Growth is an End! Dewey's Internalized Teleology

Dewey’s ethics, like his metaphysics, has aroused serious disagreement since the early 1900s. Despite significant scholarship—e.g., James Gouinlock’s *John Dewey’s Philosophy of Value* (1972), Jennifer Welchman’s *Dewey’s Ethical Theory* (1995), and Abraham Edel’s *Ethical Theory & Social Change* (2001)—serious questions remain as to how all of the pieces fit together, on the one hand, and how it fits in the landscape of philosophical ethics, on the other. The most recent edition to this scholarship, Gregory Pappas’ *John Dewey’s Ethics* (2008), goes a long way toward clearing up some of the most egregious misconceptions. Pappas gathers Dewey’s ethical views under the heading of “the method of experience, and labels it a “radical contextualism,” by way of positioning it vis-à-vis the contemporary literature in ethics. I agree with Pappas in thinking that a central insight in Dewey’s thought is the insistence that the end of moral deliberation is the melioration of a currently problematic situation. However, in his challenge to rival interpretations, Pappas implies, wrongly I believe, that the science/ethics comparison in Dewey has outlived its usefulness. In addition, his discussion leaves out two components of Dewey’s ethics, which components I take to be significant, namely the concepts of valuation judgments “in their distinctive sense,” in Dewey’s words, and Dewey’s concept of ‘growth.’ He argues that the attention philosophers have paid to these three elements over-states their importance, and warns that “we must not become so eager to become part of the mainstream philosophical dialogue that we compromise Dewey’s unique and most worthwhile contributions” (3).

Pappas is surely right to worry about one-sided, partial, or decontextualized interpretations of a philosopher’s views. The dangers are both obvious and too numerous to repeat. However, this caveat cuts both ways: If Pappas own interpretation ignores significant elements of Dewey’s thought, then he, too, can be fairly accused of the “selective reconsideration of Dewey’s ethics [which] fails to represent the radical Dewey and may amount to a failure to use his approach in the most productive way” (ibid.).

In this section I want to lay out the central features of Dewey’s ethics on which Pappas and I agree. For Dewey, inquiry begins and has its culmination in the experience of concrete problematic
situations. Pappas, following Douglas Browning, calls this the “practical starting point” (Pappas, p. 20ff; cf. (Browning, 1998) No inquiry commences without the experience of doubt. From Dewey’s “Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” we know that the problem is not merely ‘in the head,’ or subjective, but is a lack in the situation (mw.3.158-167). What Dewey called ‘the Good of the situation’—the restoration of on-going activity—defines what we ought to aim for in our moral deliberations (mw.12.176). This makes Dewey’s ethics a ‘situation ethics’: ethics is about resolving currently problematic situations, no more and no less. While I will qualify this claim in a later section, I agree with Pappas that Dewey adopted the practical starting point, and that the focus of moral deliberation must be on resolving current problematic situations, so any differences between Pappas and myself are irrelevant for present purposes.

The resolution to problematic situations must be accomplished via the “method of experience.” The situation itself thus sets both the materials and the criteria for successful resolution. Ethical theory, Dewey said, is “inquiry into conditions,” by which he meant that moral judgments are of the means-ends variety (lw.1.312). Moral inquiry is inquiry into how we might ameliorate our present situation. While moral experience cannot be separated into the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ of experience from a metaphysical (ontological) perspective, making this functional distinction allows us to inquire into ways of controlling the “direction or quality of our moral experience.” (Pappas 69) Further, Dewey recognized that our character is the instrument of our moral experiences—habits, after all, do all the perceiving, recognizing, inferring, recalling, judging, and so on that we do (mw.14.24). Thus, we need intelligent habits, which Dewey tied directly back into his theory of inquiry. The method of experience in morals just is the method of intelligent inquiry adapted for situations which are pervaded by moral qualities.
Given this description, it is clear how Dewey’s ethics must be empirically informed. For one, we know that the pattern of inquiry requires attention to the situation itself: If we do not know, e.g., that Giardia and Cryptosporidium are common contaminants in backcountry water, then we may end up making a deadly mistake, failing to be prepared when going backpacking, drinking water without purifying it first, or the like. Further, our deliberations must be informed by principle. Not absolute rules prohibiting or requiring conduct, but moral principles developed from antecedent experiences. Such principles are tentative and hypothetical, true, but they are imperative nevertheless, because they help to codify the values or interests that exist in a morally problematic situation. Finally, Dewey’s ethics is empirically informed simply in virtue of the necessity of inquiry into the causes, instrumentalities, and ends-in-view latent in the situation itself. Thus, Dewey’s ethics is methodologically similar to other types of inquiry, focused on concrete, present moral difficulties, and takes moral experience as its locus and guide.

We can make further progress at this point by turning to a brief account of what Dewey’s ethics is not. Given Dewey’s account, it is clear that he rejected teleological ethics, understood as focusing deliberation on the attainment or pursuit of aims (ends) outside of (or disconnected from) the current problematic situation. Furthermore, Dewey’s ethics, contra Andrew Altman (1982) and James Campbell (1995), is not consequentialist in any sense akin to that of, e.g., J.J.C. Smart or John Stuart Mill. For, consequentialism holds that consequences, as distinct from motives or virtues, are the criteria of right action, whereas Dewey held that those three elements—right, good, and virtue—are independent factors none of which is necessarily overriding relative to the others in any given situation. Finally, while Dewey’s views certainly emerge from his consideration of the biology and social psychology of human nature, it would be false to say
that this makes his ethics “based on” social psychology and evolutionary naturalism, in the sense that overriding, absolute moral norms emerge from truths about human nature, in the way that William Casebeer argues in his recent book, *Natural Ethical Facts* (2003), and in which he purports to be following Dewey’s lead (4). In sum, any ethical view that assumes some element of the moral life as *normatively basic* for moral deliberation misses the point of Dewey’s morality of experience.

From this account of Dewey’s ethics, we can see why Pappas might be persuaded to leave “growth” out of his account of Dewey’s ethics. The temptation, he rightly notes, is to read growth as a teleological principle, or at least as making growth “the” End of conduct. For example, Axel Honneth argues that Dewey’s notion of growth is teleological, that is, an ultimate end of conduct, and as such is incompatible with Dewey’s moral particularism (1998, p. 704). Matthew Festenstein claims that, for Dewey, “the demands of morality are rooted in a certain conception of human well-being” (2007; 2008, p. 18) and not in the needs of the current situation. Finally, Pappas notes that appeals to the psychology of growth as a part of his ethics tend to confuse philosophy with psychology (Iw.13.189-251). Pappas argues that “Dewey’s remarks about growth do not support this interpretation. The common cause of this interpretation of Dewey is either a narrow and superficial reading (taking out of context) of particular text[s] (in particular his remarks about ‘growth’)” (2007, p. 1). Understood in this way, growth is incompatible with the method of experience. Thus, Pappas concludes that “Growth is NOT the End,” and I wholeheartedly concur: It is not THE End.

Turning now to my disagreements with Pappas, we can classify them under two headings: The importance of Dewey’s talk of a “science of ethics,” and, not unrelatedly, a
disagreement over the subject-matter of ethics. Pappas argues that his interpretation requires that we *not* take Dewey’s discussions in *The Theory of Valuation* (lw.4.203-228) and “The Construction of Good,” chapter 10 of *The Quest for Certainty* (mw.3.3-39) as central to Dewey’s ethics. I can grant that the concepts discussed in these two works are not central in the sense that would move Dewey toward the views just mentioned. Yet Pappas’ account of those discussions under-emphasizes Dewey’s discussions of the continuity of experience and what Dewey called valuation judgments in their “distinctive sense,” and in so doing, mistakenly cuts off Dewey’s ethics from his discussions of moral progress and human flourishing. In his admirable drive to retain what is unique to Dewey’s ethics—its radical contextualism—Pappas, denies the continuity that is essential to any inquiry, and so constructs a “misshapen”—if not outright one-sided—picture of Dewey’s ethics.

Dewey’s interest in a “science of ethics” can be seen in his early essay “The Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality” (1987, p. 33). There, Dewey argues that the primary sense of “scientific” he wants to emphasize is “regular methods of controlling the formation of judgments regarding some subject-matter” (mw.3.3). So far, Pappas seems in the right when he claims that the similarity between ethics and science lies in their respective emphases on the method of experience. However, this is not the extent of their similarities, in Dewey’s mind. The full quote reads, “We need to throw the emphasis in using the term "scientific" first upon methods, and then upon results through reference to methods” (ibid.). Pappas is well aware that generic judgments—scientific ‘laws’ and moral principles—emerge from the historical progress of inquiry. He rightly notes that what prevents such judgments from becoming mere abstractions is that for Dewey, “the logical import of generic judgments” is their
intermediate position “as instrumentalities and methods of controlling individualized judgments” (mw.3.9). That is to say, generic formulae are crucial elements in inquiry. They are “the bridges by which we pass over from one particular experience to another; they are individual experiences put into such shape as to be available in regulating other experiences” (mw.3.9). In short, while the method is ‘supreme,’ method—in science or ethics—without general propositions is blind.

Even with generic propositions, however, the method of experience would not do full justice to Dewey’s ethics. For, there is a cumulative element in experience. Life, Dewey argues, implies continuity

“in which preceding [acts] prepare the conditions under which later ones occur… As organisms become more complex in structure and thus related to a more complex environment, the importance of a particular act in establishing conditions favorable to subsequent acts that sustain the continuity of the life process, becomes at once more difficult and more imperative” (lw.4.179).

As Thomas Alexander puts it, in moral deliberation we need to “see the actual in light of the possible,” that is, to use future possibilities as tools for the reconstruction of current experience (2003, p. 448). Over time, and with constant application and reapplication, the method of intelligent inquiry enables us to better control our environment, thus improving our chances of success. Pappas is absolutely right that it is fundamental to that method that we trust in “the capacity of experience to develop its own regulative standards,” (lw.4.204) as Dewey insisted we must: That capacity is the condition of the possibility of inquiry itself.

However, despite his suggestion that the analogy between science and ethics may have outlived its usefulness, it would seem that Pappas may have overstated that suggestion. He argues that Dewey’s is a “radical contextualism,” such that “each situation constitutes a unique context and while it is lived (as a process), that is all there is to moral life” (Pappas, 2008, p. 41).
All situations are qualitatively unique wholes, on Dewey’s view, but we might think that science depends for its functioning on similarities across situations, whereas (on Pappas’ view) morally problematic situations must be investigated and resolved as unique. If we do, then Pappas’ claim that the science/ethics analogy “may have outlived its usefulness” might make more sense.

Yet it is clear from the many things he had to say about science and ethics that Dewey saw them as parallel or even interpenetrating enterprises. As William R. Caspary points out, how you understand this analogy depends on whether you use theoretical or applied science as your base, and Dewey’s own examples tend to come from the applied sciences—medicine, engineering, economics (lw.7.287). There are a number of points of comparison between ethics and applied science, but several stand out as important for our purposes here. First, Dewey was not assimilating ethics to science, but setting them both under the genus ‘empirical inquiry.’ The “method of experience” applies, mutatis mutandis to both. Second, applied science and moral deliberation each take place in a specific situation, in which the needs of the situation itself control the formation of judgments about what one ought to do. Third, both require the use of principles, laws, and other tools for investigating the situation and constructing a judgment. Fourth, those principles are generic propositions. Finally, for each the judgment is not a proposition but an action—building the bridge, taking the action, and each experience is the test of the judgment.

Once we see this comparison, the hypothesis I suggested earlier for Pappas’ claim that the science/ethics comparison should be abandoned is shown to be unfounded. For, while it is true that scientific principles emerge because of the stabilities across situations, the same is also true of moral principles. And while we can accept Dewey’s contextualism about resolving
morally problematic situations, because we trust that the situation contains all that is required, including materials and other human and non-human instrumentalities, the same is true for applied science. Building a bridge, for example, requires careful attention to the geography and geology of the proposed site, the depth and motion of the water, wind speed and direction, and so on, in addition to facts about materials, general principles of engineering bridges, and so on. A successful bridge is the result of a careful process of adjudicating between those general principles and the exigencies of the situation.

This is not to say that science and ethics are identical—either in method or subject-matter. But the most important difference is telling against Pappas’ position. That difference, Dewey says, lies in the fact that part of the subject matter of judgment is the nature of the character of the one doing the judging. In scientific judgments, Dewey argues, the character of the one doing the judging is only significant for the practical conditions of making the judgment. Whereas, in moral judgments, the character of the one doing the judging is a part of the content of the judgment, since the judgment will both enact the end-in-view, and thus the values embodied in it, and form the individual’s future character. Moral judgments “form the future self,” as Dewey says (Iw.10.20). This is significant, because it brings into the purview of moral deliberation something other than the mere amelioration of the currently problematic situation:

> “Whenever the implication of character, the operation of habit and motive, is recognized as a factor affecting the quality of the specific object judged, the logical aim makes it necessary to take notice of this fact by making the relationship an explicit element of content in the subject-matter undergoing judgment” (mw.3.22, my emphasis).

Thus, one needs to think about what kind of person one will become in our choices of resolutions to problematic situations.
Pappas’s claim simply does not square with Dewey’s account of the development, function and role of valuation judgments. Dewey distinguishes valuing, the appreciation or prizing of qualities we experience as belonging to a thing as a “brute matter of space-time existence” (I.w.15.43), and valuations, or reflective judgments about the worth of things in their relations. We value our experiences either positively or negatively—we take an immediate and non-cognitive like or dislike to the objects of our experience. Once we start to think about whether those objects are worthy of our like or dislike, we are making valuation judgments. On Pappas’ view, Dewey’s theory of valuation judgments peaks, so to speak, here, with hypothetical judgments about how to resolve a problematic situation.

The problem with this interpretation is that it ignores—not underappreciates, ignore —Dewey’s account of valuation judgments in The Theory of Valuation, as well as his discussion of the need for integrating our beliefs about the world with beliefs about values and purposes in “The Construction of Good.” In The Theory of Valuation, after distinguishing valuings from valuations in the ordinary sense (i.e., judgments about ends-in-view within specific morally problematic situations) Dewey then goes on to raise the following question: “Are propositions about existent valuations themselves capable of being appraised, and can the appraisal when made enter into the constitution of further valuations?” (I.w.13.208). He responds in the affirmative: “In case the final outcome is to show that some kinds of acts of prizing are better than others, valuation-acts are themselves evaluated, and the evaluation may modify further direct acts of prizing” (ibid.) Dewey points out that in engineering and medicine, and in general “wherever there is an appraisal involving a rule as to better or as to needed action...there is always some observation of the outcome obtained in comparison and contrast with that intended,
such that the comparison throws light upon the actual fitness of the things employed as means” (lw.13.211)—namely, the judgment or choice of end-in-view—which “makes possible a better judgment in the future as to their fitness and usefulness” (ibid.). This is the condition of the ability of the method of experience to develop regulative standards, and it links directly to Dewey’s claims about the need for continuity and growth.

Pappas rightly distinguishes between the generic traits and phases of moral experience (the “what” of moral experience), and the cognitive-affective-conative habits though which we have moral experience (the “how” of experience). Dewey’s argument moves from the former to the latter: IF moral experience is of such-and-such a character, THEN we ought to attempt to live in an intelligent, aesthetic, and democratic way. These are what Pappas calls Dewey’s “normative commitments and hypotheses about the conditions and instrumentalities for a better moral life” (2008, p. 165). It is clear that growth is not itself a habit—there is no schema of behavior that we might describe as one of ‘growing’ like there can be for brushing one’s teeth or being courageous. Thus, growth must be a “what,” a quality of consummatory experiences.

We saw earlier that Dewey argued that for living things cumulative continuity is imperative. Growth occurs, Dewey said, “when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives” (mw.14.146). Achieving this, Dewey says, is the good of activity (2008, p. 51). It is no coincidence that Dewey’s very definition of inquiry—the transformation of an indeterminate situation into a wholly unified one—echoes his definition of growth. This is why Dewey said that we might think of the growth as a categorical imperative: “so act as to increase the meaning of present experience” (mw.14.196). While this does not mean turning one’s attention away from
the matter at hand, it does make certain demands on the ‘how’ of moral experience. In particular, it requires that we be cognizant of the implications of our decisions for our future self, that we pay attention to whether we are flourishing, and whether our choices are more or less likely to lead to flourishing in the future. The question is how we should understand this requirement.

Dewey’s aesthetic and spiritual account of experience mirrors and refines his psychological characterization of growth. He argues that intelligence is an aesthetic, as well as an intellectual endeavor, when he claims that even an intelligent mechanic who follows the method of experience “is artistically engaged” (lw.10.11). The harmonious operation of our habits through the operation of intelligence brings the past (habits are funded with prior experience) and future (deliberation is about ends-in-view as well as who one should become) together in present activity (ends-in-view are internal to present deliberation) in a way that Dewey describes as an aesthetic ideal:

“In life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges. … Only when the past ceases to trouble and anticipations of the future are not perturbing is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive” (lw.10.24).

In experiences that can be characterized by growth, we immerse ourselves in our activity. This “adjustment of our whole being with the conditions of existence” (lw.10.23), is accomplished, Dewey says, by

“the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices” (lw.9.23).

This is a spiritual, as well as an aesthetic experience. Positive psychologists list it as the virtue of “transcendence,” the sense of belonging to something larger than oneself. I agree with Owen Flanagan, however, who rejects the identification of transcendence as a virtue (Rawls, 1971).
Nevertheless, I would argue that it does amount to a nearly universal element of human experience, one achieved in those moments in which we immerse ourselves so completely in what we are doing that we literally merge with the situation. Dewey describes this experience as one in which

“there is a composing and harmonizing of the various elements of our being such that, in spite of changes in the special conditions that surround us, these conditions are also arranged, settled, in relation to us” (lw.9.12-13)

Growth, then, is a quality of our consummatory experiences which is the product of having our habits organized in such a way as to fully embrace the method of experience.

Yet even if we suppose I have shown that growth is a quality associated with the ideal execution of the method of experience, is it an ethical ideal? That it is may be seen by further comparing what Dewey had to say about growth with what he had to say about human happiness. “True happiness,” Dewey argues, “issues from objects which are enjoyable in themselves but which also reinforce and enlarge the other desires and tendencies which are sources of happiness…Harmony and readiness to expand into a union with other values is the mark of happiness” (lw.7.198-9). Again, we see the parallel language between his description of the conditions of true happiness and growth. Since one of the tasks of moral theory is to “frame a theory of the true, as distinct from the specious, good” (lw.7.191), we can infer that this sense of happiness is a moral ideal. The unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends which we experience when a problematic situation is converted into a “more extensive balance” between our own energies and those of the surrounding environment, that is to say, when we grow, makes us truly happy. And that is something we ought to pursue.

How can it be true, though, that we ought to pursue true happiness and that we should
focus only on the problematic situation at hand? There are two senses in which we ought to pursue happiness, on Dewey’s view. The first is perfectly compatible with Pappas’ reading of Dewey. If we examine the quotes I have used to describe growth and happiness, not a single one of them mentions aiming for something external to the situation. Instead, growth and true happiness are the products of the intelligent, aesthetically sensitive, and cooperative inquiry into causes and consequences that are the mark of the method of experience.

However, as I have argued, growth is a quality of those experiences, not an automatic product of the use of the method. Integration of our habits is an achievement, intelligence a quality of some acts, which means that it needs to be constantly attended to, lest character devolve into routine, mechanical habituations (lw.4.196). What criteria or criterion should we use to determine whether or not our past valuations were adequate, whether or not we were sufficiently attentive to the needs of the situation? Growth is in one sense like imperfect procedural justice: In imperfect procedural justice, there is an independent standard for what justice requires, but we only have an imperfect method for pursuing it, for example in a jury trial (Rawls, 1971). If we could take a God’s eye view of the situation, we would know what the Good (or Goods—Dewey was a pluralist, but not a relativist) of the situation is (are), and be able to work to achieve it. However, as imperfect beings, we cannot know what is the Good of this specific situation, we can only attempt to approximate it by the best method we have.(1990, p. 46) The only measure we have of our success is our experience of the consummatory experience. And, while quantification in the sense of data-driven evaluations of past valuations is certainly more than the subject can demand, Dewey does not leave us without resources. His theory of valuation judgments tells us to reflect on how well things went—examine the actual, as opposed
to the proposed consequences, ask whether the actual consequences satisfied the needs of the situation as they were thought to, and whether realizing *those* values instead of others is something that one would *now*, in the presence of actual experimental data, reflectively endorse. And, we should do this from both our own perspective but also from the perspective of anyone who had a stake in the situation to begin with.

Thus, growth is a norm both of conduct and of life: We ought to pursue growth both in specifically problematic situations, but also through an on-going evaluation of how our lives are going. That we ought to do so is supported by current work in psychology, and in particular the work of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, who coined the term “flow” or “peak experience” to capture a kind of enjoyment he distinguishes from mere pleasure in much the same way Dewey distinguished pleasure from happiness. For Csikszentmihalyi, enjoyment is possible only when “attention is concentrated fully on the activity” (1996, pp. 111-113). There are nine characteristics that comprise the “phenomenology of enjoyment” (1990, p. 49):

1. There are clear goals every step of the way
2. We receive feedback as we are engaged in the activity
3. There is a balance between challenges and skills
4. Action and awareness are merged
5. Distractions are excluded from consciousness
6. There is no worry of failure
7. Self-consciousness disappears
8. The sense of time is distorted (stops, speeds up or slows down.
9. The activity becomes autotelic, an end-in-itself

In general, “[t]he combination of all these elements causes a sense of deep enjoyment that is so rewarding people feel that expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to be able to feel it” (2002, pp. 116-117). Most of these components of “peak experience” is to be found in some way in Dewey’s conception of the experience of growth. And, as Martin Seligman reports,
“on every measure of psychological well-being…the high-flow teenagers did better” than their low-flow peers. In addition, later study indicated that the high-flow kids made it to college, had deeper social ties, and lived more successfully (Foot, 2001). While we can certainly quibble about the specific elements Dewey and Csikszentmihalyi included in their respective descriptions, there can be little doubt that growth contributes to long-term well-being.

Does this make Dewey’s ethics teleological in the sense Pappas rejects? I think not, for, again, the aim of deliberation, choice, and action in general is the activity itself. The aim of activity is still the amelioration of the present problematic situation. No single end—other than growth itself—is raised above the others as the “sumnum bonum” or “ultimate value.” What my argument adds to Pappas’ account of Dewey’s ethics is the reason much of what Dewey says about growth occurs in the context of his educational and psychological writings: If we accept growth as an ideal quality of consummatory experience, then we ought to make growth an organizing factor in our pedagogical thinking: Educational experiences should be arranged that promote growth. Far from removing the concept of growth from Dewey’s ethics, the educational and psychological emphasis on growth comes precisely from its normative status.

Furthermore, we don’t aim directly at growth in our moral deliberations. Rather, we aim at it indirectly: it is the by-product of intelligent moral judgment. The quality of the consummatory experience comes not from the achievement of external ends, but from the ideal organization and functioning of our habits in transaction with a problematic situation. As Shakespeare wrote, “Things won are done; joy’s soul lies in the doing” (Troilus and Cressida, I.ii.287). In peak experience or growth, “action and awareness are merged.” Any thoughts about past or future are considered in the light of the need of the present moment.
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Where we do aim for growth is in our reflections on how well things have gone in the past, and how we would like them to go in the future. As Phillippa Foot argues, we need to

“set the evaluation of human action in the wider contexts not only of the evaluation of other features of human life but also of evaluative judgments of the characteristics and operations of other living things” (2001, p. 25).

In other words, we need to think about what it means to live a good life *qua* human beings, as well as how to resolve our moral quandaries. Dewey, as Pappas himself acknowledges, saw democracy as an ideal mode of associated living (mw.9.93). As I have shown, that it is so is not just because democratic virtues “are the prerequisites for the application of intelligence to inquiry” (Putnam, 1994 p. 175), but also because such a mode of associated living is a necessary condition of the growth of the individual.

Therefore, we ought to use our valuation judgments “in their distinctive sense” to review both specific valuations and the overall ‘flow’ of our lives. Here is where my reading of Dewey differs from Pappas’: Pappas wants to retain the “radical contextualism” of Dewey’s account of the method of experience, for fear of losing what is distinctive about Dewey’s views. I argue that Pappas’ account of the “moral life that promises to be the most meaningful and fruitful general form of engagement in experience” (2008 p. 166) is incomplete. If we want our lives to go well, we must not only work to maintain the intelligent interpenetration of our habits, but also to deepen and enrich our attention to the details of our moral experience, to work to make ourselves better. Dewey’s account of valuation judgments in their distinctive sense is a necessary concomitant of the method of experience. What we have learned, over history and through the development of modern psychology, is that growth is essential to both the method of experience and happiness. Growth normatively grounds the virtues and character strengths involved in the
method of experience by placing them in the broader context of a worthy life. In this sense, I see Dewey claiming that growth is an “Aristotelian Necessity” of human life, which Foot, following Anscombe, defines as “that which is necessary because and insofar as good hangs on it” (2001, p. 15). Foot specifically denies that Aristotelian necessities are absolute or overriding moral norms. In fact, she disclaims any such overriding principles in moral deliberation. What she does say is that without having them as central elements in our lives, our lives cannot go well. In Deweyan terms, while growth may not be THE end, it is most certainly AN end WORTH pursuing.
References


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