

CUSTOM AND LAW: A STUDY IN JOHN DEWEY AND JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

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It was observed by Professor Luis Recasens Siches, in his monumental two volume study of the *Panorama del pensamiento jurídico en el siglo xx*, that there is a certain similarity between the ideas of John Dewey (1859-1952) and those of José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), especially in regards to their theories of knowing and of the human person. I most certainly agree. Upon my first acquaintance with the works of Ortega, long after I had heard of him and at least four years after having completed a doctoral dissertation on Dewey, I was impressed by the similarity of their conceptions of custom as the origin of law, the topic of this study. After introductory words on the intellectual backgrounds of Dewey and Ortega, I shall examine their respective views on the issue, within the context of what each meant by "society," and conclude by observing their similarities.

The philosophic activities of both Dewey and Ortega are best understood within the general movement at the turn of the century that was a reaction against the, then, prevailing idealism. Both had been influenced deeply in their university years by German idealism and had become, each in a different manner, convinced idealists. In breaking from that position, unlike many who adopted some form of realism, these young thinkers were convinced that the times called for a new philosophic attempt, a going beyond the partial perspectives that were idealism and realism. The results were the instrumentalism of Dewey and the ratiovitalism of Ortega. There is no evidence of their having been directly familiar with the work of each other, although three former students of Ortega translated a number of Dewey's works.¹

¹ José Gaos (1900-1969) translated *Experience and Nature* (1925; 2nd ed., 1929) as *La experiencia y la naturaleza* (México-Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1948), writing a prologue that is most informative.

Eugenio Imaz (1900-1951) translated two of Dewey's works: *Logic: Theory of inquiry* (1938) as *Lógica: teoría de la investigación* (México-Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950) and *The Quest for Certainty* (1929) as *La busca de la certeza* (México-Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952). In the prologues written for each Imaz briefly compares Dewey to Dilthey, a philosopher whom Ortega much admired (as will be mentioned later in this study) and whose collected works Imaz was to direct in their translation into Spanish.

The third former student of Ortega to translate Dewey was Lorenzo Luzuriaga (1889-1959), all published by Editorial Losada, S. A., of Buenos Aires: *Experiencia y*

Of the professors under whom Dewey studied at Johns Hopkins University (1882-1884), founded so that Americans would not have to travel to Germany for higher studies, the person who influenced him by far the most was George Sylvester Morris (1840-1889), professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan, who had been lecturing in Baltimore for part of each year on the history of philosophy. Morris, after studying in Germany under Trendelenburg, had formulated a version of neo-Hegelianism which combined "a logical and idealistic metaphysics with a realistic epistemology."² The example of Morris, along with readings of such neo-Hegelians as T. H. Green, John and Edward Caird, and W. Wallace, led Dewey to leave behind the Kantian and Scottish realist intuitionism he had adopted during his undergraduate years at the University of Vermont (1875-1879), and to accept the movement of neo-Hegelianism as "the vital and constructive one in philosophy." This position gave him great emotional satisfaction as it seemed to be the means of overcoming the dualism he had encountered both in his philosophic intuitionism and in the tradition of liberal Congregational evangelicalism in which he had been reared. For his Ph. D. dissertation he wrote on "Kant's Psychology." Although it was never published and has never been found, the account he gave of it in a letter to W. T. Harris (1853-1908), the Hegelian editor of the first philosophical journal in the U. S. A., *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, indicated that it was similar in content to an earlier essay, "Kant and Philosophic Method", that had appeared in the journal (XVIII, April, 1884, 162-174), a critique of Kant from an Hegelian perspective.³

educación (1960); *La ciencia de la educación* (1960); *La educación de hoy* (1960); and *El niño y el programa escolar, mi credo pedagógico* (1959). The first and last mentioned contained introductions by Luzuriaga.

² John Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" in *Contemporary American Philosophy*, edited by George P. Adams and William P. Montague (N. Y.: Macmillan Co., 1930; reissue Russel & Russel, Inc., 1962), vol. II, p. 19. This is Dewey's short autobiographical sketch of how he moved from idealism to pragmatism. The following should be consulted also: Jane M. Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey" in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, edited by Paul A. Schilpp (N. Y.: Tudor Publishing Co., 1939, 2nd ed., 1951), pp. 3-45; George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), especially chapters 3 and 4 on Morris; and Martin G. White, *The Origin of Dewey's Instrumentalism* (N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 1943; reissue, N. Y.: Octagon Books, 1964), especially chapter 2 on Morris. For Dewey's own description of Morris, see: "The late Professor Morris", "Palladium", An Annual edited by the College fraternities of the University of Michigan", XXXI (1889), 110-18; reprinted in part in *The Life and Work of George Sylvester Morris* (N. Y.: Macmillan Co., 1917), pp. 308-13 and in *The early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898, Volume 3 (1889-1892)* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), pp. 3-13. Hereafter referred to as *J.D.* This is one of the projected forty-five volumes of the extant published works of Dewey in a definitive edition under the general editorship of Jo Ann Boydston, who also edits *The Dewey Newsletter*, a valuable aid for those interested in the area.

³ See: Letter of Dewey to Harris, 17 January 1884, quoted in Dykhuizen, *op. cit.*, p. 37; for a confirmation of the similarity, see: Letter of Dewey to T. R. Ball, 28 May 1888, *Ibid.*; for reprint of article on Kant, see: *J. D.*, vol. I, pp. 34-37.

During Ortega's undergraduate and graduate years at the University of Madrid (1898-1904) he had not had close contact with German idealism, even though he was familiar with Nietzsche. In 1905 he decided to further his studies in Germany, specifically at the University of Leipzig. During the one semester he spent there he had his "first desperate hand-to-hand combat," as he put it, with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The following semester Ortega went to Berlin where he availed himself of the well-stocked library, something unfortunately absent in the Spain of his youth. In 1906, as Ortega was to write a number of years later, there was no great figure in philosophy at the University of Berlin. He did benefit from the lectures of the young Georg Simmel (1858-1918), still to write his key works but already exhibiting "the subtlest mind in Europe," and in later years proudly referred to him as "my teacher" and a "great thinker." From the end of 1906 until very early in 1908 Ortega spent a whole year in Marburg, returning once more in 1911. It was there that he studied under Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), the key figure in neo-Kantianism, the greatest philosopher then alive according to Ortega, having as a classmate Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950). "His stay in Marburg was to leave a very deep impression on Ortega, not only intellectually in the sense of philosophical formation, but personally," for, while he resided and studied in other parts of Germany, he *lived* in Marburg, his life there gave him a complete satisfaction that filled the emptiness his previous studies and Catholic religious upbringing could not.⁴

During the early years of their respective higher studies Dewey and Ortega, although both attracted by German thought, were interested in different areas of study. Had Dewey been able to finance a trip to Germany (he barely could borrow the money to go to Baltimore), he probably would have pursued his earlier interest in Kant and most certainly would have gone to Baden rather than to Marburg. Marburg and Baden were more than universities where philosophy was taught; they were the two neo-kantian schools. The School of Marburg was interested in matters epistemological and scientific while the School of Baden, whose greatest figures were Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915) and Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936), was oriented toward history, culture, and values. Dewey's early interest was, especially, the history of philosophy, something in which Windelband specialized. Later Dewey's primary concern shifted to theory of knowing, broadly conceived. The situation was the reverse of Ortega. From an earlier concern with

⁴ Julián Mariás, *José Ortega y Gasset, Circumstance and Vocation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 173. This is the English translation of *Ortega. I. Circunstancia y vocación* (Madrid, Revista de Occidente, 1960). Also see: Hernán Larrain Acuña, *La génesis del pensamiento de Ortega* (Buenos Aires, Compañía General Fabril Editora, 1962). See: Ortega, "Kant and the Modern German Mind" ("Kant: reflexiones de centenario", *Obras Completas*, iv), *Yale Review*, 1941, 95-115; and Egon Schwartz, "Ortega y Gasset and German Culture", *Monatshefte*, XLIX (1957), 87-91 (Chicago).

matters methodological, he moved more and more into studies of history and culture.

In each case, the careers of Dewey and Ortega would have been changed significantly if they early had appreciated, in Dewey's case, and known, in Ortega's, the thought of the individuals whom they would come to admire in future years. In the case of Dewey, the individual was Charles Saunders Peirce (1839-1914), who taught at Johns Hopkins from 1879-1884. Peirce already had published the essays in which he offered his new method of pragmatism, that general name for the movement within which Dewey's instrumentalism was developed. Dewey was not interested in such at the time. Indeed, he put off taking Peirce's course because it was not "philosophic logic" but largely mathematical logic and scientific methodology. When he did sign up for it, more from necessity of filling his program than interest, he was disappointed. It was to be over twenty years before he appreciated the significance of Peirce and scientific methodology, which was to become the key to his own position. How much further developed would Dewey's position have been had he initially appreciated Peirce? He never said anything about having "lost time" as did Ortega upon having discovered the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) while preparing an essay in honor of Ernest Cassier. Ortega wrote later: "I became acquainted with Dilthey's work as late as 1929, and it took me four more years before I knew it sufficiently well. This ignorance, I do not hesitate to maintain, has caused me to loose about ten years of my life —ten years, in the first place, of intellectual development, but that, of course, means an equal loss in all other dimensions of my life."⁵ Ortega had been denied the opportunity of having had Dilthey as a teacher in Berlin, for by 1906 Dilthey had ceased lecturing in the university building and admitted to the courses he held in his own home only a few especially prepared students. So, Ortega time and again tried to borrow Dilthey's main work, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (1883), out of print for many years, a work for whose Spanish translation he was to write a prologue (1946), but it always was out. When he did get his opportunity to read Dilthey, after the posthumous appearance of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, he wrote: "I was struck by a strange and disconcerting parallelism between his ideas and the problems and positions, of a strictly and decisively philosophical character, set forth in my own writings."⁶ The parallelism, not to be mistaken for an identity, was that Ortega had had to traverse the same path of thought as Dilthey had done earlier. But, whereas Dilthey halted at the level of "historical

⁵ José Ortega y Gasset, "A Chapter from the History of Ideas — Wilhelm Ditley and the Idea of Life", *Concord and Liberty* (N. Y.: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 136-37; published originally in *Philosophy and History*, edited by Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton (Oxford, 1936). The Spanish original is in José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras Completas* (Madrid, Revista de Occidente, quinta edición, 1961), vol. III, pp. 165-214. Thus far nine volumes have appeared and some material published posthumously.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

reason” as the instrument to understand human life, Ortega advanced further, in his estimation, to “living reason”.

By the time Dewey had left the University of Michigan, where he had been invited in 1884 by Morris, for the University of Chicago (1894), he had transcended most of his idealism. By the year he left Chicago (1904) to accept a position at Columbia University, the institution with which his name has come to be identified, he no longer was an idealist or absolutist. He had begun to develop his experimentalism, the earliest name he gave to his form of pragmatism, indicating as it did his attempt to extend the method of the experimental sciences to philosophy, especially to values. All his life he was to be most active in political, educational, and cultural movements, manifesting a public profile by giving popular lectures in addition to accepting guest lectureships at leading universities (including the University of Mexico during the summer of 1926) and by writing for the general press, something unheard of hitherto among professional philosophers in the U.S.A. Exactly the same can be said of Ortega. From the very beginning of his teaching career, when in 1908 he was appointed to the chair of psychology, logic, and ethics in the College of Education in Madrid, through his appointment in 1910 to the chair of metaphysics in the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Madrid, the institution with which he was to become identified, he constantly wrote for the daily press, gave innumerable public lectures, and participated in various political movements.⁷ Ortega had returned to Spain a neo-Kantian —of sorts. “Of sorts” because he saw Kantianism more as a method of rigorous philosophizing than as a body of propositions. His early emphasis on the critical spirit, paying more attention to things or to ideas and less to human beings or personal “tastes”, has been referred to as his “objectivism” or his “ideoadorationism”.⁸ From this, his own, form of neo-Kantianism he soon passed (by 1914) to perspectivism, the name that may be given to his early form of ratiovitalism, indicating as it does his methodological efforts to transcend both absolutism and relativism in knowing.

Both thinkers took philosophy into the market place from its customary ivory-tower surroundings. It is not surprising, then, that among their mutual concerns should be the interrelationship between custom and law within society —to which I now turn. In each case there will be a discussion, first,

⁷ For Ortega's early years, see Mariás' study (n. 4, *supra*). When the remaining volume of this monumental intellectual biography appears, it will be definitive. In the meantime, for Ortega's later years, see: Franz Niedermayer, *José Ortega y Gasset* (N. Y., Frederick Ungar, 1973), for whose American edition from the German original (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1963) new material was added, and Guillermo Moron, *Historia política de José Ortega y Gasset* (México, Ediciones Oasis, 1960).

⁸ His position is called “objectivism” by José Ferrater Mora, *Ortega y Gasset, An Outline of His Philosophy* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1956), p. 15, p. 9 of the new revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). His position is called “ideoadoración” by Larrain Acuña, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

of what the philosopher meant by “society” and, then, an examination of how law emerges from custom.

The appropriate context in which to discuss any aspect of Dewey’s philosophy, in this case his meaning of “society”, is that of experience. How key the notion is to Dewey can be ascertained from the fact he incorporated the word explicitly into the titles of three of his major books: *Experience and Nature* (1925; 2nd ed., 1929), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Experience and Education* (1938). In *Experience and Nature* he said: “We need a cautionary and directive word, like ‘experience’, to remind us that the world which is lived, suffered and enjoyed as well as logically thought of, has the last word in all human inquiries and surmises”. Here we see Dewey’s rejection of idealism, in which thought itself is the last word. In addition he said: “Experience is *of* as well as *in* nature.” Here Dewey separated himself from the dualism of mind and matter in classical British empiricism. Finally, he wrote: “Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience.”⁹ Here Dewey asserted his naturalism.

As he said in an essay incorporated in the collection honoring his eightieth birthday:

For many years I have consistently —and rather persistently— maintained that the key to a philosophic theory of experience must proceed from initially linking it with the processes and functions of life as the latter are disclosed in biological science. So viewed, I have held that experience is a matter or an “affair” . . . of interaction [or “transaction”, a later word used to avoid any semblance of dualism] of living creatures with their environments; *human* experience being what it is because human beings are subject to the influences of culture . . .¹⁰

Shortly before his ninetieth birthday Dewey became somewhat wary of defending his use of the term from misinterpretations, and wrote: “As a general thing it would be well to use such words as *concerns*, *affairs*, etc. where the word *experience* is used. They are specific where the latter word is general in the sense of vague.”¹¹ Nonetheless, he still preferred “experience” as the best word as yet available to emphasize the inter-connectedness of all concerns, affairs, etc. Given Dewey’s lifelong battle against dualisms of any kind, it is of no surprise that the word best expressed for him the fact that organism and environment are not independent, isolated realities

⁹ The quotes are all from John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1958; reprint of 2nd ed., 1929). The first quote is from the first edition (1925), given in Joseph Ratner, *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (N. Y.: Henry Holt, 1928), p. 15, while the last two are seen in the rewritten first chapter for the second edition, p. 4.

¹⁰ John Dewey, “Experience, Knowledge and Value: A Rejoinder” in Paul A. Schilpp, *op. cit.*, p. 530.

¹¹ John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949, paperback ed., 1960), p. 286, n. 7; see: p. 294.

but that they exist in a continuity. In this sense the word is “the very signature of Dewey’s philosophy”.¹²

With the above as background, we now are able to appreciate Dewey’s position that society *is* individuals in their relations or experience to each other (for experience is no third reality), that society *is* individuals associating in such a manner that ideas, emotions, values are transmitted and made common. In a word, “society” is the name given to a certain kind of experience, that between human organisms. This is the theme of Dewey’s many writings on “social” matters, but it nowhere is stated more directly or eloquently (this last is rare in Dewey in contrast to Ortega) than in his *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. The lectures that comprise the book were delivered at the Imperial University of Japan in Tokyo during February and March of 1919, while Dewey was on sabbatical from Columbia University.

The eighth, and concluding, lecture dealt with social philosophy. He commenced by reminding his audience of the basic fact, something no philosophy can question or alter, that “society is composed of individuals”.¹³ Given this fact, it seems—he continued—that there are logically only three views on the relation of society to the individual: (1) society exists for the sake of individuals; (2) individuals exist for the sake of society; or (3) society and individuals are correlative, each requiring the service and subordination of the other. According to Dewey, all three views suffer a common defect: “They are all committed to the logic of general notions under which specific situations are to be brought (188).” In other words, the discussion in all three theories is in terms of *the* individual, *the* society or society *in general*. Since philosophy is an intelligent guide “in dealing with particular perplexities in life”, a position Dewey has established to his satisfaction, any discussion of society is an examination of a particular *kind* of association under given conditions of definite time and place. Talk about *the* society will not come to the aid of an individual problemed by a concern with *some* society. Such general talk, far from helping resolve problems, has the tendency, in the first two theories, to cover concrete situations so that defects are obscured and the need for reform disguised. In the third theory, since in principle it was asserted that the individual and society are but two sides of the same reality, general talk takes the form of assuring us that concrete conflict is apparent, not real. Meanwhile, of course, concrete troubles and evils persist. They are dealt with by the

¹² George R. Geiger, *John Dewey in Perspective* (N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 19. See: Geiger’s contribution, “Dewey’s Social and Political Philosophy” in Schilpp, pp. 335-368.

¹³ John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 187. The book was published originally in 1920 by Henry Holt & Co., New York City, and an edition, enlarged by an “Introduction: Reconstruction as Seen Twenty-Five Years Later” of 37 pages, appeared in 1948 by Beacon Press. Hereafter pagination for this work will be given immediately after the quote in the body of this study. For the Spanish translation, see: *La reconstrucción de la filosofía* (Buenos Aires, Aguilar, 1959) with a prologue by Luis Rodríguez Aranda.

method of trial and error and the competition of selfishnesses instead of by intelligence.

It is at this point that Dewey's own position became apparent. According to him, the flaw in the theory of individualism is that an individual is considered "as something given already" rather than as *coming to be there*, as taking on his individuality through transaction with external factors that involve other individuals. Society becomes the "means of *creating* individuals (94)." It is in this sense that society is made for the individual and not vice-versa. Society does not give "something" to the individual, not even happiness; rather society is the means an individual has of creating himself.

Even as "individual" is one word but not one thing, covering as it does "... the immense variety of specific reactions, habits, dispositions and powers of human nature that are evoked, and confirmed under the influences of associated life (199-200)," so with "society." This word covers all the ways in which by associating together men share their experiences, i. e., themselves, and build up common interests and aims. Examples include: street gangs, schools, clans, social cliques, trade unions, joint stock corporations, villages, national states and international alliances. We must not permit ourselves to identify society with the national state merely because that form represents the conspicuous culmination of the great movement of social integration and consolidation against rival minor social units over the last few centuries. Again:

Society... is many associations not a single organization. Society means association, coming together in joint intercourse and action for the better realization of any form of experience which is augmented and conformed by being shared. Hence there are as many associations as there are goods that are enhanced by being mutually communicated and participated in. And these are literally indefinite in number (205).

The question is always, according to Dewey, which association is to be studied. Furthermore, since an association is the means of conjoint sharing, no organization is an end in itself. Associations have as their ends the promoting of associating or mutual sharing of "experiences," hopefully for mutual benefit. Both the individual and the structural organization are subordinated to *the process of associating*, for each takes on its "nature" in that manner. "Society" is not the name of an independent entity. Rather, "society" is what we call the process of association, the associating that goes on between individuals (207). Unless the individuals in such "an associating" relation are subordinate to the associating (society as process), there is no communication of "experiences" whereby they become human or conscious centers of experiences; otherwise "... [they] remain(s) dumb, merely sentient, (a) brute animal[s]." ¹⁴ Organized structure or organiza-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 207. "Individuals who are not bound together in associations, whether domestic, economic, religious, political, artistic or educational, are monstrosities. It

tion, which is what traditional theory generally and erroneously meant by society, also must be subordinated to the associating (society as process); otherwise "... it becomes static, rigid, institutionalized ... [and so cannot] facilitate and enrich the contacts of human beings with one another (207)."

Since the individual does not exist alone but in a world which includes other individuals, the formation of habits (acquired functioning needed to go on living) is social. Human activity as "... conduct is always shared; this is the difference between it and a physiological process."¹⁵ That is, human conduct *is* social, whether good or bad. When a certain kind of human conduct or a particular habit becomes widespread, Dewey called it a custom. Social custom, or "collective habits," are not formed mainly by the consolidation of individual habits. "To a considerable extent customs ... exist because individuals face the same situation and react in like fashion (58)." To a larger extent customs *persist* because each individual forms his habits under conditions "set by prior customs," especially family customs (given Dewey's position that the family is one type of society). The entire process of education is the art of taking advantage of the plasticity and helplessness of the young to form the habits that aim at guaranteeing the maintenance of custom.¹⁶ What is usually ignored is that prevailing customs can be changed because of the same plasticity of the young. What traditional education has discouraged (remember that Dewey made a name for himself first in education) is the individual's reflection on social custom in order to understand why he acts the way he does. The consequence is a separation—one more dualis—between habit and thought, practice and theory. Habit becomes merely the power to repeat acts and thought becomes a plan without the means of execution.

Dewey held that "customs ... constitute moral standards. For they are active demands for certain ways of acting (75)." Socrates was the first to realize that, since customs often contradict one another, they are not fit to be the guide of life unless they are consciously criticized. As Dewey said in *Democracy and Education*, "The Greeks were induced to philosophize by the increasing failure of their traditional customs and beliefs to regulate life (322)."¹⁷ The choice by the Greeks, as is our choice today, was not between accepting custom or rejecting it, but between accepting custom as it was given, an authority as it stood, or reshaping and remaking custom according to the authority of intelligence.

is absurd to suppose that the ties that hold them together are merely external and do not react into mentality and character, producing the framework of personal disposition". John Dewey, *Individualism New and Old* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 78.

¹⁵ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (N. Y.: Henry Holt, 1922), p. 17. Hereafter the pagination for this work will be given immediately after the quote in the body of this study.

¹⁶ See: John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (N. Y., Macmillan, 1916).

¹⁷ See: Ricardo Nassif, *Dewey. Su pensamiento pedagógico* (Buenos Aires, Centro Editor de América Latina, 1968).

Morals is a social matter, a matter of customs. "Morals is as much a matter of interaction [transaction] of a person with his (social) environment as walking is an interaction [transaction] of legs with a physical environment. . . . There is a peculiar inconsistency in the current [1922] idea that morals *ought* to be social. . . . Morals *are* social. The question of ought, should be, is a question of better and worse *in* social affairs."¹⁸ A person has no choice but to be moral in his actions, since he lives in a world where others live and his actions influence them and they react upon him. The choice is whether to act for good or bad consequences.

"Since morals is concerned with conduct, it grows out of empirical facts."¹⁹ Hence, everything that can be known of human nature from physiology, medicine, anthropology, psychology and other empirical studies is pertinent to moral inquiry. It must not be forgotten that for Dewey human nature exists and operates in an environment with which it is continuous. Morality resides not in the perception of these facts but in the *use* made of the perceptions to modify the environment and change personal and social habits. The choice is to use this empirical information by habits generated and confirmed by custom or by the aid of the scientific method. In this manner the person takes a part in the making and remaking of himself and society.

The most "public" manner in which individuals can take part in remaking themselves, individually and collectively, is through the formulation of laws. Such formulation consists not only of the processes that are needed "to put a law on the books" but also those processes needed to administer and interpret it.²⁰ Pre-legal societies, if such can be granted, lived by non-legal customs. When laws or legal customs were introduced, they originated from non-legal customs. Gradually legal customs, because of the organized force of the society used in backing them, became, in a way, more important than non-legal customs, and today we do not usually distinguish between legal and non-legal customs but between laws and customs. It is in this context that Dewey spoke of the origin of law in custom. His thought on the matter is found within his short essay entitled *My Philosophy of Law*, published in 1941.²¹

¹⁸ *Human Nature and Conduct*, pp. 318, 319. Italics in original.

¹⁹ *Democracy and Education*, p. 295. See: Anselmo Mataix, *La norma moral en John Dewey* (Madrid, Revista de Occidente, 1964). Consult its bibliography for a list of books and articles by and on Dewey in Spanish.

²⁰ John Dewey, *My Philosophy of Law* (1941), p. 77. This is a group of sixteen essays by leading lawyers and philosophers, including Bingham, Cohen, Dewey, Dickinson, Fuller, Green, Kennedy, Kokourek, Llewellyn, Moore, Patterson, Pound, Powell, Rodin, and Wigmore. Hereafter pagination for this work will be given immediately after the quote in the body of this study.

²¹ For a study of this essay, see: Antón Donoso, "John Dewey's Philosophy of Law", *University of Detroit Law Journal*, 36 (1959), 579-606; and, for an expansion of the same theme, Antón Donoso, "La filosofía del derecho de John Dewey", *Revista Jurídica de la Universidad de Puerto Rico*, 29 (1959), 7-38.

Therein Dewey devoted himself to the question of the nature of law and found it to involve at least three related issues: the source of law, the end of law, and the application of law. Since Dewey's standpoint was that law is through and through a social phenomenon (within human experience), it follows that for him law was social in its origin, end, and application. As in his other writings, Dewey acknowledged that "social" is a "weasel word" and he explicitly stated that his usage of the word applied to interactional (transactional) forms of behavior or activities, i.e., to ongoing processes between humans. To say that law is social, then, means that law "must be viewed both as intervening in the complex of other [social] activities and as itself a social process, not something that can be said to be done or to happen at a certain date (76)". That is, law cannot be set up as either a separate or a complete entity; it can be viewed adequately only as a social process within a wider social process.

To say that law is social in origin is to mean that the source of law is custom. It is at this point that Dewey, in one short sentence, summarized his position as seen in *Human Nature and Conduct*, the source of the above information on habits, customs and morality. He wrote: "Human beings form habits as surely as they perform special deeds; and habits, when embodied in inter-actions [transactions], are customs (78)." In order to clarify what he meant by custom as the source of law, Dewey utilized an analogy, a river valley with its streams and banks.

The stream may be compared to the social process [life as actually lived], and its various waves, wavelets, eddies, etc., to the special acts which make up a social process. The banks are [relatively] stable, enduring conditions, which limit and also direct the course taken by the stream, comparable to customs. . . . Social customs, including traditions, institutions, etc. are stable and enduring compared with special deeds and with the serial arrangements of these acts which form a process. But they, and therefore the legal regulations which are their precipitated formulations, are only relatively fixed. They undergo, sooner or later, more slowly or more rapidly, the attrition of ongoing processes. For while they [customs] constitute *structure* of the processes that go on, they are the *structure of* the processes [of life as actually lived] in the sense that they arise and take shape within the processes [life], and are not forced upon the processes from without [or above society].²²

Accordingly, for Dewey, legal customs or laws are no more nor less "moral" than private habits and (social) non-legal customs. For him *all* conduct is moral, including conduct "under the law". Laws are those

²² *My Philosophy of Law*, p. 79. Laws are structures that channel action; "they are active forces only as are banks which confine the flow of a stream, and are commands only in the sense in which banks command the stream". John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Denver: Alan Swallow, n. d.; reprint of 1927 ed. by Henry Holt of New York City), p. 54.

customs that any society —hopefully acting intelligently or by scientific inquiry— has found the need to “precipitate” into specific formulations that can be enforced by means other than those used in the enforcement of non-legal customs. All customs are moral in the sense of directing human activities. To disobey a law, i.e., to act contrary to its directions, is to act badly. Conversely, to obey a law is to act well. Not all moral activity, be it good or bad, is also legal activity, be it good or bad; but all legal activity *is* moral activity.

The key to an understanding of Ortega’s meaning of “society” is his notion of life, human life, as the “radical” reality in which all other realities—including society, morality and law— are experienced. He was rather unsystematic in the presentation of his position and the closest he came to a sustained exposition of the basic notion he held was a course of lectures on what is society he delivered in 1949-50 at the Institute of Humanities he founded in Madrid after he returned from self-imposed exile. Only twelve of the proposed twenty lectures were given and these he prepared for publication, “adhering, in general, to the text that he had prepared for his course”.²³ The volume, entitled *Man and People*, was published posthumously in 1957.

With the publication of his *Revolt of the Masses* in 1930 Ortega realized that he needed to make public the underlying presuppositions of his critique of the massman mentality that was plaguing European civilization. Due to poor health, political activity, self-imposed exile, and his own work habits, the project was postponed to almost the end of his life. In *Man and People* he restated many ideas he had expressed earlier and made explicit notions basic to his ratiovitalism.

The ostensible reason for the book is to bring some clarity to the constant talk about social matters, including “the individual” and “collectivism”, “laws and the law”. Without a minimum of clarity the talking becomes harmful, issuing forth into argument, fighting and killing. Since the underlying essential ingredient in all these ideas is the idea of “the social”, of “society”, it is to this idea that Ortega addressed himself. He set out to search for clear ideas, that is, the truth, about society. “Like every strictly theoretical problem, this is at the same time an appallingly practical problem, one in which we are up to our necks today and indeed —why not say it?— drowning. We take it up not out of mere curiosity . . . (57).” Before beginning, however, Ortega expressed his disappointment that the idea had not been clarified already by such important figures in sociology as Comte, Spencer, Bergson, and Durkheim.²⁴

²³ “Publisher’s Note” in José Ortega y Gasset, *Man and People* (N. Y.: W. W. Norton, 1957), p. 7. Hereafter the pagination for this work will be given immediately after the quote in the body of this study.

²⁴ We must ask ourselves, at this point, whether Ortega thought he was doing philosophy or sociology (society theory), i.e., whether he thought his study was philosophy or sociology. Why did he criticize so severely these giants of sociology?

Ortega began his search for the reality called "social" with an examination of human life. To him, life is the type of reality "... that is definitely and determinedly different beyond any possible doubt or error, and hence is irreducible to any other type of facts (38)". It is the ultimate reality, or the radical and root reality, because it admits of no reality beneath it and because upon it all other realities necessarily appear. By "human life" as radical reality he meant "my life", the life of each of us rather than that of someone else. As he wrote: "In deference to idiom, I shall sometimes call it 'our life', but you must always understand that by this expression I refer to the life of each individual and not to the life of other people nor to a supposed plural and common life (39)". The lives of other people appear in the scenario that is *my* life; I see it but I do not live it. It may be noted at this point that Ortega considered his major contribution to philosophy to be his discovery of "my life" as the radical reality. In his words: "To the shame of philosophers it must be said that they have never seen the radical phenomenon that is our life. They have always turned their backs on it, and it has been the poets and novelists, but above all the ordinary man [as evident in his speech], who has been aware of it with its modes and situations (55)."

Especially emphasized by Ortega was that calling "my life" the radical reality does *not* mean that it is the only reality, let alone the highest, worthiest, most sublime, or supreme reality. In other words, his conception of "my life" is not solipsistic. More than once he stated: "... let there be no misunderstanding here. In no sense would I suggest that I am the only thing that exists (47)."²⁵ For, of all the innumerable attributes that can be posited of our life, the most indispensable one is that our being is had in an ambit, "in conjunction of completely definite circumstances (42)". This observation was what Ortega meant when he said life is circumstantial and he claimed that it was "the basis of my philosophic thought" as far back as his first book in 1914, *Meditations on Quixote*.²⁶ By having

For not being philosophers? The case of Durkheim especially is important since Ortega acknowledged that only he "... had a confused and momentary glimpse of ..." what is society. *Man and People*, p. 179.

²⁵ Ortega did not use the word "exist" to refer to human living as do most existentialists and, for this reason, Mariás objects to Ortega's being named among that group. In *Man and People* he wrote: "Today some writers attempt to make the term designate man's mode of being. But man who is always 'I' —the I that each of us is— is the only being that does not exist, but *lives* or is alive (41)".

See: Julián Mariás, "The Presence and Absence of Existentialism in Spain", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XV (1954-55), 180-191; Hugo Rodríguez Alcalá, "José Ortega y Gasset and Jean-Paul Sartre on Existence and Human Destiny", *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, 24 (1956), 193-211; and Janet Winecoff Díaz, *The Major Themes of Existentialism in the Work of José Ortega y Gasset* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970).

²⁶ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote* (N. Y.: W. W. Norton, 1961). This edition has an introduction by Julián Mariás, as well as the essential notes from his commentary to the Spanish edition of *Meditaciones del Quijote* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957). See also his *José Ortega y Gasset, Circumstance and Vocation*, whose Part Three is on the importance of this book.

attributed to life circumstantiality Ortega maintained that my life does not exist as a solitary entity, or even as a separate reality from that reality commonly called “the world”. Rather, “I am myself plus my circumstance”, in the phrase that became identified with Ortega. That is, my life includes not only me but also a definite circumstance that encircles me and in which I work *at living*. It is in this world that encircles me that I must look for that reality called “society”.

We must ask ourselves if our behavior in the presence of the different types of things (mineral, vegetable, animal, or human) that make up the world is “social”. Ortega quickly passed over, “without a stop”, minerals and plants but, interestingly, hesitated when he came to animals. Since whatever “social” will mean, Ortega is convinced, has something to do with reciprocal “intercourse”, it seems that our confrontations with animals include the possibility that they might respond to our actions. “The animal and I are ‘we’ because we mutually are *to each other* (87).” I co-exist with an animal, co-existence being an intertwining of existences, two beings inter-existing, not simply “being there” without having anything to do with each other. He lingered at this point for a moment and decided to lay aside the question as not being able to be answered satisfactorily. (“With the animal there is a very limited, confused, diffused, and dubious *nostrity* (110).” Henceforth Ortega will direct his attention to the thing that we call “men”.

The main question, at this point, is: “How do those things that I call ‘other men’ appear in my vital world (89)?” Reminding us that “all co-existence [—the basis for “social activity”—] is a co-existence of two inwardnesses”, the question is: how do these two inwardnesses become present to each other? In the light of what he had said already about the structural laws of the world, which are the laws of experience, a negative answer can be given. We do not experience immediately or patently the “inwardness” of another human. What is patent is the body of the other, and from the body as the “expressive field” or the “field of expressiveness” we know that an “inwardness” is compresent. This is neither a logical process nor an intuitive transportation of myself into the other body, for the other “. . . appears to us above all in his gesticulations, and there is good grounds for saying that a man *is his gestures* . . . (114).”²⁷

The above has been the preparation for Ortega’s main point, as seen in Chapter 5 on “Inter-Individual Life”, the key chapter in his book. It is that *reciprocity* is the condition of being human, for the first thing that appears to each of us in his life is the other man. “Because every ‘each’ is born into a family, which itself never exists in isolation . . . [t]he living human being . . . is born among men and they are the first thing that he encounters . . . (155).” That is, a human is *a nativitate* open to others. Indeed, it is through intimate co-living with others that each person, as a result of discovering the “you” of others, comes to be aware of his “I”. As Ortega

²⁷ See *Man and People*, p. 126, for why Ortega disagrees with Husserl concerning how a person knows another person.

had written years before, “the ‘we’ comes first, and then the ‘I’”.²⁸ Human life is, for Ortega, inter-individual life, and human activities are inter-individual actions. “The inter-individual relation is a typical reality of human life—it is human living together (178).”

The meaning of reciprocity is that not only do I act on the other but I expect him to respond. This unique reality, an action in which two active subjects take part, is inter-action. It is precisely this reciprocal activity that is “social”. A human being is, in his condition, social. An isolated individual human makes no sense to Ortega, for such an individual could not be born let alone develop himself. The concrete and unique “I” that each feels himself to be

... is not something we possess and know from the outset but something that gradually appears to us exactly as other things do, that is, step by step by virtue of a series of experiences that have their fixed order. I mean, for example—and this is the strange and unexpected thing—we discover that we are *I* after and by virtue of having first known the *you’s*, our *you’s*, in our collision with them, in the strife we called social relation (166).

This is extremely central to Ortega’s position, so much so that he stated explicitly: “I dwell on this because it is important for my doctrine that it be clearly understood (166).”

It is at this point that Ortega introduced a distinction that he thought distinguished his position from previous theories of society. He attempted to separate inter-individual actions and social actions, although he had referred to the two interchangeably hitherto. Using the example of a policeman directing traffic, and later of a salutation (Chapter 9) and all of language itself (Chapter 11), whose acts are not from his own inwardness, that is, meaningful to him in his own life, Ortega attempted to show how such activities proceeded from the indeterminate subject called “people”, “society”, the “collectivity”, “everybody”. Since there are only particular individuals co-existing with other particular individuals, we are faced with a reality that is human without individuals. In his words:

(So here) we have human actions of ours that lack the primordial characteristics of the human, that they have no particular subject who creates them and is responsible for them, for whom they have a meaning. We have, then, a human action; but it is irrational,²⁹ without spirit, without soul, in which I act in a fashion of the gramophone on which someone puts a record that it does not hear, of the planet circling blindly in its

²⁸ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme* (N. Y.: Harper & Bros., 1961), p. 108. This edition has an “Introduction” by José Ferrater Mora. *The Modern Theme* is the (mis)translation of the Spanish title *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (1923).

²⁹ This is the basis of Ortega’s maintaining that society is constitutively sick. See: *Man and People*, p. 271.

orbit, of the vibrating atom, the germinating plant, the nest-building bird. We have a human activity that is irrational and soulless. . . . It looks as if it were something human, but [is] dehumanized, mechanized, materialized (175).³⁰

For Ortega the social world equals the world of usages. In ordinary language, he pointed out, the word “usage” is employed identically with the word “custom”. In this context

usage would be custom, and custom is a certain mode of behavior, a type of action which has become customary, that is, habitual. Usage, then, would be a social habit. Habit is conduct that, by being frequently repeated, becomes automatic in the individual, and is produced or functions mechanically. When this conduct is not only frequent in an individual, but is frequently repeated by many individuals, we should have a customary usage (192-93).

Based on this ordinary use of the word, even sociologists of the stature of Max Weber have maintained frequency of behavior in various individuals to be the “substance” of usage. Ortega disagreed. To him there are actions that are frequently performed that are not usages (taking a walk) and usages that are infrequent (Roman custom of a ceremonial festival every century). “To see in the formidable reality of usage a simple precipitate of frequency is unworthy of an analytical mind (195).” Indeed, it is the opposite: we do not act frequently because it is an usage. The main attribute of usage is the violence or threat of violence directed to a particular subject if he does not comply. Thus, the characteristics of the “the social” in my life is a usage done: (1) under threat of violence and, therefore, (2) frequently and, therefore, (3) habitually.

In contradistinction to personal and inter-individual habits that have meaning because they are performed as a “means” to an end, for a purpose, and because we are responsible for them as “ours”, social habits or usages are *meaningless*. Thus, in forcing us to do them “society” is forcing us to act without meaning or mechanically. Once usages did have meaning; they were inter-individual and, therefore, intelligible human actions, “actions with a soul, which were drained of meaning, became mechanized, automatized, and as it were mineralized, in short, soulless (198)”. Accordingly,

³⁰ According to Ortega, “the majority of sociologists . . . have not succeeded in even setting foot in genuine sociology because on the very threshold they have confused the social with the inter-individual (179)”. He admitted that he himself had gone along with the “common usage” of using one word for two realities but maintained it is time to admit the error and realize that “. . . *the social appears not, as has hitherto been believed and as far too obvious, when we oppose it to the individual, but when we contrast it with the inter-individual (179)*”. (Italics in original.) His “uncommon usage” of the “social” or “society” contributes to the difficulty of clarifying his ideas. In attempting to change the usage of “social” by sociologists, Ortega may have tackled the impossible.

Ortega considered a usage to be a “human petrification, the fossilized behavior or idea (212)”.

Usages start when at least a minority of “those who count” begin doing something because it is “the thing to do”, without realizing why they are doing it, by aping or parroting the personal or inter-individual habits that do make sense of others. By the time “everybody” is doing it, that is, everybody who counts, whom still others imitate, the original meaning or sense almost has disappeared. When new usages come into practice, they seem to have more sense than the older ones only because the older ones are the most empty. All usages are slow in becoming established and slow in disappearing. Hence, even new usages are in essence old when viewed from the chronology of an individual life. All usages can be classified into two groups, depending on the type of violence or threat of violence used to enforce them: what Ortega called “weak and diffuse” usages and “strong and rigid” usages. Examples of the first are various ways of dressing, eating, speaking, and conducting ourselves in everyday life so that we follow what is vaguely called “public opinion”. (It is here that his example of the salutation is revealing.) “Examples of the ‘strong and rigid usages’ are—aside from economic usages— law and the State [the institutionalization of public power to enforce legal usages], within which appears that terrible but inexorable and indispensable thing, politics (215).” This gigantic architecture of usages is precisely what society is.

Ortega’s only reference to law in *Man and People* was when he disagreed with those philosophers of law who hold that the peculiar attributes of law are: (1) that its functioning is independent of our adherence, that is, that law exists whether or not we as individuals adhere to it; and (2) that it serves us as a collective authority to which we resort or can resort. For Ortega these attributes are, indeed, characteristics of law but not peculiar to law; they are the two most marked characteristics of any usage or binding observance (*vigencia*).³¹ What law or legal usage is, in particular, is that “public opinion” that is enforced or enforceable by “public power”. Thus, law is the minimal usage thought indispensable for the maintenance of the life of society. In this sense law is not only the reflection of antecedent social realities (weak usages) but also the effort to correct them and, sometimes, the effort to initiate new realities or usages. This he brought out in a speech he delivered as a member of the Spanish Parliament (Cortes).³²

³¹ *Man and People*, pp. 268, 214. Others, influenced by Ortega, who developed this dimension of his system, were: Jesús López Medel, *Ortega en el pensamiento jurídico contemporáneo* (Madrid, Artes Gráficas Ibarra, 1963); José Hierro S. Pescador, *El derecho en Ortega* (Madrid, Revista de Occidente, 1969); and, especially, Luis Recaséns Siches in all his many works and who, as early as 1934, linked Ortega’s conceptions of law and life.

³² The words of Ortega are quoted in Hierro S. Pescador, *op. cit.*, p. 312, n. 275. The speech was entitled “Proyecto de Constitución” (Sept., 4, 1931) and appeared in *Rectificación de la República*, pp. 87-88.

Throughout Ortega's consideration of usages, including his brief reference to legal usages, there was no mention of morality. This should not lead to the conclusion that he was not interested in the area or thought it insignificant. Rather, ethics—for him—is so intimately tied in with metaphysics, his theory of human life, that the two cannot be distinguished. This is why Ortega, throughout his writings, seldom touched explicitly upon the theme of ethics. According to him, living is, above all else, having to make our lives, intelligently and freely. Thus, life is constitutively moral—even apart from our acting well or badly. We all have the calling or vocation to be humans and our actions are morally good (moral) or morally bad (immoral) in accordance with our following of this vocation. When we follow our calling, we are “authentic” and live a happy existence.³³

The word “moral” irritated Ortega because it had been abused traditionally to designate a person's acts, acts which were spoken of as if somehow ornamental or exterior to his being and performed as supplementary in order to obtain a prize. He asked his readers, in one of the few essays in which he used the word, to interpret it as signifying, instead, the very being of a human when he is in his proper way of living. This moral living (to be “moralized”) is the opposite of what it means “to be demoralized”. “Demoralization” is a condition of the whole person, in which he is not in possession of himself, in which he is outside of his authenticity and, for that reason, does not live his life by taking part in creating his destiny.³⁴

Thus, for Ortega, personal and inter-individual habits, as well as social usages, are all moral because the person is constitutively moral. Social usages are constitutively “morally bad” because they are meaningless and lead to demoralization. Philosophy is our means of seeing these usages clearly or in truth for the meaningless habits that they are and of rejecting them or of readmitting the habits as meaningful into the repertory of our lives, this time because the person himself has rethought them and examined their foundations as means to the end of a happy existence. In short, “philosophy enables us to rethink critically usages so they become meaningful once more (264)”.³⁵

³³ José Ortega y Gasset, “Pidiendo un Goethe desde dentro” in *Obras Completas* (Madrid, Revista de Occidente), iv, p. 410, originally written for *Die Neue Rundschau* (Berlin, 1932). The English translation of “existencia feliz” as “successful life” is, unfortunately, misleading as seen in “In Search of Goethe from Whithin” in José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1956), p. 133, and originally published in English in *Partisan Review*, Dec., 1949. Despite its title, *El acto humano y la felicidad en la filosofía de José Ortega y Gasset* (Salamanca, Imprenta “Calatrava” Libreros, 1971), the essay by Hermínio Martínez is not helpful (with a quote on p. 59 by one of Ortega's critics attributed to Ortega himself) as it is basically a restatement of the very brief, but useful, *La ética de Ortega* (Madrid, Taurus Ediciones, 2nd ed., 1959) by José Luis L. Aranguren.

³⁴ Ortega, “Por qué he escrito ‘El hombre a la defensiva’” in *Obras Completas*, iv, p. 72. See: essay by Rodríguez Alcalá in n. 25 (*supra*).

³⁵ See: José Arsenio Torres, *Philosophic Reconstruction and Social Reform in John Dewey and José Ortega y Gasset*, University of Chicago, unpublished dissertation, 1954; Garly L. Albright, “The Concept of Perspective in George H. Mead and

The following observations on the similarities of the positions of Dewey and Ortega in no way are to be interpreted as minimizing their differences, which are many. As was stated at the beginning of this study, both thinkers are best understood as participants in that general movement against the monism of idealism. However, they were not favorable to a return to dualism in any of its forms. This is seen, especially, in their respective theories of the human. In both cases, the human was *not* viewed as radically other than his environment or circumstance. The human was seen in interaction or transaction with his surroundings such that he does not either end or begin with his skin. The person permeates the world and the world intermingles with the person. Together they form a unit, the unit which is reality.

It is within the above context that each thinker developed his notion of society as the *relation* between individuals, refusing to concede that it is an entity "in itself". Individual humans, for both philosophers, do not exist: each of us need other humans to come to be both in the sense of biological generation and in the sense of "taking on" our respective selves through our activities. Accordingly, both Dewey and Ortega viewed the person as constitutively moral (not to be confused with "morally good"). All our reflective activities help or hinder our becoming human. Laws, or customary social activities that have institutionalized power to insure compliance, emerge from the general ways of acting that have evolved from the day-to-day living that is necessary to sustain and develop life.

Finally, both philosophers held that the human activity of philosophizing is the best means of reflecting on inherited customs in order to insure that they are not "blindly" (unreflectively) followed. To Dewey and Ortega intelligent or meaningful *activity* demands philosophic *reflection*. That is, we think in order to live—in order to live ever more fully. Both thinkers tried to substitute for the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* the more basic principle *Cogito quia vivo*.

José Ortega y Gasset", unpublished dissertation, 1966, Columbia University, (George H. Mead, 1863-1931, was a colleague of Dewey at both the universities of Michigan and Chicago and was called by him "a seminal mind of the first order". From 1890 onward the influence of Mead on Dewey's psychology ranked with that of William James). Both are listed in Udo Rukser, *Bibliografía de Ortega* (Madrid, Revista de Occidente, 1971). This bibliography attempted to cover the entire world; the portion on the U.S.A., is extensive, (pp. 231-252), but not complete, and was compiled by Robert McClintock, whose study on *Man and His Circumstances: Ortega as Educator* (N. Y.: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1971) refers to Dewey.