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*The Undiscovered Dewey: Religion, Morality, and the
Ethos of Democracy*, by Melvin L. Rogers.
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In his previous essay, “Action and Inquiry in Dewey’s philosophy,” Melvin L. Rogers contends that John Dewey modifies Aristotle’s epistemic categories (*episteme*, *phronesis*, and *techne*) and thereby offers a theory of person and inquiry that post-Analytical philosophers need.¹⁾ With his much deeper understanding of Dewey, Rogers once again gives us an Aristotelian interpretation of Dewey’s philosophy in his recent work, *The Undiscovered Dewey: Religion, Morality, and the Ethos of Democracy*. This time, however, he brings up Dewey’s theory of democracy, which can be understood in the context of “cooperative intelligence,” to borrow the phrase from James Campbell.²⁾ Just as

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1) Rogers, Melvin L., “Action and Inquiry in Dewey’s Philosophy,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 43 (1), (2007): 90-115.

2) I borrow the phrase, cooperative intelligence, from James Campbell. According to him, intelligence enables us “to move beyond the immediately good to lasting values, to actions and beliefs and goals that make possible human growth and long-term fulfillment,” and it “is not an individual possession but a possession of the

Aristotle argues for the inseparability between ethics and politics in his account of practical philosophy, Dewey links democracy to both religiosity and morality. Rogers recognizes this fact and attempts to reveal the secret of the linkage among them. He understands that Dewey's conception of democracy as a way of life can be a good theoretical source of participatory democracy that is a moral and political idea required for public today: with Dewey's theory of democracy, Rogers is well equipped to critically respond to those advocates of the elitism in politics who are cynical of the public and their capabilities in democratic government.

As an initial step to achieve this goal, Rogers discusses Dewey's theory of civic religiosity which I firmly believe is a core concept of democracy as a way of life. He opens his discussion by raising a question as follows: "In the absence of unifying theological commitments, how do we go about the business of managing democracy while simultaneously paying respect to religious commitment?" (xi). Rogers makes a claim of religious naturalism that men can live a religious life that is "pious without lapsing into blind deference and so threatening democracy" (242). He conceives of men who live such religious lives as an informed body of democratic citizens. They are men of democratic faith in human nature: faith that, given the conditions, men realize their individualities that would otherwise remain potential, and fully function.³⁾ For Rogers,

group. The effort of the vibrant community of cooperative inquirers is consequently our best means of addressing our collective problems. Hence my subtitle: *Nature and Cooperative Intelligence*. It is my contention that without cooperative intelligence, democracy, for which Dewey argues, would not be distinguished from Ochlocracy or mob rule. Plato and Aristotle recognized that democracy lacks cooperative intelligence, and thus identified it with a political system governed by demagoguery. For more information concerning the phrase, see, Campbell, James, *Understanding John Dewey: Nature and Cooperative Intelligence* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1995), x.

3) Cf, Dewey, John, "Creative Democracy - The Task Before Us," 1939, (LW 14:226).

those religious men are democratically participatory citizens. They are cooperatively deliberative (or intelligent) to construct (or improve) the milieu whereto their better potentialities actualize themselves. When inquiring into situations, they work together to identify their shared problems and resolve them in such a way as to realize the democratic ideal, which is all-around human growth. These democratic inquirers do not hold the dictatorship of fixed morality. For them, normative authority is not given from the outside of their existence, but rather within their activity of democratic inquiry. The democratic inquirers admit their fallibility. They are humble and tolerant to different ideas from their own. For that reason, they are capable of mediating conflicts between pluralistic values, but without occasioning a crisis of normativity.

So far, I have briefly explained how Rogers negotiates a wide range of Dewey's thought. However, my explanation of it is too brief to be intelligible. Thus, despite the danger of being somewhat redundant, I clarify each chapter's points made by Rogers, hoping to illustrate how civic religiosity, democracy, and morality are intertwined in Dewey's philosophy. His book consists of five chapters, which are divided into two parts. In Part I (From Certainty to Contingency), Rogers attempts to offer a revisionist reading of Dewey's view of religion and his theory of inquiry. Part I is the stage for his discussion of civic religion, pragmatic ethics, and radical democracy as a way of life, all of which are his key topics in Part II (Religion, The Moral Life, and Democracy).

Part I is comprised of the first two chapters. In Chapter 1 (Protestant Self-Assertion and Spritual Sickness), Rogers puts Dewey in a three way of conversation with Calvinist theologian Charles Hodge and liberal

Here the reference to Dewey's writing is keyed to his Collected Works published by the Southern Illinois University Press. The abbreviation LW, followed by specific volume and page number, stands for Later Work within that series of publications.

Protestants, such as Henry Ward Beecher, Lyman Abbott, James McCosh, and John Fiske. Rogers focuses on and understands two topics: piety and faith. According to him, Hodge believes that only Calvinist theologian worldview can be a candidate of the moral idea needed to contemporary soulless, immoral men. It persuades men to accept the object of their piety – namely, God. It helps them realize the purpose in world and secures a sense of moral commitment to self and society. On the contrary, according to Rogers, liberal Protestants made an intellectual attempt to understand piety by pursuing quest for “certainty”: in this liberal theology, surely, “progress remains, but it finds expression through a divinely sanctioned vision of *self-assertion*” (30).

Rogers recognizes that Dewey gives us an alternative to Hodge’s reactionism and liberal Protestants’ modernism. Rogers criticizes that the former promotes fundamentalist dogmatism which is not correspondent to our contemporary pluralist world, and the latter leads to disenchantment of the self’s relation to the world. He believes that Dewey’s naturalist progressivism or progressive naturalism, with which fallibility and transactionalism are presupposed, is a good alternative to both theologies. It is indeed deemed correspondent to moral pluralism and links the self to the world. According to Rogers, Dewey builds this progressivism by accepting Darwin’s scientific worldview. In fact, Dewey secures a great insight on “nature” from Darwin’s scientific worldview, that is, the idea of “contingency” (For Rogers’s articulation of Darwin’s concept of contingency, see, 31-35).

Dewey understands men and their religious, pious lives in the contingent Darwinian nature, and advocates transactionalism: “there is transaction relationship among self, other, and the world – resulting from the movement of and disruption in life (what he called ‘problem’) – that generates and structures frameworks of meaning” (48). Rogers argues

that this transactionalism allows Dewey to avoid the pitfalls that can present serious metaphysical and epistemological problems emerging out of Hodge's Calvinism and liberal Protestantism. Metaphysical problem refers to the order of universe which they think is given, hence certain and necessary. In the universe that shuns the contingency, self is just an occasion for a sick soul that loses piety: self is underwritten by piety that is implicit in the contingency. Epistemological problem is that a sick soul pursues the quest for certainty.

In Chapter 2 (*Agency and Inquiry After Darwin*), Rogers deals with the epistemological problem by focusing on Dewey's theory of inquiry and agency. For Dewey, inquiry is not a certainty-begging epistemological enterprise, and agency is not an intellectual atom considered to be a sick soul. Dewey conceives inquiry as an empirical, naturalistic, moral, and socio-political action wherein normative authority lies. The key element to this action is "the place of contingency therein" (61). He believes that through their inquiring action, men improve their environing conditions. Rogers writes: men's inquiring "action and knowledge (that is, of both self and world) are emergent environmental properties, potentially defying human mastery and control" (61).

Rogers recognizes that as such, Dewey's meliorism presupposes the nature of man as humble yet hopeful. In the process of inquiry, humans understand that the results of their inquiry, including hypotheses employed in their project to resolve problems they are faced with, are fallible. Accepting fallibility, inquirers are humble. However, this does not mean that they lose hope. With hope, "humility is the gift of inquiry" (101). In other words, their inquiring action would not be possibly made without their desires accompanied by confident expectation of its fulfillment. They *can* have such desires because they have the democratic

faith.

Living a life guided by civic religiosity as such, men will not stop pursuing inquiry: they will continuously rearrange their experiences (and reconstructing their knowledge) to make their enviring conditions better and more fruitful. At the end of the Preface of the book, Rogers delivers a central message of the book: “The defining feature of Dewey’s philosophy ... is an understanding of humility that does not extinguish hope.”(xiii). Along with his idea of contingency, his theory of human agent as humble yet hopeful is the core part of Dewey’s philosophy.

Part II weds Dewey’s theory of inquiry and human agency to Dewey’s core areas flagged by Rogers’s subtitle, that is, Religion, Moral Life, and Democracy. Rogers offers an Aristotelian interpretation of these areas. This is important because Aristotle is commonly identified with a group of philosophers who advocate political elitism. But this does not mean that Rogers’s Aristotelian interpretation of the mentioned areas of study is wrong: as a matter of fact, in the history of political philosophy, there are some thinkers, such as Hannah Arendt and John Pocock, who have used Aristotle as a source of participatory democracy.⁴⁾ In Part II, Rogers contends that this reading of Aristotle’s politics is not correct. He sees that Dewey corrects this misreading, so as to offer a democratic ethics and a pragmatic theory of democracy. Rogers recognizes that for Dewey, the best political regime that was imagined by Aristotle is not the

4) Arendt’s *The Human Condition* is a work of civic republicanism originating in Aristotle. I regard this political idea as a part of the idea of participatory democracy. The relation of Aristotle to the civic republican tradition is also found in John Pocock’s famous book, *The Machiavellian Moment* and is repeated by many who have been influenced by it. For more information concerning the political idea of civic republicanism, see, Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Pococke, John G., *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003)

aristocratic republic where a few educated elites whose minds are self-restraint govern for the good of all, but rather, the kind of participatory democratic government where all citizens participate in ruling and are ruled by themselves. According to Rogers, Dewey regards Aristotle as a significant critic of the political elitism, which is a systematic but failed attempt to theorize how the common good can be formed and achieved. In short, Rogers reads Dewey as Aristotelian of participatory democracy, who advocates a small participatory democratic government where educated and deliberative citizen run politics for the common good. As such, my correct reading of Part II, especially Chapter 5 (Constraining Elites and Managing Power), is verified by Rogers's positioning Dewey against Walter Lippermann. Rogers notes: "for Lippermann experts give shape to the problems that are only dimly perceived by both citizens and political officials" (201). Along with Dewey, Rogers critically evaluates Lippermann's conception of citizens – citizens who "are dogmatic and irrational, hence incapable of "understanding problems and assessing potential proposals" – as rootless: "there is no reason to posit this (conception of citizens) as fundamental to human psychology and human socialization, precisely because citizens invariably move away from or rethink the belief they hold" (emphasis added, 201).

Rogers notes that Dewey conceives democratic citizens as a deliberative and informed body of socio-political men. This is critical insofar as citizens have been incorrectly deemed incapable of managing powers in politics over themselves and thus some intellectuals like Lippermann have embraced the practice of political elitism. For Dewey, citizens are capable of addressing their moral and socio-political problems and adopt at imagining hypotheses to lead them to resolving those problems. This is how they improve their conditions, and there is

no reason to be ruled by the political elites. With deep trust of democratic faith, Dewey can say this.

In Chapter 3 (Faith and Democratic Piety), Rogers articulates Dewey's concept of civic religiosity. This is linked to the democratic capacity. It is well known that for Dewey, the adjective, religious, does not refer to the quality of deity as an attribute of divine being or object, but rather, to the quality of human experience in contingent nature. Rogers writes: "what Dewey ... wants to identify as religious" is those forms of experience that "intensify and deepen our communion with the large world" (125 – 126). When it is narrowly or mistakenly used to indicate a feature of organized religion or a property of institutions, religious life is meant as a life living according to faith as the body of dogma of an organized religious institution. On the contrary, when the adjective, religious, refers to the quality of human experience, religious life is meant as a democratic life of faith in human nature.

Rogers recognizes that in this Deweyan religious naturalism, religiosity denotes piety that is without falling into the body of dogma and allows us to live a life controlled by the democratic faith: a life of "democratic piety" (For Rogers' full articulation of the phrase, see, 126 – 136). Rogers urges his audiences to "understand piety and faith as *democratic virtues*" (*italics mine*, 127). Men who cultivate themselves toward those "religious" traits of character are considered democratically virtuous. They are pious, but not in a sense that their lives and experience are incorporated to the order of supernatural beings or objects as fixed and related to infallible dogmas behind this order. Instead, they are democratic in their lives and expand the horizon of experience to make our lives richer and flourishing.

In Chapter 4 (Within the Space of Moral Reflection), Rogers recognizes that in Dewey's pragmatist ethics, there is a connection

between morality and democracy, and attempts to explain this linkage. For Dewey, moral inquiry is not a pure reason-based and autonomous action to give the moral laws that are completely independent of enviroining conditions. It is rather a cooperatively intelligent action of democratic deliberation – wherein morality lies – to address various socio-political and economic issues in contemporary pluralist world. “Moral conflict” between diverse views of issues emerges and “deliberation” is thus required to resolve the conflict that would otherwise develop into culture wars (170). Rogers supports Dewey’s argument that deliberation should be democratic. Dewey’s religious naturalist concept of democracy – which is understood in the context of meliorism – directs our moral thought and judgment along the lines to address hindrances to human growth and the actualization of individuality. We as a cooperatively intelligent society have “mutual responsibility” to identify problems we commonly share together and resolve them in such a way as to lead to all-around flourishing of human life (170). Rogers concludes chapter 4 that as such, moral inquiry is considered to be the best method to pursue the quest for the common good in our pluralist world.

I have reviewed each chapter in a reversed way because I feel that Rogers’s reading of Dewey’s theory of democracy should be highlighted in his moral philosophy. Dewey’s view of moral life embraces the participatory democracy, which is his Aristotelian understanding of democratic life. In Rogers’s interpretation of Dewey’s view of moral life, I see him emphasizing on democratic deliberation whereon moral life is based. According to Rogers, Dewey does not regard deliberation as the kind of “utilitarianism’s calculative understanding of deliberation” because this “calculative approach undercuts the deliverances of the imagination, and in some instances simply ignores them altogether” (177).

It is conceived of as the imaginative action that allows us to “have access to” and “focus on funded experiences for future possibilities” (176).

Rogers offers a great insight into Dewey's theory of moral life, but it seems to me that his understanding of deliberation-based moral life is limited, since he does not include a discussion of Dewey's theory of democratic virtues. Briefly conceived, democratic virtues are traits or habits of character, which are considered morally good because they are dispositions to kinds of cooperatively intelligent and constructive activity by which individuals work together to create the proper conditions, thereby actualizing their individualities that might otherwise remain merely potential. In his recent book, *Human Eros: Eco-ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence*, Thomas Alexander writes: “the core of democratic virtues lie in the ability to learn the art of living meaningfully, cultivating experience so that society can intelligently act for those consummatory experiences which realize the deepest sense of embodied value and meaning in our existence.”⁵⁾ For Dewey, moral life is a form of life constrained by democratic virtues. Living moral life is bringing democracy (understood in terms of civic religiosity) to our problematic situations. Democratically virtuous men are the democratic public, cooperatively intelligent and participatory. With his concept of democratic virtues, we can not only critically respond to the elitism in politics, but also mediate moral conflict between our plural values which are incommensurate. Dewey's concept of democratic virtues should have been articulated in Rogers's discussion of Dewey's ethics, in order that he could find out and fill the gap between morality and democracy. But this criticism does not undermine Rogers' contribution to the growth of Dewey scholarship by discussing Dewey's study of ethics that is linked

5) Alexander, Thomas M., *Human Eros: Eco-ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 202.

to democratic ethos intertwined with civic religiosity.

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