Deweyan Growth, Egalitarianism, and Rawls: Connections and Clarifications

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In the North American context, one cannot delve deeply into the philosophical study of education without reliably encountering much secondary scholarship on the work of John Dewey. Thus, one might be forgiven for initially overlooking Nicolas Tanchuk's refreshingly rigorous engagement with the conceptualization of growth within that body of work. To my mind, that inattention would be a real mistake.

Tanchuk breaks with some of the secondary work on Deweyan ideas as he seeks to avoid the "ambiguous and often hazy talk" that may obscure a clearer sense of the ideals upon which he focuses in his fine article. Tanchuk approaches his goal by offering an extended account that aims to clarify several features of a Deweyan approach to growth understood as a normatively demanding moral and political ideal.

I very much appreciate that this work seeks to carefully advance a detailed theory through robust argumentation; philosophical work on education greatly benefits from such efforts. In truth, I read Tanchuk to have provided a novel theory that rests upon Deweyan foundations, rather than arguing for Dewey's "true" meaning or intention (however defined). As such, I shall direct much of my attentions to Tanchuk's theorizing rather than point to questions of Dewey's own work on growth and related concepts.

While I am not yet convinced by the central argument of Tanchuk's article, I suspect that this is largely owed to my own relative unfamiliarity with the particular steps of an obviously nuanced and capacious abiding project. In truth, it is a project that has much potential; I read Tanchuk to be working on a set of interrelated ideas that hang together to constitute an impressive whole. Given that, in what follows I wish to create an opportunity for clarity on some

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of the ideas that drive this worthwhile project. It is my hope that these clarifications, which I shall organize in relation to 1) growth, 2) egalitarianism, and 3) the Rawlsian foil of the article, might render the ideas therein more accessible to a wider audience of scholars.

Perhaps chief amongst the helpful clarifications (and the one that shall receive the least space here) would be a fuller definition of *what* the article takes Deweyan growth to be, in anticipation of its analysis of *how* it ought to be valued/justified. In some moments of the article a reader might be led to believe that growth is synonymous with "learning" or, perhaps more accurately, "learning for learning's own end." In other segments of the article, growth is identified as strongly similar in function to Rawlsian "aggregate welfare.""[1] As I suspect that Tanchuk's view of Deweyan growth might differ from standard takes on the concept, it would be helpful to have more of that substance in the service of more fully embracing the arguments and conclusions.

The second opportunity for clarification might be found in providing a more explicit statement about equality's relation to growth. In some moments, it seems as though the concept of equality pulls in multiple directions without the reader having a clear sense of why it behaves as it does in each instance.

To demonstrate, the article's analysis of Deweyan growth might rely upon equality understood as: A) "equal growth" and/or, B) "growth towards equality."

In the first instance, equal growth might be achieved if both parties within a pair grow in equal objective amount (here, one might imagine equal units of growth added to each party). Equal growth could also be achieved if both parties within a pair grow in equal proportional amount relative to their starting allotments (here, one might imagine equal percentage gains, as measured in units of growth, for each party). In either case, it would seem that equal growth reifies existing (presumably, undesirable) inequalities between parties such that the article's central claims of reciprocal transparency might be considerably frustrated.

In the second instance (growth towards equality), it would seem that

the desired goal of equal capacities between parties necessitates unequal gains in the service of equalizing members of the pair. Perhaps this outcome-oriented approach to equality and growth in Tanchuk's Deweyan theory represents a meaningful deviation from Dewey, as he seems to use the phrase that Tanchuk references, "equable and easy," in reference to intellectual *opportunities* rather than *outcomes.*[2]

Further clarification of the usage of equality that drives this Deweyan project would be especially helpful as I take one of Tanchuk's disagreements with Rawls to stem from the worry that a Rawlsian view on this Deweyan theory of growth might identify the unequal treatment of learners in the service of gains for the elite. But, of course, Rawlsians are rather focused on avoiding similar trouble with elitism and goals of equality. Given their dedication to Rawls' difference principle (which allows inequalities only in the service of gains to the least well-off), it is unclear why Rawlsians would not readily recognize the same potential in this Deweyan theory of growth (i.e., unequal growth might be justified only in instances in which it contributes to otherwise unachievable growth for those with the least capacities). Indeed, Tanchuk seems to recognize a similar possibility as he identifies something of a difference principle for growth, though this seems focused on improving *equality* rather than *welfare.*[3]

In any case, I am inclined to provisionally grant Tanchuk's assertion that the Rawlsian elitism objection seemingly defeats the simple version of the Deweyan theory of growth. In response to that potential defeat, Tanchuk powerfully suggests that the Deweyan theory can avoid this defeating objection on its own terms; yet, I would appreciate further discussion of why the problem is sufficiently avoided by moving equality to a conceptual location internal to the value of growth. Asked differently, what about that internal location fortifies the Deweyan theory of growth from Rawlsian objections of elitism? Indeed, much of this seems to depend upon Tanchuk's use of equality in ways that might be usefully clarified for the uninitiated reader.

As a final subject of clarification, I am excited about Tanchuk's view of Rawlsian theory and would welcome the opportunity to have him provide more context for his perspective. I am very glad that his article spans philosophical

traditions and think one of its real strengths is found in its willingness to do that captivating work in the service of new theorizing on such influential schools of thought. But I wonder about the degree to which the Rawlsian approach, presented in contrast to the Deweyan, seems to potentially encompass more of the Deweyan conceptual moves than Tanchuk's article acknowledges. In this, allow me to point to two sample areas that might allow for additional explicit analysis: self-interestedness and shared interests.

Tanchuk seems to read Rawls as holding a view of persons as *selfish* such that they must be systematically contracted into mutually or objectively beneficial actions. Though this is forwarded as a point of distinction between the Rawlsian and Deweyan approaches, it seems more likely to me that Rawls is best read as describing the *self-interestedness* of persons such that they benefit from a procedure by which they come to recognize their shared goals. And this does not seem very distant from elements of the presented Deweyan theory. In fact, Tanchuk suggests that persons will realize that their values align with others in the service of a (potentially utilitarian) view of the desirability of maximizing growth (however defined).[4] Might a Rawlsian social contract be echoed in the form of a Deweyan pedagogical contract? If not, it would be helpful to have more explicit statement about why we ought to regard these views as significantly dissimilar.

Tanchuk writes that Rawls' view (on the separateness of persons) requires a denial of the existence of any 1) ultimate and 2) unifying good. However, it is unclear why, in the context of the Deweyan discussion, Rawlsians would need to take a position as strong as denial on the first part of that construction. Their goals of political liberalism are met by their silence on the existence of an ultimate good; they need only be agnostic about that metaphysical matter. Additionally, on the second part of that construction, Rawlsians could well be understood as recognizing a unifying good. In many respects, the basis of Rawls' project is an engagement with the process by which diverse groups of persons holding seemingly incompatible sets of values can come to realize that they hold some unifying views of the good in common. In this way, Rawls' project is one of (an admittedly minimal) reciprocal transparency in the ways

that Tanchuk seems to define it.

With more opportunity, I would also invite Tanchuk to offer additional comments on the requirements of reciprocal transparency but, in respect of the constraints of this venue, I will table my eager curiosity and resign myself to thanking him for a wonderfully rich article, indicative of a worthy larger project. I very much look forward to potential growth as I learn from his current and future splendid work.

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1 Tanchuk, this volume.
2 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916), 88.
3 Tanchuk, this volume.
4 Ibid.