

Big City, Big University, Big Conflicts: Upon arrival to chair the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago in July 1894, John Dewey joined a large, well-funded university in the fastest growing city in the United States in the middle of one of the greatest labor struggles in an era of great labor struggles. Part of an explosion of practical and utopian experimentation that included the famous “White City” at the center of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, Rockefeller’s university and Pullman’s model town also confronted an organized labor movement demanding full participation in the life of the city. Dewey found the situation endlessly stimulating. It not only encouraged his growing interest in public affairs (as did his marriage to the social reformer Alice Chipman). It also gave rise to his pragmatic philosophy, something different from but arising out of the marriage of “the New Psychology, evolutionary theory, Hegelianism, and Christianity” (288-289) that he had been pursuing since his days at Hopkins. Although never a dynamic teacher, Dewey impressed his students and younger colleagues with some mysterious quality of equanimity, composure, poise - qualities that shaped his philosophic response to modern society. Soon after arriving in Chicago in 1894, Dewey wrote to his wife Alice back in Michigan that “the city seems filled with problems holding out their hands and asking somebody to please solve them - or else dump them in the lake. I had no conception that things could be so much more phenomenal and objective than they are in a country village, and simply stick themselves at you, instead of leaving you to think about them. The first effect is pretty paralyzing, the after effect is stimulating.... you can't really get rid feeling here that there is a 'method' and if one could only get hold of it things could be so tremendously straightened out.” The method was pragmatism.

George Pullman Meets.... George Pullman built his model town twelve miles south of Chicago in 1880. Aware from his own career in building luxury railroad sleepers that environment shaped behavior (his sleeping cars produced decorum even in the unwashed - when they could afford the ticket), Pullman hoped a morally uplifting town might produce a loyal, efficient, and disciplined workforce. But he also expected the town to pay its way in profits; after all, stockholders had to have their dividends if Pullman wanted them to continue to invest. Even the church in his model town had to produce a profit of 6%. The model town experienced sporadic conflicts between labor and capital before 1894 (saloons clustered just across the town line in Kensington, where disgruntled workers went for their beer) Then in 1893 a stock market crash, beginning with railroad stocks, triggered a great depression. Railroad construction drove economic expansion in the late 19th century, attracting foreign investment and foreign labor, stimulating the production of iron, timber, coal, and equipment, and establishing a national market for mass produced goods. But a laissez-faire (not to mention a corrupt) approach to railroad construction left the industry unregulated and largely overbuilt. When an economic downturn came, railroads failed and unemployment soared. The 1893 World’s Fair somewhat delayed the depression in Chicago, but the closing of the fair left the city filled with the unemployed. In his model town, Pullman faced slack orders and abundant labor. He did what any profit-maximizing capitalist would do; he slashed wages. But Pullman did not reduce rents in his company housing, which seemed to him a completely different issue. And he continued to pay stockholders handsome dividends.

...Eugene Debs: His workers saw things differently and attempted a one-day strike, which only prompted Pullman to fire the entire workforce and close the plant. The Pullman workers decided

to join Eugene Debs' newly-formed American Railway Union and asked for a boycott of Pullman cars in support of their strike. A long-time member of the railway firemen's union, Debs recognized that trade or craft unions had little leverage against giant corporations, especially when other trade unions - of, say, engineers or brakemen - refused to support their strikes. So he built an industrial union, combining all crafts as well as the unskilled. The ARU conducted a successful strike against the Great Northern Railroad in June 1893. But Debs knew the stakes would be higher in Chicago. Despite Debs's fears, the ARU supported the Pullman strikers in July 1894 and soon faced the combined power of all the major railroads converging on Chicago as well as the power of the federal government. The General Managers Association of Railroads demanded a federal injunction prohibiting Debs and other ARU leaders from doing anything to support the boycott (including giving speeches). Federal troops arrived in Chicago to break the strike and violence erupted. Twice arrested (first on conspiracy charges, then for violating the injunction), Debs eventually served six months in jail. After Debs failed to secure the support of the railway brotherhoods and the AFL, the strike and the ARU collapsed.

The Professors and the Pullman Strike: Dewey arrived in Chicago as the strike began and witnessed all of this. He instinctively sided with the strikers and found himself transfixed by a strike organizer he met on a train, while disgusted with the outrage of the well-to-do who had been inconvenienced by the strike. Dewey came to see that the middle-class, including many UC professors, were more bloodthirsty and more self-righteous, more moralistic, than the businessmen themselves and that the University was squarely in the ranks of capital and respectability. But Dewey also believed that even in defeat the strike had been a great victory for working people, forcing the issue (of industrial slavery? see block quote on 298) into the open and serving "to get the social organism thinking" (297).

The "Social Organism Thinking": Individualism and Laissez-Faire... The headings above (Pullman meets Debs) are purposeful, since this is exactly the sort of thinking demolished by the magnitude of the strike. Neither Pullman nor Debs could control the strike; both were astounded that what they helped to start might lead to "the starvation of a nation" (as William Howard Taft put it - 300). In terms of individualistic (liberal, Lockean) psychology, Pullman was sole proprietor, empowered to do whatever he liked with his property (as in the *Dartmouth* decision of 1819); the laborers were also individual proprietors, empowered to sell as much as of their labor as they liked for whatever price they could get. Capitalists and laborers each maximized pleasure through a "hedonistic calculus" (300). But acting in combination for ends that transcended one's "natural relation" to economic affairs was illegitimate and - after the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 - illegal. Both the ARU and the GMA were, of course, combinations. The magnitude of their struggle was such that the state had to intervene in the name of that thing dispensed with in the *Dartmouth* case, namely the "public welfare." Although President Cleveland intervened against the ARU, the same argument could be used - would be used - to regulate capitalistic combinations.

.... or Reform Darwinism and Intersubjectivity? It is tempting to see Social Darwinism as the source of anti-labor thinking. Evolutionary theory (the survival of the fittest - again, Spencer's idea, not Darwin's) and statistical thinking (that natural laws determined the natural - and best - results of that struggle) did probably play some small role in the justification of inequality of

wealth and power. William Graham Sumner, the Yale professor of Social Darwinism, had some uses for the wealthy classes. But even before the Pullman strike, laissez-faire and social Darwinism were on the wane (Pullman's model town, for instance, contravened such theories as did the White City and a host of other more prosaic reforms – sewers come to mind). Evolutionary thinking had a more profound influence on a host of new ideas that elevated the role of the mind in human affairs and human evolution. And the view that consciousness is the product of social exchange (we come to form and know our own minds through interaction with others – i.e. intersubjectivity) and is oriented toward action gained acceptance. After all, academic professionals produced expert knowledge designed to guide social development through scientific means – hardly what social Darwinism promoted.

Academics and the Mind as a Social Factor: Despite Dewey's view of UC as a capitalistic institution, the academic world advanced what Lester Ward called "the mind as a social factor," offering what has been called "reform Darwinism" as an alternative to social Darwinism (i.e. it is perfectly "natural" for the human organism to try to manipulate its environment and that human evolution proceeds through intelligence). Richard Ely formed the American Economic Association to counter laissez-faire and promote reform. Henry Carter Adams argued that property could and should be regulated in the public interest. George Herbert Mead argued that selfhood arose from interaction with others. In his response to Henry Maine's indictment of popular government, Dewey insisted that democracy was not the sum of ill-advised and selfish individual preferences. We can't see "the popular will" but that does not mean it doesn't exist. It is the non-social individual, the individual with everything that makes us human stripped away, that doesn't exist. Society is the undeniable fact. Dewey's colleague at Chicago, Albion Small conceived of sociology as an "engaged" discipline (not a statistically-minded and speculative one) and insisted "that action, not speculation, is the supreme teacher" (305). Thorstein Veblen challenged the conception of the person as "a homogeneous globule of desire of happiness." The people were not "passive reactors to stimuli, but...actors for ends" (306). Profit and loss did not exhaust human motivations; economic interests were always embedded in larger social purposes ("the economic interest does not lie isolated and distinct"). We are experimenters in the multi-faceted goods of experience.

A Practical Sociologist of Do-Goodism and the Transformation of Hull House: The intellectual who most profoundly shaped Dewey's thought, however, was a practicing rather than an academic sociologist. The ambitious daughter of a prosperous former friend of Lincoln, Jane Addams found her life's work on a visit to England's Toynbee Hall in 1888. The original social settlement, Toynbee Hall operated on the theory that in providing cultural uplift to the culturally-impoorished poor the middle-class "settlers" (do-gooders all) also did their own souls some good. Addams and her friend Ellen Starr founded Hull House on this theory. Less a welfare agency than an educational institution, Hull House tried to bring American cultural and civic norms to immigrants while maintaining respect for immigrant traditions. At first Hull House operated as therapy and feminist opportunity for middle-class women, but the arrival of the socialist agitator and intellectual Florence Kelley turned Hull House into a forceful reform agency. Kelley won appointment as chief factory investigator, Hull House ran reform candidates for city council, and the settlers produced Hull-House Maps and Papers (1895), a reform-minded

sociological investigation modeled on Friedrich Engels's The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844. Dewey, not surprisingly, found himself drawn into Hull House's activities, attending lectures and lecturing himself, as Hull House became a significant factor in the civic life of Chicago. When the Pullman strike came, most of Hull House - especially Kelley - sympathized and worked with the union. But Addams, partly from personal and largely for philosophical reasons, opposed the boycott. The philosophical reasons derived from Addams's growing faith in democracy. She began to abandon the top-down, do-goodism philosophy of Hull House and came to believe that it only perpetuated class divisions and animosities. Thus Addams opposed anything that sharpened divisions, including the strike. The challenge of democracy was not simply to extend the good to all classes. Until "all men and all classes contribute to a good," she argued, "we cannot even be sure that it is worth having" (312). She developed a passion for obliterating all kinds of conflict in favor of cooperation. "Interests, if they are worth securing, are mutual," is the way Menand describes Addams's faith.

"A Modern Lear" and Addams's Conversion of Dewey: Individualism and Paternalism versus Mutuality and Self-Determination: Addams's opposition to the Pullman strike led to an argument about argument with Dewey. Baffled by Addams's equanimity in the face of strife (greater even than his own), Dewey resisted her insistence that antagonism is always unnecessary. But she won him over as Dewey confessed to Alice that he had the "dialectic wrong end up," conceiving "the unity as the reconciliation of opposites, instead of the opposites as the unity in its growth, and thus translated the physical tension into a moral thing." The "resistance the world puts up to our actions and desires is not the same as a genuine opposition of interests" (313). Addams had developed this idea in an article on Pullman, "A Modern Lear; An Industrial Tragedy." The strike reflected a conflict between the older values of individualism and paternalism against the newer values of mutuality and self-determination. But what made it a tragedy was that both sides wanted - needed - the same outcome but misunderstood one another. Pullman genuinely wanted to be a great man who did good things, but he left "those ideals unconnected with the consent of their fellow men." The strikers also failed to understand how the "new claim on the part of the toiling multitude [and] the new sense of responsibility on the part of the well-to-do, arise in reality from the same source" and "logically converge into the same movement" (315). "The right outcome," as Menand puts it, "is always the outcome democratically reached." (But it can't be altogether promising that no one would publish Addams's essay, that Pullman had himself buried in a concrete vault to avoid desecration by disgruntled workers, and that the Illinois Supreme Court ordered the Pullman company to divest itself of its model town as contrary to "good public policy" - 316.)

"The Unity of Knowledge" (I): Reconciling Opposites and Thinking and Doing at the Dewey School: Dewey's experimental school at the University of Chicago - an experiment in philosophy rather than psychology or education - came out of his interest in his own children, his educational experiences at Hull House and with Jane Addams, and his idea of Chicago itself as a laboratory. But it also reflected what he had learned from Addams and from the Pullman strike, that opposites, including thinking and doing, are only part of a larger unity. The Dewey school, in which learning proceeded through practical activity, organically linked thinking and doing. The school represented one application of Addams's conviction that there were no absolute

antagonisms, neither between capital and labor, nor self and society, nor thinking and doing. In organizing the school around constructive activity (building, cooking), the school grew “out in two directions - one the social bearings of that constructive industry, the other the contact with nature which supplies it with its materials” (319). (This reminds me of the folklorist Henry Glassie’s point that the building of anything implies both an ideology and a teleology because labor must be organized and nature appropriated.) The school was also a completely conventional extension of Dewey’s interest in the new psychology - a set of experiments likely to bring legitimacy to the new discipline. It was explicitly a philosophical experiment testing Dewey’s theory of “the unity of knowledge.” But unlike his teachers Torrey (and behind Torrey Marsh) and Morris, Dewey did not understand that unity as metaphysical, a product of divine will or the Absolute. Instead he meant “that knowledge is a by-product of activity” (322). (You writers out there: here’s a Deweyan brief for revision and rewriting: “people do things in the world, and the doing results in learning something that, if deemed useful, gets carried along into the next activity.” - 322). The separation of learning from doing not only produced boredom but established an invidious distinction between knowing and doing (between the leisure class and the laboring class). So, for example, cooking provided a means of examining arithmetic, chemistry and physics, biology, geography.

“The Unity of Knowledge” (II): The Reflex Arc Experiments Measure Attention: The unity of knowledge had a second meaning. Locke, Kant and those who followed them understood mental states as products of sensory data “that have been combined by the operation of various mental processes - perception, attention, cognition, discrimination, comparison, association” and the like (324). To study these processes was to measure them, hence the “reflex arc” experiments that measured attention. Breaking all mental activity into a sequence of sensation - idea - action that operated in a Newtonian, billiard-ball conception of causation, Wundt and others sought to measure that act of attention: how long did it take between stimulus and response? Using a simple light-button experiment, Ludwig Lange (working in Wundt’s laboratory) concluded that attention took a tenth of a second (he compared the lower speed of those who concentrated on response to those who watched for stimulus and assumed the difference to be the time required for attention). It was hailed as a major breakthrough.

“a matter of the relation between the whole organism and the whole situation”: an Environmental Account of Mind: William James thought this rather silly, not least because repeating the experiment multiple times meant that muscular reflex not attention was being measured. James Mark Baldwin, a functionalist, also disputed Lange’s findings on the grounds that you “cannot break an act up.” Individual reactions times varied, Baldwin argued, suggesting that attention could not be abstracted from the complete act which “is a matter of the relation between the whole organism and the whole situation.” Angell and Moore did more tests, confirming both Baldwin’s (individual times varied) and Lange’s (after practice those concentrating on response reacted faster) findings. They concluded that “attention” was operating on both sides, watching for stimulus and concentrating on response. Attention was not a discrete thing but part of the whole act, nothing more or less than “the process of mediating the tension between habit and new conditions” (327 - watching for the stimulus became habitual

quicker than did concentrating on response, hence focusing attention where it was needed, on response, produced quicker times).

Biologized Hegel: From Divine Absolute to “the unified biological activity of adapting to the environment”: Dewey wrote a short, technical paper on the subject which - many have said - holds the key to his thought. Breaking experience down into parts (sensation, idea, and response) “breaks continuity and leaves us nothing but a series of jerks, the origin of each jerk to be sought outside the process of experience itself” (328). Actions have goals built into them, as in the case of the child reaching out to touch the candle. Rather than “seeing and then touching,” with random stimulus, external idea, and mechanical response, the child is “seeing-in-order-to-touch” (think about a baseball outfielder – does he just happen to notice a fly ball, then think, oh that might be fun to catch, and then start running after it?). The idea is part and parcel of the stimulus and the response - the idea comes from inside of experience, is part of experience. Dewey took Hegel’s idea of the divine Idea working itself out in history and turned it into “the unified biological activity of adapting to the environment.” He had been using the same idea in writing about his school. As Menand puts it: “Knowledge is not the result of experience, any more than a response is the result of a stimulus; knowledge is experience itself in one of its manifestations.”

An Ethical Being of a Unique Sort of Earthly Clay: Menand calls the reflex arc paper “the essential expression of Dewey’s particular mode of intelligence” (330) for it attacks what have been called pernicious dualisms, tacit hierarchies between stimulus and response, self and society, thinking and doing. But it is more, I think, as Menand’s reference to Hegel suggests. Darwin and evolutionary naturalism appeared to have left us with two options. Either reject Darwin and cling to a conception of humanity as the working out of a divine idea or embrace Darwin and accept humanity as the product of earthly clay, red in tooth and claw. Dewey suggested a third option. By placing ideas inside human experience, as part and parcel of doing, Dewey showed “how man had evolved into a thoughtful, purposeful creature.” Just as James had found intelligent design in an evolutionary universe (it was us), so too did Dewey. The “current of life which runs in at our eyes and ears,” James wrote in his contribution to the reflex arc debate, “is meant to run out at our hands, feet, or lips. The only use of the thoughts it occasions while inside is to determine its directions to whichever of these organs shall, on the whole, under the circumstances actually present, act in the way most propitious to our welfare.” Dewey also placed thought wholly inside human experience but more fully articulated the moral dimension of human thought, the “emergence of a unique sort of earthly clay,” as Robert Westbrook puts it. Dewey wrote that “when the sentient organism, having experienced natural values, good and bad, begins to select, to prefer, and to make battle for its preference; and in order that it may make the most gallant fight possible picks out and gathers together in perception and thought what is favorable to its aims and what hostile, then and there Nature has at last achieved significant regard for good.”

Which is why I try, try, try to wake every morning, no matter how tired or discouraged, eager for more experiments in the goods of experience.