<u>Between Critical and Normative Theory: Predictive Political Theory as a Deweyan Realism</u>

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Abstract: Over the last decade, a call for greater "realism" in political theory has challenged the goals and methods which are implicit in much contemporary "normative" theory. However, realists have yet to produce a convincing alternative research program that is "constructive" rather than primarily "critical" in nature. I argue that given their common wariness of a devotion to abstract principles, realists should consider adopting John Dewey's vision of theoretical expertise as an expansive kind of prediction that engages all of our historical, scientific, and imaginative resources. After demonstrating that realists are in need of such an affirmative vision, I outline Dewey's original proposal, and elaborate its value in contemporary circumstances as a "predictive" method for political theory that stands between familiar critical and normative approaches.

Keywords: Realism, pragmatism, John Dewey, judgment, method

Introduction

This paper argues that the growing movement advocating greater "realism" in political theory should look to John Dewey as an ally, and his pragmatism as a rich source of methodological insight.[1] Though admittedly a diverse group, most who have been called "realists" in this context share an overlapping set of complaints about a prominent variety of contemporary analytic normative theory, centering on its impoverished relationship to real political life.[2] Despite yielding potent critiques of dominant theoretical methods, however, the realist movement has yet to produce a plausible alternative of its own. It is surprising, then, that few realists call upon Dewey's work,[3] which not only develops strikingly similar criticisms of overly abstract political philosophy, but also sketches a compelling alternative method – a "reconstructed philosophy" grounded explicitly in practical situations of judgment.

In what follows, I outline a "predictive" approach to political theorizing inspired by Dewey's sketch, which urges us to imagine the likely consequences of the concrete choices we face, rather than refining abstract concepts, principles, and ideals. While appreciating the real value of the analytic "normative" methods criticized by realists – and thereby avoiding the hyperbolic suggestion of certain realists that they are inherently useless or ideological – a Deweyan method can serve as an alternative for realists and others rightly frustrated with the *hegemony* of those methods. First, I defend the necessity of substantive, constructive political theory in addition to theory that is primarily "critical" in nature, yet validate realist complaints about the abstract "normative" approach to it which currently predominates. Next, I devote two sections to developing Dewey's approach with explicit reference to his work on judgment and philosophical method. Finally, I elaborate this approach in my own terms, and as a contemporary response to

realist concerns, by way of answering two instructive objections. The result is a predictive vision of political theory which stands between familiar traditions of critical and normative theory.

Varieties of political theory and the genesis of contemporary realism

As democratic citizens, we will always disagree with one another about the judgments we must make in political life. As "experts" in political judgment who are nonetheless committed to democracy, then, how ought political theorists and philosophers contribute to this disagreement? A number of responses are available, one of which is to theorize the proper *procedures* for resolving those disagreements rather than advocating any particular *substantive* resolution (Waldron 1999). All democrats agree that such procedures are important, of course, but as even most "proceduralists" will admit, no procedure is fully unbiased: to claim perfect neutrality is therefore simply to smuggle in one's own commitments. Moreover, it seems odd to require that people who spend their careers thinking about politics stand aside, on principle, from substantive political discourse. Few if any actual proceduralists, indeed, have accomplished such a feat.

Much contemporary political theory responds instead by contributing primarily in what might be called a "critical" mode. Rather than providing "recipes… for the cookshops of the future," as Marx famously mocked utopian socialists for doing, such scholars devote their attention to exposing the harms embedded in dominant norms, discourses, and institutions. Foucault (1978; 1977; 1988) provides both a spectacularly successful example of this approach – for instance, in his harrowing depictions of prisons, hospitals, and mental institutions – and a justification for it, through his genealogical critique of the "discourses" which produced these institutions, and which are typical of allegedly "neutral" academic scholarship. Some of his admirers have surmised that as long as we seek to devise constructive political philosophies,

theorists can function only as "dangerous social actors" (Hendrix 2012). As a result, we should adopt a different task: what Foucault (1980, 81) called the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges." The basic idea is to amplify the voices of the "subaltern," in Gayatri Spivak's (1988) words, rather than presuming to advocate on their behalf.

Even among those who accept the force of Foucault's critiques of particular norms, discourses, and institutions, however, many remain unsatisfied with this conclusion. Foucault "disconcerts," as Charles Taylor (1984) memorably put it, posing difficult problems without giving any hint as to how they might be resolved. Even if we accept that prisons, hospitals, and mental institutions are seriously problematic, for example, we still need *some* way of understanding and responding to the phenomena currently constructed as crime, sickness, and mental illness. The reckless "deinstitutionalization" of mental patients in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, achieved little more than the abandonment of vulnerable populations to homelessness and poverty (Torrey 1998). Though this was surely not Foucault's preferred "solution" to the problems he raised with mental hospitals as they existed, and it would be absurd to blame him for this outcome, it reminds us that Foucault did not propose any solutions of his own.

The problem with a purely critical theory is that it does not address the concrete dilemmas we face, where there are always tradeoffs, complexities, and conflicting ideals. Even with clear ideals in view, practical judgments are rarely easy to make; they are more difficult still when the ideals themselves are disputed. Consider the dilemma, for example, experienced by a vegetarian presented with meat by welcoming foreign hosts, who wishes to avoid imposing hegemonic Western values. More politically, consider the dilemmas faced by those seeking to empower poor women and their children through government assistance, without reinscribing the very

patriarchal gender roles and patterns of dependency they seek to undermine. Or, perhaps, the difficult choices about whether to intervene in sectarian conflicts abroad, given the experience of both spectacular false-negatives like Rwanda, and equally spectacular false-positives like Iraq. These moments of real, experienced conflict highlight the necessity of what I shall call "constructive" political theory, in addition to "critical" or procedural theory. Constructive theory speaks directly to the substantive judgments faced by democratic citizens, attempting to weigh various costs and benefits of possible actions.

In one prominent mode of constructive political theory, each of these practical dilemmas is conceived as a conflict between certain "mid-level" principles or discrete intuitions: vegetarianism vs. cultural humility; economic vs. social empowerment; self-determination vs. humanitarian concern. Interpreted in this way, such conflicts can be resolved only by appeal to a more fundamental principle or ideal, such as utilitarianism, contractualism, equality, or autonomy, which renders the conflicting concerns commensurable. By explaining the value of both vegetarianism and cultural humility in a single terminology, for instance, the meta-principle of utilitarianism allows us to understand *why* vegetarianism and cultural humility are normally good principles, and, even more importantly, to reach decisions in cases where they conflict, by referring to the more basic principle which grounds them both.[4] Finding a more adequate ideal of autonomy, similarly, might help resolve the conflict between economic and social empowerment of women.[5] Elaborating such meta-principles in this way enhances both the clarity of the mid-level principles and discrete intuitions we hold, and the consistency between them – a process often known as "reflective equilibrium."

Simply committing to a meta-principle such as utilitarianism, however, is not yet to resolve the problem we have encountered. Utilitarianism could pull either way in our vegetarian's

dilemma, for example, depending on which sorts of pleasures and pains count, and how much they count relative to one another. While utilitarianism is especially notorious for this sort of incalculability, no principle is immune to dilemmas of interpretation. Contractualism typically requires us to imagine what agents *would* decide in counterfactual circumstances, for instance, which is equally subject to dispute. Then one must choose between meta-principles, many of which may seem attractive. Democratic politics adds yet another layer of complexity, when those with very different principles try to respect each other while making decisions in common.

If we interpret practical dilemmas primarily as conflicts between competing principles, in other words, it does not take long to reach the highly abstract questions typical of contemporary analytic moral and political philosophy. In this sense, John Rawls was correct to observe that despite their apparent detachment, abstract philosophical debates do arise naturally from everyday political concerns. As such, one of the theorist's legitimate contributions to democratic judgment is to elaborate clear concepts and consistent general principles which citizens might adopt in resolving such dilemmas; and this, in short, is the task of much contemporary analytic political philosophy.

Henceforth, I refer to any theory with this general structure as a "normative" theory, and this choice warrants a brief clarification. The term "normative" is often used within the community of political theorists to refer to the sort of inquiry I am discussing – i.e., broadly analytic theory focused on consistent general principles, clear concepts, and abstract ideals – though this usage is admittedly both localized and colloquial, rendering an explanation necessary. In particular, it is important to clarify that this usage is in no way intended to imply that other forms of theory *lack* an ethical or what is sometimes called a "normative" dimension; on the contrary, all varieties of theory discussed in this essay (i.e., procedural, critical, and predictive) have a robust ethical

dimension. In this context, the label "normative" simply picks out a particular approach to evaluative theory, which proceeds by elucidating the explicit normative *criteria* to be applied in particular cases.

So conceived, then, normative theory is only one possible approach to evaluation, and as I understand it, the realist movement responds to its unjustified hegemony within the domain of constructive political theory. Though few would condemn a general aspiration for consistency or clarity, many realists share the sense that political theory and philosophy have sacrificed too much in their service. Some realists are concerned primarily with the allocation of intellectual resources among more and less "feasible" ideals, observing that relatively infeasible ideals often take priority because of their higher degree of abstraction from the factual constraints of the world – and thus their more general or "fundamental" normative character – but that more feasible ideals are actually more useful to political practice (Lawford-Smith 2013; Hamlin and Stemplowska 2012; Swift 2008). On this account, the solution is a proper division of labor between "ideal" theory as already practiced and "nonideal" theory, which applies these fundamental principles to real practical dilemmas. Others argue, by contrast, that the project of "ideal" theory itself is misconceived, and that the abstraction occasioned by demands for clarity and consistency can be actively harmful, leading to the exclusion of valuable perspectives or the elision of important "remainders" and "paradoxes" (Mills 2005; Honig 1993; Mouffe 2000).

There are real differences between these and other varieties of realism (Baderin 2014). However, we should be careful not to overstate them: nearly all realists challenge the emphasis of analytic normative theory on refining basic principles and abstract ideals, at least when it comes at the expense of other forms of inquiry. At the same time, this commonality also exposes a genuine problem that has yet to be adequately addressed: despite their shared objections to the

abstracting, idealizing, analytic normative approach, there is little agreement among contemporary realists about what sort of inquiry ought to be undertaken in its place. Some emphasize "proceduralist" solutions or retreat into a largely "critical" mode, but as I argued above, neither response is sufficient. Even William Galston (2010), in his seminal essay identifying and endorsing a coherent "realist" thread linking an otherwise heterogeneous group of theorists, acknowledges that the contribution of realism has so far been largely "critical and cautionary… as opposed to a coherent affirmative alternative" (408). Going forward, then, I take for granted some sympathy with realism, in order to focus more carefully on elaborating such an alternative. Though my discussion of the normative approach and its realist critics is clearly incomplete, I must bracket any lingering concerns in order to tackle the paper's central project: i.e., outlining a constructive approach to political theorizing which addresses realist concerns.

The problem may be stated succinctly. Realists need a "coherent affirmative alternative" to the tendency towards abstraction they criticize in analytic normative approaches. Once we start down the road of reconciling conflicting principles and intuitions with reference to more fundamental principles or more abstract ideals, however, it is difficult to see how this tendency can be resisted. Other modes of constructive theory can be found, I argue, only once we drop the assumption that practical dilemmas are best interpreted through the conflicting principles and intuitions they represent, which must then be resolved through abstraction. As it happens, this is precisely the move made by John Dewey in his analysis of human judgment, and pursuing Dewey's arguments in this regard yields an alternative mode of constructive political theory that should be compelling for those with realist sympathies. In what follows, then, I explore Dewey's work on judgment and its implications for philosophical method.

Dewey's theory of "situated judgment"

John Dewey's approach to valuation and judgment in ethics, aesthetics, and politics privileges situational intelligence and holistic experience over general principles.[6] He is a democrat, famously, because "the man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches" (LW 2, 364).[7] As theorists aiming to contribute collaboratively to democratic judgment, then, we should humbly avoid the temptations of "social system-making" and "programs of fixed ends." Such "wholesale creeds and all-inclusive ideals are impotent in the face of actual situations… doing always means the doing of something in particular" (LW 5, 120). We need to make valuations, Dewey notes, only when we encounter concrete problems that must be solved. The particularities of each situation, however, may not fit comfortably into the parameters of our existing concepts and principles. If we follow philosophical tradition and respond to this mismatch by continuing to refine our principles – engaging in something like a "reflective equilibrium," perhaps – we may find that we are forced to create ever narrower categories and ever finer distinctions to sustain their generality and consistency. "We continually reason," Dewey warns, "as if the difficulty were in the particular system that has failed and as if we were on the point of now finally hitting upon one that is true as all the others were false" – but, of course, "the real trouble is with the attitude of dependence upon any of them" (LW 5, 120). This is because, in short, the "hard and rigid character" of many moral principles "assumes a fixed world and a static individual, and neither of these things exists" (LW 5, 124).

First, the "fixed world." One of the major focal points of Dewey's work on social and political philosophy is the celebration of human freedom, which he interpreted not as radical free will but as a "power of varied and flexible growth, of change of disposition and character" (LW 3, 111). The result of this individuality is the vast complexity and unpredictability of human

social worlds, where "the indirect and unthought-of consequences are usually more important than the direct" (LW 2, 301). Despite his enthusiasm for experiment and the scientific method, he recognized that the social sciences could never be as precise as those which make use of controlled environments: "no one can foresee all consequences because no one can be aware of all the conditions that enter into their production" (LW 3, 105). Thus, a political or social proposal must be executed in practice, and its consequences observed, before we can truly judge its value. Given human creativity and reflexivity, we should *expect* genuinely new problems, possibilities, and values to arise in the course of social life.

This brings us to the "static individual." Dewey's vision of human nature and experience was heavily influenced by Darwin, from whom he adopted a sense of the continuity of mind and body; nature and culture (MW 3, 3-14). In Dewey's words, "The progress of biology has accustomed our minds to the notion that intelligence is not an outside power presiding supremely but statically over the desires and efforts of man [i.e. Reason], but is a method of adjustment of capacities and conditions within specific situations" (MW 4, 44). Natural selection produced our many interconnected intelligences through small, equilibrating adjustments to specific situations over long periods of time; not with the singular intention or foresight of a designer. Human intelligence is therefore not a systematic, determinate power of reason with singular intentions, but organic; networked; multiple – it is the "sum-total of impulses, habits, emotions, records, and discoveries which forecast what is desirable and undesirable in future possibilities..." (MW 10, 48). We should expect human faculties such as intention, judgment, and valuation to be overwhelmingly complex, interdependent, and continuous with one another. Because all of the different components of our experience coevolved in an "organic equilibrium," no clear divisions of labor between rational and nonrational faculties can be uncovered (EW 5, 101). Instead,

human experience confutes the dualities that Dewey sought constantly to overcome: reason and emotion; intellect and habit. Contemporary biology and psychology largely confirm Dewey's more speculative assessments (Clancey 1997, 92; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Gallagher 2009).

Judgment, for Dewey, is a delicately equilibrated organic faculty of evaluation that is only called for, as we have seen, when particular problems must be solved. It is "situated" in both a particular set of circumstances and a particular individual's complex set of intelligences. Thus, if we want to improve judgment, we have to think about what will best educate the judgment of *that* individual in *those* circumstances. In some cases, it may make sense to consult principles as "empirical generalizations from the ways in which previous judgments of conduct have practically worked out" (MW 14, 165). If it has been a useful heuristic in previous judgments to think about minimizing pain and maximizing pleasure, for instance, this utilitarian principle may be useful in the future as well. Similarly, if the restriction of speech typically yields undesirable consequences in the long run, even when it is seems necessary in the moment, it is probably advisable to place "free speech" in the category of inviolable "rights." Often, of course, principles arrived at in such a manner will be indeterminate, or worse, come into conflict. In these cases, we have a choice. Either we can continue to look for a principled resolution – further specifying the concepts involved and swelling the book of rules to be consulted in each particular judgment – or we can educate our judgment in a different way. Because we can assume neither a "fixed world" nor a "static individual," it is Dewey's wager that the temptation to go beyond the heuristic use of principles – to pursue "system-making" at all costs – is a dangerous one.

Foundational principles – "fixed ends," in Dewey's language – attempt to describe the structure of value in the universe. In order to do this, they must abstract from the world, picking out only those features of it that are important in making judgments and describing how these

values ought to be weighed against one another. Any such abstraction, however, is unlikely to be complete, final, or uncontestable. For Dewey, Matthew Festenstein (1997) writes, general principles "falsify the experience which they aim to describe through abstracting some element of that experience and identifying it with that experience as a whole" (25). Gregory Pappas (1998) elaborates further:

> Dewey's criticism of normative rule-oriented theories… is based on the fact that such theories do not really assist our moral practice. Ethical theory even becomes an obstacle to moral practice once it presumes to replace individual and contextual reflection with fixed rules and mechanical decision procedures. One of Dewey's great insights was that our moral lives are such that what is and is not important cannot be determined beforehand, and that theoretical rules most often function as little more than blinders. (104)

The elimination of nuance and plurality inherent in the project of providing ever-more-general principles inevitably eliminates some relevant factors, all of which cannot possibly be foreseen and accounted for in advance. Seeking to resolve disagreements or reach judgments by means of this abstraction relies only on a few of our many interconnected intelligences, and is likely to ignore both the particularities of our circumstances and the wisdom of our intuitions.[8] We may still reflect on the criteria to be used, of course, but to treat them as the only subject of philosophical interest is simply to stifle our own creative, problem-oriented faculty of judgment.

Experimentalism, prediction, and the stages of judgment

As Dewey saw it, the primary innovation of the scientific revolution was to leave behind an approach to the natural world whose primary concern was logical consistency, and whose

method was therefore speculative. Its replacement was an approach whose primary concern was successful prediction and intervention, and whose method was therefore problem-oriented and experimental (LW 15, 81-89; LW 4, 72-74; LW 5, 178). If the fundamental laws of the universe are unchanging, as we suspect, then consistency will be important in the end. But the experimentalists of the Royal Society, on whose model modern science was created, rightly argued that this obsessive practical focus on analytic consistency – which was responsible for the caricature of pre-modern science as proliferating epicycles upon epicycles in order to preserve the Earth as the center of the universe – was crippling our ability to make useful interventions in the world.

Dewey argued that political theory and philosophy should undergo a parallel transformation, prioritizing particular "questions and inquiries" over "social system-making and programs of fixed ends," and seeking "solutions in the terms of concrete problems as they arise" (LW 5, 120). The most explicit consequence of this was his "experimentalist" vision of political life. Elizabeth Anderson (2014) points out that Dewey's conception of judgment necessitates trying our ideas in practice, rather than relying on moral argumentation.

> Pragmatist moral epistemology also rejects philosophy's a priori, dialectical methods for determining the good and the right. One cannot prove that something is valuable by mere argument. Arguments, at best, make certain value judgments plausible as hypotheses — and even then, only if grounded in experience and reflection on the wider consequences of acting on them. Ultimately, the hypotheses must be tested, by seeing how one values the actual results of putting them into practice.

The first recommendation of a Deweyan pragmatist, then, will be to encourage frequent experimentation – a suggestion taken seriously by the explicitly Deweyan "democratic experimentalism" which has recently gained prominence in legal scholarship and public policy (Dorf and Sabel 1998). Laudable as such efforts are, however, the practical barriers to frequent political experimentation are severe. Given the path-dependence of institutions and our limited capacity to make effective interventions, not to mention our brief time on the earth, we will never be able to undertake even a fraction of all possible experiments in social life. Moreover, Dewey does not simply recommend experimentation for experimentation's sake; it must be guided intelligently. We need not "experiment" with slavery or genocide any further.

Dewey, of course, was a devoted democrat: since all who experience a social form have an important perspective on its value, he argued, the evaluation of any experiment must be fundamentally democratic, and democratic societies ever vigilant against the exclusion, suppression, or discounting of certain participants. Due to the practical and moral limitations on experimentation, however, even a fully democratic culture would not obviate the need for constructive political theory and philosophy – contributions by experts, in other words, to political judgment. Instead, he argued, philosophy would have to be "reconstructed" or "recovered" in order to be useful to democratic citizens. Contrasting it to a focus on such inert problems as "the relation of the concept of authority to that of freedom," Dewey writes that we should undertake "inquiry into the consequences of some particular distribution, under given conditions, of specific freedoms and authorities… [and] inquiry into what altered distribution would yield more desirable consequences" (LW 2, 356). The purpose of a reconstructed philosophy is thus the "creation of methods such that experimentation may go on less blindly..." (LW 2, 256-257). Its activity should be "developing and testing the ideas that, as working

hypotheses, may be used to diminish the causes of evil and to buttress and expand the sources of good" (MW 4, 45). Given that we cannot undertake all of the experiments we would like to undertake, political theorists and philosophers can aid democratic judgment by making and refining predictions about what *would* happen if we did. Democratic citizens can then engage these predictions – the more fully elaborated, the better – with their richly textured faculties of judgment, approximating holistic experience rather than adopting the "blinders" of fixed ideals or principles. At its best, this sort of theory will help citizens to decide which experiments to try.

With the aid of Dewey's framework, then, we can think of political judgments very loosely as having three "stages." First, there is the perception of problems, which determines the frame of action within which we make judgments; i.e., it determines which judgments we feel compelled to make in the first place. Second, there is the imagination of possible responses, or the options we perceive ourselves to have in those circumstances; and third, there is the evaluation of those possible responses. Given this schematic outline, then, we might imagine that the "critical" approach to political theory outlined in the first section is directed primarily at the first stage of judgment, pressing citizens to feel the force of new or underappreciated problems, though it can also contribute implicitly to the third stage, casting doubt upon the value of certain proposals. The analytic "normative" approach dedicated to elaborating concepts and principles, then, is focused explicitly on the third stage, though it may implicitly push us to perceive new problems as well. In this way, critical and normative theory complement one another; each valuable in its own way to democratic judgment. Largely neglected by both, however, is the second stage of judgment – the imagination of possible responses – which is assumed to be the domain of politics and policy; better fit, depending on one's perspective, for expert economists

or social activists. A Deweyan approach, by contrast, rejects this assumption, holding that political theorists have a role to play as well in our *practical* political imagination.

Of course, Dewey would not have thought of himself primarily as a "political theorist." With disciplinary boundaries in flux throughout his lifetime, in fact, this category was not clearly separable from that of the philosopher or the social scientist. Dewey was both and then some: in addition to his political and ethical writings, he is known for foundational work in fields as diverse as epistemology, psychology, and education policy. Thus, in making the claim that a Deweyan approach recommends a particular role for political theorists, I do not mean to suggest that Dewey had identified a pre-existing group of people within a well-defined discipline, whose energies he sought to re-direct. Rather, Dewey argued for the development of a particular kind of expertise – i.e., helping citizens to decide which experiments are worth trying – which would be worthwhile regardless of who developed it.

Contemporary realists, on the other hand, *are* speaking directly to a pre-existing group of people: the broad community of political theorists working mostly within the relevant subfields of academic political science and philosophy. They seek to re-direct the energies of this community away from what they see as its excessive focus on further refinement of abstract normative principles. Nevertheless, a clear alternative to this form of abstraction has yet to emerge from the realist community. The proposal of this paper, then, is that Dewey's "reconstructed philosophy" might fill this role. The disciplinary community of "realist" political theorists who are unsatisfied with critical and abstract normative approaches, I argue, ought to adopt a Deweyan "predictive" method of inquiry, creating a research program around the middle stage of judgment rather than focusing primarily on its first and third stages. In what remains, then, I will elaborate this proposal by way of addressing two objections: first, that while it may

be valuable, the task of prediction is not the right match for political theorists; and second, more specifically, that it is not an answer to the particular concerns of *realists*.

Political theory as (imaginative) prediction; pragmatism as (methodological) realism

We could admit, first of all, that resolving disagreement about predicted consequences is useful, and nonetheless maintain that this is simply not the domain of political theory and philosophy. Those who are understandably weary of efforts to scientize the humanities might object that this sort of "pragmatism," though perhaps on the wane in Philosophy departments in the mid-20th century, began to dominate Political Science with the "behavioral revolution," and that "predictive" political theory is simply another name for social science as it developed after Dewey's death. This objection, however nobly motivated, is misplaced: in short, it is exactly because we are *not* scientists in any strict sense that making these kinds of predictions *is* our job. The world is not so courteous as to present us only with a limited number of well-defined variables with limited interactions, as we noted above, nor unlimited time to experiment with different forms of social life. In order to aid important political judgments, we need to envision the consequences of large-scale changes to material circumstances, social norms, political institutions, and cultural narratives; tasks ill suited, in other words, to the precise tools of science. The role of political theorists, on this conception, is not to do primary research on the effects of particular empirical interventions, but to synthesize the best work from a number of diverse fields, including but not limited to the social sciences, making larger-scale predictions about the consequences of actions and interventions that cannot be tested scientifically. To call this inherently more speculative practice "prediction," of course, is to stretch the normal scientific meaning of the word, as Dewey acknowledged. It is worth adopting his somewhat provocative

usage, however, in order to emphasize the *continuity* between these practices, which is too often ignored by those on both sides of the ill-conceived descriptive-prescriptive divide. Using a common language of prediction highlights the ways in which these modes of inquiry ought to discipline and learn from one another.

In response, then, it might be argued that social scientists, who can evaluate the relevant empirical studies with greater precision and reliability, are still better positioned than political theorists to "discipline" the more expansive and imaginative form of prediction envisioned by Dewey.[9] By contrast, it could be added, the sorts of expertise developed by political theorists are not particularly relevant to the needs of large-scale prediction. The objection is instructive, and several answers to it are necessary. First, we must admit that it contains some truth. At present, many political theorists lack the tools necessary to properly interpret and synthesize the relevant findings of other fields. Thus, adopting a Deweyan method of inquiry is not entirely inert: at least some of us should change what we are doing and learn the tools we need to best undertake this kind of large-scale, synthetic prediction.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to think that political theorists *are* the right disciplinary community for the job. Consider first our somewhat idiosyncratic devotion to the study of canonical figures in the history of political thought, many of whom – from Aristotle to Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx, and of course Dewey himself – were not only or even primarily political philosophers. As thinkers of a realist bent are fond of reminding us, political theorists have always drawn from and even contributed to the study of history, psychology, economics, and whatever else was available to them, often because they have hoped to make exactly the sort of large-scale predictions Dewey recommends. In advocating an approach to political philosophy grounded in "social theories of power" rather than first principles, for example, Jacob Levy

(2015) observes in a realist spirit that if such a social-theoretic approach is "sometimes absent from contemporary normative theory… that is one reason for looking to the history of political thought, where a greater methodological richness can be found" (4). Political theorists' training in the history of political thought therefore has two important implications: first, that we are already accustomed to grappling with this kind of imaginative prediction; and second, that adopting a similarly "interdisciplinary" approach in our own constructive work does not change the fundamental character of the discipline.

Of course, one might think that with the increasing sophistication in our methods of knowledge production since the age of Aristotle or even of Dewey, there is a good reason we now typically sort ourselves into disciplines. In a sense, this is undeniably true: one cannot hope to be at the *forefront* of so many fields at once, in the way that some of these classical figures could. Even now, however, it is not impossible to ground one's theoretical perspective in a broad, interdisciplinary understanding of human beings and human societies. Indeed, we might say something even stronger: to be at the forefront of political theory often *requires* some sort of interdisciplinary synthesis.[10] Consider the work, for example, of thinkers as diverse as Elizabeth Anderson, Anthony Appiah, William Connolly, Jon Elster, Sharon Krause, Helene Landemore, Martha Nussbaum, James Scott, Ian Shapiro, and Cass Sunstein, each of whom treats traditional texts alongside work in the social and cognitive sciences. Of course, it is not just quantitative and explicitly experimental knowledge that deserves inclusion – the humanities and interpretive social sciences are also essential to the integrative understanding envisioned here. Since political theorists are more accustomed to using such resources, it does not merit as much attention here, but it does count as yet another reason that it is political theorists and not social scientists trained

explicitly in quantitative methods who are the most natural fit for the sort of prediction I have in mind, which is not simply a kind of statistical meta-analysis.

Perhaps most importantly, in fact, the very critical and normative methods which a predictive approach seeks to transcend are nonetheless crucial background for its pursuit. Though critical theorists are led astray when they refuse to make any consciously constructive contributions to democratic judgment, for example, Foucault and others are right to challenge the normalizing effects of academic discourses, and the authority with which we presume to perpetuate them. Thus, it is only with an acute sensitivity to these dangers that we ought to proceed in predictive inquiry. Similarly, though analytic normative theorists have a problematic tendency to proliferate abstract discussion of principles at the expense of concrete inquiry into the particular situations of judgment we face, these principles often serve as excellent heuristics, pointing our attention in particularly fruitful directions when examining those concrete circumstances. It is at least partly through engagement with critical and normative theory, in other words, that we become attuned to a genuine diversity of perspectives, the moral patterns which permeate social life, and the relentlessly subtle ways in which power structures our experience. This traditional sort of "expertise" is as relevant as ever to political theory in a broadly predictive mode.

Despite its scientific inspiration and the language of hypothesis testing, therefore, we should not mistake Dewey's project for a naïve scientism; an attempt to make political theory more "objective" or "rational." As we saw above, his reading of Darwin leads him to *question* the possibility of a singular rationality. In his interpretations of Dewey, Richard Rorty (1982; 1989) has emphasized the role of narrative and artistic imagining, which for Dewey is indeed a necessary part of the process of social intelligence: "The first intimations of wide and large redirections of desire and purpose are of necessity imaginative. Art is a *mode of prediction* not

found in charts and statistics, and it insinuates possibilities of human relations not to be found in rule and precept, admonition and administration" (LW 10, 352, emphasis added). Rorty imagines that this justifies a surrender of philosophy to poetry – that is, a surrender of logic to narrative (1989, 26). Dewey recognized, however, that we can also go beyond these first intimations about new forms of life, projecting our more systematic social and historical inquiry into the future. For Dewey, art and statistics are both moments of a continuous practice of predictive inquiry, each with irreplaceable contributions to make.

What a Deweyan perspective recommends, specifically, is leveraging an integrated, interdisciplinary understanding of human societies to think through the predicted effects of potential "interventions" on larger scales than is possible to predict scientifically. We might do our best, for example, to imagine all of the various consequences of large-scale racial integration, as Elizabeth Anderson (2010) does in *The Imperative of Integration.* Anderson, a pragmatist explicitly inspired by Dewey, adopts of a wide array of disciplinary lenses to make a synthetic argument that is irreducible to any of them, demonstrating predictive political theory at its best. Others have applied similar methods in evaluating competing regimes for maintaining civic "virtue" (McTernan 2014), achieving deliberative conversions (Bagg 2015), enabling second-order social reflexivity (Aligica 2014; Bell 2015; Knight and Johnson 2011), and weakening the effect of money in politics (Lessig 2011). We can imagine similarly wide-ranging predictive approaches to proposed interventions like instituting reparations for slavery, changing our understandings of marriage, abolishing prisons, enforcing strict norms of gender equality, opening borders, undermining norms of individual responsibility, or imposing global redistributive taxes on capital. These proposals vary in feasibility, for judgments about which long-term ideals to promote in the broader public sphere are just as real, situated, and pressing,

as judgments about which policies to support in the short term. In fact, since legal theorists and scholars of public policy do occasionally engage in predictive inquiry regarding proposed adjustments to legal and institutional regimes, it is with regard to long-term ideals – and, crucially, all manner of extra-legal norms, discourses, and narratives – that political theorists may have the most to contribute.

This brings us, then, to our second major objection: that however valuable it may be for political theorists to do, this task does not respond in any obvious way to realist demands. Again, we must admit from the start that there is some truth to this objection, especially if we assume that contemporary realism is closely tied to classical realists such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes. One familiar doctrine that might be associated with "realism," for instance, is that because humans are inherently selfish, they could never attain the levels of social cooperation necessary for socialist, communist, or even liberal internationalist goals. Though this particular claim is not widely-held among contemporary realists, several do exhibit a fear of "utopian" speculation in general, recommending instead an emphasis on basic security from violence and cruelty.[11] From this perspective, speculation about open borders and prison abolition must appear quite fantastical. To those who support such radical goals, meanwhile, "realism" might seem an odd label for Dewey's progressive experimentalism.

Nevertheless, we can defend a Deweyan predictive approach as a variety of realism in two ways: first, by distinguishing between "substantive" and "methodological" realism; and second, by emphasizing again the significance of extra-legal norms. It must be admitted that a certain element of the broader realist tradition is pessimistic about the possibilities of cooperation and skeptical of utopian speculation – an attitude we may call "substantive" realism. Nonetheless, this is only one part of realist tradition, and it is one that contemporary realists have de-

emphasized. In his pivotal "manifesto" for the realist movement, for example, William Galston (2010) summarizes its four basic components: "the injunction to take politics seriously as a particular field of human endeavor; the proposition that civil order is the sine qua non for every other political good; the emphasis on the evaluation and comparison of institutions and regime-types, not only principles; and the call for a more complex moral and political psychology" (408). Of these four, only the second – an emphasis on civil order – plausibly implies a pessimistic "substantive" account of human possibility, and even this allows for more ambitious political schemes once the demand for order has been satisfied.

The other three components, by contrast, are conducive to a wide variety of social and political projects. Largely eschewing the blanket pessimism of their classical forebears, contemporary realists are more likely to endorse what might be called "methodological" realism – i.e., a commitment to political theory that is comparative, contextual, psychologically rich, institutionally innovative, and grounded in specific situations of political judgment. These commitments, then, are plainly aligned with the Deweyan approach elaborated here, which gives the lie to any necessary connection between a realist *methodology* and a pessimistic, conservative, or quietist conception of the *substantive* goals to which we may aspire. *Pace* those partisans of abstraction who cry "utopophobia" at any mention of particularity or constraint in political philosophy (Estlund 2014), we need not abandon methodological realism just because we reject the conservatism of certain classical realists. Indeed, we may productively advocate for quite radical institutional proposals, such as prison abolition or open borders – just so long as we do so responsibly, acknowledging the work that must be done to render those proposals feasible.

As this caveat makes clear, a predictive approach does recommend a certain degree of caution. A Deweyan realist will maintain that such apparently infeasible ideals as prison

abolition and open borders may be useful in certain situations of judgment, as when expressing long-term goals for society. However, she will also readily admit that they will not typically be called for in everyday political situations requiring collective action, which are highly constrained by the dispositions of others. In such circumstances, radical action can easily turn out to be counterproductive, and as noted above, the point is definitively *not* to engage in reckless experimentation for experimentation's sake. Rather, it is the express purpose of predictive political theory to consider *which* experiments are worth trying, and under what circumstances; precisely to avoid, in other words, the sort of rash, irresponsible "experiments" that have brought us everything from Stalin's gulag and Mao's famine to US misadventures in Latin America and the Middle East. Far from tempering our enthusiasm for the predictive enterprise, such examples reinforce its vital necessity. Methodological realism can help us to distinguish when substantive realism is appropriate, and when it may be relaxed.

For this reason as well, then, social norms are a particularly important arena for Deweyan experimentation and prediction. In contrast to larger-scale institutional interventions, norms – however radical – may be implemented piecemeal, without the cooperation or endorsement of large groups. To support a norm is already to begin to implement it, and thus, the connection to political practice is much tighter for predictive political theory which concerns changes in social norms than it is for theory which concerns large-scale institutional interventions. If we predict positive outcomes for radical changes in norms – regarding gender equality, for example, or individual responsibility, or the meaning of marriage, or the deliberative standards to enforce in public forums – we can begin to experiment with such proposals far more quickly than we can with equally radical institutional proposals whose success requires a great deal of coordination. At the same time, such experimentation is less volatile: while its long-term effects may be

profound, they will accrue incrementally and are more easily reversed. Though the evaluation of utopian institutional proposals is undoubtedly important to predictive political theory, therefore – while more marginal institutional innovation will likely continue to be the purview of law and policy – discussion of norms, discourses, and narratives forms the centerpiece of the Deweyan predictive approach. It is also this *social* experimentation that will be most congenial to those realists harboring reasonable suspicion of rapid institutional change.

Conclusion

One of the tough questions facing any democratic political theorist is why s/he should be supposed to have any special expertise. To be a democrat is to reject the Platonic suggestion that because we trust cobblers with making our shoes and navigators with guiding our ships, we should trust experts with our political life as well. So then what is the character of our expertise, and what is its relationship to the judgment of democratic citizens? Dewey's answer is contained in the second half of his famous aphorism about democracy, the first half of which is quoted above: "The man who wears the shoe know best that it pinches and where it pinches," he writes, "even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied" (LW 2, 364). Political theorists will never be able to know all of the ways in which the shoe pinches, so to speak, and the making will always be a collaborative, democratic project, but if they develop their expertise in the right way, they may indeed come to design better shoes. The predictive method elaborated in this paper, inspired by Dewey's vision of a "reconstructed philosophy," begins to imagine what, precisely, this might mean.

This method, I have argued, is particularly well-suited to address the concerns of contemporary "realists," who take seriously the relationship between political theorists and real

political life in democratic societies. While realists have launched convincing critiques of a particularly prominent variety of analytic normative theory, and especially its emphasis on abstract principles, they have yet to produce an affirmative, constructive alternative for theorizing politics. In the first section, I demonstrated that such a constructive method is necessary, and argued that analytic normative theory was a legitimate variety of it. I also showed, however, that realists have legitimate concerns about the dominance of this normative approach within political theory. In the sections which followed, I presented the outlines of an alternative as I found it within Dewey's theory of judgment and philosophical method. This alternative highlights the "predictive" tasks characteristic of the middle stage of judgment, thereby carving out space between "critical" theory focused primarily on the initial perception of problems, and "normative" theory focused primarily on the ultimate criteria for evaluation. Finally, I clarified its practical implications for political theorists, providing contemporary examples of constructive political theory in a predictive mode, and defending it specifically as a variety of realism.

1 In William Galston's (2010) classic analysis and defense of "realism" as a distinct trend within contemporary political theory, the term is meant to encompass a large and diverse group of theorists ranging from Bernard Williams (2005) and Raymond Geuss (2008) to Bonnie Honig (1993), Jeremy Waldron (1999), Colin Farelly (2007), and David Miller (2013).

2 Galston cites realists' common target as the "moralism, legalism, and parochialism of American liberal theory," especially as "exemplified by John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin," which is "utopian in the wrong way" and "represents a desire to evade, displace, or escape from politics" (385-386).

3 Dewey's political philosophy is enjoying renewed interest, though with a few exceptions (Anderson 2010, 3–7; Knight and Johnson 2011, 1–5,14–16; Koopman 2009, 172–179) is rarely linked with realist themes.

4 This argument is laid out most explicitly by Gerry Cohen (2003). Though Cohen presents his position as a minority view, realists claim that it implicitly informs many "analytic" approaches to political philosophy (Galston 2010, 405–6).

5 In broad strokes, this is the task undertaken by a number of creative projects in feminist-inspired political theory (Hirschmann 2003; Nedelsky 2011; Krause 2015).

6 In this, at least, Dewey was not unique. Many who have theorized judgment – from Aristotle to Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt – have done so in order to question the sufficiency of general principles (Thiele 2006; Garsten 2006).

7 All citations to Dewey refer to the Southern Illinois University Press edition of his collected works, edited by Jo Ann Boydston. They follow the standard format, where EW refers to *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898, 5 vols.* (Dewey 1969-1972); MW refers to *The Middle*

Works of John Dewey, 1899 - 1924, 15 vols. (Dewey 1976-1983), and LW refers to *The Later*

Works of John Dewey, 1925 - 1953. 17 vols. (Dewey 1981-1990). The first number after this

designation indicates the volume, and the second number indicates the page.

[8] Some have understandably doubted the "wisdom" of the intuitions. Though this is not the place

to develop a sustained argument, see Railton (2014) for an excellent review of the controversy,

and a limited defense of intuition which I take to be Deweyan in spirit.

[9] I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this point.

[10] Along these lines, and also drawing on Dewey, Philip Kitcher (2012, xv) recommends

"synthetic" as opposed to "analytic" philosophy, which develops expertise in the synthesis of

knowledge for human ends, rather than the analysis of concepts.

[11] See Williams' (2005) "basic legitimation demand," which is inspired by the work of Judith

Shklar (1984; 1989).

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