

ABSTRACT

In *Democracy and Education* John Dewey is critical of Rousseau's reference to human nature as a source of the aims of education. The essay shows that Dewey's critique fails because it is founded upon an incomplete understanding of Rousseau. More broadly significant is Dewey's neglect of the crucial role assumed by the Natural both in educational theorizing and in justification in general. Reference to the Natural serves to legitimize while diverting critical attention from the roots of the favored proposal.

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Dewey on Rousseau: Natural Development as the Aim of Education

In Chapter Nine of *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey explicitly declares his view of the role properly assumed by an understanding of human nature. Conveniently (although the strategy gives rise to some complications as well), the discussion takes the form of a critique of Jean Jacques Rousseau who is said by Dewey to be right in referring to human nature ("natural development")¹ as a supplier of conditions to be respected by educators but flatly wrong in looking to it as a source of the aims and ends of education. What is Dewey's support for this statement? Where did Rousseau go wrong?²

I.

Dewey opens his discussion with an explanation of why general aims for education arise. His view is that historical conditions call them forth; excesses in one direction lead to a reaction in the form of a stated aim quite opposed to existing practice. In the case of Rousseau, Dewey claims, early eighteenth century disregard for the natural endowments of pupils coupled with its emphasis upon artificial and conventional scholastic methods gave rise to an unprecedented call for attention to and practice in accordance with natural development. It is because Rousseau argues the case for natural development as an aim so forcefully and influentially that Dewey makes his ideas the vehicle for the evaluation of that aim.

The treatment of Rousseau begins with a reference to the early pages of *Émile* where the author outlines the sources of education which, it will be recalled, are the triad of Nature, men, and things. Rousseau declares the importance of the consonance of the three sorts of education and since men have no control over the first (which is constituted by the effects of unperverted inborn capacities and dispositions), the latter two are to be brought into accordance with it. Thus presented, Dewey then proceeds carefully to examine this view.

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To some extent Dewey agrees with Rousseau. The latter is incisive in his specification of the three factors of educative development. He is, says Dewey, correct even in his assertions that adequate development of the individual depends upon the consonance and cooperation of the three factors and that "the native activities of the organs, being original, are basic on conceiving consonance."³ Note, however, that in the last alleged concurrence of views, Dewey has deviated somewhat from what he at first characterized as Rousseau's position. The "native activities of the organs" are by no means equivalent to the effects of unperverted capacities and dispositions mentioned by Rousseau. No doubt the former are a subdivision of the latter, but in concurring with Rousseau on their primacy, Dewey is in fact only going part way with his predecessor.⁴ As shall be seen, by so restricting the meaning of the education provided by Nature, Dewey misrepresents Rousseau and misunderstands the meaning of natural development as an aim.

Dewey then initiates his criticism of Rousseau. He begins by noting that, for Rousseau, the three sources of education (Nature, men, and things) do not always work in concert. To this he adds the much more controversial interpretation that in Rousseau's mind the native organs and faculties possess a spontaneous development that "can go on irrespective of the use to which they are put" and to which "education coming from social contact is to be subordinated."⁵ This position rankles Dewey. The reason for this reaction is revealed in what for Dewey are the necessary consequences of Rousseau's naive faith in native faculties. Take, for example, the acquisition of language. No doubt, he states, it is true that the acquisition of language starts with the ears, vocal apparatus, etc. But,

it is absurd to suppose that these have an independent growth of their own, which left to itself would evolve a perfect speech. Taken literally, Rousseau's principle would mean that adults should accept and repeat the babblings and noises of children not merely as the beginning of the development of articulate speech — which they are — but as furnishing language itself — the *standard* for all teaching of language.⁶

Dewey rejects Rousseau's position because the appeal to nature for a standard presupposes an awareness of how the human attributes would develop *if they were not subjected to social environmental influences*. But how such faculties might develop can never be known because man does not exist in such a vacuum (and never has). Therefore, since the so-called natural development which is to serve as a standard is impossible to know, it cannot serve as the basis for determining the aims of education.

Following this initial criticism Dewey proceeds to summarize Rousseau's contribution to education while in the process presenting his own alternative to taking natural development as an aim. The earlier philosopher, says Dewey, was incisive and extremely significant insofar as his emphasis upon Nature convinced educators to pay close attention to the *conditions* it imposes upon them. He is pleased with Rousseau's revelation of an inherent "bias" in each individual which, if overlooked or violated, is stunted, corrupted, and perverted. Applied to practice, Nature provides "conditions of educational efficiency" which include an emphasis upon health and bodily activity, a regard for individual differences, and close attention to the waxing and waning of preferences and interests. Above all, says Dewey, Rousseau's focus on Nature is valuable in that it requires educators to attend especially to the early years in which tendencies are shaped forever, for better or for worse.

But Dewey's celebration of the use of Nature as a provider of the *conditions* to be

observed by education is matched by his criticism of its use to provide the *ends* of education. To allow the latter is to extol impulses and tendencies to such a degree as to proscribe any organizing medium. They are neither good nor bad in themselves. Therefore, it is unjustified to believe that their free play either outlines a desirable end or could lead to such. The proper policy, Dewey asserts, is to recognize the existence of these forces and, instead of allowing them free rein,

see to it that the desirable ones have an environment which keeps them active, and that their activity shall control the direction the others take and thereby induce the disuse of the latter because they lead to nothing.⁷

It is because adoption of natural development as an aim makes no provision for distinctions between tendencies and fails to nurture the good while discouraging the bad that it is to be rejected.

II.

On the positive side there are several points to be mentioned regarding Dewey's understanding of Rousseau and the effort to locate the aims of education in human nature. To begin with, Dewey is correct in emphasizing both the social origin and intended socio-political consequences of holding forth the standard of nature. Existing abuses in society and education provided the impetus for its development; and once developed the standard became a justification for a number of criticisms and proposals.⁸ Noteworthy, too, is Dewey's acknowledgement that much of Rousseau's speculation about man and many of the educational policies built upon this speculation have been reinforced by the discoveries of modern science.⁹ In particular, Rousseau's repeated emphasis upon the differences between individuals, his assertion that such frequently were inherent, not environmental in origin, and his insistence that educational practice be adapted to such individual variety, have all been supported by scientific inquiry. To understand the possibilities of nurture (including education), it is essential to pay attention to nature.¹⁰ This ranks among the most fundamental and long-lived of Rousseau's principles and it is to Dewey's credit that he called attention to that fact.

But Dewey does not fully understand Rousseau. In the critique of natural development as a source of aims for education, Rousseau is misrepresented and, consequently, it is not surprising that when his views are questionable, they are attacked for the wrong reason. Rousseau's use of a view of human nature to provide the ends and justification of education may be untenable, but if this is the case it does not follow from Dewey's analysis of the philosopher. Consider the strategy employed by Dewey. He will demonstrate the inadequacy of utilizing a conception of natural development as a source of aims for education by undermining the primary advocate of such a policy.¹¹ The advocate (Rousseau) will be defeated by showing that the consequences of his proposal are absurd. But is it really Rousseau's views which are challenged here?

Recall that Dewey understands Rousseau to say that there are native organs and faculties that possess a spontaneous development which takes place independent of any use to which they are put and that this spontaneous development is to be given precedence over the education coming from social contact. This interpretation, however, is at best misleading. According to Rousseau there are inherent potentialities which do possess both a (easily perverted) pattern of development and, given the model of the primitive natural state, a preferred direction and end. The ideal he formulates rests upon their nurture and his social and educational criticism upon their alleged misguidance and perversion. But the development — for

better or for worse — of such original endowment does not and can not take place independent of surrounding conditions. *The Confessions* boldly declares that man is what politics makes him¹² and it is because he is so acutely sensitive to this principle that Rousseau dwells to such lengths upon the necessity of controlling the environment not only in his prescriptions for the real and ideal communities but in the so-called isolated education of *Émile* as well. Therefore, when Dewey asserts that Rousseau's view is that native activities have "a normal development apart from any use" and that this is tantamount to meaning that "adults should accept and repeat the babblings and noises of children not merely as the beginnings of the development of articulate speech — which they are — but as furnishing language itself — the *standard* for all teaching of language," it is not Rousseau he is challenging but rather a partial and deceptive summary of his view. Dewey fails to acknowledge the higher sense of 'natural' present in Rousseau and does not recognize that its realization depends upon both respect for the developmental pattern and end of inherent faculties *and* provision of conditions friendly to them.¹³

It is unclear who, if anyone, would subscribe to the account of natural development as an aim that Dewey has presented. Certainly Rousseau does not represent such a lack of sophistication, organization, and control. He specifies a very few original operations (*amour de soi* and perhaps *pitie*). These are initially unadulterated but Rousseau repeatedly declares that alone and undeveloped they do not enable man to live in society. He then adds that in their development they are much more likely to degenerate than to preserve their purity. That is, a good society and a happy, moral people is much more difficult to realize than tyranny, injustice, and misery. Note, however, that Rousseau strives for the former and that all of his programs involve a good deal of the deliberate nurture and constraint which Dewey claims is absent in educational efforts which hold natural development as an aim. This misunderstanding of Rousseau follows from Dewey's failure to recognize that original endowment can contain within it an ideal which, under later but inescapable conditions, requires a good deal of external sustenance for its realization. Only the most one-sided reading of *Émile* could support the view that the pupil is ever totally left to his own devices, or that his tendencies are given free rein. Indeed, Dewey and Rousseau are so much alike in their emphasis upon the important role to be played by social authority that one is shocked that the former draws a distinction between them on this very point.

Dewey's strategy in Chapter Nine of *Democracy and Education* is to reject natural development as the source of the aim of education through reference to what allegedly are its necessary consequences. In essence his argument has been that to accept such an aim means that education must not move beyond the original and rudimentary and that it must eschew the injection of mature elements into the life of the pupil. If these were the necessary consequences of reliance upon natural development as an aim for education it should indeed be rejected. But Rousseau, the very figure who purportedly represents most clearly such an approach to education, demonstrates that a conception of human nature as development does not require an exclusive preoccupation with the primitive. On the contrary, his view of human nature as development of potential which *cannot* be altogether stifled contains within it a second conception of 'natural' which is anything but rudimentary. This sophisticated sense of 'natural' becomes an ideal which serves for Rousseau to explain and justify both his criticisms and proposals.¹⁴ Coming from the celebration of a hypothetical primitive human nature which is seen as impossible in and not fitted for existing conditions but which nevertheless is capable of animating a standard for the current age, this ideal is at the heart of Rousseau's

formulations on politics and education. A conception of human nature can, therefore, provide the aim of education.¹⁵ Is it also the case that, even for Dewey, it invariably does?

III.

Before moving to the question on which the previous section closed, it will advance the understanding of Rousseau to consider briefly an aspect of his program that Dewey seemingly overlooks altogether.

In *Democracy and Education* Dewey incisively notes that "the doctrine of following nature was a political dogma."¹⁶ Reference to nature as a standard was a way of calling existing institutions, customs, and ideals into question. But if Dewey is quick to recognize the critical function of the ideology of nature, he totally neglects its unifying cohesive function for Rousseau. This is doubly unfortunate for it not only leaves uncovered one of Rousseau's most provocative decisions about human nature, but it also obscures what is perhaps his greatest challenge to future statesmen and educators (especially those of the democratic inclination).

Among the most troublesome but least examined of Rousseau's inconsistencies is his dual stance on both the capacities and goodness of man. Rousseau is with some justification primarily associated with the doctrine that man is good by nature. Although this association is understandable (recall, for example, his celebration of the innocence of primitive man), it is to be noted that even in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* Rousseau himself declares the amoral character of the young and primitive and that in any event, given the philosopher's premises, it follows only that man is by nature no more good than bad.¹⁷ But even if man is neither good nor bad by nature, there are certain inevitable facts which have a significant bearing upon his moral development. Probably the most important of these is the emergence of pride (*amour-propre*), a factor which reduces to the related desires to appear favorably in the minds of others and to appear to oneself in a way which is recognized as being approved by others. But if pride (i.e., the drive to appear well to others and to be as others appear to want one to be) is a fact, then the rule of opinion is acknowledged.¹⁸ The problem then becomes the nature of the opinion which is to prevail. Favored rules of conduct and the laws which sustain the community will remain efficacious only if they capitalize upon the force of pride. The way to insure moral behavior and the obedience to law necessary for the existence of a viable community is to see that they become the *sine qua non* of both the respect of others and self-respect.

It is quite rare, however, for persons to announce that they are acting in a certain way because it is a means of satisfying their pride. Instead, the usual response to a person when pressed for an explanation of his behavior is to refer to a reason which is reducible to a general principle that is simply taken for granted. For example, when asked "Why did you help that disabled old gentelman who slipped on the ice?", the reply is "Because he was in distress," "Because he was another human in distress," "Because it was the right thing to do," or something of the sort. Man is apt to give reasons even if the reasons are unexamined and the action derives from habit and an acute sense of the prerequisites of public (and hence self) approval. This is not necessarily to be lamented, of course, since this mechanism often brings a sense of community and sacrifice, as well as a host of other goods.

Now Rousseau is quite aware of the operation of pride and public opinion, and

of the uses for good and ill of these powerful forces. He knows, too, of the growing tendency during this age to ask for and give reasons despite their superfluity in the acts and thoughts of the vast majority of persons, including the burgeoning number of "philosophers." But a justificatory *system* (with satisfactory answers following from undisturbed premises) is nevertheless called for and it must be provided lest men turn potentially catastrophic inquiry upon the actual springs of behavior. The existing constitutents of public approval.¹⁹ Rousseau's doctrine of following nature is at least in part forwarded as the most adequate and appropriate candidate for such a system in the new age just then emerging.

The function of Rousseau's celebration of the natural as a reason-giving cohesive force is not mentioned by Dewey. This oversight is accompanied by his lack of attention to the view of human nature underlying this suggested function of the doctrine of nature. Put briefly,²⁰ the ideology of nature is expounded not only because man is ruled by opinion, a salutary form of which would be threatened by the absence of such a doctrine, but also because Rousseau avers that the mass of mankind is incapable of the wisdom and responsibility required to remain stable, happy, and productive once they become aware of the conventional foundations of all reasons for acting. The doctrine of nature is to serve both as a situational source of reasons and as a constant reminder that there is some moral order in the nature of things which is beyond the meddling of man and provides a standard, guide, and end for an existence which could very well appear pointless without it. It is more than a timely critical device; it is a response to what Rousseau considered to be a timeless political problem.

IV.

So far it has been indicated that Dewey fails to acknowledge important elements of Rousseau's theory of man which would have to be examined in order truly to defeat his attempt to derive the aims of education from a conception of human nature. In addition, by not piercing to the heart of Rousseau's views, Dewey overlooks a fundamental political educational problem which is particularly important for a democratic age. This is especially disturbing, moreover, because in his rejection of Rousseau's reference to human nature for the ends of education and in his positing of an alternative method of deriving such ends, Dewey implicitly takes a stand on the very issues he declines to mention are raised by Rousseau. The present section intends to show that Dewey's aim of education no less than Rousseau's derives from a decision about human nature and that the banning of conceptions of man from a central place in educational theorizing would severely limit if not emasculate all such activity, including that of Dewey.

The road to this conclusion begins with revelation of Dewey's aim for education. He says, "the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education."²¹ The statement, taken from Chapter Eight of *Democracy and Education*, occurs in a section designed to discredit the search for and adherence to any one aim for education. That Dewey presents such a singular comprehensive purpose as the end of education in the midst of this argument might be startling to the reader unfamiliar with the philosopher's thinking. Yet Dewey, no doubt, would fail to see reason for this surprise because in his mind there are in fact two very different types of aims present here. Dewey's one aim for education is exempt from the indictment directed toward all other singular candidates in that his alone arises out of the meaning of education itself and hence in no way can be interpreted as an external imposition upon it. Indeed, he admits that he starts with a conception of

education and that it serves as the foundation of his critique of existing practices and proposals.²² Moreover, it is not merely the idea of the process of education which is held high; rather, it is the continued capacity for growth and greater self-direction as they are present in the life of the individual which set the standard for educational and social practice. Accordingly, institutionalization of an aim not directly derived from the meaning of education itself is condemned because it means

some portions of the whole social group will find their aims determined by an external dictation; their aims will not arise from the free growth of their own experience, and their nominal aims will be means to more ulterior ends of others rather than truly their own.²³

The question now to be confronted is whether Dewey has really managed to avoid dependence upon a *standard* (an end) provided by a view of human nature in his critique of aims and in development of the notion of education which underlies it and purportedly provides its own critical measure. Begin by examining Dewey's meaning and use of the concept 'education.' In *Democracy and Education* the term is given a number of meanings but in the final analysis it is "that reconstruction or reorganization of experiences which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience,"²⁴ or, in the more popular formulation of Dewey's view, education is growth leading to further growth. This latter abbreviation is not unfair to Dewey for he does emphasize that his view of education is only a formalization of the distinctive characteristic of life, i.e., growth. In the case of man it is education's business to further this process which is an end in itself.

But is this the whole of the matter? Note that "business," a word Dewey often uses,²⁵ is ambiguous. It can describe what is being done as well as what one ought to do. Dewey habitually conflates the two modes; indeed, he so consistently and emphatically derives values from facts that it is evident that in his mind such a strategy poses no problem.²⁶ It is, however, unfruitful merely to accuse Dewey of committing the naturalistic fallacy, though it is worth noting that this is a problem which still haunts attempts at justification.²⁷ Rather, begin by observing the unmistakable presence of a prescription and standard in the early lines of Chapter Eight of Dewey's treatise:

The account of education given in . . . earlier chapters virtually anticipated the results reached in a discussion of the purport of education in a democratic community. For it assumed that the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education . . . Now this idea cannot be applied to *all* the members of a society except where intercourse of man with man is mutual, and except where there is adequate provision for the reconstruction of social habits and institutions by means of wide stimulation arising from equitably distributed interests. And this means a democratic society.²⁸

While Dewey here indicates that standards follow from the meaning of education itself, he later explicitly admits that "education as such has no aims. Only persons, parents, and teachers, etc., have aims, not an abstract idea like education."²⁹ This no doubt is true, but where, then, does the standard originate? Even if Dewey is allowed to refer to the process of evolution in this regard, it is evident that it is a vision of the human good and the conditions required for its realization that truly underlie his critical comments and proposals. For even if propriety is associated with flexibility and adaptability to changing conditions, these are endorsed only because it is assumed that man is better when he is more fully capable of and engaged in reconstructing himself. Dewey places a high value on action and change which is reflected both in his implied views of what is proper for and owed to man and in his explicit criticisms of existing practices and proposals for

reform.³⁰ Increasingly, these recommendations are coming under attack but not until his underlying values, most notably his conception of the good of man, are made the focus of *philosophic* examination will Dewey be understood and his ideas and proposals faithfully and adequately evaluated.

Observe, too, that in addition to providing a somewhat veiled account of the proper destiny and treatment of man, Dewey has included quite without recognition an assertion about the capacities of the mass of men. In the long passage cited above Dewey calls for a democratic society and this both depends upon and issues in unlimited access to ideas, unceasing stimulation, and an ongoing reconstruction of all habits, beliefs, and institutions. In making this recommendation Dewey seemingly foresees no serious problems for the maintenance of political order and the preservation of the mental and physical well being of the populace which is continuously to reconstruct itself. Here Dewey's omissions regarding the function of the doctrine of nature for Rousseau are reflected in his own proposals. Rousseau, it will be remembered, utilized the idea of nature as a cohesive as well as a critical device. On his view such an element was required to provide reasons for acting and, for those of somewhat deeper natures, an end for existence. The doctrine of nature was furnished as a currently palatable solution to a problem which for Rousseau was eternal precisely because in his view the mass of men are and forever will be constituted such that peaceful and productive communities are impossible without such a support. It appears that in his repeated call for democratic life Dewey has refused to meet Rousseau's challenge even while making a fundamental decision about human nature no less sweeping and consequential than that of his predecessor.³¹

The word 'appears' has been used in the last sentence because there is an interpretation of Dewey's efforts (perhaps impossible to prove) which shows him aware indeed of Rousseau's warning. Recall that the doctrine of nature was in large part advanced because it was a social cohesive and source of justification particularly suited to the tastes of the age foreseen by its author.³² Could it be that Dewey, too, recognizes the need for a binding doctrine and that, looking about him, decided that the most effective candidate for such service is an unlimited faith in the possibilities of man once he is released from traditional restraints? Note that this doctrine could be effective as a cohesive authority and source of justification *without* social and political conditions having to be in fact fundamentally reconstructed. This may explain the distress experienced by some of the more recent critics of Dewey (who typically are apt to criticize Rousseau as well) when the philosopher formulates potentially conflicting notions of democracy and seems to fall quite short, in practice and in certain programs, of standards frequently voiced in his writings. Ideals and doctrines which if embraced as an ideology might serve to preserve a political order could undermine and destroy that order if they are in fact pursued immoderately and without testing.³³ That Dewey would not explicitly admit such a strategy and acknowledge the existence of an underlying questionable assertion about man is not surprising. He may believe, as does Rousseau, that for a political education program of this sort to succeed, both its roots and the problem that it is meant to address are best left unarticulated.

V.

Dewey is not alone in hoping to derive not only aims but an entire theory from the idea of education itself.³⁴ This is a praiseworthy effort especially insofar as it is an attempt to establish a well-defined field of inquiry and set of questions which

could underlie a distinctive and respected discipline of education. If such a venture succeeded, perhaps then there would be fewer "students of education" whose primary interest and concern is something other than the study of education. Yet, as much as the field of educational inquiry needs a distinctive focus, there are other equally pressing considerations which entail the conclusion that a mere examination and elucidation of 'education' is not sufficient to serve this end. The central reason why this is the case is that it is always legitimate to ask "why?" about educational recommendations (and criticisms). The day may soon arrive when standards will allow description to justify prescription but, until then, the fact that something is the case is not a compelling reason for saying that it should be and recommending that it ought to remain that way. Unless, therefore, "education" (like Rousseau's "human nature") suggests an ideal (an end) as well as a process, it cannot serve as the basis of a fully adequate educational theory. Some vision of the good is required and it must be a good not already extant. But when in education one speaks of the good, he is speaking of the good for man. Specification of the human good, however, depends upon a study of what man is as well as an articulated idea of what he ought to be. Study of the idea of education should not be forsaken. It must, however, proceed hand in hand with the philosophical study of human nature, and both must be attentive to the contributions of other disciplines.³⁵

An upshot of the view just expounded is that insofar as conceptions of the human good are unsettled and controversial so too will educational policies generated from full-blown theories be controversial. Is this — 3K V to be lamented? While the answer to the first question may vary, the second question must be answered with a firm "No." Dewey, in Chapter Eight of *Democracy and Education*, suggested that a primary reason for utilizing the idea of education as the source of aims for education is that to use any other source is to impose the ideas of one group upon others via the practice of education. This purportedly is undemocratic and hence should be avoided. But Dewey's view of education itself, with its underlying conception of man and the good, was seen to involve controversial aspects. This is not to condemn Dewey, however; rather, it is to welcome his return to the arena. He is again in battle because he strives to generate a fully adequate theory of education and this necessarily includes the positing of some justificatory device which, in order to serve as a guide to action, has to be controversial. Educational theorists are forced to choose between adequate but controversial and inadequate but non-controversial bases for policy. Dewey strives for the best of both pairings but in spite of his attempts, he has in fact subscribed to the former option and this is to his credit. To build education upon controversial premises does not make Dewey undemocratic. Rather, the necessity of beginning with such premises in order to present a comprehensive educational theory is an indication of the implausibility of fully implementing the democratic ideal.

Notes

¹Dewey uses the terms 'natural development' and 'nature' interchangeably, and it is clear that it is *human* nature he is discussing. Treating these terms as synonymous is particularly appropriate for a discussion of Rousseau for whom human nature is a pattern of development. It may safely be assumed that if Dewey deems a developmental conception of human nature inadequate as a source of the ends for education, he would even more adamantly condemn the use of a non-developmental view of man.

²Dewey's critique of Rousseau was previewed in a lecture before the Federation for Child Study in 1914. See the *Kindergarten-Primary Magazine* 36 (1913-14): 186.

³John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 113.

⁴Specifically, in *Émile* (London and New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 6, Rousseau states that the "inner growth of our organs and faculties is the education of nature." (Emphasis added.)

⁵*Democracy and Education*, p. 113.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸Yet, as shall be indicated below, a fully adequate understanding of Rousseau's use of nature depends upon going one step further than Dewey both in his explanation of why Rousseau referred to the standard of nature and in what he expected it to accomplish.

⁹See *Democracy and Education*, pp. 116, 117.

¹⁰Cf. Charles Hardie, *Truth and Fallacy in Educational Theory* (Cambridge at the University Press, 1942), who argues that the question to be asked by educators is what is and is not "modifiable" in the pupil. Although some are tempted to dismiss the efficacy, significance, and even the existence of the given, it surely is wasteful and sometimes harmful to allow sentiment to guide educational practice in this way.

¹¹The defeat of Rousseau of course would not by itself have the desired effect of discrediting all attempts to draw the aims and justification of education from a view of (human) nature. Since, however, this analysis will show that Dewey fails to defeat Rousseau, there is no need to develop the problem in this more fundamental premise.

¹²*Confessions*, J.M. Cohen, trans. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971), p. 377. Cf. p. 516.

¹³For Rousseau "natural" may refer to but is not synonymous with the primitive. Indeed, man must eschew the primitive and continue to evolve if he is to be natural. Suggestion of this view occurs very early in *Emile* (p. 7) where Rousseau concludes, "If the term nature is to be restricted to habits conformable to nature we need say no more." Note the blatant ambiguity of 'nature' in this sentence. At first glance "nature" seemingly refers to an impersonal altogether non-contrived realm reminiscent of the state of nature recounted in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Central here is dominance by principles (pitié and amour de soi) which are not at that time recognized. These principles (and thus nature), however, can at a later time be identified and mimicked. Thus the second meaning of 'nature' arises. Here the natural refers to something new (not original) which, while consistent with primitive nature, is much more than and beyond it. Not everything which is acquired is natural, of course, but what is natural changes over time and comes to include much of what is acquired. Cf. *Emile*, pp. 167, 368.

Dewey's oversight seems to be attributable to his falling victim to a common plight among readers of Rousseau, viz., the tendency to be swept away by one of the Genevan's antinomies. In this case the opposition forwarded by Rousseau is between (the good of) nature and (the evil of) society. See *Democracy and Education*, pp. 91, 112. A quick and selective reading of Rousseau's writings might allow this sharp distinction to stand, but a review of a full range of his works shows that for him the two are not necessarily so opposed as Dewey maintains. Indeed, Rousseau's entire program may be characterized as an attempt to bring the natural and social into one. He may have failed, but before this is said, the nature of the problem Rousseau perceived and the character of and reasons for the particular solution advanced should be acknowledged. Interestingly, Dewey at one place is on the brink of observing the convergence of the natural and social for Rousseau but he fails to follow through and apply such an understanding to his general interpretation of the philosopher. Cf. p. 118, note.

¹⁴Dewey's argument (above, p. 4) that the standard of nature cannot serve as the basis of aims for education because it presupposes insight into an unknowable pure development of faculties is an unshakeable objection to any strategy which depended upon actual experience of the "natural." But Rousseau's utilization of the standard of nature does not require that anyone ever know or experience the "natural" first hand.

Something similar may be said of Dewey's view (above, p. 5) that reference to natural development is inadequate because it is not sufficiently distinctive. Again Dewey's objection is sound against some references to nature as a standard, but it is not persuasive against Rousseau's notion of the natural which is distinctive indeed.

¹⁵Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Dewey has failed to show that a conception of human nature cannot so serve. Rousseau's success in making human nature fundamental is still at issue.

Note also that insofar as Rousseau is acutely sensitive to the demands of existing conditions (most notably the inevitability of social existence and the degree of corrupting influence present therein), it is not strictly true that a conception of human nature alone is a guide to activity. Indeed, it is because life under law, for example, is inescapable that Rousseau strives to formulate the best laws possible and finds that this requires a "change" in human nature. (See *Social Contract*, especially Book II, Chapter vii). But it must never be forgotten, if one is to understand the philosopher, that any changes in man

which are thought to be necessary are salutary only if they are compatible with the standards Rousseau claims to have discovered in presocial human nature.

¹⁶*Democracy and Education*, p. 117.

¹⁷For Rousseau primitive man is "stupid." He does not reflect on his actions and is "good" (this being our projection of morality upon a being who has no conception of its meaning) only because he has no interest in harming others and is slightly distressed at their suffering. There is no moral domain in the state of nature so there is no vice. It must follow, however, that there is also no virtue.

¹⁸Opinion for our purposes may be understood as morals and manners (in French, *les moeurs*) which define a way of life, i.e., they serve as standards, restrain conflict, allow communication, and are the foundation of social integration.

¹⁹Fear of catastrophe assumes that salutary opinions presently reign.

²⁰It is important to realize that the doctrine of nature is not merely a pragmatic political device for Rousseau. He felt, no doubt, that he was in possession of truths and insights which were quite non-conventional. It might be said that the pragmatic use of the doctrine of nature was the means by which Rousseau thought truth and virtue could be most widely and deeply given to the many who could not know them in the way he did.

²¹*Democracy and Education*, p. 100.

²²Cf. *Ibid.* where the search for "an end outside the educative process to which education is subordinate" is to be avoided, because "Our whole conception [of education] forbids."

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 100-101. Notice that since the meaning of education and full individuality coincide for Dewey, to speak of "external dictation" to one is to speak of external dictation to both.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 76. Cf. pp. 49-53, 77.

²⁵See for example, *Ibid.*, p. 359. One might instead wish to focus on "growth" which for Dewey is both a fact and an imperative because it is a fact.

²⁶This aspect of Dewey is most clearly demonstrated in his *Theory of Valuation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969) especially pp. 51f., 57-58, 64 (!). See also "Evolution and Ethics" in "The Monist," Volume VIII, No. 3 (April, 1898), pp. 321-41; consider especially pp. 326, 333, 334-35, 340-41; and see "Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality" in *The Decennial Publications of the University of Chicago, First Series*, Volume III, pp. 115-39. Placing Dewey's views in the context of modern moral philosophy is Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: MacMillan, 1966), p. 253.

²⁷Anthony Flew in his well written and very helpful *Evolutionary Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967) has perhaps taken the matter as far as it can go. Flew conclusively illustrates the limited applicability in ethics of an evolutionary view of man and nature (in the process showing just how much, or how little, Darwin was responsible for the application of the evolutionary model to ethics) and concludes with the profitable suggestion that while there are no grounds for the deduction of morality from an account of the facts regarding nature, there is something to be gained from viewing man and his beliefs in an "evolutionary" perspective." For more on this possibility Flew directs the reader to Julian Huxley, *Evolution in Action* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953) and *Essays of a Humanist* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), who indeed exemplifies viewing man and his creations in an evolutionary perspective but seems to commit the deductive fallacy as well. Cf. *Essays*, pp. 224-25.

²⁸*Democracy and Education*, p. 100.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁰In *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1929), p. 37, Dewey states that action in itself no more than knowledge of a mythical immutable realm should be the end of human life. Rather "The aim and end is securer, freer and more widely shared embodiment of values in experience by means of that active control of objects which knowledge alone makes possible." Despite this qualification, however, it is clear that Dewey is committed to a view that equates man's moral and material well-being with practical activity in which knowing and knowledge are instrumental. Cf. pp. 36, 37, 45-46, 100-101, 138, 166-67, 244-46, 250, 252, 281 and *Human Nature and Conduct*, pp. 121, 223, 225-26, 232.

An objection to a prior draft of this discussion indicates that these matters, especially Dewey's notion of the human good and the place of a view of human nature in his educational and political proposals, require further elaboration. Throughout Dewey's writings the good for man is associated with the liberation and free expression of his potential. In this vein, Dewey, in *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1954), describes the best educational aims and methods as being those which translate into a policy "to surround the young with the physical and social conditions which best

conduce. . .to release of personal potentialities" (pp. 200-201). Such a policy is good, says Dewey, because it results in a richer personality and a bettered community life. But why are these desirable? Usually Dewey sees little reason to pursue this question. In *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Capricorn, 1962), however, he does venture to answer the query. There (in a critical judgment of private enterprise) he asserts that existing economic policies and practices are to be condemned because they do "not satisfy the full human nature of even those who profit" by them (p. 88). More specifically, certain "impulses and needs" are choked by the existing economic regime. Now while *Human Nature and Conduct* suggests that some impulses and needs pass away, some do not and are (according to Dewey) inherent in human existence. In any event, in a fashion not entirely unlike Rousseau, Dewey specifies a number of impulses and needs whose deprivation becomes grounds for censure and whose nurture is the basis for approval. Elaboration of human impulses and needs produces a conception of human nature; specification of those which should be satisfied is the foundation of a theory of the human good. Dewey has, therefore, both a conception of human nature and an idea of what is good for man. While it is perhaps not always obviously apparent, these are at the root of his recommendations for both education and society.

³¹Cf. C.B. MacPherson, *Democratic Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 202: "Liberal hope (or despair) puts human nature out of sight or seeks a way to infuse it gradually with higher moral qualities."

³²Cf. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), pp. 10-14 where he speaks of susceptibility to different sorts of "metaphysical pathos" which plays "a great part, both in the formation of philosophical systems by subtly guiding many a philosopher's logic, and in partially causing the vogue and influence of different philosophies among groups or generations which they have affected." Metaphysical pathos gives an idea "plausibility and currency." Note that the contention of the present study is that Rousseau is more aware of and unaffected by metaphysical pathos than implied by Lovejoy's general judgment of system builders.

³³This principle could apply to a democratic political order as much as to any other.

³⁴This is not to say that Dewey is a conceptual analyst in the usual sense of the term. He is less interested in the ordinary meaning of education than he is with its signification in light of the assumed preferability of liberal democratic society and real developments in science and technology (especially the advance of evolutionary thinking and the experimental method). Noting the existence and assuming the desirability of democracy, the evolutionary model, and the experimental method Dewey then looks for the meaning of education in the emerging age. It is the outcome of this search which provides the aims for and becomes the core of his educational theory.

³⁵Some idea of the suggested relationship between education and philosophical anthropology is suggested by B.J. Diggs' discussion of the relation between political and moral philosophy. The latter, though it informs political inquiry, need not (it could not) be altogether settled prior to engaging in it. See *The State, Justice, and the Common Good: An Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy* (Glennville: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1974), p. 24.

Resume

Dans son oeuvre *Democracy and Education* John Dewey fait des objections à l'affirmation de Rousseau que les buts de l'éducation proviennent de la nature humaine. Cet article démontre l'invalidité des objections de Dewey en raison de sa compréhension incomplète des idées de Rousseau. Ce qui est plus important c'est l'omission de la part de Dewey de toute discussion du rôle du Naturel dans la construction de théories de l'éducation de même que dans la justification dans son sens plus large. L'allusion au Naturel sert à légitimer les propositions fondamentales de l'auteur et en même temps détourne les objections des critiques.