

Inquiry and Virtue: A Pragmatist-Liberal Argument for Civic Education

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Liberal democracy and virtue have an uncomfortable relationship. The republican tradition ranging from the ancient world through the Atlantic tradition of the Founding Fathers, to present-day communitarians, argues that democracy relies uniquely on the virtue of its citizens. They hold that republics are not defeated from without, but corrupted from within. There is a dire need for a shared conception of the good life. Only then are citizens willing to act together and to make the sacrifices necessary for the common weal. Liberals, however, argue that a shared conception of the good life can be bought only at the price of freedom. Within a nation-state of our size and possessing our level of freedom, differing images of the good life are inevitable and worth respecting. Therefore, the state should not craft souls, but provide the conditions for all to flourish according to their own desired ends.

Liberals are not tolerant of all forms of life. Moral doctrines, communities, and traditions that do not accept liberal values of tolerance, respect, liberty, equality, and free inquiry do not have a place in the liberal public sphere (although anti-liberal beliefs may be retained in one's private life). However, liberals are in a uniquely difficult position because, while they may possess deeply held commitments regarding the need for openness, courage, or respect in a good life, part of that life includes not imposing their image of a good life on others. Liberals must find reasons for coercing fellow citizens that do not require a prior "conversion" to liberalism. They must find impartial reasons for their partiality. More sardonically, Robert Frost defined a liberal as someone "too broadminded to take his own side in a quarrel."

The contest between liberalism and virtue is particularly heated in the area of public education. Because public education is coerced, both by requiring attendance by the young and by taxation of adults, it is a test case for liberalism. Seemingly, public schools must refrain from imposing an image of human excellence on children of disparate faiths and traditions since the state sanctions those who do not comply. Take the example of California's recent mandate that the historical contribution of homosexuals be included in the curriculum. As a liberal, it is possible to believe not only that toleration and respect of homosexual citizens are inherently good and necessary for the health of our democracy, but also that imposing these virtues through a coercive system of education is intolerant and disrespectful since it violates the right of illiberal parents to raise their children

as they see fit. The difficulty is that civic education—that is, education for good citizenship, including the cultivation of certain virtues—is both necessary if liberal democracy is to continue and hard to justify on liberal terms.

I argue that recent political philosophy rooted in the tradition of American philosophical pragmatism offers a way to reconcile the liberal image of a good life with the pluralism of modern, liberal democracies.¹ Pragmatism has clear historical links to the rise of progressive education and political liberalism. In particular, John Dewey is a pivotal figure in both. Widely known as the father of progressive education—although he chafed at the label—Dewey was also a key figure in interwar American politics. One biographer goes so far as to name his work *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (Ryan 1995). A great deal of excellent work has been written on Dewey's philosophy of education (e.g., Garrison 2010). With apologies to those authors, I will intentionally avoid a discussion of pragmatist philosophy of education. Rather, in this article, I discuss the *political* problem of how we might justify education for civic virtue in public schools while avoiding the problem of liberal pluralism.

I present two types of argument for liberal-democratic virtues, both of which are grounded in the pragmatist thought of Charles Peirce and John Dewey. The first type relies on their substantive teleological accounts of truth and moral flourishing. The second type, however, is based on their account of the general conditions of inquiry and not on any substantive ontology or moral ideal. I argue that, under conditions of liberal pluralism, the latter is more practically viable and morally justifiable. I conclude by applying the general argument for liberal-democratic virtue to the case of civic education and by addressing some objections. The argument from a pragmatist account of inquiry shows the legitimacy of coerced civic education while giving due respect to the plurality of moral traditions among those being coerced.

1. Teleological Pragmatist Accounts of Virtue

This section sets out one nonexclusive account of the relationship between pragmatism and virtue. Here, the emphasis is on how liberal-democratic virtues may be rooted in substantive pragmatist metaphysical and moral commitments. For now, I will present only thick metaphysical versions of Dewey's and Peirce's pragmatism, and how liberal-democratic virtues arise from them.² This section is intentionally partial and does not claim to describe the sole or primary means for a pragmatist to justify liberal virtues. As will be discussed in the next section, the pluralism of the modern nation-state makes the following substantive approach problematic.

Before proceeding, however, I must clarify what is meant by "liberal-democratic virtues." Virtue generally means those qualities of character deserving of praise, exhibiting excellence, or conducive to a good life. Virtues include piety, magnanimity, and prudence, among many more. By "liberal-democratic"

I mean the subset of those virtues central to the maintenance and justice of a liberal-democratic society. Democracy requires, for example, that citizens exhibit concern for the whole and moderate their selfish desires, while also courageously defending their beliefs in the public arena. Liberal-democratic societies particularly emphasize toleration and mutual respect. If we are to protect basic rights and liberties, including rights to privacy, practice of religion, and free expression, then toleration of competing images of a good life is essential. Ironically, if we are to have a liberal society that refrains from imposing a singular image of the Good on its citizens, those citizens must have a set of liberal-democratic virtues conducive to that end. In what follows, I attempt a justification of civic education in a cluster of those virtues—openness, a willingness to experiment, courage, perseverance, sociality, inclusiveness, moderation, self-reflection, and toleration.³

1.1 Dewey: *Virtue as Attentiveness to Experience*

“Experience,” as William James noted, is a double-barreled word. It includes the passive and active, the experienced and the experiencer. Based in an openly Darwinian model, Dewey presents experience as the nexus of meaning where an organism makes contact with, manipulates, and is acted upon by its natural and social environment. This transaction is disrupted when previously fit habits no longer result in a fruitful relation with the organism’s environment. Dewey describes this as a “problematic situation” and calls for its “reconstruction.” If the organism is to survive, it must develop new habits, and, in more developed species, habits of reflection. The latter are second-order habits that allow the organism to take the formation of primary habits as an active concern.

We may then draw certain broad conclusions about experience in general. Experience has an irreducibly temporal dimension. Recalling Peirce’s notion of *tychism*, Dewey argues that time matters, and that novelty and chance are real. The next moment is not strictly determined. We find that it has phases that are, to borrow from a chapter heading in *Experience and Nature*, precarious and stable. At times, our transactions sustain us and provide nutrition. At others, we starve. Our relationships with others sometimes provide the conditions for flourishing, or they may stunt further growth.

Perhaps the most sustained account of Deweyan democratic virtue is provided by Gregory Pappas in his *John Dewey’s Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (Pappas 2008, especially chapter 11; see also Teehan 1995; Pappas 1996; Rice 1996; Olson 2007). Pappas reveals how a compelling theory of virtue develops out of Dewey’s concept of experience. Virtues of open-mindedness, sensitivity, conscientiousness, and courage are all qualities of character that suit a world that is both precarious and stable.

A character that is not open to future experience is unprepared to deal with, or learn from, novel situations. Open-mindedness and sensitivity are virtues because they show “hospitality to the new,” the ability to learn from experience, and a “willingness to let experiences accumulate and sink in and ripen” (Dewey

1887–1952/MW 9: 183).⁴ And to hear what experience has to teach, we must have a refined sensitivity. A blunt or dogmatic approach to the world closes one off from the situation at hand in all of its complexity and richness. The conscientious person then attends to the implications of his/her acts and seeks the greater significance of what he/she experiences.⁵ But to counter the instability of life, a person must develop virtues of persistence and courage. Sheer vulnerability to the new is not enough to sustain a fulfilling relation to an environment. There is also the need to press on when experience does not satisfy. Courage without openness produces dogmatism, while openness without courage dissolves the self. Both results are failures of transaction (Pappas 2008, chapter 11; Dewey 1887–1952/LW 7: chapter 14–5).

An implication of the novelty and precariousness of experience is that morality is not a matter of identifying fixed moral ends, principles, or virtues. Each of these is derived from the needs, relations, and tensions of the situation at hand. Moral reflection arises when the fund of valued goods or social duties no longer harmonize under novel conditions. This morally problematic situation must then be reconstructed. Through inquiry, we determine which goods and duties should have priority at this time, which need to be set aside and which must be invented. Moral is not a matter of identifying and applying the transcendent Good, but of constructing the good so that human practice may proceed in a fruitful manner.

Virtues are those qualities of character that allow experience to grow in “ordered richness.”⁶ Scattered through his many works, Dewey catalogues a substantial table of such virtues, including honesty, courage, kindness (MW 14: 35–6 and MW 9: 357), open-mindedness (LW 8: 136; MW 9: 49, 183, 366), curiosity and respectfulness (MW 14: 136), sympathy, sensitivity, persistence (MW 12: 179–80), imagination (MW 5: 351–61, LW 7: 255–60), and finally the cardinal virtues of justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom (MW 5: 364–79). As Pappas writes of openness and courage, but is true of the virtues in general,

[f]or pragmatism they are virtues because (1) they are part of the concrete set of habits which make possible the amelioration of experience through its own means (what I will call the “pragmatist faith”), (2) they are dispositions of the kind of character and community that is faithful to experience, and (3) a checking-complementary relation of these dispositions in a character is the only way to avoid extremes that pragmatism considers undesirable. (Pappas 1996, 323)

Or, as stated by another author, “[t]hese are virtues required by any moral agent (understood transactionally) attempting to maintain the integrity of their moral image in an uncertain and changing world” (Teehan 1995, 856). Ultimately, Dewey defined education as “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of the experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (MW 9: 82). Education is the growth of experience. Democratic virtues are those that are required for personal growth in a constantly changing environment.⁷

1.2 Peirce: Virtue as Concrete Reasonableness

Charles Peirce provided a similarly thick account. Despite some noble attempts to correct the disparity, Peirce's normative theory still receives little attention compared with the effort spent to plumb the depths of his semiotics and logic.⁸ Although this brief discussion will not eliminate that gap, I hope to sketch out Peirce's own account of what we might call a "virtue ethics," although Peirce did not believe himself to be doing anything of the sort. I argue here that Peirce's model of Reality as increasingly self-controlled and self-reflective, and as oriented toward an ultimate good, undergirds his account of virtue.

Ironically, Peirce did not believe that scientific inquiry had much to offer ethics. He believed that ethical behavior was largely the result of instinct and tradition. It is a matter of habit or convention, and virtue does not depend on rational reflection (Peirce 1931–1958/1.623).⁹ Further, in matters of vital importance such as morality and religion, we have neither the time nor inclination to apply science (1.636–7). Belief is a commitment, an urge to act in the name of some ideal, but scientists hold their beliefs at abeyance as hypotheses that are open to experimentation. The scientist whose first commitment is to a moral or political belief then undercuts the clinical detachment required for inquiry. Science then requires a certain laxity of moral commitment. As a consequence, Peirce amusingly informs his audience at the beginning of his 1898 lecture on 'Philosophy and the Conduct of Life' that philosophy must be kept away from practice, and "I do not hold forth the slightest promise that I have the philosophical wares to offer you which will make you either better men or more successful men" (1.621).

Of course, this is not the whole story. Although he did not believe that scientific philosophy would help us directly, it was shot through with commitments of its own, and these may indirectly describe the admirable character. Where the moralist is governed by some particular conventional or instinctual ideal, the scientist cares only for Truth and Reason, and this love shapes the moral character of the scientist.

The eternal forms, that mathematics and philosophy and the other sciences make us acquainted with, will by slow percolation gradually reach the very core of one's being; and will come to influence our lives; and this they will do, not because they involve truths of merely vital importance but because they are ideal and eternal verities. (1.648)

Let us then examine Peirce's account of why scientific inquiry has a normative dimension and what bearing this has for a pragmatist virtue ethics.

All conduct desires to achieve some end, to satisfy some desire. In order to act according to these ideals, agents develop rules of conduct. Such rules are resolutions to act in a certain manner in future situations. When desire inevitably arises and we act in pursuit of it, we are then in a position to reflect on whether our conduct accorded with our prior resolution, and in so doing provided a feeling of pleasure. Delving deeper, we may examine the intention behind the resolution or,

of particular importance to our present discussion, the character of the man behind the intention. Right thought and right behavior are structurally similar. As Peirce stated, “[t]he phenomena of reasoning are, in their general features, parallel to those of moral conduct. For reasoning is essentially thought that is under self-control, just as moral conduct is conduct under self-control” (1.606; for more on self-control in Peirce’s thought, see Petry 1992).

That conduct is governed by some ideal is not sufficient to make it right conduct. Ends or ideals may be desired without being desirable. Right conduct pursues what is desirable in itself without any ulterior motive. We must necessarily postulate an ultimate end if ethical conduct is possible (5.130–3). Ethics is, therefore, dependent upon the deeper level of esthetics. As Peirce understands it, esthetics is not the evaluation of artworks but the deliberate formation of taste, the creation of habits of feeling that will govern future conduct. Esthetics concerns the truly desirable, that ultimate aim that ought to serve as the ideal of our conduct (1.574, 5.36). Truly right conduct, either logical or ethical, is that which seeks the right end, the ultimate aim.

This aim must be general in nature, unified, pure, and precise. It is Real, not a postulate. It is self-satisfied, but it is also not static. It is inherently good, not instrumentally so (1.611–4). For Peirce, only one thing satisfies these conditions, and it is Reason. Reason is perfect in itself, but it is inexhaustible as an object of desire and devotion. The scientific endeavor is the perpetual attempt to think and act according to the Real while never fully succeeding. Peirce clearly understands this as a sacred task, an act of devotion:

The creation of the universe, which did not take place during a certain very busy week, in the year 4004 BC, but is going on today and will never be done, is the very development of Reason. The one thing whose admirableness is not due to an ulterior reason is Reason itself comprehended in all its fullness, so far as we can comprehend it. (1.615)

Elsewhere, he writes that nature is “something great, and beautiful, and sacred, and eternal, and real,” and that the scientist’s aim is “simply and solely knowledge of God’s truth” (5.589, 1.239).

A logical and ethical life is then a life spent in service of Reason and the Real. We may now see why Peirce believed that science required its own ideal and its own way of life. “The ideal of conduct will be to execute our little function in the operation of the creation by giving a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable whenever, as the slang is, it is ‘up to us’ to do so” (1.615). Ethical conduct contributes to the growth of concrete reasonableness, of the self-control and self-reflection that Peirce, as an objective idealist, saw as the development of God. This process requires the development of habits of self-control in general, and greater control of one’s reasoning in particular. Dedication to the ultimate aim of Reason entails moral conduct and scientific inquiry.

Therefore, despite Peirce’s claim that the scientific way of life must refrain from thick commitments, such a life does place requirements on the character of

the scientist.¹⁰ Peirce has sketched an image of human flourishing. For a person to be committed to Reason, he/she must show love and devotion to the truth, or what Peirce calls as “the true scientific Eros” (1.620; see also Reilly, 1970, 9–23). Inquiry requires dedication to one’s highest ideals in the face of the temptation to accept easy and comforting beliefs. He/she must be industrious and dedicated to the work before him/her, despite the fact that the project will not be completed in his/her lifetime (1.576, 5.387). This way of life requires selflessness, courage, and humility. The scientist “must prefer the truth to his own interest and well-being and not merely to his bread and butter, and to his vanity too” (1.576). Lastly, there must be a social sentiment, an overcoming of our natural feeling of self-love through the unification of sentiment into communities of feeling and interpretation (1.673, 5.354–7).

This all culminates in Peirce’s panegyric to the methods of scientific inquiry:

The genius of a man’s logical method should be loved and revered as his bride, whom he has chosen from all the world. . . . And having made it, he will work and fight for her, and will not complain that there are blows to take, hoping that there may be as many and as hard to give, and will strive to be the worthy knight and champion of her in the blaze of whose splendors he draws his inspiration and his courage. (5.387)

Of course, to anyone familiar with his many indiscretions—ranging from physical abuse of his wife and employees, to personal abuse of drugs and alcohol, and abuse of federal funds as a member of the U.S. Oceanic and Geodetic Survey—Peirce’s praise of self-control and devotion to one’s beloved might seem hollow, hypocritical, or just laughable (Brent 1998). But setting the character of the man aside, it is clear that his placement of scientific inquiry within a broader metaphysic entailed a further account of the virtuous life.

2. Democracy and the Virtues of Inquiry

These substantive arguments for particular virtues are rooted in an image of reality and humanity’s place in it. For Dewey, it is a novel, natural world that requires openness, respectfulness, and courage. For Peirce, we must develop self-control and a love of Truth so that we might be in touch with Reason and, in part, bring it about. These are the sort of virtues one might want to see inculcated in children if we are to have a sustainable liberal-democratic culture. They must be open to the experience of others, yet willing to defend their beliefs in a process of political debate. They must be tolerant of those with whom they disagree, yet demand that respect be returned.

From a substantive position, the argument would run as follows: Because this thick description of the True and the Good is correct, liberal-democratic virtues instrumental to that end are true and good as well. Therefore, parents should be required to financially support democratic education, and children should be required to receive it, under threat of sanction. In this section, I argue that Dewey’s

and Peirce's grounding of virtue in thick metaphysical accounts of experience, novelty, the Real and/or concrete reasonableness are unhelpful within the context of liberal public reason and within deliberation about what should be done with the force of law. I then justify democratic virtue education by turning to another, equally important aspect of their thought—their pragmatist account of inquiry.

2.1 Critiquing the Teleological Pragmatist Approach

Now that we have a sketch of two pragmatist, substantive attempts to ground democratic virtues in a thick account of reality and humanity's place in it, we may turn to the problem of liberal pluralism. Stated simply, pluralism raises a problem because, in liberal democracies, (i) the use of coercion must be justified to the citizens affected, but (ii) the freedom afforded to democratic citizens ensures that they will not agree on one comprehensive metaphysical or moral doctrine. Therefore, (iii) justifying coercion on the basis of such a thick account is certainly impractical and likely unjust, as it will exclude many reasonable ways of life.

Appeal to a substantive metaphysical and moral doctrine is problematic not because people are too stubborn or unreasonable to accept its truth. This is not a failure of understanding, although such failures do explain many political disagreements. If that were true, then we would have to assert that those who disagree are irrational, ignorant, or insincere. But this does not seem to represent many cases where reasonable people disagree. Rather, disagreement over the Good is a result of freedom. In any sufficiently free and large society, there will be many incompatible yet reasonable doctrines (and an endless number of unreasonable ones). Given that no one doctrine will be shared by the citizenry, yet all will be affected by the law, the law's authority cannot rest on any particular image of the universe and the Good (Rawls 1996).

As it bears on the discussion at hand, the result is that we may not coerce individuals into being liberal-democratic citizens on the basis of Dewey's and Peirce's arguments (at least, not on the substantive accounts presented so far). Whether I, as a partisan Deweyan, find his account true or argument persuasive is beside the point. As a matter of prudence, it will neither persuade those of other moral and metaphysical traditions nor secure their participation in our project of social cooperation. As a matter of justice, I must accept that others may be wrong, yet still entitled to their beliefs. I must accept that others reasonably disagree, even with the truth—assuming, of course, that I am in possession of the truth.¹¹

It is not that we are forbidden from bringing moral commitments into the public sphere. Rather, acceptance of a substantive doctrine must not be a *precondition* for acceptance of an argument. If an argument is brought into the public sphere, it must be adjudicable by means of public reason. A Deweyan may bring his/her Darwinian ontology into the public arena as part of his/her argument that we must educate for democratic citizenship, but that ontology must be open to debate. He/she may try to persuade fellow citizens to see the truth of the Darwinian ontology but, ultimately, there are limits. Not everyone will be persuaded. Out

of respect for the experience of others and the requirements of political prudence, the pragmatist must abide by certain argumentative constraints, just as they would ask the fundamentalist to do, despite the gulf between pragmatist fallibilism and fundamentalism.¹²

2.2 *Virtues as Conditions of Inquiry*

Within recent pragmatist political philosophy, there have been attempts to find a way to justify democracy without relying on a shared image of the good life. An alternative to grounding justification of democratic virtues in a thick account of experience and human nature is to ground it in inquiry. Robert Talisse and Cheryl Misak have made such an attempt. They argue that there are general norms of inquiry that provide a firm foundation for basic principles that bind even the harshest critic of democracy, yet do not assume a prior commitment to some ideal. Their argument is that the mere assertion of belief commits the person to a process of inclusive, public justification (Misak 2000; Talisse 2007; see also Westbrook 2005, Anderson 2006, and Putnam 1992, 104–08). Misak argues that “the requirements of genuine belief show that we must, broadly speaking, be democratic inquirers” (2000, 106).

Although my argument bears a resemblance to Talisse and Misak’s, there are significant differences. First, they appeal to the conditions of belief assertion, while I emphasize the conditions of successful experimental inquiry. Their argument and mine share a quasi-transcendental character. As the “quasi” indicates, neither argument is a traditional deduction of the necessary conditions for the possibility of some given phenomena. Misak explicitly rejects the transcendental-pragmatic argument by Habermas and Apel (Misak 2000, 35–45). Rather, democratic inquiry is a necessary condition for genuine belief in the way that oxygen is a necessary condition for combustion. Oxygen is not derived conceptually from combustion; however, it is practically necessary. Misak and Talisse argue that democratic inquiry is necessary for genuine belief, as refusal to participate in a democratic community of inquiry undercuts one’s claim to be reasonable. I argue that liberal-democratic character is a necessary condition for good inquiry; further, I do not appeal to the conditions of genuine belief, but of successful problem-solving. These conditions have been revealed during the long history of attempts to solve problems. Second, as noted, I extend the quasi-transcendental argument to considerations of character. If we are to inquire well, then we must have a certain character. In particular, liberal-democratic virtues are the necessary conditions for the possibility of good inquiry. And the need for good inquiry is inescapable. Therefore, we are justified in coercing civic education upon the basis of these reasons.

Let us turn to the argument itself. For both Peirce and Dewey, inquiry is the attempt to reconstruct a formerly habitual and fruitful transaction with the world. Our ruts are usually satisfying and lead where we expect. However, particular habits sometimes break down as we encounter new phenomena, or our standard

actions bring about new consequences. When our relationship to our environment is sufficiently out of sorts, we feel uneasy and compelled to investigate. Inquiry is that process of instituting new habits through changing ourselves and our environments. Once the concrete situation is corrected, which allows us to achieve a fruitful transaction with our world, inquiry ends. Peirce describes this as the doubt–belief arc, while Dewey describes it as the movement from a problematic situation to a reconstructed one.

Moral and political inquiry, specifically, addresses the conflict of competing goods. The goal is not to attain the Good, but to harmonize the various goods that are already in play. For example, were it not for the preexistence of goods, such as the welfare of children or the preservation of families and moral traditions, then there would be no need to deliberate about what school policy should be. Such inquiry attempts to resolve a situation already shot through with competing goods into one where goods are articulated, ranked, and harmonized.

To get from the problematic to the reconstructed, we must develop certain techniques to “fix” belief. Peirce dismisses many possible methods. One may tenaciously hold to the standard way of behaving, rely on the authority of others to tell them what is best to do, or submit them to the test of abstract reason by asking themselves what seems most reasonable. However, in trying each, we find ourselves inevitably running into brute facts. The world resists our desires, we find our beliefs are not shared by others, and so on.

Only the scientific method of inquiry allows problems to be consistently resolved, including problems of value.¹³ It is the only method that tests beliefs against the world. Beliefs, both old and new, become the hypotheses that are proposed to alleviate the original uneasy breakdown of habit. They are put into practice and their consequences evaluated. If they work, then the unease goes away and we have a new equilibrium. If not, then we learn from the failure and propose a new hypothesis. Scientific inquiry then has certain stages: there is felt unease, an attempt to articulate the problem, proposal of hypotheses, testing them, and finally evaluation for future action (LW 12: *passim*, especially chapter 6).

Scientific inquiry not only tests against the natural environment, but also against the social one. Hypotheses are tested in public, and others may repeat the experiments, evaluate the results of previous tests, or add their wisdom by proposing their own solutions to the problems at hand. The best inquiry is conducted by a community of inquirers, and the larger that community, the more likely a resolution of the problem—assuming they are committed both to resolving the problem and conduct themselves according to the best methods currently known.

We need not say with Peirce that the True is that which the community of inquiry is “fated” to believe, given infinite time and an infinite number of inquirers (CP 5: 407). However, we may say that when certain conditions are met, good inquiry follows and problems are more likely to be resolved. The long history of humanity’s attempts to overcome problems both big and small has shown that some conditions are more conducive to trustworthy habits and beliefs than others.

Improvement of inquiry then requires determination of those conditions under which inquiry is more likely to succeed. Regarding method, science has shown itself more valuable than imploring the gods or unquestioning faith in community authorities. These conditions also include objective, institutional conditions, such as freedom of expression and the press so that information might be more easily exchanged. Free institutions of learning, such as universities or publicly funded research centers, lessen political and economic distortion of experimentation. The lessening of violence in political decision making produces outcomes that are more likely to harmonize competing goods.

But they also include certain subjective conditions. That is, improved inquiry requires that those involved possess certain virtues, such as openness, respect, and courage (see Bohman 2010, *passim* but especially p. 200). Consider the basic arc of inquiry just outlined. To engage in this process, the inquirer must exhibit certain qualities of character. First, he/she must be open to new information. Unwillingness to acknowledge novel situations or facts results in the inability either to identify sources of unease or to discover sources of new hypotheses or evidence. As Peirce and other philosophers of science have noted, scientific inquiry is a creative enterprise, requiring flights of imagination. To use more technical language, in addition to induction and deduction, inquiry requires abduction, or inference to the best explanation, or “educated guessing.”

Following openness is the willingness to experiment, to test beliefs and proposals against the natural world and the experience of others. Willingness to experiment entails other virtues, including, on the one hand, perseverance and courage, and on the other, moderation and willingness to reflect. Perseverance and courage are required by those who must engage in the arduous task of forming tests and gathering evidence, and face the recriminations of those who question received authorities or tenaciously held beliefs. Moderation and reflection are similarly required because the inquirers must limit their regard for their own beliefs if they are to question or test them. These are virtues of obedience, submission, or scientific objectivity.

As inquiry is a social process of public experimentation, inquirers must be open to the broadest acceptable range of input. The community of inquiry must be maximally inclusive if we are to maximize the chances of success. To exclude participation on the basis of arbitrary considerations like gender, class, race, or nationality would be to artificially limit sources for hypotheses and experimental feedback. In other words, inquiry requires toleration and mutual respect, whenever reasonable. This is not to say that it is infinitely tolerant. The pragmatist model finds those who are unwilling to engage in the process of proposing, critiquing, and defending hypotheses unreasonable. But limits on participation, toleration, and respect are themselves determined only in the course of inquiry, so there must always be a way to question them in the course of future inquiries.

Inquiry then entails a certain character, and what qualifies as virtue depends on its value to inquiry. Put simply, “[a] character trait (habit, disposition or human potency) is a virtue if it facilitates intelligent problem solving. A character trait is

a vice if it hinders intelligent problem solving” (Olson 2007, 10). Or, to cite James Gouinlock at length,

[i]n Dewey’s ideal, experimental inquiry and democratic behavior become fused. The nature of their combination can perhaps be best suggested by thinking of them as a union of certain moral and intellectual virtues . . . The virtues include the willingness to question, investigate, and learn; a determination to search for clarity in discourse and evidence in argument. There is also a readiness to hear and respect the views of others, to consider alternatives thoroughly and impartially, and to communicate in a like manner in turn. One is not irrevocably committed to antecedent conditions but is ready to qualify or change his views as a consequence of inquiry and communication. There is an urgency to persist in shared discourse in the direction of agreement. These virtues embrace novelty, innovation, growth, regard for the concerns of others, and scientific discipline. (Gouinlock 1995, 88; see also Dewey LW 14: 166, 167, and MacGilvray 1999, 549)

Hence, the virtues that make for good inquiry are also many of those that typify liberal-democratic citizens. Dewey long held that scientific and democratic practice was similar in structure: “I would not claim that any existing democracy has ever made complete or adequate use of scientific method in deciding upon its policies. But freedom of inquiry, toleration of diverse views, freedom of communication, the distribution of what is found out to every individual as the ultimate intellectual consumer, are involved in the democratic as in the scientific method” (LW 14: 135).¹⁴

To simplify the argument, inquiry is the process by which doubt or the problematic is converted into belief or the reconstructed. Because problems are unavoidable, inquiry is too. Although doubts may be resolved in various ways, pragmatists believe that experience has shown that scientific inquiry is by far the most successful. Such inquiry requires the virtues of openness, willingness to experiment, perseverance, courage, moderation, reflection, sociality, inclusiveness, toleration, and mutual respect. These are also many of the virtues required by a liberal-democratic society. Because the need for successful inquiry is inevitable, virtues required for such inquiry are necessary as well, and a society may justifiably cultivate these virtues in its citizens—not because they are the substantive values of a liberal-democratic community, but because they are the virtues of inquiry. Of course, history has shown that individual scientists, even brilliant ones, may be vicious people. Nevertheless, the community of inquiry must exhibit these virtues as a whole. As regards educational policy, the result is that if we are to produce good inquirers, they must be educated in certain (liberal-democratic) virtues. This is particularly true, given the problems that the community is trying to solve—those that are felt widely, and require cooperation and mutual concern.

2.3 *Method, Not End*

This approach from the conditions of inquiry differs importantly from the first pragmatist way to ground virtue. Admittedly, by linking scientific inquiry with

character, this argument also recalls Peirce's substantive one. Peirce went so far as to challenge the reader to identify any great man of truth who was a criminal, claiming that they are mutually exclusive (1.576). Critically, however, the connection to the objective idealist metaphysic has been dropped. These virtues are not valuable because they are instrumental to the end of concrete reasonableness or the self-organization of a loving God. Second, this differs from the substantive Deweyan account above in that they are the virtues of a method, not of any particular end, nor is this argument based on a substantive and prior commitment to liberal ideals. It does not argue that citizens must be educated for tolerance because it maximizes the greatest utility (Mill), we are endowed with natural rights (Locke and Jefferson), or we are rationally autonomous beings (Kant). Rather, the justification is based on the necessity of inquiry in light of the permanent need to address problems.

Further, in distinction from epistemic justifications of democracy as the best form of government because it is the only form that provides the epistemic conditions for truth, the argument from inquiry does not assert the value of truth, and then claim that inquiry and democracy are valuable because they serve that end (Estlund 2007). Democracy is not justified because it produces truth; that is, democracy is not valuable simply because it is a means to something inherently valuable outside of it. Inquiry is not motivated by anything other than the attempt to reconstruct a situation, to solve a felt problem. Truth is internal to this process. For Peirce, truth is what arrives at the end of an endless, well-conducted inquiry, while for Dewey, it is (notoriously) "warranted assertibility."

The argument from the conditions of inquiry is then non-teleological, except in the general sense that problem-solving has a generic *telos*: to resolve felt problems. Democratic virtues are conditions for the possibility of inquiry, not the True or Good. They govern the attempt to understand one's present ideals, to resolve tensions between them, and to formulate new ideals in response to the problems that arise in the course of living according to one's ideals. As inquiry is the result of problematic situations, the only way to avoid it is to never encounter a tension between one's ideals and the world, or between the ideals themselves. Such a life is simply unavoidable, given limited resources, the existence of others, and a world that frustrates our desires. Most importantly, for the problem at hand—the tension between the liberal image of the good life and its commitment to toleration—there is no imposition of an ideal life on illiberal citizens. The *telos* is provided from *within* the illiberal community as it attempts to resolve internal tensions and conflicts with the larger world.¹⁵

3. Educating for Democratic Virtue

We now have an alternative pragmatist-liberal argument for the superiority of certain virtues central to the democratic character: good inquiry requires certain liberal-democratic virtues, and the need for good inquiry is inescapable. Further-

more, this argument is less vulnerable to the liberal objection that this argument appeals to prior belief in a liberal moral and metaphysical framework, and therefore is disrespectful to illiberal citizens. One does not have to be a liberal to accept this argument. One must only value inquiry. In principle, we may reasonably expect others to be persuaded by it, even if there is no prior conversion to liberalism.

Let us return to the case of civic education. If the argument above is cogent, then liberals have a compelling argument on behalf of certain virtues. This argument can be used in service of civic education in public schools, despite the fact that attendance by children and taxation of parents is backed by force of state sanction. Schools must cultivate liberal-democratic virtues of toleration, openness to novelty, respect, courage, and honesty because these virtues are required for good inquiry and good inquiry is necessary.

3.1 The Case of Civic Education

Of course, not every parent wants their child to be educated in these virtues. What strikes the liberal as obviously virtuous may strike another as equally obviously vicious. The tolerance and mutual respect valued by the liberal may be seen as the celebration of depravation or sin. Given that, from within the liberal framework, the state has a *prima facie* duty to respect the values of such families, churches, and other moral communities, this poses a problem for those liberals who would require liberal civic education in public schools.

Consistent with the liberal value of toleration and the practical necessity of maintaining social stability, the state has affirmed a right to be exempt from compulsory attendance in public schools, either entirely or from certain parts of the curriculum. There are many bases for exemption, but I focus here on the first amendment right to the free exercise of religion. The pivotal court decision in this matter is the well-known *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (although *Michigan v. DeJonge* and *Duro v. District Attorney* also address the matter). In the *Yoder* case, members of the Old Order Amish religion and the Conservative Amish Mennonite Church objected to a Wisconsin law mandating attendance in public schools until the age of sixteen, and petitioned to remove their children at the end of eighth grade on the grounds that compulsory attendance violated their religious beliefs. Their Amish faith required a separation from the “evil world” and a commitment to a tightly knit community threatened by supposed virtues, such as openness, toleration, and a willingness to experiment. Rather, Amish youth must develop the virtues of purity, piety, and discipline. The Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the right to the free exercise of religion outweighed any state interest in compelling children to attend another two years of public education (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 US 205 [1972]).

Interestingly, in his dissent, Justice William Douglas made a classic liberal argument, contending that the child’s right to determine their own way of life was being overlooked: “He may want to be a pianist or an astronaut or an oceanographer. To do so he will have to break from the Amish tradition. It is the future of

the students, not the future of the parents, that is imperiled by today's decision. If a parent keeps his child out of school beyond the grade school, then the child will be forever barred from entry into the new and amazing world of diversity that we have today" (ibid.). However, as I have tried to argue, such a substantive appeal to the value of autonomy is problematic if pluralism is to be taken seriously.

According to the argument I have put forth, the Amish children from the Yoder case would be compelled to receive education in those liberal-democratic virtues necessary for inquiry, that is, to be provided a character that will allow them to test their beliefs against the "evil world." Even from a liberal position, such coercion is unnerving. However, it is, in principle, justifiable. The Amish community has historically had to come to terms with the modern, secular world. From within, there have always been tensions between those who would be more open and those who would not, between those who interpret their tradition more strictly and those who have not. Particularly in the case of technological appropriation, the Amish have a long history of slowly testing the effect of new technologies against communal and traditional values (Kelly 2010, chapter 12). The inescapability of the need for inquiry entails children's inescapable need for certain virtues. This need is not imposed from without, but arises from within. Rather than present a harmless supplement to traditional beliefs, this argument concludes that public reasoning, and the democratic virtues it requires, must be taught to children even when it does pose a threat to traditional pieties. For simply trying to live according to these pieties in a conflicted and frustrating natural and social environment entails a commitment to liberal-democratic virtues.

3.2 Objecting to Inquiry

Given this conclusion, one might reasonably object that the shift from substantive arguments to arguments grounded in the structure of inquiry does not avoid the problem of pluralism. Rather, it obscures it by a false appeal to universal norms that are, in fact, surreptitiously partisan. The argument from inquiry circumvents problematic moral virtues with inquiry-based ones, but the latter are also hotly contested.

The argument from inquiry assumes that illiberal citizens still accept public inquiry. I believe this describes the majority of conservative American citizens. For example, parents may believe that tolerance of homosexuality should not be taught to children because promotion of tolerance of homosexuality has a corrosive effect on the health of the child and on basic institutions like the family and their Church. The sheer fact that their position is illiberal does not make them unreasonable (as some have charged of Rawls's account of "reasonableness"). Their position is reasonable because they believe that this is a publicly defensible position and that the facts will bear it out. They are willing to submit their beliefs to a process of public inquiry and experimentation. In cases such as this, the justification of coerced civic education has force.

However, some are put off when Dewey claims that there is “but one method for ascertaining fact and truth—that conveyed by the word ‘scientific’ in its most general sense,” or that “Democracy thus appears as the means by which the revelation of truth is carried on” (LW 9: 23 and EW 4: 9). Commitment to a public and discursive model of truth is to reject Peirce’s other means of fixing belief—the methods of tenacity, authority, and *a priori* reasoning. The pragmatist assumes an image of truth and how it is attained, a deep metaphysical commitment that other citizens may not share and that results in a civic totalitarianism with undesirable consequences for religious communities (Macedo 2000, 139–45).

Rather than accept the idea that truth arises through the public testing of hypotheses of reasons and evidence—that is, that there is an essential link between truth and public experimentation—fundamentalist communities argue that Truth is given by means of divine revelation, private intuition, or sacred texts and traditions. They may further argue that the use of public reason exposes one’s sacred beliefs to corruption by those who have not received the revelation. Recall the 1983 case *Mozert v. Hawkins*, in which parents claimed the right to reject any public education that exposed their children to any beliefs other than their own, as this might lead children to respect other faiths and to question their own (*Mozert v. Hawkins* 1984).¹⁶ If others are corrupt, then we might be better off not exposing Truths to criticism. In other words, they may appeal to the methods of “fixation” rejected by Peirce: tenacity, authority, and appeal to subjective reason. The criticism is ultimately that, while children and parents are inevitably compelled to inquire, they are not compelled to engage in pragmatist-scientific inquiry. Therefore, they are not compelled to cultivate liberal-democratic virtues.¹⁷

Robert Talisse has argued that, while reasonable disagreement may exist more than substantive moral and metaphysical beliefs, it may not in matters of seeking truth. Recall his quasi-transcendental argument that mere assertion of beliefs as true entails a process of presenting and evaluating reasons. There are implicit norms in this process. Anyone who asserts “I believe that *p*, but I have never subjected *p* to the type of scrutiny that would allow counterevidence to challenges to *p* to emerge, and have never attended to the reasons that others have for holding beliefs opposed to *p*” has undercut their own claim to be reasonable (Talisse 2010, 46). One could tweak this to hold that those who assert “I believe *p*, but I am unwilling to test *p* experimentally” would have similarly given up on the norms implicit to asserting their beliefs. Upon self-assessment, it signals an epistemic failure. However, as noted in section 2.2, the argument I present here is not the same as Talisse’s. I do not appeal to the conditions for the possibility of belief assertion but the conditions of good inquiry. Therefore, this response is inconsistent with the argument at hand. In addition, although his argument may conceivably appeal to our imagined fundamentalist, it is unlikely to do so. Talisse’s argument may be sufficient to convince a liberal-democrat that the fundamentalist has sacrificed his/her epistemic authority, but the fundamentalist rejects the assumption connecting Truth and public argumentation. If the goal is to

persuade the fundamentalist to send his/her children to public schools, then it is unlikely to succeed.

A more modest alternative is to concede that if not everyone assents to a necessary connection between truth and public argumentation, then we must appeal to an empirical connection. In that case, the pragmatist would have to concede that the fundamentalist may reject his/her account of truth and its internal connection to public inquiry, but in doing so, the fundamentalist is also rejecting the scientific and democratic revolutions. In that vein, Amy Gutmann argues that those who reject the teaching of evolution in public schools reject not only a particular scientific theory, but also the form of scientific reasoning itself. “The religions that reject evolution as a valid scientific theory also reject the secular standards of reasoning that make evolution clearly superior as a theory to creationism” (Gutmann 1999, 102). They reject the standards of cogent reasoning that form the core of scientific method. In this case, one might point out the great successes of public experimentation and the corresponding decline of the methods of revelation and authority in science and public life, and argue that the open exchange of reasons has been shown a far superior method of solving problems. The appeal is to the history of problem-solving and to the benefits of scientific inquiry they currently enjoy. Given the historical successes of experimental inquiry, we may argue that those who enjoy its benefits while denying it a place in education are being unreasonable.

In the extreme case, believers may reject the modern world remade by public reason as corrupt. They may see scientific-technological and democratic inquiry, and the “progress” that follows, as a fall from a simpler, more divine time. Reasonable agreement may not be possible. At that point, there would be the need for bargaining, voting, or other nondiscursive means of decision making, even as we hold that those who are unwilling to engage in experimental inquiry are being unreasonable. But, even if the argument from inquiry is not universally persuasive, it is at least less controversial than more substantive ones. While deep moral disagreement is easy to find, there is certainly *less* dispute over the assertions that coercive acts must be open to public scrutiny, that hypotheses must be tested, or that problems are best resolved by those who exhibit certain qualities of character (even if we must admit the existence of extreme epistemic positions that reject these conclusions). Consistent with pragmatism’s commitment to meliorism, the argument from inquiry offers hope for greater agreement, even if universal agreement always evades us. The claim here is modest—that arguments based in an account of inquiry are on less controversial ground, both prudentially and normatively. Given the need to secure broad consensus if virtue education is to be instituted, and given the further ethical demand (within the liberal model) to respect, when possible, all comprehensive doctrines affected by the policy, our reasons should strive to be as “public” as possible.

Nevertheless, the inquiry-based, pragmatist account allows the liberal democrat to argue that virtues necessary for inquiry are not open to reasonable disagreement. That is, the underlying necessity of inquiry implies that even anti-democrats admit that liberal-democratic virtues are required of all. Parents

are not previously obliged to accept the ideal of consciously reproducing a liberal society. Rather, they need only admit that next generation must be able to inquire. Therefore, the state may legitimately use coercion to cultivate a generation of children who are able to test their beliefs. From a comprehensive Deweyan position, this is so because the world is both precarious and stable, while for the comprehensive Peircean, it is a requirement of the pursuit of Truth. But from the inquiry-based pragmatist position, it is entailed by the need for any moral tradition to engage objections both from within and without, or to deal with new problems. Even the fundamentalist parent must acknowledge external tensions with the modern, secularizing world, and internal tensions between those who interpret their tradition. Both call for inquiry. Despite the difficulties that arise from liberalism's central commitment to toleration, there is at least one impartial reason for compulsory civic education.

Notes

- ¹ In this, I am engaged in a project similar to that of Eric MacGilvray and Robert Talisse (MacGilvray 2004; Talisse 2007). For a nice summary of the attempt by pragmatists to develop post-Rawlsian justifications of political liberalism, see Festenstein (2010).
- ² I have ignored the contributions of other pragmatists, specifically James and Mead. I have done this only for reasons of economy.
- ³ Stephen Macedo has offered his own defense of liberal virtues, including sympathy, self-reflection, willingness to experiment, openness, self-control, altruism, and appreciation of social inheritance (Macedo 2000, 271–72). See also Galston (1991) and Kloppenberg (1998).
- ⁴ Following standard practice, all further references to Dewey's works will indicate the volume of the Early Works (EW), Middle Works (MW), or Late Works (LW) of *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, followed by the page or chapter number.
- ⁵ Sadly, conscientiousness and openness are not easily joined. A study of the geographic distribution of the "big five" personality traits in the United States found that where agreeableness and conscientiousness are more prominent—the southeast—openness is lacking. The reverse is found where openness is more prominent—the northeast and west coast metropolitan areas (Rentfrow, Gosling, and Potter 2008), graphically represented at <http://mapscroll.blogspot.com/2009/05/new-and-improved-geography-of.html>.
- ⁶ Dewey elsewhere defines democracy as the "belief in the ability of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness" (LW 14: 229).
- ⁷ A complementary Deweyan argument is made by Juan Carlos Mougán Rivero that social cooperation, as a necessary element of human flourishing, grounds other democratic virtues (Mougán Rivero 2008).
- ⁸ This section is indebted to Hookway 1985, 58–79; Sheriff 1994, 60–82; Reilly 1970, 9–23; and particularly Mullin 2007, 133–48.
- ⁹ Following standard practice, all further references to Peirce's works will indicate the volume and paragraph number of the *Collected Papers*.
- ¹⁰ For more on Peirce's substantive moral and metaphysical commitments, see Potter (1967) and Mayorga (2009).
- ¹¹ Despite presenting an excellent account of Dewey's moral theory, Pappas fails to address the real force of the pluralist objection (2008, 284–6). He sees disagreement as the result of dogged partiality or stubbornness rather than as an outcome of free reason. Disagreement is presented as the result of irrationality, despite Pappas' insight that, for Dewey, tension and conflict are a fundamental quality of moral life.

- ¹² Admittedly, most Deweyans do not believe that the Rawlsian problem of reasonable pluralism poses a problem for a pragmatist justification of democracy. In particular, they have objected to Robert Talisse's claim that pluralism requires that we abandon Dewey entirely for a Peircean epistemic approach (Talisse 2007). Because of limited space, I cannot attempt to defend the Rawlsian objection here. However, despite sharing his belief that Rawls's pluralist problem must be taken seriously, I should note that I disagree with Talisse's conclusion: both Dewey and Peirce have much to offer a pragmatist philosophy of democracy, and it need not be strictly epistemic in form (Deen 2009).
- ¹³ The contention that scientific inquiry is the best method to resolve not only matters of fact but also of value is a controversial one. Central to pragmatist moral philosophy are a rejection of the fact-value split and a call to extend experimental methods to morals. Defense of these central beliefs would require far more space than this article allows, as it spans much of Dewey's vast corpus, not to mention the work of other pragmatists. However, those interested should consult Dewey's *Ethics* (LW 7), *Theory of Valuation* (LW 13: 189–251), and "Logic of Judgments of Practice" (MW 8: 14–82).
- ¹⁴ The inquiry-based virtues discussed here do not encompass *all* democratic virtues. As Michael Walzer and others have noted, democratic politics is not the same as a democratic deliberation. It requires virtues appropriate to political mobilization and *realpolitik* (Walzer 2004, chap. 5). However, they are among the central liberal-democratic virtues.
- ¹⁵ This argument from inquiry differs from Stephen Macedo's position in *Liberal Virtues* that liberal virtues are entailed by the process of public justification. Although I find that argument compelling, I differ in an emphasis on inquiry, which does not run the risk of emphasizing discourse to the detriment of experiment (Macedo 1990).
- ¹⁶ The federal appeals court ultimately ruled that the parents did not have legitimate claim.
- ¹⁷ A variant of this argument is that, while the method of experiment and inquiry is appropriate for natural scientific facts, it is not proper for moral values. However, as already pointed out in footnote 12, the pragmatist tradition has a long history of rejecting the fact–value dichotomy and of calling for an experimental approach to values.

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