



Enabling the Individual: Simmel, Dewey and “The Need for a Philosophy of Education”

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Article abstract

The essay brings together Georg Simmel's and John Dewey's reflections on the issues of education against the background of their diagnosis of a crisis in modern culture. In speaking of a “tragedy of culture” (Simmel) or, respectively, of a “tragedy of the lost individual” (Dewey) both thinkers stress the challenge the individual faces in constituting itself as a unity within a highly differentiated culture. I will show that both Simmel's as well as Dewey's considerations refer to the urgency of understanding individuality not as something static and fixed but as a coherent manner of interacting with continuously transforming conditions. This is an insight which emerges from Simmel's “philosophy of life” as well as from Dewey's “philosophy of experience” and it urges modern education to focus on enabling the individual's “self-control” and “self-direction” within its own life and experience process.

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Abstract The essay brings together Georg Simmel's and John Dewey's reflections on the issues of education against the background of their diagnosis of a crisis in modern culture. In speaking of a “tragedy of culture” (Simmel) or, respectively, of a “tragedy of the lost individual” (Dewey) both thinkers stress the challenge the individual faces in constituting itself as a unity within a highly differentiated culture. I will show that both Simmel's as well as Dewey's considerations refer to the urgency of understanding individuality not as something static and fixed but as a coherent manner of interacting with continuously transforming conditions. This is an insight which emerges from Simmel's “philosophy of life” as well as from Dewey's “philosophy of experience” and it urges modern education to focus on enabling the individual's “self-control” and “self-direction” within its own life and experience process.

The emphatic insistence on “The Need for a Philosophy of Education”, mentioned in the heading, comes from the title of an essay by the American philosopher John Dewey. This essay was published in 1934 in the journal *The New Era in Home and School*. Dewey comments there on the “progressive education” movement, which was increasing in significance in the USA at that time.¹ He contends that by defining itself mainly in contrast to the so-called “old education”, which is identified with “external and authoritative imposition” (Dewey, [1934] 1974: 7), this new movement itself had hitherto failed to develop a well-founded theory of education. According to Dewey, it rather tends to “stop short with the

¹ On Dewey's relation to ‘progressive education’ see Oelkers/Horlacher (2002) and, with a focus on pedagogy in Germany, Bitner (2001).

recognition of the importance of giving free scope to native capacities and interests” (7-8), does not face the central question of “what education really *is*” (4) and does not devise corresponding aims and methods. Hence, a philosophy of education is needed in order to justify a fundamental change in educational practice, which Dewey also yearns for. But we can ask: why is this an urgent issue at all? In this essay as well as in a large number of other writings, Dewey argues that it is not a theory that calls for such a change, but social and cultural evolution itself. The progress in natural science and technology within the ongoing process of industrialization determines the conditions of “modern life” and raises the question of how the increasing quantity of material cultural goods can be integrated into the development of the members of society themselves and could thus quite literally become the material for their personal cultivation. It is the “qualitative question” of whether “a material, industrial civilization [can] be converted into a distinctive agency of liberating the minds and refining the emotions of all who take part in it” (Dewey, [1929/30] 1984: 100). This question already led Dewey in 1899 to a clear judgment: “It is radical conditions which have changed, and only an equally radical change in education suffices” (Dewey, [1899] 1974: 299).

Georg Simmel’s open response to a 1909 survey entitled “The Future of Our Culture” draws a comparable picture of the situation. This essay deals with the question of how cultural development can be actively supported at present time. His diagnosis reads:

As far as I can see, the reason for the apparent pessimism of the majority of philosophical minds regarding the present state of culture is the widening gulf between the culture of things and personal culture. As a result of the division of labor during the last few centuries, the technology at our service and the knowledge, arts, lifestyles and interests at our disposal have an expanded to an unprecedented variety. But the individual’s capacity to use this increased raw material as means of personal

culture increases only very slowly and lags further and further behind (GSG 17: 80-81; Simmel 2006: 101)².

According to Simmel, the cultural policy of past “great eras [...] always concentrated on the subjective factor: the *education* of the *individual*” (82; 102). This is also the key to dealing with the current situation as well, he claims. But this factor needs to be radicalized:

It would be essential to concentrate school education [...] on those categories which prepare the pupil for the reception of the elements of objective culture which await him. [...] Our young people are prepared to compare the Peloponnesian War with the Second Punic War, to reproduce the train of thought of Lessing’s ‘Laokoon’, perhaps even to indicate the order of the Platonic Dialogues. But they lack the means to appropriate [*Aneignung*] and transform [*Verarbeitung*] the cultural values in politics, art, ethics and science of our present time.³ No cultural policy can eliminate the tragic discrepancy between objective culture, with its unlimited capacity for growth, and subjective culture, which can grow only slowly. But it can work towards reducing that discrepancy by enabling the individual to make better and more rapid use of the elements of objective culture in our lives as the raw material of subjective culture, which, when all is said and done, is the only thing that gives the former any real value (82-83; 102).

What is described here as a “tragic discrepancy” was two years later stated more acutely with the famous notion of a “tragedy of culture”; a formula which has become almost synonym for Simmel’s philosophy of culture. In the essay “The Concept and Tragedy of Culture”, first published 1911 in the journal *Logos*,

² When quoting from translations of Simmel’s works, the reference to the English version is placed directly behind the reference to *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe* (GSG); separated by a semicolon. Wherever no translation is referred to, it is my own translation. At this point, I would like to thank Aengus Daly, who has proofread my English manuscript, for his valuable indications.

³ Unfortunately, the part of the quote up to here is missing in Simmel 2006.

Simmel speaks of a profound alienation [*Entfremdung*] in modern culture which is founded in the immanent dialectic of the concept of culture as such. At first sight, this could be read as a pessimistic and resigned insight. While Dewey is well-known for his large number of publications on education and the co-foundation of an experimental school in 1896 in Chicago which “went down in history as one of the first experiments of ‘progressive education’ of 20th century” (Neubert, 1998: 53), Simmel’s published works do not in fact offer any explicit pedagogic content. However, in his lectures on school-education [*Schulpädagogik*], held in 1915/16 at Strasbourg, Simmel dealt with concrete questions concerning education and the teaching framework and thus concretized the aforementioned task of “enabling the individual”. These lectures reveal that the “tragedy of culture” was not Simmel’s last word on this topic, but that he, too, was concerned with developing a philosophy of education that could provide an appropriate response to the conditions of modern life.⁴

In the following I will bring together Simmel’s and Dewey’s reflections on modern education in three steps. First, I will present their analyses of the profound crisis in modern culture as culminating in the requirement to re-define individuality in terms of modern conditions. In so doing, I will outline the systematic parallels between the Simmelian and the Deweyan approach to this task. In a second step I will show that both of their educational programs refer to these theoretical considerations in their rejection of a so-called ‘either-or’ and their search for a ‘third way’ beyond subjectivism and objectivism within the framework of a ‘philosophy of life’ (Simmel) or, respectively, a ‘philosophy of experience’ (Dewey). Thirdly, and finally, I will argue that both thinkers’ reflections on the philosophy of education reveal a particular concept of philosophy itself, namely, as a genuine part of culture.

⁴ On the reception history of Simmel’s *Schulpädagogik* see Amat (2018: 267ff.), whose merit it is to have presented in detail the central role of Simmel’s educational ideas within his ‘relationalist philosophy’; more than 25 years after the pioneering works of Danner (1991) and Levine (1991).

1. Simmel and Dewey on Modern Culture

1.1. Simmel's "tragedy of culture"

In "The Concept and Tragedy of Culture" (1911), Simmel provides a powerful description of the profound "antagonism of forms: between subjective life, that is restless but infinite in time, and its contents which, once created, are immovable but timelessly valid" (GSG 12: 194; Simmel 2006: 55) through their being condensing into solid forms in the sphere of objective spirit. They thereby gain a value that is independent of the process of valuation of the soul and take their place in a "persisting, objective order of values, be they logical or moral, religious or artistic, technical or legal" (200; 59). According to Simmel "culture directs its unity through both" the subjective and objective order of values "for it implies that kind of individual perfection which can take place only by receiving or using a supra-personal construct, located in some sense outside the subject" (204; 61-62). Culture, as the frequently cited definition of Simmel says, is

the path from the closed unity through the developed diversity to the developed unity [...] toward a phenomenon which is laid out in the embryonic forces of the personality, sketched, as it were, as an ideal plan into the personality itself (196; 56).

In view of the objective orders of value we can speak of a 'culture of things', but in a strict sense the concept of culture refers to the 'culture of individuals' because culture conceptually means a "synthesis of a subjective development and an objective spiritual value" (208; 64).

Simmel diagnoses an essential imbalance between subjective and objective culture in the modern differentiated society on this conceptual basis: As "the meaning of the objective factor escapes the subject due to its formal determinations: independence and impersonality [*Selbständigkeit und Massenhaftigkeit*]" (214; 68), the subject is left behind and seems conversely to be brought into service of objective spirit:

There thus emerges the typical problematic condition of modern humanity: the feeling of being surrounded by an immense number of cultural elements, which are not meaningless, but not profoundly meaningful to the individual either; elements which have a certain crushing quality as a mass, because an individual cannot inwardly assimilate every individual thing, but cannot simply reject it either, since it belongs potentially, as it were, to the sphere of his or her cultural development (220; 73).

Herein the paradox is manifested: all cultural contents “are indeed created by human subjects and are meant for human subjects, but follow an immanent development logic in the intermediate form of objectivity [...] and thereby become alienated from both their origin and their purpose” (217; 70). The “tragic” character of this development “as opposed to a sad or, viewed from outside, a destructive one” lies ultimately in “the fact that the annihilating forces aimed against an entity stem from the deepest layers of this very entity; when it is destroyed, a fate is completed which is planned within itself and is the logical development, so to speak, of the very same structures with which the entity built up its own positive nature” (219; 72).

Already in his *Philosophy of Money* (1900) Simmel had exposed the active role of division of labor as it promotes the process of decoupling objective culture on the level of production and consumption. On the one hand, this is because of “the inadequacy [...] between the worker’s existential form and that of his product”, since the product is no longer an expression of “the unity of the ‘ego’” (GSG 6: 629; Simmel 2004: 454) of a single person. On the other hand, this is because of the “autonomy of production with reference to the consumer” (634; 457), insofar as, paradoxically, “the more objective and impersonal an object is the better it is suited to more people” (631; 455). It is against this background that Simmel can affirm it to be “true that, in our present epoch, important things are carried out not by individuals but by the masses” (648; 467). This ‘mass character’ of modern culture, finally,

correlates with a “bewildering plurality of styles” (641; 462) that categorically distinguishes modern life from earlier epochs:

What the Ancient Greeks created in politics and science, strategy and scope for pleasure, had a sufficiently consistent style and simple structure to be grasped to some extent by any educated man. He could, without difficulty, make use of the sum total of objective culture to build up his own subjective culture. Thus they could both evolve in a harmony which, in the modern age, has been destroyed as they have become independent of each other. In our indescribably complex culture, individual ideas and achievements leave behind permanent forms in which the fruits of individual lives become independent of those lives (GSG 17: 81; Simmel 2006: 101-102).

It is the resultant “inevitable lack of common style” (81; 101), the missing “general form of the particular” (GSG 6: 659; Simmel 2004: 473) which “robs the individual of any consistent inner relationship to culture as a whole, and casts him back again on his own resources” (GSG 17: 81; Simmel 2006: 102). This can initially be interpreted in a positive sense, because “[o]nly where a variety of given styles exists will one detach itself from its content so that its independence and specific significance gives us the freedom to choose between the one or the other” (GSG 6: 642; Simmel 2004: 463). But the emerging challenge of developing an individual “style of life” (591; 429) which gives its contents a unified form is in constant danger of failing through general disorientation and excessive demands, because of the impossibility of assimilating the inexhaustible contents of objective spirit. Thus, the ‘tragedy of modern culture’ can be reformulated as the individual’s tragedy – in light of the lack of a uniform style of modern life – of finally recognizing itself *as* a free individual but also of the threat of falling into despair about fulfilling this freedom.

1.2. Dewey's "tragedy of the lost individual"

From this analysis, we make a connection to Dewey's comparable diagnosis of a "crisis in culture" (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 99), which he made in a series of articles in 1929/30 in *The New Republic* under the programmatic title "Individualism, Old and New". Dewey there describes in detail the paradoxical phenomenon that in modern 'American life', which is greatly influenced by an increasing "corporateness", although "[a]ssociations tightly or loosely organized more and more define the opportunities, the choices and the actions of individuals" (58), these individuals nonetheless find themselves isolated and disorientated within society. According to Dewey, the reason for this is to be found in the "loss of secure objects of loyalty" (71) in almost every area of cultural life: "It would be difficult to find in history an epoch as lacking in solid and assured objects of belief and approved ends of action as is the present. Stability of individuality is dependent upon stable objects to which allegiance firmly attaches itself" (66). In modern culture, characterized by material abundance, economic and political insecurity and the shrinking significance of religious practice (see 67-71), the individual seems to be hopelessly "lost" (66).

For Dewey, the irony of this situation lies in the fact that it was the idea of individualism that originally inspired the industrialization process, but that then turned into its opposite through its practical realization as an economic principle:

The earlier economic individualism had a definite creed and function. It sought to release from legal restrictions man's wants and his efforts to satisfy those wants. It believed that such emancipation would stimulate latent energy into action, would automatically assign individual ability to the work for which it was suited, would cause it to perform that work under stimulus of the advantage to be gained, and would secure capacity and enterprise the reward and position to which they were entitled. At the same time, individual energy and savings would be

serving needs of others, and thus promoting the general welfare and effecting a general harmony of interests (78).

But this expectation was not fulfilled. On the contrary, Dewey describes the current situation as an “economic determinism” (46) because the individual’s activity seems to be completely subordinated to the logic of pecuniary profit, whose mechanism shows itself paradigmatically in the role of the ‘working class’ in the production process: “Their hearts and brains are not engaged. They execute plans which they do not form, and of whose meaning and intent they are ignorant – beyond the fact that these plans make a profit for others and secure a wage for themselves” (104). For Dewey, this is only one example among many for “a perversion of the whole ideal of individualism to conform to the practices of a pecuniary culture [which] has become the source and justification of inequalities and oppressions” (49). Indeed, this development mirrors a general aberration: The failure of the general effort of freeing the individuals from institutional constraints so as to provide space for them to freely develop their personal potential and thereby to create common shared ideals and values that they could all harmoniously identify themselves with:

[...] the ideal of equality of opportunity and of freedom for all, without regard to birth and status, as a condition for the effective realization of that equality [...] has not become the well-spring of a new intellectual consensus; it is not (even unconsciously) the vital source of any distinctive and shared philosophy (49).

Under these circumstances, the active process of ‘loosening’ “from the ties that once gave order and support to their lives” (75) leaves individuals ‘lost’ in the passive literal sense. This process threatens to ultimately culminate in a general “loss of individuality” (70), insofar as mass-production and mass-distribution generate a society marked by superficial conformity instead of being a vivid and organic ‘whole’ of interacting individuals (82). This irony is expressed concisely in Dewey’s ambiguous formula of “the tragedy

of the ‘lost individual’” (81): because the individual is, for the first time in history, able to benefit from freedom of self-determination and so to recognize itself *as* individual, it finds itself confronted with an unmanageable and incoherent variety of cultural goods operating by a logic of their own, but on which its very own cultivation relies, “[f]or human nature is self-possessed only as it has objects to which it can attach itself” (70). Dewey resumes:

The tragedy of the ‘lost individual’ is due to the fact that while individuals are now caught up into a vast complex of associations, there is no harmonious and coherent reflection of the import of these connections into the imaginative and emotional outlook of life (80-81).

Against this background, it becomes clear that the similarity of Dewey’s and Simmel’s diagnoses of crisis is indicated not only by the analogous way in which their conclusions are articulated, but also by the structural parallels in the underlying analyses. What Simmel describes as the “tragedy of culture” in modern life can indeed be reformulated as a “tragedy of the lost individual” in the Deweyan sense: *As* an individual, it faces the challenge of constituting itself as an “integrated personality” (65) within a conglomerate of diverse cultural forms, each of which makes different demands on it:

We should forget “society” and think of law, industries, religion, medicine, politics, art, education, philosophy – and think of them in the plural. [...] All these callings and concerns are the avenues through which the world acts upon us and we upon the world (120).

In 1916 and 1918,⁵ Simmel illustrated this situation by contrasting two concepts. On the one hand, he speaks of a ‘totality

⁵ Namely in „*Der Fragmentcharakter des Lebens*“ (1916) which is in part identical with chapter 2 of Simmel’s *Lebensanschauung* (1918).

of life' [*Lebenstotalität*], which designates the “continuous stream of contents” (GSG 13: 215; Simmel 2012: 247) of subjective life throughout the entire course of its life; and on the other hand, he uses the concept of ‘world-totality’ [*Welttotalität*], or more precisely, of ‘world-totalities’ in the plural, insofar in every form of culture “the theoretical infinity of possible contents coalesces in each case into a ‘world’ united by a consciously *special* character” (GSG 16: 238; Simmel 2010: 20). It is against this background that Simmel speaks of “the fragmentary essence of our life” as soon as it becomes “mentally conscious” (GSG 13: 203; Simmel 2012: 238):

All of our thought-contents are indeed accompanied by a more or less clear feeling that each content must belong somewhere. [...] Insofar as our contents of life exist more or less in between life per se, on the one hand, and ideal totality of worlds, on the other hand, they become fragments. [...] Life makes up a whole, yet so too does each categorial world. Where life and worlds intersect, they create fragments – fragments of life, fragments of worlds (213, 215-216; 246-247).

Precisely this “in-between” is where, according to Simmel, “ego-formation” itself takes place:

And just as this life process separates its contents from itself, just as they obtain a significance beyond their dynamic reality, so too it releases from itself, on its other side as it were, the ego – differentiated in a certain sense *uno actu* with the contents, and therewith also distinguished as a special significance and value, existence and claim from the contents that at first exclusively fill the naive consciousness. The more we have experienced, the more decidedly the ego marks itself off as the one and continuing thing in all pendulum swings of fate and conditions of the world (GSG 16: 312; Simmel 2010: 73-74).

The feeling of alienation in modern culture can be described against this background as a profound ‘fragmentation of the personality’ in the sense that in the highest tension between life- and world-totalities the individual seems to be no longer able to

adequately relate the fragmentary contents to both the totality of the world and its own life. Consequently, it cannot constitute itself as a unity. Dewey speaks in an analogously way of a “disintegration of individuality” (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 73) in modern culture, in “which new modes of living, produced by new forms of industry and commerce, have [been] introduced” (74). Instead of being able to achieve a personal unity through harmonious interaction with stable objective conditions, “[i]ndividuals are groping their way through situations which they do not direct and which do not give them direction” (75).

We can also find a degree of convergence in Dewey and Simmel’s approaches to the question of how to deal with this situation. Crucially, for both thinkers, a withdrawal from society and culture is not an option. In “The Conflict of Modern Culture” (1918) Simmel criticizes the longing for a guarantee “that life is purely itself and that no external, objectified, rigid forms have been absorbed in its flux, or its flux in them” (GSG 16: 196; Simmel 2006: 84).⁶ For him, this longing manifests itself in the “*mania for originality*” (195; 83) that is “the underlying motive for modern individualism” (196; 84). But this sort of individualism is fallacious, because the essence of the “tragedy of culture” lies precisely in the “profound internal paradox” (206; 90) such that life, when it aspires to self-consciousness, “must either produce forms, or proceed within given forms. What we *are* is, it is true, spontaneous life, with its equally spontaneous, unanalyzable sense of being, vitality and purposiveness, but what we *have* is only its particular form at any one time, which [...] proves from the moment of its creation to be part of a quite different order of things” (205; 89), that is, of different cultural forms. In a similar way, Dewey emphasizes that

⁶ It is notable that Simmel refers to American pragmatism at this point. The reason why his criticism is not justified, at least as regards Dewey, should be made clear in the antecedent and in the following analysis. On Simmel’s criticism of pragmatism in general see, for example, Geßner (2003: 239-245).

“disintegrated individuals can achieve unity only as the dominant energies of community life are incorporated to form their minds” (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 72-73) and argues that the attempt of individuals “to save their individuality by escape or sheer emotional revolt” (81) offers no way out of their “lostness”:

It ignores the fact that the mental and moral structure of individuals, the pattern of their desires and purposes, change with every great change in social constitution. Individuals who are not bound together in associations, whether domestic, economic, religious, political, artistic or educational, are monstrosities (80-81).

Both thinkers agree that taking the modern situation seriously, namely, that situation in which the individual is, as Simmel put it, thrown “back again on his *own* resources”, does not ultimately mean isolating the individual so as to thereby discover an alleged true meaning beyond any external context. On the contrary, it means recognizing the individual’s full responsibility for investing its own resources in cultural change by cultivating itself within.⁷ In the final analysis, taking the modern situation seriously means recognizing how this situation calls for the “creation of a new individualism” (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 56) and one whose conception of individuality takes into account the realities of modern culture by integrating the new objective conditions instead of demonizing them.

1.3. In search of a new individualism

In Simmel’s case, the attempt to redefine ‘individuality’ under the terms of modern cultural consciousness [*modernes Kulturbewusstsein*] and to thereby provide an alternative to the one-sided “subjectivism of modern personal life” (GSG 16: 81; Simmel 2006: 102) is already apparent in early sociological writings. In “*Die beiden Formen des*

⁷ Fitzi stressed this point by working out Simmel’s emphasis on the individual’s “Kulturverantwortung” (2002: 324).

Individualismus” (1901) Simmel contrasts two forms of individualism, namely a “qualitative” individualism and a merely “quantitative” one. While, according to Simmel, the 18th century, which operated under the premise of “formal freedom” from institutional constraints, sought to reveal the ever identical “universal man” [*allgemeinen Menschen*] in every individual, the thinking of the 19th century finds its ideal in the “human diversity” [*Verschiedenheit des Menschlichen*] (GSG 7: 53). The individual as realization of the general concept of man [*Allgemeinbegriff Mensch*] (53) “who appears as a free and autonomous individual per se” (51) is contrasted with the individual who has to realize a “specific ideal image that is comparable to no other” (53) and defines itself by qualitative uniqueness and irreplaceability. Facing this essential tension between *equality* and *difference*, modern society strives to balance them out, as Simmel puts it in 1910, through elaborating them “into economic principles”: “For clearly the doctrine of freedom and equality is the basis for free competition; and the doctrine of differentiated personality is the basis for the division of labor” (GSG 20: 257; Simmel 1971: 225). Simmel then argues that since “unlimited competition and individual specialization in the division of labor have effected the subjective culture of individuals in ways that show that they are not exactly the most suitable processes for promoting that culture” we can ask if “over and above the economic form in which these two ideals are mutually operative – the only thus far realized – there is a higher form that constitutes the hidden ideal of our culture” (257-258; 225-226). But Simmel counters:

I would prefer to believe that the idea of free personality as such and the idea of unique personality as such are not the last words of individualism – that, rather, the unforeseeable work of mankind will produce ever more numerous and varied forms with which the human personality will affirm itself and prove the worth of its existence (258; 225-226).

The theoretical framework for such an alternative perspective⁸ is provided by Simmel's concept of "the law of the individual" [*individuelles Gesetz*], which was more particularly developed as an ethical concept, but can be seen as a key to Simmel's philosophy of life and culture in general.⁹ The basic motive of Simmel's considerations is not to set the *Ought* [*Sollen*] as a "general law" in opposition to subjective life but rather to see it as a mode of the process of life itself, in the sense that the *Ought* expresses the "ideal sphere of the entire personal life" as every single duty finally has its roots in its totality (GSG 16: 383; Simmel 2010: 125). As Simmel puts it, "ultimately or primarily *I* have it to do, it belongs to *my* circle of duties, and *my* life-image [*Daseinsbild*] is a more or less valuable one by its completion or neglect" (405; 140). Instead of promoting subjectivism, what is crucial here is that this view leads to "a much more radical objectivity" (382; 125) than any "general law" could provide. This is because the individual cannot elude the *Ought* by invoking a purely subjective point of view. With the formula of the "law of the individual" Simmel actually seeks to dissolve the "false fusion between individuality and subjectivity" (410; 143-144) so as to be able to emphasize "the objectivity of the individual" (408; 142):

Up to now the moral demand seemed to be referred for its sanction to this decision: either it is that which presents itself as obligatory in subjective consciousness, in a decision based on personal conscience, or it comes from the objective, from a superindividual precept drawing its validity from its material-conceptual consequences. In contrast to this choice, I believe a third way exists: the objective Ought of this very individual, the

⁸ Podoksik (2010) actually speaks of "three forms of individualism" in Simmel's thinking.

⁹ On this point see, in particular, Amat (2017), as well as Geßner (2003: 224-232). "Das individuelle Gesetz" first appeared in 1913 in the journal *Logos* and is in part identical with chapter 4 of Simmel's *Lebensanschauung* (1918).

demand imposed from *his* life onto *his* life and in principle independent of whether he really recognizes it or not (408; 142).

He emphasizes that this approach does not invoke a sheer “qualitative individualism” by arguing that

being-other and being-special, the qualitative incomparability of the particular – is *not* in question here. We are concerned not with uniqueness, but with the true character in whose form every organic life, and above all psychic life, proceeds – with growth from one’s own root. [...] The individual is the *whole* person, not the remainder left over when one takes away from this person everything that also falls to others (414-415; 147).

Thus, the “individual law” stands, so to speak, beyond the categories of *equality* and *difference* and it is primarily indifferent to the possibility of comparing individuals. Further, the expression “growth from one’s own root” must not be misunderstood. The “law of the individual” represents no original and fixed ideal, pursuant to which life is simply an “un-folding” [*ent-wickeln*] in the literal sense. Simmel rather speaks of a “vital movement of the law itself” [*vitale Bewegtheit des Gesetzes selbst*] (Simmel 1987 [1913]: 199)¹⁰ since “it is valid for us only because we are these specific people whose being is somehow modified by every completed deed, and therewith the Ought-ideal steadily flowing from it is modified in the same instant” (GSG 16: 420; Simmel 2010: 151). It becomes clear here that the “individual law” is always coined by the objective contexts of meaning in which the individual gains experience. It is thus “not something ahistorical, nonmaterial, or only consisting of so-called character” but “determined by, or includes as an ineluctable element, that this person is [for example] a citizen of a specific state” (410; 143) – or more generally: part of various ‘world-totalities’:

¹⁰ This formulation from 1913 has not been included in *Lebensanschauung*.

[...] all ties, demands, impulses – whether social or fateful, rational or religious, or stemming from the thousand conditions of the environment – surely influence this life itself; duty is determined according to the filling and forming that life experiences from these (404-405; 140).

The idea of individuality that is thus expressed is formulated extremely clearly in the article “*Individualismus*” (1917):

The undefinable determination of life, which we call ‘individuality’, always means that the two live together [*daß ein Wesen beide in Eins zusammenlebt*]: The individual is a self-enclosed whole [*innere Zentriertheit*], a self-sufficient being [*sich genügende Selbst-Sein*], and a world unto itself [*Eigenweltlichkeit*] and at once in relation to something extraneous, to a larger whole, towards which it takes a positive or negative stance, to which it adjusts itself or opposes (GSG 13: 300)¹¹.

A person’s individuality is not separable from this relating towards the world-totalities and towards the totality of its own life. We could even say: it *is* itself this self-relating.

Against this background I am in complete agreement with Amat’s comment on Pyyhtinen, namely that the law of the individual “‘expresses’ less an ‘irreplaceable nature’ [...] than a singular subjective-objective situation” (Amat, 2017: 60, quoting Pyyhtinen, 2008: 290), as it “is constantly redefined depending on the constellations in which our life takes place” (60). My impression, however, is, that there is a problem of translation here. Simmel does in fact identify the “law of the individual” with

the emergence of duty out of the *irreplaceable* [*unvertretbaren*], unmistakable point of unity or, what is here the same thing, the totality of the living ego as the present moment of the ideal life

¹¹ My translation is partly taken from Pyyhtinen (2008: 284).

thus determined [...] (GSG 16: 405; Simmel 2010: 140, my emphasis).

But it can be asked if the word “*irreplaceable*” adequately expresses the semantic meaning of the original German word “*unvertretbar*”, as the former seems to suggest that “the point of unity” could be somehow apprehended in a rather static substantial sense,¹² while the latter unmistakably refers to its procedural character, in the sense that nobody else could act in its place [*es vertreten*].

In my opinion, this is quite exactly what Dewey has in mind when he states that “individuality is *inexpugnable*” (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 120, my emphasis) in the sense that

it is a manner of distinctive sensitivity, selection, choice, response and utilization of conditions [...]. No individual can make the determination for anyone else, nor can he make it for himself all at once and forever. A native manner of selection gives direction and continuity, but definite expression is found in changing occasions and varied forms. The selective choice and use of conditions have to be continually made and remade. Since we live in a moving world and change with our interactions in it, every act produces a new perspective that demands a new exercise of preference [...] Individuality is at first spontaneous and unshaped; it is a potentiality, a capacity of development. Even so, it is a unique manner of acting in and with a world of objects and persons. It is not something complete in itself, like a closet in a house or a secret drawer in a desk, filled with treasures that are waiting to be bestowed on the world. Since individuality is a distinctive way of feeling the impacts of the world and of showing a preferential bias in response to these impacts, it develops into shape and form only through interaction with actual conditions; it is no more

¹² The emphasis on “irreplaceability” rather seems to belong to a concept of “qualitative individualism”. Indeed, Pyyhtinen refers to the individual law as the core of “Simmel’s version of qualitative individualism” (287).

complete in itself than is a painter's tube of paint without relation to a canvas (121).

Finally, against this background, I propose to supplement Pyyhtinen's differentiation of "the '*who*' and the '*what*' of the individual" (Pyyhtinen 2008: 279)¹³ by the '*how*'; as individuality here means neither an incomparable *what* of unique personal characteristics nor a subjectivist *who*, which as a fixed and unchanging identity in itself is juxtaposed against the objective world. It is rather a (*unvertretbares*) '*how*' of acting within constantly changing subject-object-relations in their concrete situatedness¹⁴. This has, in Dewey's words, the sense of an individual manner of *how* to "live a life", facing the question "*how* we are going to use and be used by" the material and forms of our cultural world (Dewey, 1930 [1922]: 81) or, to use Simmel's words once again, it has the sense of an individual "style of life", through which every part of life is an expression of a 'whole' and at the same time reshapes that 'whole'.

For Simmel, it is precisely here that the challenge for modern education arises. This challenge is that of educating the individual "towards the intellectual control of the life he lives" (GSG 20: 434):

[...] if there is a migration of the I into the world which is not external but purely expresses the life of the I in the sense that it integrates the world and its demands by being integrated in

¹³ Pyyhtinen gives a detailed presentation of the "deep ambiguity [...] between the who and the what of the individual" in Simmel's writings: "[...] on the one hand, the individual is an absolute singularity, *someone* unique and non-repeatable, on the other, one is composed of *something*, of more or less typical traits shared with others" (294). But, in fact, he himself already offers a third notion by speaking of the sheer existential fact "*that*" one is as life's "characteristic of ontological singularity" (294).

¹⁴ Such a concept of individuality is also emphasized by Ricken (2014: 564), but without reference to Simmel or Dewey.

them; then the rhythm thereby gained [...] will again be felt as *one* life. The difficult task of education is preparing for this (417).

2. Perspectives for Education Beyond an “Either-Or”

2.1. *Education in the light of Simmel’s philosophy of life*

The lectures on *Schulpädagogik* which Simmel held in 1915/16 and whose manuscripts appeared posthumously in 1922 do not explicitly intend to reflect on “pedagogy as science” but instead are seen as a “foundation and in service to a practice” (GSG 20: 318).

According to Simmel, we can distinguish three educational purposes: The accumulation of theoretical knowledge, the unfolding of all the subjective possibilities of the student and the acquisition of practical skills (328-329). Simmel argues that while past education focused to differing degrees on the knowledge and the ability of the student, the “modern idea of education” (329) emphasizes the union of all three dimensions. Hence it means an “education of the *whole* person” (337). After having been long attached to an “objectivism” and “passivism” (334), education now tends to “stimulate the student’s own capacity to act [*Selbsttätigkeit*]” (332). Crucially, for Simmel, this does not mean turning to subjectivism but it rather remains bound to the fact, that pedagogy is “the dualistic science and technique per se”:

As educational claims always refer to a subjective as well as to an objective content, pedagogy is constantly relied on fusions, compromises and double warranty of interests. But certainly, we walk the most uniform path with *two* legs (336).

As opposed to a “radical either-or” [*radikales Entweder-Oder*] (336), educational practice should enable a *third* [*ein Drittes*], which Simmel identifies with the true meaning of “*Bildung*”:

‘Education’ [*Bildung*] is the synthesis of two purposes. It is neither the mere *having* [*Haben*] of knowledge contents, nor the mere *being* [*Sein*] as an empty constitution of the soul. The

educated person is the person whose objective knowledge has entered into the liveliness of his subjective development and existence, and whose spiritual energy, on the other hand, is filled with a broad and ever-growing range of contents as possible that are valuable in themselves (355).

In course of the reflection on different aspects of teaching framework, such as questions concerning the pace of instruction, the selection of subject-matter, teaching style and climate, as well as of the role of specific school-subjects, Simmel introduces various ideas which, from the contemporary perspective, are strongly reminiscent of the specific concepts in ‘progressive education’, namely, interdisciplinary teaching, the ‘genetic method’, “individualization of schooling” (339), connection with the life-world of the students (344) – to name just the most obvious ones. These motives are oriented by the basic claim of recognizing the “individuality of the student as a determining factor” (332) within educational practice. This becomes particularly clear in Simmel’s discussion of performance assessment:

Any particular acting and knowledge, any state and any proving oneself, is an expression of *the whole person*. [...] In every demand and every assessment, the teacher should remind himself [...] that he is not facing somebody who delivers piecemeal work, who has to solve a Latin task or an arithmetic problem, who is the subject of effort or laziness, but that these are the particular functions, sides, expressions of *one* life-totality (356-357, my emphasis).

In this spirit, Simmel requires that the teacher should “get an idea of the whole personality of the student as soon as possible” (351) which is ultimately “not only the *terminus ad quem* but also the *terminus a quo*” (356) of education. “Each teaching content should stimulate the entire breadth of life” (356) so as to be able to “simultaneously gain a major impact and a large basis” (359). In full consistency with his earlier writings, Simmel warns against the “tremendous mistake of thinking that the human ‘character’ is something qualitative stable

and substantial persisting, instead of as something living, which can evolve through enormous oppositions contents, without thereby negating its native and invariable traits. The law of the character is not a law of being [...] but a law of becoming” (409) pursuant to – to put it more specifically – the law of the individual life-totally.

Against this background, the didactic challenge in the selection and preparation of the teaching content lies in counteracting a “dispersal and atomization” (362) through establishing connection and continuity which “is suitable as a carrier for the continuity of subjective life” (349). Simmel speaks of the “‘gapless-ness’ of teaching” [*Lückenlosigkeit des Unterrichts*] (349), which at the same time needs to remain “capable of developing” and “flexible” (350) so as to guarantee a capacity to integrate new contents which – at best – insert seamlessly insofar “every moment swells and pushes toward the next one” (363). Moreover, Simmel stresses that “every teaching content is part of a whole, indeed of many ‘wholes’ in whose context it can only be apprehended” (355). Teaching is thus doubly committed to continuity in respect of life- as well as world-totally:

In the same manner as teaching, with regard to the subjects, should seek to apprehend the student as a unity and entirety, as *one* life in all his achievements [...] it should preserve the unity of its objects; where they have to be dismantled [...] this should always be done by preserving a full awareness of their unity and rootedness [*Einheits- und Wurzelungsbewußtsein*] (428).

It becomes clear here at the latest that even though Simmel’s *Schulpädagogik* does not provide a complete systematic theory of schooling, all his reflections are founded on the fundamental ideas of his philosophy of life according to which education addresses itself to the task of promoting a lively interaction between the development of the individual student and the contents of objective culture. It does so “by constantly tying in the life and experience of the student before and during the school time. The teacher should not miss any opportunity to integrate the experiences of the student

in order to give them meaning, continuity and valuation outwardly and inwardly” (344). As Simmel clarifies:

The relation which has to be established between teaching content and personal education [*Lehrstoff und Menschenbildung*] by means of pedagogy should be presented as the relation of objective spirit and life (334).

“Enabling the individual”, as Simmel demanded 1909, ultimately means to fostering “the ability to assimilate an increasing abundance of knowledge material ever more easily [and] to develop the mind as a whole, as a potentiality, as a life” (337) in order to recognize its dynamic and give it direction. It means, as Schlitte (2017: 223) puts it, an “education toward individual law” [*Erziehung zum individuellen Gesetz*].

2.2. *Education in the light of Dewey’s philosophy of experience*

Even though I cannot present Dewey’s comprehensive educational work in its entirety here, I would like to take up those aspects which show systematic similarities with those of Simmel’s ideas that were discussed above.¹⁵

In “Individualism, Old and New” Dewey admits that he “indeed attempted analysis, rather than either a condemnation of the evils of present society or a recommendation of fixed ends and ideals for their cure” (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 111). But, in the same breath, he makes unmistakably clear that this should be seen less as a failure than as the only way to take the modern conditions for what they essentially are: namely conditions which “are in flux” (112). As they “are always moving; [...] always in transition to something else” (109), it would be useless to try to prepare the individual for specific conditions and orient it to general fixed ideals. For the ‘modernity’ of modern culture is not only expressed in the replacement of older objective conditions by a constant set of new ones, but in the fact

¹⁵ Danner (2007) already argued that for both thinkers the concepts of ‘means’ and ‘ends’ serve as important pedagogical categories.

that conditions in general are subject to constant change. It can be said that a constant inconstancy determines the conditions of the new social situation that the individual has to face. Dewey explicitly states that he sees “no way to ‘restrain’ or turn back the industrial revolution and its consequences” (74). Instead, “the important question is whether intelligence, whether observation and reflection, intervenes and becomes a directive factor in the transition” (109) of given conditions, by creating concrete ideals which do not lie beyond these conditions, but express *their* possibilities, “possibilities of what is now moving” (112). This is why, according to Dewey, “[t]he solution of the crisis in culture is identical with the recovery of composed, effective and creative individuality” (109). In his early pamphlet entitled “My Pedagogic Creed” Dewey had stated:

[...] the only possible adjustment which we can give to the child under existing conditions is that which arises through putting him in complete possession of all his powers. With the advent of democracy and modern industrial conditions, it is impossible to foretell definitely just what civilization will be twenty years from now. Hence it is impossible to prepare the child for any precise set of conditions. To prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities [...] (Dewey, 1974 [1897]: 429).

As already cited at the outset, according to Dewey, such a preparation is not completed by “giving free scope to native capacities and interests” (7-8). This is because not only the objective conditions, but also the individual’s potential for growth must not be regarded as determined. Dewey there discusses the “analogy of the development of a seed into the full-grown plant” (4) which had been emphasized by Rousseau and his followers. When we define human education as “growth”, he says, we must take into account the existing “capacities for growth in different directions toward different outcomes” in contrast to the development of the plant which is “largely prescribed by its antecedent nature” (4). Dewey argues that the fundamental failure of many supporters of the so-

called “progressive education” lies in fact in their inclination “to take the individual traits that are showing themselves as finalities, instead of possibilities which by suitable direction can be transformed into something of greater significance, value and effectiveness” (8). They mistakenly tend to treat development purely as a matter of “unfolding from within” which “will take place almost automatically if hands are kept off” (8). On the contrary, for truly “cultivating individuality” (7), according to Dewey, “the knowledge, judgment and experience of the teacher is a greater, not a smaller factor, than it is in the traditional school” (10). This is because the teacher is faced, over and over again, with the complex challenge of gaining an adequate idea of the student’s development so as to be able to give it direction:

Existing likes and powers are to be treated as possibilities, as starting-points, that are absolutely necessary for any healthy development. But development involves a point *towards* which as well as one *from* which; it involves constant movement in a given direction. Then when the point that is for the time being the goal and end is reached, it is in its turn the starting-point of further reconstruction. The great problem of the adult who has to deal with the young is to see, and feel deeply as well as merely to see intellectually, the forces that are moving in the young; but it is to see them as possibilities, as signs and promises; to interpret them, in short, in the light of what they may come to be (8).

The crucial point then lies in the fact that “human individuals vary in their structure and possibilities as plants and metals do not” (7). So the teacher “[l]ike the artist [...] has the problem of creating something that is not the exact duplicate of anything that has been wrought and achieved previously” (7). For, how we might add, individuality is ‘inexpugnable’, “every new individual sets a new problem” (9). This is why “a body of subject-matter much richer, more varied and flexible, and also in truth more definite, judged in terms of the experience of those being educated” (9) is unquestionably needed. Like Simmel, Dewey too nonetheless

emphasizes the importance of an internal coherence in the teaching process and its content, as “development, however, is a *continuous* process, and continuity signifies consecutiveness of action”:

Here lies perhaps the greatest problem of the newer efforts in education. It is comparatively easy to improvise, to try little of this today and this week and then something else tomorrow and next week. [...] The need for taking account of spontaneous and uncoerced interest and activity is a genuine need; but without care and thought it results, all too readily, in a detached multiplicity of isolated short-time activities or projects, and the continuity necessary for growth is lost. Indeed, the new education processes require much more planning ahead on the part of teachers than did the old – for the planning was all done in advance by the fixed curriculum (10).

Overall Dewey too declares himself to be less in search of “a middle course or compromise” (8) than a genuine alternative to the “*Either-Ors*” which we find in the history of educational theory in the form of an “opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without” (Dewey, 1979 [1938]: 17). This is a perspective which he elaborated in detail in various pedagogical writings, not least in his wide-ranging main work *Democracy and Education* from 1916 and which he presented in a concentrated form in *Experience and Education* in 1938. Dewey there stresses once again that the new educational ideal of a “cultivation of individuality” (19) will remain abstract under the assumption “that it suffices to reject the ideas and practices of the old education and then go to the opposite extreme” (22). Instead, it can only become reality when education is “treated as intelligently directed development of the possibilities inherent in ordinary experience” (89). Finally, “the need for a philosophy of education”, which Dewey already postulated four years earlier, reveals itself as “the need of a theory of experience” (25) to provide the theoretical foundation for “a system of education based upon living experience” (39).

With this objective in view, Dewey brings together his earlier considerations. He does so by formulating two main principles which “in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience” (44-45). That is, on the one hand, the principle of *interaction*, as “experience does not occur in a vacuum” (40) but genuinely expresses the reciprocal relation of the individual and the world it lives in:

The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations. And when it is said that they live *in* these situations, the meaning of the word ‘in’ is different from its meaning when it is said that pennies are ‘in’ a pocket or paint is ‘in’ a can. It means, once more, that interaction is going on between an individual and objects and other persons (43).

Dewey concedes that it might sound like a commonplace that there “are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience” and that it “is constantly fed from these springs” (40). But to take the principle of *interaction* seriously requires, contrary to the view taken by many child-centered approaches of his time, to give “equal rights to both factors in experience – objective and internal conditions” (42). The task of the teacher is to “recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experience of growth” (40). However, instead of “*subordinating*” one factor to the other, the teacher is responsible for a “mutual adaptation” (45) between subject-matter and material on the one side and the needs and capacities of the individual on the other. (46-47) Herein lies the essential condition for a learning and teaching environment in which fruitful interactions can take place.

In returning to his earlier thesis “that the educative process can be identified with growth when that is understood in terms of the active participle, *growing*” (36), Dewey once again stresses the significance of *continuity*, which serves as the second main principle. The educational task lies in selecting “the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent

experiences” (28) and thereby promote the development of a “fully integrated personality” which “exists only when successive experiences are integrated with one another”. (44) It is hence the *process* itself which has to come into focus, as “*only* when development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth does it answer to the criterion of education as growing” (36). The key therefore lies in continuously broadening the scope of experience by stimulating experiences which lead to further experiences in new situations. An experience fulfills the criterion of *continuity*, if it “arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future”. (38) It becomes clear here that the two principles of *continuity* and *interaction* are thoroughly inter-related to each other, as they present “the longitudinal and lateral aspects” (44) of an individual experience in the sense of growing:

As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow (44).

Against this background, Dewey conclusively clarifies that “the fundamental issue is not of new versus old education nor of progressive against traditional education but a question of what anything whatever must be to be worthy of the name *education*” (90). That means, as was already quoted at the beginning, facing the crucial question “what education really *is*”. Following the preceding analysis, we can now truly understand Dewey’s answer, which reads: “[E]ducation is a development *within, by, and for* experience” (28, my emphasis) or, as his most popular definition in “My Pedagogic Creed” says:

I believe that [...] education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing (Dewey, 1974 [1897]: 434).

– namely the continuous enrichment of experience through constantly stimulating, deepening and refining the interaction between the individual and the world it lives in “by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience” (Dewey, 1979 [1938]: 49).

I think that, against this background, we can finally make a connection to Simmel’s concept of “individual law” which can, to quote Amat (2017), be interpreted as “the ideal of maximizing life’s meaning” (58), in which process and goal are united by the idea of the “maximal fruitfulness of the individual’s relationship with the world, that is, to an individual, unique and maximal vitalization of the contents of objective culture”. (59) Paraphrasing Dewey’s saying, we can state that “education toward individual law” (Schlitte, see above) in the Simmelian sense is a development *within, by, and for* the active vitalization of objective spirit.

In summary, following both thinkers we can interpret “the need for a philosophy of education” as the need for a philosophy beyond an exclusive “either-or”. Both Dewey’s philosophy of experience and Simmel’s philosophy of life seek to offer a ‘third way’ beyond subjectivism and objectivism by pointing the educational process towards enabling the individual’s “effective self-direction” (Dewey, 1974 [1899]: 310), meaning the power of “self-control [*Selbstbeherrschung*] in which the self turns out to be not only the one controlled but also the one controlling” (GSG 20: 469). For Dewey, taking this seriously means that “[e]ducation as growth or maturity” never comes to an end in the long run. Instead, it “should be an ever-present process” (Dewey, 1979 [1938]: 50). As the world in which experience takes place is always moving, “an educated person is the person who has the power to go on and get more education” (Dewey, 1974 [1934]: 4). The point of Dewey’s concept of

education is the “formation of enduring attitudes”, among which “the most important [...] is that of desire to go on learning” (Dewey 1979 [1938]: 48). Finally, Simmel stresses in a similar way that “it can definitely be identified with a higher intellectual attitude when the student is always aware that everything he knows is a part of a wide knowable world [...]” (GSG 20: 466).

2.3. *Overcoming the Crisis?*

Levine drew the following conclusion concerning Simmel’s *Schulpädagogik*:

The task of the teacher, in short, is to provide a continuous setting for overcoming the crisis of modern culture (Levine, 1991: 113).

We can agree to this conclusion if we interpret “overcoming” in the sense of remaining able to act through handling concrete conflicting situations. But it would be problematic to interpret it as the possibility of a solution in principle to the profound underlying conflict. In fact, for Simmel the diagnosis of the “tragedy of culture” remains fully valid until 1918. In “The Conflict of Modern Culture”, he interprets the “never-ending change in the content of culture, and in the long run of whole cultural styles” as a sign of “the infinite fertility of life”, but also as the expression of “the tragic conflict of life as mind” (GSG 16: 200; Simmel 2006: 86). He concludes this with the almost cynical remark that it is “anyway pure philistinism to assume that all conflicts and problems are meant to be solved” (206; 90). Michael Landmann’s characterization of Simmel’s principle of philosophy as a “dialectic without reconciliation” [*Dialektik ohne Versöhnung*] (Simmel, 1987: 16) remains fully valid. But the impossibility of a perfect synthesis in principle must not lead to total resignation. It finds its goal in the steady effort to provide transitory stabilities and intermediations, even though they can only be provisional.

Simmel's emphasis on pedagogy is thus not a sign of believing in a solution to the "tragedy of culture" but in the possibility of enabling the individual to deal with it in the sense of an "a task lying in the realm of the infinite" (GSG 12: 210; Simmel 2006: 66). The most important purpose of pedagogy thus seems to be making precisely this transparent:

[...] it is at least a final task to recognize that the conflicts between the norms of personal life and those of the society are inner necessities of this life itself. [...] We can only try to *strengthen* the students facing these inevitabilities, by convincing them that such a struggle is not something totally beyond life but is included in its unity and direction. (GSG 20: 471).

Dewey, on the contrary, explicitly speaks of a "solution of the crisis in culture" (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 109). Even though education cannot be orientated towards any fixed ends and ideals but is obligated to keep its own process – the "continuous reconstruction of experience" – permanently alive, Dewey nonetheless thinks that this process will produce and preserve a harmonious "society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others". (Dewey, 1974 [1934]: 12)

The positive and constructive energy of individuals, as manifested in the remaking and redirection of social forces and conditions, is itself a social necessity. A new culture expressing the possibilities immanent in a machine and material civilization will release whatever is distinctive and potentially creative in individuals, and individuals thus freed will be the constant makers of a continuously new society (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 109).

This will be a society whose "corporateness" is no longer superficial but that "marks the beginning of a new era of integration" (64), one in which the "balance of the individual and

the social will be organic” (65). The key is, as Dewey put it in his early pamphlet “The School and Society”,

[...] to make each one of our schools an embryonic community of life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious (Dewey, 1974 [1899]: 310).

What becomes clear here is that for Dewey education does not refer to any fixed general ideal of humanity, but nonetheless is embedded in the process-related ideal of democracy which, to Dewey, “is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 2008 [1916]: 72). It is against this background that Dewey can ultimately preserve the concepts of *equality* and *freedom*, less in the sense of abstract ideals than as characteristics of a vivid interaction between the individual and society:

Equality and freedom expressed not merely externally and politically but through personal participation in the development of a shared culture (Dewey, 1984 [1929/30]: 57).

Simmel, however, leaves almost completely open what form the future society might take. Instead of believing in some form “that constitutes the hidden ideal of our culture”, he explicitly prefers to believe that “the unforeseeable work of mankind will produce ever more numerous and varied forms with which the human personality will affirm itself and prove the worth of its existence” (GSG 20: 258; Simmel 1971: 226). According to Simmel, the inner conflict of life then must not be seen as something that has to be

dissolved but turns out to be the main stimulant of a continuous and fruitful change of cultural forms:

And if, in fortunate periods, these varied forms may order themselves harmoniously, even their possible contradiction and struggle will not merely disrupt that work, but rather will stimulate it to new demonstrations of strength and lead to new creations (258; 226).

3. Concluding Remarks: Philosophy as a Part of Culture

Whether by emphasizing to a greater degree the harmony or the tension inherent to cultural development and individual cultivation within it, both thinkers unmistakably teach us the urgency of recognizing these processes *as* ongoing processes of change that can only be dealt with by keeping them actively alive. Indeed, most of the above described mechanisms of modern economy and technique still seem to determine reality today, even though they constantly take on different forms. Moreover, even though there have already been various innovations in the educational systems of Western culture, a coherent philosophy of education such that Simmel and Dewey desired, over and above the ‘either-ors’ described, still seems to be lacking.

Finally, the emphasis on the “need for a philosophy of education” can be interpreted in a second way: It is not just that that modern ideas of education need an adequate philosophical foundation but, inversely, philosophy needs to address the problem of education if it seeks to address the problems of modern culture.

Dewey actually goes so far as to fundamentally interlace philosophy and education by defining philosophy “as the general theory of education”. In *Democracy and Education* he states that philosophy has always been characterized as “an attempt to *comprehend*— that is, to gather together the varied details of the world and of life into a single inclusive whole” with the aim of attaining “as unified, consistent, and complete an outlook upon experience as is possible” (334). But in view of the “very nature of experience

as an ongoing, changing process” (334-335), Dewey argues that we cannot understand the characteristics of totality, finality and generality from the side of subject-matter but should interpret them in the sense of a specific “disposition toward the world” (334):

From this point of view, ‘totality’ does not mean the hopeless task of a quantitative summation. It means rather consistency of mode of response in reference to the plurality of events which occur. [...] Finality does not mean, however, that experience is ended and exhausted, but means the disposition to penetrate to deeper levels of meaning – to go below the surface and find out the connections of any event or object, and to keep at it. In like manner the philosophic attitude is general in the sense that it is averse to taking anything as isolated [...] (335-336).

According to Dewey, the demand for such a “‘total’ attitude arises because there is the need of integration in action of the conflicting various interests in life” (336) – meaning that

when the scientific interest conflicts with, say, the religious, or the economic with the scientific or aesthetic, [...], or when institutionalism clashes with individuality, there is a stimulus to discover some more comprehensive point of view from which the divergencies may be brought together, and consistency or continuity of experience recovered (336).

The key thus lies in recognizing that philosophic problems emerge from genuine “life-situations” and must therefore connect back to them. Dewey builds the bridge to educational practice as follows:

If a theory makes no difference in educational endeavor, it must be artificial. The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice. If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men,

philosophy may even be defined *as the general theory of education* (338).

Against this background, it becomes clear in what way “‘philosophy of education’ is not an external application of ready-made ideas to a system of practice having a radically different origin and purpose” (340-341) but the expression of the fundamental interdependence of theory and practice, considering that “[e]ducation is the laboratory in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and are tested” (339) and – vice versa – “‘philosophy is the theory of education as a deliberately conducted practice” (342).

In his introduction to *Philosophische Kultur* (1911) Simmel had also spoken of philosophy as “a specific intellectual attitude to the world and life, a functional form and manner of perceiving things and dealing with them internally” (GSG 14: 162; Simmel 2006: 33); in the sense of the consistent movement of thought – as it says in his *Rembrandt* (1916) – “to lower a plumb line [*Senkblei*] through the immediate singular, the simply given, into the depths of ultimate intellectual meanings” (GSG 15: 309; Simmel 2005: 3). It “is the endeavor of philosophy” as Simmel formulates in his *Hauptprobleme der Philosophie* (1910) “to set the whole for the part [...], by setting the part for the whole” (GSG 14: 32), to thereby “obtain the *unity* which the mind needs in view of the vast plurality, the colorful, riven, unreconciled of the world” (35), to be able to live it through. In this spirit Simmel demands in his *Schulpädagogik* that

the teacher should constantly seek the opportunity to pursue the individual realizations and problems into their depth and generality, to follow the philosophical path, albeit not towards a dogmatic goal, but to show the directions in which the philosophic plumb line [*philosophische Senkblei*] can be lowered from the surface (GSG 20: 435).

Finally, to Simmel, the “pedagogical attitude [*pädagogische Einstellung*]” (320) *is* genuinely a “philosophic” one, for he requires

that: “Each lesson should be given in philosophical spirit” (GSG 20: 354)

In “Philosophy and Civilization” Dewey stressed that philosophy “is not just a passive reflex of civilization” but actively shapes cultural change: “In forming patterns to be conformed to in future thought and action, it is additive and transforming in its role in the history of civilization”. (Dewey, 1931: 7-8) This is based on the insight that philosophy can face the conditions of a continuously transforming culture only by understanding itself not as an activity beyond, but as a genuine part of that culture. Recognizing philosophy, in Simmel’s words, as “a consistent intellectual attitude toward all existence” means in fact recognizing it as “an exponent, an element or a form of culture in general”, wherein finally lies “the condition for a ‘philosophical culture’ in a broader and modern sense” (GSG 14: 165-166; Simmel 2006: 35-36).¹⁶ This is an insight that seems to remain valid and relevant today.

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¹⁶ On Simmel’s idea of a “philosophical culture” see, in particular, Geßner, 2003: 287-292.

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