Some Thoughts on John Dewey's Ethics and Education

Gregorios Karafillis

University of Ioannina, Kalamaria, Greece

The philosopher and educator, John Dewey, explores the emergence of the terms "ethics" and "education" from a pragmatist's perspective, i.e., within the linguistic and social components' framework, and society's existing cognitive and cultural level. In the current article, we examine the development, logical control and the relation between ethics and education as well as the ethical principles he follows. The latter comprises his ethical ideas and his ideas about morality which constitute school's ethical raison d'être, the general ethical education which is achieved there, the special study programme and the ideals that are actualised by people. These principles lead to the conclusion that education is a necessity of life and a social function, and that it is self-referential and cross-referential by others, and is conditioned by conservatism or progressiveness subject to measurable criteria, whilst its democratic perception is assessed by the quality of the respective societies. Therefore, each theory arises from the ethical problems existed in the real world and is subject to logical control, whilst its individual and collective self must serve ethical situations that lean towards the good achievement.

Keywords: ethics, education, moral, thought, logical control, individual, collective

Introduction

John Dewey, being one of the founders of the American philosophy of "pragmatism" (Berstein, 1994, pp. 27-38; Khalil, 1994; White, 1943, pp. 134-148; Shook, 2000, pp. 256-257), adhered to the movement's classic principle of conceptual clarity and distinctness for all predications throughout his philosophical and pedagogical pursuits. As a philosopher at first and then as an educator—so as to be clear about his identity—and even as a fundamental standard for this approach, he integrated the emergence and development of a term within the linguistic and social components, for they, to a great extent, denoted the acquired cultural and cognitive level of the society within which the specific term was born and evolves.

We shall explore the issues of "ethics" and "education" under the specialized and restricted light of our study's title of course in terms of Dewey's aforementioned viewpoint (Fesmire, 2003). However, it is to be noted that we begin by making clear that we are about to express and state our certain thoughts that describe, interpret and prove—wherever this is necessary—the related ideas of Dewey and by correlating them to the philosopher's text itself. We state that we are not going to embark on an exposition of his general beliefs on the two subjects. Any such attempt would remain incomplete due to the size of the relevant opus and would by no means cover his prolific writings. Instead, we choose to explore the terms only said in Dewey's early works and concentrate on four issues that illustrate the philosophical and educational direction of this American philosopher and educator. We shall only digress exclusively in the case of "democracy" and "education", since in it, Dewey recapitulated and confirmed his ideas relevant to philosophy of education. In particular, we shall

Gregorios Karafillis, professor, Department of Primary Education, University of Ioannina.

be focusing on:

    (1) The determining of ethics and its content;

    (2) The logical scrutiny/control of moral propositions;

    (3) The arising specific moral problems;

    (4) The relation between ethics and education.

The Formation and the Content of Ethics

As noted above, Dewey, the pragmatist, proceeds from the point zero, i.e., the point of departure that can be located in the emergence and development of the term "ethics". The origin and determination of the said term—accurately defined in ancient Greek philosophy—includes the behavioural ways, the customs and habits, as does the corresponding Latin term "moral" to which he ascribed equivalent importance (Dewey, 1891, p. 1; Welchman, 1995; Gouinlock, 1994; Boydston, 1967-1991). This definition, as to the contents of ethics, viewpoint adopted by Dewey led him to neither accept nor espouse any form of transcendence in the establishment of ethical rules, but to adopt an empirical and naturalistic viewpoint that is subject to a specific order: first of all, to "habit" that is born out of necessity and the repetition of sound ways and practices and is therefore recorded and applied as a necessary condition for the survival and evolution of man; second, to "customs" which are perceived and act as a recording, adoption and application of consistent precepts ensuring them; third, to "behaviour" that follows the efficacy of habits and ethos, whilst at the same time and within the development of things, solves the problems that arise from the existing and simultaneously evolving viewpoint.

If, subsequently, we examine the term "ethics" and the parallel term "moral" from a wider perspective, we can conclude that, as Dewey advocated, they are closely linked to "conduct". It is to be noted that conduct, as well as attitude and behaviour, undoubtedly relates to practices and always has a form of empirical basis. However, they are neither dealt with the limitation of each event's viewpoint either perceived or comprehended the event in general from the viewpoint of the values they possess or create. This gives rise to a value system that can have a normative function, yet arises and is renewed by the existence of problems, by real life itself. It should be noted that it is within this framework that Dewey explored the notions of good (Dewey, 1891, pp. 13-138), obligation (Dewey, 1891, pp. 129-158) and freedom (Dewey, 1891, pp. 158-166) and fundamental issues that we shall circumvent, as they do not directly relate to our discussion on ethics and education.

Additionally, we should transcend the generality in approaching the term "ethics" and focus on the respective ethical level of the individual, we shall conclude that Dewey did not study the individual in isolation, as an autonomous unit, but within the ethical world. This world includes social relations and ethical conventions (Dewey, 1891, pp. 167-168), whilst to the ethical life of people in general and individuals in particular, Dewey (1891, pp. 182-211) attributed the ideals of conscience that arose from this ethical framework, and consequently, the consciousness of this world's principles gave rise to an individual's morality. It transpires that the most defining issue in conditioning an individual's ethical conscience is primarily the ethical struggle for the application of set ideals (Dewey, 1891, pp. 211-217), but also the consistency towards applied morality, and certainly, ethical virtues (Dewey, 1891, pp. 227-233).

From this struggle for an applied morality, we can be led to a classification of ethics that primarily includes the judgement/decision in terms of the value of conduct/behaviour as the object of ethical theory.

Evaluation of ethical struggles leads to the adoption of practices and suggestions that can improve, correct and judge ethical behaviours. Some such measures/suggestions, according to Dewey (1897, p. 1), are the practical encouragement and discouragement of similar actions, the praise or punishment of previous ethical patterns based on relevant judgements and the reflective evaluation of logic as to such actions.

We could summarize this by saying that Dewey found it straightforward to establish an ethical theory, because it is systematic in character. That is, it is based on the systematic judgment of value, the path of which is determined by primary judgments that do not relate to individual events but to the habits of an action and the formulae that cause/condition those actions, leading us to a spontaneous generalization (Dewey, 1897, p. 1). Dewey completed his ethical theory concept by noting that, "As already stated, ethical theory arises from practical needs and is not simply a judgment about conduct, but a part of conduct, a practical fact…" (Dewey, 1897, p. 3). On this point, it is crucial to highlight the function and validity of the classic pragmatic principle that rules may constitute a framework but those rules emerge or are recast during the process of things happening, that is, they form part of development.

From the above analysis, it is easily proved that the formation and the content of ethics, as Dewey (1897) proposed, are constituted and accomplished through habit, custom and behavior. This certainty is established beyond doubt, once we invoke the parameter of real life. In that, our point is confirmed. Ethics leads to education, and their practical expression, which though requires empiric foundation, meaning that it is expressed through the existence of real life problems. We thus accept this hierarchy of ethical order formation, in which the person functions as a unit, though in the context of social laws. This integrated and sufficient context does not function automatically. It requires a moral struggle for the implementation of the order and morality that should be evaluated positively and furthermore considered as models. A person's entire life does not deviate from the rules, and the context that is created and renewed through the flow of real life.

Logical Control of Ethical Propositions

The second issue we shall briefly explore is the possibility or the existence of a logical control of ethical propositions. We have already ascertained that for the status of ethical propositions and principles, Dewey (1903b) placed primary importance on "reason", and in particular, logical judgement. However, logical judgement here is to be understood within its scientific and applied parameters. If we accept Dewey's position that "Science is a body of systematized knowledge" (Dewey, 1903a, p. 115), then we should acknowledge that science includes both method and outcome (Dewey, 1903a, p. 115) and at the same time that "scientific" denotes the more emphasis on an inquiry's existing logic rather than the particular form of its determinations (Dewey, 1903a, p. 116). Dewey insisted that "by 'scientific' is meant methods of control of formation of judgments" (Dewey, 1903a, p. 138). Subsequently, and taking this principle into account, ethical judgements are not the result of experience, but they are perceived as something in-between. This definitely includes the confirmed and empirical methods, however, it also includes the method that appertains to the nature of the problem in question, further advocating that ethical judgments depend on causality (Dewey, 1903a, p. 116).

The underlying concept here denotes ethics' dependence on logic, namely, the dependence on ethical propositions from the corresponding logic in the form of judgments and reasoning(s). The scientific approach denotes a systematic examination of ethical judgments that are not autonomous and uncontrollable, but are

interpreted for a greater or lesser part from the logical patterns (Karafillis, 2007, pp. 135-137), within which they can be classified and evaluated.

At this point, we could widen the discussion to how scientific or unethical these propositions are, and consider conclusions drawn from the scientific approach to things as follows: Dewey advocated that by the term "scientific", we mean ways of forming judgments. At the same time, though he argued that judgments and ethical perceptions are born from the problems faced by a man when he researched and checked things. Subsequently, it transpires that judgments cannot exist independently of things, i.e., they cannot have a transcendental identity and entity, which further means that we cannot have an ideal ethical world without the presence of man, not only as its interpreter but also as its creator (Ralston, 2010). This real existence of the world and of its ethical status vindicates Dewey's pragmatic viewpoint as to the world's identity and the notions with which he depicted and interpreted it.

Concerning this issue, we claim that rational control of ethical proposals exists as a rule and is founded scientifically and via naturalistic methods. Furthermore, the total reality (material and spiritual) constitutes the background of existences (beings), and requires monitoring and comprehension which further require a scientific method necessarily based on logic alone. Science is, in a way, applied logic, so the control of ethics in general, of ethical behavior and action, is subject to judgment and reasonable rules. However, this always happens within the context of reality in action, within the pragmatic principle of being that also functions as a possibility of application.

Specific Ethical Problems

The third issue in our discussion refers to the specific ethical problems which arose. On the whole, we could say that these are specific problems, and that the ethical parameter comes into play when the intended targets possess conflicting values (Dewey & Tufts, 1908, pp. 207-208). Otherwise, people would display constant and uniform behavior, which would not lead to any differentiation, and consequently, no ethical problem would arise. An ethical perfection would prevail and refer to uniformity in values, causing these ethical and value-related situations to function on the level of an ethical heavenly stagnation. Dewey is then right in asserting that ethical theory is bore out of ethical problems (Dewey & Tufts, 1908, p. 212), in the sense previously described, apportioning its various expressions (Dewey & Tufts, 1908, p. 216). Specific ethical issues "par excellence" can be deemed those relating to good and happiness (Dewey & Tufts, 1908, pp. 263-264), both of which remain main aims, whilst another issue where man's evaluated activity is involved is "duty", which constitutes a trait of ethical life (Dewey & Tufts 1908, pp. 337-361). Hence, Dewey (1908) displayed a positive viewpoint about life and expected an equally positive perspective for the adjustment and arrangement of ethical things with the obvious aim of achieving good and ensuring happiness. These aims are not sought in an even and uniform society, but within a contradictory, one rife with different and conflicting interests. Consequently, achieving the respective aims depends on a person's activity. For this reason, our self (Dewey & Tufts 1908, p. 369) hold a distinctive place within the specific framework. Our self is as a being directly interested in the realisation of the said goals, as an activity working towards this end and ensuring the specific perspective, and as an evaluated being that is being collectively appraised for the above. Hence, within this framework, we can see the various forms of ethics (naturalistic, biological, egotistical and altruistic) (Dewey & Tufts 1908, pp. 369-375) that develop and constitute stages and levels in

its historical dimension, and the course of ameliorating the specific person himself/herself something that is achieved through the safeguarding of virtue (Dewey & Tufts 1908, p. 369). We refer to the ethical status that leads to the functioning of civil society and the political state (Dewey & Tufts, 1908, p. 451) as higher forms within which man is integrated and acts. As a historical and social being, man exists and acts within the context of the existing moral field, either in agreement or in conflict with the level of principals and evaluative options.

Relation Between Ethics and Education

The fourth and most important issue of our study is the relationship between ethics and education (Martin, 2002, pp. 492-499). How can we combine the existing ethical status with an educational perspective or how can we combine an ethical theory or the predominant ethical theory of an era with a specific educational programme? Not even on this subject did Dewey accept facts that transcend the reality of a normal and realistic life, nor moral rules characterised by the transcendence and idealism towards which we should tend. Therefore, ethics and ethical rules do not function autonomously but coexist and co-evolve with social development. Constant modernization and correlation of facts are, therefore, required to achieve balance and ensure the functionality of things. This rule also applies to the correlation of ethics and education. Dewey was adamant that the discussion for a new state of affairs in education should be from the wider and social perspective. No change should rely on the arbitrary or imperious inventions of teachers (Dewey, 1900, p. 20). Reformation of methods and curriculum should aim at and correspond to the needs of the evolving society, as do the changes in manners, industry and commerce (Dewey, 1900, p. 20). Therefore, what Dewey labels as social consensus is the compliance and correlation of education with social system laws, and in essence, he proposes an educational system that follows and adapts to the laws of the market, as we would say nowadays. The ethical principles that Dewey supports and follows in terms of education are as follows:

(1) School's ethical purpose which includes ethical ideas and ideas regarding morality (Dewey, 1909, pp. 1-4);

(2) Ethical education achieved through school's community (Dewey, 1909, pp. 5-19);

(3) The specific nature of the study programme (Dewey, 1909, pp. 29-35);

(4) The psychological perspective of ethical education (Dewey, 1909, pp. 45-49) and especially the moral ideals that have to be realised in persons (Dewey, 1909, p. 48).

First, school's ethical purpose shows that Dewey, within the framework already described, accepted one of school's main aims to be the shaping of children's moral character. This ethical status, within which schools operate, and in which children are called to engage, includes principles, such as good, happiness and personal freedom. These goals are positive, but more may be added, since ethics (Neubert, 2010) are born out of situations and problems, and therefore ideas regarding morality vary. It is hereby supposed that Dewey is consistent with his basic theory on the birth of ethical principles and values from existing reality, which leads to constant changes or modifications of ethical systems.

Second, ethical education acquired through schooling illustrates that the school environment fulfils one of the determinant targets: the moral shaping of humans, or, at least, decidedly contributes to it. Education and the curriculum, in particular, aim at the acquisition of knowledge but are not limited to this alone. The process of learning itself contributes to a person's ethical formation. However, it is the schooling environment as a whole,

as a society of activities and a prescriptive, and in part, open framework through activities and with the contribution of teachers and parents mould the child's ethical character. We would note that knowledge and ethics reflect on school's aims and scopes. But still, the creation of a cognitive and ethical criterion needs to be applied in a climate of freedom that helps the development of the two essential components, both of the school and the children's.

Third, the study programme includes a series of lessons and books that aim at and contribute to young people's ethical formation. Obviously, the freedom of choice should permeate the curriculum. Otherwise, it would lead to specific ethical characters shaped within a regulative process. Hence, the study programme has a defining role as both to educational direction and the respective type of citizens we create. Consequently, it is important to point out the meaningful role of cognitive subject matter, as well as the methodical and planned study on the accomplishment of ethical status in young people.

Fourth, the psychology of ethical education includes specific ideals that do not diverge from the general framework described above, i.e., its emergence from situations themselves. The ideals are not abstract and transcendental, and we are not called to comprehend and retain them, but to actualize the ethical framework within which they exist and to apply it on a personal level as individuals. These ideals contribute to a homogenous culture and resolutely contribute to society's cohesion and functionality. Dewey's perception on the fulfillment of ethical ideals in specific persons is judged as a proposal of confirmation of ideals from real people, instead of a perspective of theoretical heritage which people should approach and simultaneously not be applied by underlying the difficulty and the painful effort of doing so.

Five Basic Questions in "Philosophy of Education"

We used evidential reason and analytical methodological tools to highlight our opinions about these four issues. But, as we stated into the introduction of this paper, we will make an exception in order to discuss the same issues in the classical work of Dewey (1948/1916), such as *Democracy and Education* (Pappas, 2008; Carr & Anthon, 1996), because it delves into education and ethics in a more systematic and comprehensive way, including the issue of democracy. There, he posed the following five basic questions on which we can elaborate.

Education as a necessity of life (Dewey, 1948/1916, pp. 7-11) means that there cannot be life without the exercise and the learning of specific survival methods. This principle constitutes common ground, but its significance lies in that it proves that Dewey has expunged from his beliefs any theocratic or even religious notion and faith on how things work. Education, in its wider sense of learning and knowing of the essential practices that secure life's necessities, is considered "sine qua non" and is registered within human abilities. Life is a self-renewing process and education contributes to this function of social life (Dewey, 1948/1916, p. 11). Hence, within this process, education can only exist through the communication of society's organic elements, i.e., people, especially those through communication between the older and the younger generations. Society's organic identity together with its constant renewal leads to a continuous composite which, in turn, demands better teaching and learning methods (Dewey, 1948/1916, p. 11).

The position that education is a social function (Dewey, 1948/1916, pp. 15-25) may be another cliché. But, given the era in which it was articulated and highlighted, it assumes paramount importance, since it curbs conservative and theological ideas about the intervention of factors and institutions of a transcendental dimension and attitude. It is a fact that all activities of its members, including education (Dewey, 1948/1916, p.

26), happen within the social environment. However, for the efficiency and the smooth running of education, we have to accept the three factors that the social environment ensures: it unites and classifies the elements of the arrangement we want to develop; it crystallizes and renders social conditions appropriate; and it creates and further develops a better environment that has a positive influence on the activities and energizing of young people (Dewey, 1948/1916, p. 27).

The direction and wider perspective of education (Dewey, 1948/1916, pp. 49-61; Pring, 2007) as a life necessity and an activity within the social environment illustrates that it is impossible for it to become self-regulatory, but to push towards adopting the notion that all actions are influenced and approved by the other people. Hence, the developing forces function within a collectiveness (Dewey, 1948/1916, p. 47) characterized by interaction. The distinction to be made is that this body does not necessarily become homogenous and the respective influences are differing force and quality which can, however, be theoretically adopted by the weak and inferior in terms of knowledge. If we wish to use a criterion to assess schooling, this cannot be any other than the extent of desire for continuous development that it instils as well as the set of tools that it provides for people to realize this desire (Dewey, 1948/1916, p. 62).

The characterization and appraisal of education as either conservative or progressive (Dewey, 1948/1916, pp. 81-91) should be based on consistent and measurable criteria. These can be designed and assessed. However, there is a pre-existing and purely theoretical framework within which the conservative or progressive is being implied by the notion of education's continuous improvement. This improvement is subject to measurable criteria, only after we declare that we follow the social norm of progress that is later confirmed by the various elements that we bring in. Existing within this framework can be the continuous reconstitution of experience, the design for the future and the contribution from the re-evaluation of the past (Dewey, 1948/1916, p. 93).

Evaluating the democratic perception of education (Dewey, 1948/1916, pp. 94-101) is "de facto" conducted by an individual society's quality. Namely, since education is a social process, and different types of society have always existed (both in the past and nowadays), it is each individual society's social ideals (Dewey, 1948/1916, p. 115) that measure how democratic education serve as a social process. Inevitably, then, the element of democratic or non-democratic education will emerge through the comparison of ideals. Because the propaganda of some ideals—their projection in a transcendental and metaphysical way, the culture of a peoples, etc.—can project the minor as major and the illiberal as a national ideal, the measure to be used is the considerations and interests to be equally distributed to all, achieving fullness and freedom that are transferred to the other groups as well.

Through the issues we analyzed above, Dewey aimed at improving the functional and tool-based role of education which is considered to be important in every manifestation of daily life. His view on the necessity of education is considered common today, and is valued negatively or positively, depending on its existence or its lack. The basic element of education is that it teaches tools of survival and in that it is close to training. Education is the totality which can be separated into different fields, or specific educational actions are summarized in education as a whole. Thus, ways of survival do not exist in isolation or in gap. Instead, they belong to together coexisting and co-coordinating with the actions of others within the social scene defining education as a social function which exists within the structure and functionality of this society which it strengthens, reproduces and changes. Within the body of society, everyone's actions meet with approval or disapproval within the general ethical status quo of society and the ethical measure of other people. The ethical

context that society has structured, which definitely exists in educational practice, characterizes education itself as conservative or progressive, and indirectly, suggests the necessary changes and improvements. From this perspective, education is democratic, when it illuminates the majority and embraces the whole society, and when social ideals correspond with and are adopted from the majority of the citizens.

Conclusions

Considering our thoughts on Dewey's position on ethical principles and education (only in early works), we have to stress the exercise of his views on the level of reality, without transcendentalisms and the analogy of conduct as a characteristic and measure of the ethical world. This means that each theory of ethics can only derive from the ethical problems that arise in the real world. This world as a collective subject is liable to logical control, hence the ethical propositions born within it are subject to the same kind of scrutiny. The individual and collective self should serve ethical situations towards the achievement of good, of happiness, et.. Education moves within this ethical framework, calculating rules and social developments. It involves knowledge and exists not only as a social function, but also as an activity inside the social environment, within which it can acquire a conservative or scientific direction and develop a democratic perception for itself.

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