

Reconstruction in Dewey's Pragmatism: Home, Neighborhood, and Otherness

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Introduction: Why Dialogue with Dewey Today?

John Dewey was engaged, throughout his work, in the reconstruction of American democracy and education. Committed to that philosophy for and in action that is pragmatism, a philosophy for solving the problems of human beings, he addressed himself to what he saw as the crisis of democracy in twentieth-century America. In 1927, discussing the erosion of the public sphere in American society, Dewey criticized what he saw as the hollow concept and practice of “citizenship” in democracy. In the “void between government and the public,” men became, he warned, “skeptical of the efficiency of political action.”¹ Indifference and apathy are the signs of a bewildered public—a state where one does not know “what one really wants.”² This is a kind of existential crisis of democracy. Dewey reminds us that the phenomenon of the “eclipse of the public”³ has a bearing not only on democracy as a matter of deliberative procedure or political participation, but also on one’s way of living, on an ethical dimension of life: the question of how one should live a good life. For him, the political task of democracy, what it means to be a citizen, is inseparable not only from the ethical but also from the educational—a dimension of education that involves the internal transformation of human being. He proposed the recreation of the “Great Community”—a public space in which different individual voices are heard through mutual learning and cooperation. How I should live is inseparably related to how I live with others.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century the significance of Dewey’s pragmatism needs to be critically reconsidered not only in America, but also on a global scale. Americanization, as both a dimension and an engine of globalization, flattens, rather than enhances, global awareness; or worse, it assimilates, in the name of hospitality, the different, the foreign, and the silent into its own home. Privatiza-

tion and selfish individualism, the standardization of taste in the global market—all present challenges to citizenship education. Furthermore the loss of common ground between ethnic and religious groups is demonstrated in continuing wars and tensions around the world. The sense of the lack of common ground is too real to be ignored. How should we initiate and continue the search for the common when we confront radical differences in values, with no apparent hope for reconciliation? In order to rectify this growing sense of lack, education in the “knowledge,” “skills,” and “dispositions” of citizenship has been offered as a solution.⁴ The nature of the skepticism and the nihilistic sense of loss seem to call for something more than—perhaps something that precedes—questions of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. If Dewey’s philosophy is the product of American thinking, how far is it itself a part of the problem of globalization? Or, if it aims to be a voice critical of its own culture and society, how far can Deweyan democracy resist the tide of Americanization? All these imminent challenges and questions require us to be engaged in dialogue with and reconstruction of Dewey’s pragmatism. This is also necessary for destabilizing the way in which we use the language of democracy in the discourse of a globalized economy, and for remembering a forgotten dimension of education—one that serves the task of creating democracy as a way of life. The point of this paper, therefore, is to revive and reconstruct Dewey’s pragmatism so that it becomes an alerting and inspiring voice in response to the nihilistic crisis of today’s democracy and education. In other words this is a Deweyan task of reconstruction in philosophy, and it prompts the present endeavor in the continuing critical reception of the inheritance of American pragmatism.

First, a hidden (or forgotten) dimension—the Emersonian perfectionist dimension—is discussed as a potentially helpful way of enhancing pragmatism’s potential today. I shall especially highlight three ethical modes of relation to others—open-mindedness, friendship, and sympathy—that Dewey proposes as crucial conditions for achieving democracy, starting at home, expanding outwards. Second, I shall examine a critical point that tests the limits of Dewey’s pragmatism—critical in the sense that his own language can slide into the assimilatory discourse of globalization. In particular his theory of face-to-face communication is destabilized in the light of the Emersonian perfectionist notion of conversation, with its implications for the place of the eccentric within a culture (which turns out, in any case, to be cultures). The nature of this critical boundary will be elucidated as a repression in Dewey’s pragmatism. Finally, I shall point to a way beyond the limits of Dewey’s pragmatism—beyond problem solving, towards dissolution—in order critically to inherit the asset that it offers to contemporary democracy and education.

Democracy, Education, and Pragmatism: Starting at Home, Expanding the Neighborhood

As a philosopher of growth, Dewey never gave up his faith in democracy. His struggle to reorient American society toward “liberal-communitarian democracy”—the reconstruction of a public space in which individual freedom is realized within

community—can be understood as an expression of his hope for democracy. That democracy can always fall into a state of conformity means that it must never be allowed to settle down in relation to some fixed *telos*; democracy, thus understood, is a state forever to be worked towards, never finally to be achieved. This reflects his idea of growth without fixed ends.⁵ In this regard Dewey inherits perfectionist strains of thought from Emerson, which Stanley Cavell names “Emersonian moral perfectionism.”⁶ Dewey himself called Emerson “The Philosopher of Democracy.”⁷ Upholding the idea of democracy as a way of life throughout his career, he sustains a vision of democracy to be expanded outward from within. Our private lives are inseparable from the creation of the public.

One of the crucial factors in democracy as a way of life is “our personal relations to other persons,” relations constituted through “free inquiry, free assembly and free communication.”⁸ To be with others, for Dewey, is not simply a physical fact: rather it is an achievement, one that involves assiduous efforts. Democracy as the process of education involves mutual learning from difference, from different others as “friends”:⁹ “The task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute.”¹⁰ In order to be with others and to learn from them, we need, Dewey emphasizes, open-mindedness and friendship: “Open-mindedness is not the same as empty-mindedness. To hang out a sign saying ‘Come right in; there is no one at home’ is not the equivalent of hospitality. But there is a kind of passivity, willingness to let experiences accumulate and sink in and ripen, which is an essential of development.”¹¹ “Friendship and intimate affection are not the result of information about another person even though knowledge may further their formation. But it does so only as it becomes an integral part of sympathy through the imagination.”¹²

The first quotation here is from *Democracy and Education*, and the second from *Art as Experience*. In the first, he is not just talking of the welcome given to the stranger but of a more general condition of thinking about others—or, we might say more generally, an openness to the other. In the second quotation, he ponders an idea of friendship, one that cannot be subsumed into an economy of exchange, a mode of relationship that precedes the cognitive dimension. As another ethical trait, the idea of sympathy is also proposed. In *Ethics*, Dewey defines sympathy as follows: “Intelligent sympathy widens and deepens concern for consequences. To put ourselves in the place of another, to see things from the standpoint of his aims and values, to humble our estimate of our own pretensions to the level they assume in the eyes of an impartial observer, is the surest way to appreciate what justice demands in concrete cases.”¹³ The tag of “philosopher of democracy” sometimes leads to the idea that Dewey’s concerns are circumscribed within a political arena that is relatively narrowly defined, but here he expresses his concern with the fundamental conditions of human being in our relation to others. These three ethical attitudes of open-mindedness, friendship, and sympathy are interrelated to constitute the conditions for creative democracy.

It is especially the later works of Dewey that echo the tone of Emersonian moral perfectionism¹⁴—of a moral life in which friendship and conversation play central roles in the perfection of self and society. The rereading of Dewey’s text in the light of Emersonian perfectionism helps to tap a hidden potential in his idea of democracy as a way of life. The political life in Emersonian perfectionism involves the existential and ethical questions of how we ourselves, each of us, must confront the shameful condition of democracy—the state Emerson calls “secret melancholy”¹⁵ and Thoreau, “quiet desperation.”¹⁶ This is the state of conformity, where “[man] dares not say ‘I think,’ ‘I am,’”¹⁷—where skepticism raises its head in doubting our mutual existence in society, in fomenting our despair at the fact that we are “left out of the basic decisions of the society” in which we find ourselves, and in harbouring the insidious, nihilistic belief that that “society is not mine.”¹⁸ It is, however, in this existential, even emotional sense of loss that Emersonian perfectionism finds its niche, and from which it seeks its way out. Echoing the voice of Emerson, Cavell says that despair is a “political emotion.”¹⁹ Likewise in Dewey’s later writings—including *The Public and its Problems*, *Individualism Old and New*, and “The Creative Democracy The Task Before Us”—a despair towards the loss of, and hence, a hope for recalling this “political emotion,” or we might even say, political passion, are driving forces for the eternal perfection of democracy.

Deweyan creative democracy is and should be applied not only within America, but also beyond its boundaries: it is a principle to be practiced and realized in our cross-cultural and international understanding. In his 1921 essay, “Mutual National Understanding”—one that expresses something of what he believes he has learned from his visits to Japan and China—Dewey talks about international understanding between East and West. He delves into a deeper realm of possible mutual understanding, beneath physical and external boundaries. This passage beyond boundaries, however, must start at home. As Dewey says in *The Public and its Problems*,

It is said, and said truly, that for the world’s peace it is necessary that we understand the peoples of foreign lands. How well do we understand, I wonder, our next door neighbors? It has also been said that if a man love not his fellow man whom he has seen, he cannot love the God whom he has not seen. The chances of regard for distant peoples being effective as long as there is no close neighborhood experience to bring with it insight and understanding of neighbors do not seem better. A man who has not been seen in the daily relations of life may inspire admiration, emulation, servile subjection, fanatical partisanship, hero worship; but not love and understanding, save as they radiate from the attachments of a near-by union. Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.²⁰

He implies that the immediate sense of attachment is a crucial factor in the formation of one’s identity; and that “home” is the basis of one’s “love” and “understanding.” Dewey is, however, opposed to any exclusive form of patriotism— as this would gen-

erate “suspicion, fear, often hatred, of other peoples” and division among nations.²¹ He envisions democracy in a global community as a force that would transcend physical, political, and cultural divisions.²² Larry Hickman claims that Dewey is a “global citizen” and that his philosophy “provides tools for the formation of global publics.”²³ David Hansen associates Deweyan democracy with cosmopolitanism.²⁴ Unlike the kind of cosmopolitanism that Martha Nussbaum proposes (which she argues is based upon the idea of “common ends,”²⁵ “humanity as such,”²⁶ and “universal reason”²⁷), common good in Dewey’s pragmatism is always to be pursued and revised in the process of dialogue²⁸: it is humanism without any pre-established common humanity. By valuing both the significance of home and global community, Dewey’s antifoundationalist pragmatism provides us with a third way, beyond the tension between patriotism and cosmopolitanism.

Thus, Deweyan education for global citizenship begins at home by cultivating the attitudes of open-mindedness, friendship, and sympathy, and it then expands outward toward the distant. This cannot be understood as a political task alone: it requires an education in mutual learning from difference and distance. As Dewey says: “Travel is known to have a broadening effect, at least if the traveler is willing to keep his mind open. The amount of enlightenment which is gained from travel usually depends upon the amount of difference there is between the civilization from which the traveler starts his journey and that of the country at which he arrives. The more unlike the two are, the more opportunity there is for learning.”²⁹

In short, the task of creative democracy in Dewey’s pragmatism is to close the gap between the familiar (within home) and the distant (what is beyond home), and to reach the best possible condition of mutual understanding—a state “in which all share and to which all contribute.” The building of such relationships of neighborhood with others, from the intimate to the distant, are passages in the perfection of democracy, both at home and on the global scale.

Repression in Dewey: In Dialogue with the Voice of Emerson

Questioning Dewey

If we look at contemporary political situations around the world, however, Dewey’s conception and language of democracy and education does raise some questions. How does such a vision of global community get going? Dewey’s call for democracy as a way of life needs to be turned to a response to the real difficulties of our times—including the difficulty of inspiring political passion of a kind that transcends narrow patriotism and of expanding the imagination beyond national concerns. Elaine Scarry argues against Nussbaum’s cosmopolitanism to the effect that we should recognize the real difficulty of imagining others—both intimate and distant.³⁰ At the same time, if we follow Dewey, this does not mean that we should give up the hope of cultivating imaginative sensitivity to others. This will indeed involve looking at that crucial starting point of what happens within home, in our relationships to what is familiar to us. And it will perhaps involve seeing home as

a place that is already in some sense riven. The domestic is the scene of tragedy, as Aristotle and the Greek tragedians before him saw; it is a place of familiarity, to be sure, but also of jealousies and rivalries, of family rifts; it is the place that must somehow eventually be left. Home cannot be (simply) a stable shelter, the foundation of morality: rather it is already complicated by the relationship between the mother and father, and by the child's relation to them. Home is indeed the place of the original trauma of separation symbolized by the experience of birth, the place of the infant's realization of separateness. It is the place where you realize parents are not perfect, that home is not totally secure. And its stability constitutes, paradoxically perhaps, the background to a breaking away. It is in these experiences that we can start to relate ourselves to the strange and the foreign and we can do this from within home.

It is in response to this challenge that Dewey's ethical stance on democracy and his maxim that "democracy must begin at home" begins to be destabilized and his language of mutual national and cultural understanding deconstructed. Deweyan growth, growth without fixed ends, is at the heart of his antifoundationalism, and it underwrites his ethical claims regarding one's relation to others—of open-mindedness, friendship, and sympathy. If so, then, we face the questions of how we, as readers of Dewey, are to receive the ethical import of his writings without falling into a foundationalist discourse and position on morality, in our own relationship with others and other cultures; and of how we are to accept and start with the groundless sense of home we are faced with today. Answering to these necessitates a shift of attention concerning how his work is to be read and his language responded to.

More specifically, what Dewey conceives as "our personal relations to other persons" needs to be critically reconsidered. In order to educate our ways of living in the relationship of open-mindedness, friendship, and sympathy, Dewey emphasizes the significance of communication in "face-to-face relationships by direct give and take."³¹ The phrase "direct give and take" can be associated with his idea of mutual learning. The "highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication," he writes, "must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it."³²

In view of the contemporary state of democracy, however, how can Dewey's language of mutuality and "direct give and take" be distinguished from the economy of exchange that pervades our thinking, an economy of thought and life that is modeled on the global market? How can his vision of vivid communication regain its status in a situation where polite gentility and a politic wariness characterize our modes of communication? Ours is a mode of speech in which the passionate voice of the "I" is ever harder to hear, subsumed as it is into the silence of "quiet desperation." To realize what Dewey envisions as "a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication," we need more than what the discourse of mutuality and exchange and the metaphor of the "face-to-face" imply. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey says of our relation to the other: "We learn to see with his eyes, hear with his ears,

and their results give true instruction, for they are built into our own structure."³³ So we might ask Dewey today: Is the existence of the other something that can be determined in terms of what is immediately and visibly present to us, and within the structures of our own being? Is not there a danger of assimilating the other into the same, in the name of mutuality?

Furthermore, on a more global horizon, Dewey's call for "a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute" can easily be subsumed in the assimilating and unifying force of globalization. To enable Dewey's language to help us expand the horizon of our imagination toward the unknown and the strange, beyond what is present to us, face-to-face, we need the more radical language that these considerations might suggest: the trauma of separation—the trauma at the heart of our becoming human, even at the origin of experience itself, in discovering our separateness from others—can be a basis for our acknowledgement and acceptance of the disturbance of our relationship with the other.

Attending to the Voice of Emerson

For the sake of sustaining Dewey's orientation towards a perfectionist quest for common humanity, let us turn again to Emersonian moral perfectionism. It can be seen as a form of relational ethics in which "conversation" and "friendship" play key roles. They provide occasions when we are re-engaged with language together, where (ideally) we continually learn to speak again. Echoing the idea of perfection without final perfectibility, Emerson talks about the "game of conversation": "Conversation is a game of circles. . . . When each new speaker strikes a new light, emancipates us from the oppression of the last speaker, to oppress us with the greatness and exclusiveness of his own thought, then yields us to another redeemer, we seem to recover our rights, to become men."³⁴

Conversation here implies something different from the cooperation that is at the fore in Rawls' theory of justice.³⁵ The imperfectability of our moral life requires us to keep testing words together. The mode of conversation is more disturbing, sometimes more irritable, and not uncommonly more antagonistic than Dewey's relatively smooth idea of face-to-face communication might entail. Its destabilizing force is such that the alleged identity of the self starts to disintegrate and diffuse. In Dewey's pragmatism, communication implies the interaction of diverse perspectives, through which mutual understanding is achieved. The point of conversation, in contrast, is not to know others, to be geared towards settling down in agreement, and consequently to share a common ground of understanding. In Cavell's Emersonian moral perfectionism, it is rather in its disequilibrium, even in its antagonism ("my friend as my enemy"³⁶), that conversation achieves the acknowledgement of another. Though Dewey's theory of communication is by no means to be identified with exchange in terms of a global market, it retains a tendency to right itself, to regain equilibrium through interaction, and it sits close to the point where our thinking slides into this.

The need to pay critical attention to such a danger becomes all the more clear once we observe the state of the “eccentric” in a culture (or more precisely, in the various cultures that make up what is called a culture). Let us listen for a moment to the voice of the “Devil’s child” in Emerson’s “Self-Reliance,” who seems compelled to live in conflict with the “sacredness of traditions,” to live “wholly from within”: “If I am the Devil’s child, I will live then from the Devil.”³⁷ Emerson himself asserts: “I will not hide my tastes or aversions.”³⁸ The Devil’s child may confound you, unsettle you, and threaten you. His may be an unbearable voice to hear. But in confronting such a child, what would your response be? Perhaps this is Emerson’s endorsement of the strong-willed individual, whose motif is, as Cornel West says, “power, provocation, and personality.”³⁹ Perhaps, alternately, we may be prompted to think of the necessity of discipline: we are born into a culture and live in a language community, and, hence, we must acquire its grammar and norms. As Jim Garrison puts this: “Until individuals have acquired command of social meanings and values they cannot meaningfully create.”⁴⁰

Yet these responses seem to cover over a hidden dimension of the voice—one that exposes us to the vulnerability and fragility of the human condition. It is equally necessary, however, that we respond to the unlimited reservoir of our desires, that we live “from within,” for this is an excess that cannot be fully contained in those publicly shared meanings. Emerson’s child voices the urgency of such a need. We must live with the dual necessities, the necessities of fate and freedom, of initiation into culture and deviation from it. And this can create an irresolvable tension—not only between the individual and her social surroundings, but also within the individual, for she is internally torn between inside and outside. Emerson’s emphasis can then be interpreted in terms not so much of the priority of individual freedom over social discipline or cultural initiation as of the necessity of undergoing this tension in itself. His foremost concern here is with the extent to which we can acknowledge this gap exposed by the voice of the Devil’s child, by the voice that disturbs those apparently shared norms within a culture. As Emerson says: “This one fact the world hates, that the soul becomes; for that for ever degrades the past, turns all riches to poverty, all reputation to a shame, confounds the saint with the rogue, shoves Jesus and Judas equally aside.”⁴¹

What the voice of the Devil’s child represents is perhaps the remembrance of disparity and distance as the origin of our relation to the other. We enter into the muddle of life expressed by the child, as Cavell says with the acknowledgment that “[o]ur way is neither clear nor simple; we are often lost.”⁴² Such a mode of confronting the other requires a more thorough realization of alterity—a sense of the other that is beyond the grasp of our understanding. Cavell says that the presence of “this other of myself” is a condition of my perfection.⁴³ That there is this unknownness, this nontransparency, means that my relationship with the other can never be directly face-to-face: it is irrevocably indirect, and it always already entails an excess beyond mutuality.

This requires us, as was indicated above, to reconsider more radically the whole metaphysics of expansive growth while sustaining its antifoundationalist line. The resuscitation of culture awaits the prophetic voice of the dissident, the voice that can “deconfound” that culture, in Stanley Cavell’s phrase. Without such resistance within culture, resistance within home, the perfectionist language and expansive commitments to hospitality and sympathy can become merely rhetorical, ideological; or they can be assimilated into the totalizing force of standardization, with its increasingly globalized covering over of difference.

A Significant Blindness in Dewey

In dialogue with Emerson’s voice, we find in Dewey’s text a kind of repression, and this is most strikingly illustrated in what sometimes seems to be his distaste for, even revulsion at, psychoanalysis. It is this repression that is related to Dewey’s blindness to the traumatic aspects of starting at home and building neighborhood. It is this, more generally, that demonstrates the limits of his pragmatism. Let us first observe what Dewey says about psychoanalysis in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1921):

So the most popular forms of the clinical psychology, those associated with the founders of psycho-analysis, retain the notion of a separate psychic realm or force. . . . But they still cling to the idea of the separate psychic realm and so in effect talk about unconscious consciousness. They get their truths mixed up in theory with the false psychology of original individual consciousness, just as the school of social psychologists does upon its side.⁴⁴

Dewey’s pragmatism resists the danger of an introspective psychology that isolates mind from its environments and organic connections. Robert Westbrook says that “unlike Freudian ‘repression,’ Deweyan ‘suppression’ was not the normal course of things” and that “sublimation was for Dewey a conscious, rational operation” that related to more normal psychic events than were the subject of Freud’s studies.⁴⁵ For Freud, Westbrook continues, there was the “possibility of a compromise in the conflict of instinct and culture but not of resolution; faith in such a resolution was a first principle of Dewey’s social psychology.”⁴⁶ In other words, his notion of impulse in habit reconstruction is a function of resolving conflicts and tensions.

Dewey’s revulsion at psychoanalysis elucidates his pragmatist proclivity towards coping with problems; the placing of coping at the heart of a philosophy is tantamount to a kind of denial, as if it were possible to contain problems and modes of enquiry within the territory of resolution. It is in such a spirit that we find Dewey saying: “All friendship is a solution to the problem.”⁴⁷ Thus, Dewey omits or muffles another possibility of acknowledging the deep psychological reality of the trauma, an acknowledgement that would require something more like a radical leap, beyond the realm of rational control. Westbrook tries to show how Dewey’s later ethics takes a “tragic view of experience,” alongside acknowledgment of the “rarity” of consummatory experience.⁴⁸ But the criticism that his pragmatism lacks a tragic sense is hard to shake off.

Towards Further Reconstruction in Pragmatism: Beyond the Discourse of Problem Solving and Action

What I have been trying to achieve in this paper is a Cavellian deconstructive reading of Dewey's pragmatism. This is not to override the significance of his pragmatism, or to assimilate his voice to that of Emerson or Cavell. It is rather to engage in a critical reception of American pragmatism, especially its antifoundationalist, perfectionist lines of thought, in such a way as to expand its horizon. I believe this is a way to revive Dewey's call for creative democracy in our times. That call must be addressed also towards the need for humility in the face of alterity, in the face of the strangeness of the eccentric, both outside and inside of one's own home, such as to resist the lure of assimilating difference into the same. Such an ethical relationship can be acquired and practiced in our daily living, releasing the exclusive and fearful tendencies in our thinking towards the different—beyond national and cultural boundaries, in the light of the difference within them. Along these lines, Dewey's language of open-mindedness, friendship, and sympathy, and an overarching concept of "mutual understanding" must be deconstructed. The Emersonian voice of the Devil's child destabilizes the idea of home, following the Emersonian perfectionist route to creating and criticizing democracy from within, in the passage from the private to the public. To address the private—as the nontransparent, the unknown, and the invisible—is not to take a reactionary turn towards subjective preference, imagined, as this sometimes is, to be the only alternative to transparency and visibility: it is to attend to the voice that brings us up short, that makes us aware of prevailing forces that would turn mutuality into exchange, and convert the urge to understand into the source of repression.

To lend an ear to the Devil's child within a culture requires a shift in our thinking, away from problem solving and towards dissolving and dissolution—in such a way as to sustain a sense of the unsolved tension, the rift, between instinct and culture. What is at stake here is not mutual understanding, but a kind of encounter that is prompted by a mismatch, by the sense of separation, by relationships in disequilibrium. It is this very sense of a gap that cannot be found in Dewey's discussions of open-mindedness and mutual understanding.

In place of the sometimes polemical pragmatism of problem solving, Cavell's philosophical inclination is towards a more overarching transformation of the very way we picture the problems of our lives. He contrasts here a Wittgensteinian approach to problems with that of Deweyan pragmatism: "for my taste pragmatism misses the depth of human restiveness, or say misses the daily, insistent split in the self that being human cannot, without harm to itself, escape."⁴⁹ As *Philosophical Investigations* shows repeatedly, the problems philosophy sets for itself are not so much to be solved as to be dissolved. But what that book also reveals to the attentive reader is that the philosophical pressure behind the problems does not simply dissipate but keeps coming back. One response, the one to be resisted, in the face of these pressures is to cling fast to the fixities of our understanding, our belief that systematic solutions are to be found. Another is to acknowledge the moment of

impasse, the necessary rift, the inevitable separation. This, Cavell says, is Wittgenstein's "scene of instruction."⁵⁰ In confronting the moment when "I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned," Cavell's response, borrowing from Wittgenstein, is to keep engaged in the "eccentricities" of the unknown in search of (a temporary, though secure) ground in "our use of language with each other."⁵¹

Here, as Cavell suggests, dissolution is not simply a matter of thinking but inevitably conditioned by the language we choose to use. The exercise of one's language, testing it together in conversation, is a way of learning "membership in the polis," and this involves identifying citizens as "neighbors."⁵² And yet neighboring, in the wake of Cavell's take on dissolution, cannot be simply communal: rather it must address us to the fact that "education for citizenship is education for isolation"⁵³: how to reach out our hands to others from within the state of quiet desperation, while acknowledging separation as the human condition in confronting the voice of the eccentric. Such conversation requires particular modes of engagement—those of "listening, the responsiveness to difference, the willingness for change"⁵⁴—and the kind of vulnerability the "I" exposes in confronting the other, or the element of risk, of destabilizing the moral ground on which the "I" is standing, you risk "your understanding of the other as of yourself."⁵⁵ Both responsiveness and vulnerability, in Cavell's view, are related to Emerson's reconfiguration of Kant, with "the intellectual hemisphere of knowledge as passive or receptive and the intuitive or instinctive hemisphere as active or spontaneous."⁵⁶

Conversation provides the occasion through which the "rights of one's own desires" are given words, through which they are acknowledged.⁵⁷ What is alleged to be "eccentric" is not just left inaccessible, trapped in the unknown, but awaits its expression. There is then a responsibility to lend an ear to "the grief, the sense of rejection, that this [person's] extended muteness bespeaks."⁵⁸ The other to oneself emerges in the course of conversation in the moment when, in effect, one "can ask [the other] to rescue [oneself] from [one's] fear of expression."⁵⁹ In Emersonian perfectionism a recovery from skepticism, a way out of silence (the deprivation of one's voice), points towards a regaining of this "desire to think", to the "possibility of thinking", against the "denial of the world."⁶⁰ To be able to say "I think" is to regain "authority in . . . speech"⁶¹: it is to take responsibility for "my" words. Conversation matters precisely because of this recovery, the remembrance of one's desire to speak again.

To fold back this dissolution into pragmatism, into its hallmark ideas of action and practice, is to revitalize pragmatism's connection with language. In Cavell's ordinary language philosophy, we use language by "knowing which forms in what contexts are normative for performing the activities we perform by using language."⁶² The performative here differs from performativity in Lyotard's sense or from the appeal to visible action in problem solving that is typically found in Dewey's pragmatism. Subverting any dichotomization of action and language, the performative here can be related to the language cultivated in Emersonian conversation. If we seriously seek for a way for education to inspire the political passion of

the young, to allow them, in their own state of silent melancholy, to remember their desire to think, this broadened sense of the performative must also be a dimension of citizenship education—one that perforce will often precede or go beyond visible action and immediate change.⁶³

Citizenship education thus reconsidered, through this reconstruction of Dewey's pragmatism from the perspective of Cavell's Emersonian moral perfectionism, cannot be assimilated into a conventional discourse of political and citizenship education—not even into those forms that highlight mutual understanding and the politics of recognition. The difference is most clearly marked when it comes to dealing with what is alleged to be eccentric within a culture. Against the political slogan of citizenship with inclusion, Dewey, whom this paper seeks to release from his own repression, may now dare to call for citizenship without inclusion as the most sincere possibility of our neighbourly relations with others. This also means to acquire the state of being “beside oneself in a sane sense,” which is to say, to be next to oneself.⁶⁴ Such a thought might in the process release us too from the drive towards the identification and articulation of the core of the self, whose self-expression often succumbs ironically to assimilation and conformity.

Notes

1. LW 2: 310, 319.
2. LW 5: 133.
3. LW 2: 304.
4. Crick, *Essays on Citizenship*.
5. MW 9: 55.
6. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*; Saito, *The Gleam of Light*.
7. MW 3: “Emerson.”
8. LW 14: 226, 227.
9. *Ibid.*, 228.
10. *Ibid.*, 230.
11. MW 9: 183.
12. LW 10: 339.
13. LW 7: 251.
14. Saito, *The Gleam of Light*, 63.
15. See Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 252n12.
16. Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance*, 5.
17. Emerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 141.
18. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 188.
19. *Ibid.*, 98.
20. LW 2: 368.
21. LW 7: 260.
22. LW 2: 370.
23. Hickman, “John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology.”
24. Hansen, “Dewey and Cosmopolitanism.”
25. Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 9.
26. *Ibid.*, 15.
27. Putnam, “Must We Choose,” 95.

28. Ibid., 97.
29. MW 13: 262.
30. Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other People," 98-110.
31. LW 2: 371.
32. Ibid., 350.
33. LW 10: 339.
34. Emerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 170.
35. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 173.
36. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 59.
37. Emerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 134.
38. Ibid.
39. West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 69.
40. Garrison, Review of *The Gleam of Light*.
41. Emerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 142.
42. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 324.
43. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 26-27.
44. MW 14: 61-62.
45. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 291.
46. Ibid., 292.
47. LW 10: 339.
48. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 416.
49. Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 5.
50. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 186.
51. Ibid., 114. For further discussion of the concepts of deconfounding and dissolution in Cavell, see Saito and Standish, "What's the Problem with Problem-Solving?" 162-163.
52. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 85.
53. Ibid., 85-86.
54. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 173-174.
55. Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 235.
56. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 129.
57. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 182.
58. Ibid., 203.
59. Ibid., 206.
60. Ibid., 201.
61. Ibid., 203. Cavell says: "The point of the proof in saying 'I think' is not alone that it must be said, or thought, in taking it upon myself, but also that no one else can, that is, no one can say it for me" (202-03).
62. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 33.
63. In Dewey's account of language, this illusion seems to be retained. For instance, he says: "Signs and symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternally shared experience is ushered in and sustained. But the winged words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech" (LW 2: 371). The stance toward the written language here marks a sharp contrast to Cavell.
64. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 104.

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