theoretical perspective may give us further development of these points.

### Original contributions

The thesis has addressed a series of important concerns that have been underexplored by the political philosophy of education. In exploring the educational experiences afforded by non-school institutions, along with the educative and mis-educative experiences they produce, I offered original insights into the nature and scope of education, the role of education in democratic theory, and how to evaluate the non-school institutions for their contribution to pro or anti-democratic growth.

### *Furthering our understanding of 'democratic education'*

The most important contribution is expanding the scope of democratic education through greater conversation with John Dewey's educational philosophy. As I have stated above, this move allows the democratic theorist ample room to consider which other social institutions play a key role in promoting the development of learner agency. I have shown this expansion of scope, however, relies on an argumentative move to see 'education' as referring to the process of pedagogues cultivating the right environmental qualities of their given social institution. To recap Dewey, we cannot educate people directly; we do so by giving them the right type of social and intellectual context to thrive in. I have pressed the case that matters of institutional design becomes a paramount concern for transformative agents wishing to promote democratic character with the educative power of ordinary social institutions.

The framework of learner agency and growth enables me to hang together the values of self-realization, substantive ties to others, and the interest in social and political democratization. I have provided the democratic educationalist with one possible matrix to weave together a viable interpretation of how democracy educates its members without necessarily putting on the emphasis on schooling politics. While schools will continue to occupy the pride of place in educational research generally, my hope is the agency-centric framework developed in the thesis can increase our comprehension of how other ordinary social institutions help to support the mission of the school, primarily in providing an appropriate social, cultural, and political context for normative analysis to occur against.

The areas I selected—parenting, workplaces, public cultural institutions—can all be evaluated for their educative deposit by utilizing the theory of learner agency and growth constructed within Chapters 1 & 2 as regulative ideals. To be sure, this is a non-exhaustive list, as noted above. It does provide an opportunity for political philosophers of education to apply their

toolkits and amendments to classic cases of adult, non-school education. As demonstrated throughout the thesis, once we do think of these institutions for their formative contributions to democratic character, then we gain a clearer read on how to avoid cramped or stultified forms of personal development. My contributions in Chapters 3–5 were piecemeal in nature. I did not seek to overturn existing research. The strategy was to leverage the Deweyan-inspired framework developed in Chapters 1 & 2 to identify nuances in need of further clarification and evaluation. As one example, I argued a focus on growth and learner agency of parents suggests a greater warrant for those parents who cannot engage with traditional forms of parental influence as outlined by previous research. For another example, I suggested that a complete understanding of the role of public culture must make room for the educational missions of PCIs in expanding aesthetic experiences to ordinary people against currents of cultural elitism.

#### *Furthering our understanding of Deweyan democratic theory*

I was able to achieve an expansion of scope through relying on Deweyan democratic theory. I have contributed to our understanding of Dewey's theory of ethical democracy, or democracy as a way of life, by developing a reading that strongly connects and interleaves with core concerns in his philosophy of education. This means the thesis contributes to a growing scholarly interest in the political and social philosophy of Deweyan pragmatism.

Firstly, my research contributes by helping to rehabilitate the theory of growth for a contemporary audience in the political philosophy of education. Following on from Festenstein's, Hildreth's, and Jackson's work, it was demonstrated that the ideal of growth is not as vulnerable to charges of normative ambiguity as it might seem on first blush. Furthermore, contextualizing growth within a theory of how learner agency sustains democratic character and social bonds allows its constitutive and co-developmental implications to be readily grasped. In sum, I presented a core account of why we should value an ethical democracy and its normative relationship to our educational lives.

Secondly, Chapter 2 allowed me to contribute to an ongoing discussion on the influence of pragmatist social and institutional epistemology on epistemic justice research. Building on the work of Medina, I was able to clarify the structural basis of epistemic injustice as it pertains to education, through elaboration on some conceptual and normative tools developed in Chapter 1. The result was an extension of Medina's argument on second-order ignorance to institutional processes. In short, Deweyans have good reasons to be interested in the self-correcting and evolutionary nature of democratic social inquiry; if they are, then my addition of institutional meta-ignorance points to the ability of social institutions to confound their own epistemic practices regarding self-regulation.

Finally, Chapter 3 filled an alarming gap in Dewey's theory of democracy: the missing parent. Greenwalt's critique that Dewey (a) did not have much to say about parents, and (b) this is because he privileges environmental over relational elements was found to be fair and pressing. I offered Deweyan democrats a way out of this lacuna: by embracing the pragmatic and aspirational elements of democracy as a way of life, we are led to alignment with broad perfectionist aims to improve the outcomes associated with the family bond. The two dimensions we can probe, relational and between parent-schools, should be of the highest order of concern for Deweyan theorists whose theories rest on the formative effects of everyday social life.

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