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Beyond Moral Development: Re-Theorizing Ethical Practices in Service Learning

Over the past two decades perhaps no pedagogical practice has so quickly and broadly changed the dynamics of the US college classroom as service learning. Also known as service-learning (there's much debate about the hyphen), community service learning, academic service learning, or sometimes more broadly as civic engagement, college educators—and now even many high school teachers feel the pressure to engage their students in the life of the community. The service learning movement has pushed colleges out of their ivory towers and into the community, but the insertion of power, money, and often well-to-do students into community life raises a number of ethical challenges.

"The federal government should increase funding to low-income elementary schools," argued one of my service learning students, "so they can offer poor kids and their parents Gymboree and Mommy and Me classes like normal kids get to take." My eyes swept across a classroom of nodding heads till they found the principal of the school where my students were serving. She calmly raised her hand: "I hate to tell you, but there is nothing 'normal' about Gymboree." What ensued was a class conversation about privilege, government policy, and the rights and responsibilities people have in educating their children. It was a conversation—turned more debate—that challenged students to make arguments based on the theoretical reading they had done, but unlike typical classroom debates, the students made arguments rooted in concrete experiences and deeply held beliefs. Few people were converted that day, but many left with more rigorously "considered convictions," as Paul Ricoeur calls them.

Every time I teach a service learning course it takes me weeks to adjust to the different rhythm of the classroom—to let go of my imperialist grip on the knowledge I want students to obtain (and, honestly, to convince my ego that students will still think I am smart if I do not lecture the whole time). I have to stop telling the groups of students gathered together before class to sit down so we can start. Instead, I begin to start class by asking those groups of students to share with the class because I have learned that usually they are talking about something crazy and remarkable that happened at their service learning site. I cannot always predict where the class will go, but the students and I both learn more as we struggle to pull together the theoretical course readings and our shared practical experiences.

As the director of a service learning program, the challenge I face with every service learning class and every professor I train to teach a service learning class is how to prepare students to address the ethical challenges they face in the very practice of service learning itself. Some of the ethical challenges lend themselves to the typical kinds of ethical reasoning textbooks prepare students to address, like the above question about the extent of government funding to Title I schools (students quickly pick up how to address this issue using utilitarian, libertarian, or Kantian approaches). But often hidden within students' real world examples are much more complex problems. For instance, when other students suggested that volunteers should help low-income schools instead of increasing government funding, the student in the above example replied that the schools need to provide more programing for families because volunteers—like herself—can only offer short-term relationships. And after describing the look of disappointment on the face of the child she had mentored at the end of their final meeting, she wondered—on the verge of tears—whether she had done any good at all for that child. Did the math tutoring outweigh the emotional burden of that child facing yet another broken relationship? Such deeply felt interpersonal ethical challenges are much harder to answer, and unfortunately, the service learning literature offers little guidance.

The literature, in fact, seems to be far more interested in assessing levels of student "moral development" than with actually helping students develop the practices in ethical thinking that will benefit them in and beyond school. Moral development here refers explicitly to a psychologized conception of morality that originates in the work of Jean Piaget and becomes popularized in Lawrence Kohlberg's "theory of moral development." Kohlberg lays out six stages of development through which people can pass as they increasingly learn to exercise the primary concept of justice. Though a heavily critiqued theory, Kohlberg's work remains incredibly influential, and James Reist, a student of Kohlberg, developed the most popular empirical test of moral development. The *Defining Issues Test* (DIT) judges how a person processes ethical scenarios, like Kohlberg's Heinz dilemma, to determine into which stage of moral development the person falls. The little bit of research in the service learning literature that concerns morality uses a test, typically the DIT, to assess moral development, but they do not give much thought to the test's validity or to the practices of ethical reasoning that students need.[1]

[1] See, for example, Judith A. Boss, "The Effect of Community Service Work on the Moral Development of College Ethics Students," *Journal of Moral Education* 23, no. 2 (1994); M. Gorman, J. Duffy, and H. Heffernan, "Service Experience and the Moral Development of College Students," *Religious Education* 89, no. 3 (1994); L.M. Fenzel and T.P. Leary, "Evaluating Outcomes of Service-Learning Courses at a Parochial College," in *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association* (Chicago, 1997); D.

I want to know how professors who engage in radical pedagogies, like service learning, can prepare themselves and their students for the ethical challenges such pedagogies introduce into the classroom. How do we think through, for example, the shift in power dynamics between professors and students, the paternalistic overtones often carried by students out into the community, or the brief nature of semester-based service efforts? Like most service learning practitioners, I first turned to John Dewey for answers because he is the recognized intellectual father of the service learning tradition. But I argue his philosophy does not provide a model that can address the individual, interpersonal, and social ethical challenges that service learning raises. Instead, I find great continuity between service learning and the work of Paul Ricoeur, and I think Ricoeur offers some concrete practices in narrative reflection and ethical reasoning that can prepare faculty and students for the challenges we face when we employ radical pedagogies.

The service learning literature has mostly ignored the terms ethics and morality or collapsed them into the psychologized concept of moral development. Dewey, however, differentiates between the terms ethics and morality; he uses ethics to refer to the science of morality and morality to the customs ethics studies. Like Dewey, I want to preserve a difference in the terms ethics and morality, but I define them more in line with Ricoeur.[2] After noting their similar etymology, Ricoeur states that he reserves "the term 'ethics' for the *aim* of the accomplished life and the term 'morality' for the articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint."[3] Like Ricoeur, I see the moral life as encompassing more than what the tools of psychology can study, and I see it as more comprehensive then Kohlberg's focus on justice.[4] By attending to both the aim of the good life and the norms through which it passes, I argue faculty can better prepare students for the challenges raised by the service learning classroom.

The structure of this article mirrors Ricoeur's hermeneutical circle. It begins with the practice of service learning, turns to the dominant philosophy of John Dewey used to theorize such practice, and returns to practice via a detour into continental philosophy that I believe better responds to the ethical challenges Dewey neglects. The paper uses such an approach in keeping with both Ricoeur's thought and the concrete practice of service learning. Historically, service learning was well underway before serious attempts to understand its philosophical framework

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Greene and G. Diehm, "Educational and Service Outcomes of a Service Integration Effort," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 2 (1995); Matthew L. Bernacki and Elizabeth Jaeger, "Exploring the Impact of Service-Learning on Moral Development and Moral Orientation," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 14, no. 2 (2008).

[2] John Dewey and James H. Tufts, *Ethics*, rev. ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), 3-5.

[3] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 170.

[4] Ricoeur, for instance, emphasizes the role of autonomy and respect in addition to justice in the moral life. See ibid., ch. 8.

were undertaken.[5] And the priority of practice to theory continues to bear out as most schools and professors get their hands dirty long before they try to understand why they are doing it.

SERVICE LEARNING IN PRACTICE

The origins of service learning can be traced to the 1960s with the development of the Peace Corp, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and the Civil Rights Movement. But as it is practiced on college campuses today, service learning is more a product of the 1980s and 90s with the founding of Campus Compact, the 1989 Wingspread Conference that produced the *Principles of Good Practice in Combining Service and Learning*, and the explosion of programs and research agendas across college campuses.[6] Campus Compact now includes the membership of nearly 1,200 college and university presidents and service learning touches almost every major college campus in the US.

Though widespread—and perhaps because it is widespread—service learning has always lacked a coherent definition. The term was coined in 1967 by Sigmon and William Ramsey, but there has never been much consensus on the definition: some believe service learning is a philosophy of education, some a pedagogical exercise, some see it as co-curricular, others as exclusively curricular, and some see it as primarily a form of activism.[7] In her review of the literature, Jane Kendall counted 147 ways to define the term—and that was over two decades ago.[8] For the purposes of this article, I look just to service learning in its narrower definition as an aspect of the classroom. I follow something like Kathleen Maas Weigert's synthetic view that academic service learning includes six elements:

> On the community side: the student provides some meaningful service (work), that meets a need or goal, that is defined by a community (or some of its members). On the campus side: the service provided by the student flows from and into course objectives, is integrated into the course by means of assignments

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[5] There was even resistance to theorizing about service learning when it was in its infancy. See, for example, Dwight E. Giles, Jr. and Janet Eyler, "The Theoretical Roots of Service-Learning in John Dewey: Toward a Theory of Service-Learning," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 1, no. 1 (1994): 77.

[6] Barbara Jacoby, ed. *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 11-15.

[7] Ibid., 12, 5. For a range of definitions of service learning see Tania D. Mitchell, "Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 14, no. 2 (2008); Kathleen Maas Weigert, "Academic Service Learning: Its Meaning and Relevance," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 73 (1998); Jeff Howard, ed. *Praxis I: A Faculty Casebook on Community Service Learning* (Ann Arbor: OCSL Press, 1993); R.A. Rhoades, *Community Service and Higher Learning: Exploraitons of the Caring Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Giles and Eyler, "Theoretical Roots."

[8] Jane Kendall, ed. *Combining Service and Learning: A Resource Book for Community and Public Service*, vol. 1 (Raleigh: National Society for Experiential Education, 1990).

> that require some form of reflection on the service in light of course objectives, and the assignment is assessed and evaluated accordingly.[9]

Service learning is more than community service, and it is more than volunteering alongside one's professor. It integrates relevant and meaningful service work into the curriculum so that both the service and the learning are transformed.[10] When done well service learning upends the traditional college classroom, pushing both the professor and the students out of their traditional roles and into what Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky call the "productive zone of disequilibrium." [11] Jeff Howard refers to service learning as a "counternormative pedagogy" because it resists the "banking concept of education."[12] Students are not passive recipients of "deposits" of knowledge, and faculty are not in front of the classroom controlling the agenda of the course. Students become active learners, taking what they experience in the community and using it to push the classroom material and conversations in directions that faculty never imagined. Education becomes less about an individual's comprehension of facts and more about an individual as part of a community that works together to solve challenges.

The service learning classroom can be an exciting and vibrant one. It does, however, raise complex ethical questions: Are we using the community as a means to our educational ends? How do we reconcile the ongoing needs of the community to the semester-based constraints of student service? Do we create more harm than good by allowing often wealthy students to serve diverse and poorer populations? That is, does it reinforce paternalistic, racist, and classist stereotypes? What is genuine partnership? Are students establishing life-long habits or merely fulfilling required elements of a course? Many service learning practitioners have acknowledged the ethical complexity of the practice, but few articles have offered philosophical, religious, or ethical tools to help address such challenges.[13]

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[9] Weigert, "Academic Service Learning," 5. I offer these elements not as an essentialist definition but as an orientation to a practice that appears in as many forms as places.

[10] E.P. Honnet and S.J. Poulsen, *Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning*, Wingspread Special Report (Racine: The Johnson Foundation, 1989).

[11] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 29.

[12] Jeffery P.F. Howard, "Academic Service Learning: A Counternormative Pedagogy," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 73 (Spring 1998): 23; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993), 72.

[13] Three highly circulated articles do acknowledge the ethical challenges and offer some suggestions, but notice that they are not in prominent pedagogical journals: John W. Eby, "Why Service Learning is Bad," http://www.messiah.edu/external_programs/agape/servicelearning/articles/wrongsvc.pdf; Keith Morton, "Starfish Hurling and Community Service," http://www.thesca.org/blog/2007/02/28/starfish-hurling-and-community-service; John McKnight, "Why "Servanthood" is Bad," *The Other Side* Jan-Feb (1989).

SERVICE LEARNING IN THEORY

When service learning began to seek its intellectual tradition, it located itself in the progressive education movement, finding its intellectual trajectory in Aristotle, Rousseau, and Dewey.[14] Service learning scholars see Dewey's work as "the philosophical touchstone of the experiential movement."[15] Dwight E. Giles, Jr. and Janet Eyler admit that "there appears to be no evidence that the concept of service-learning was part of Dewey's formally stated philosophy of education," but nevertheless as it is practiced, "service-learning reflects, either consciously or unconsciously, a Deweyian influence."[16] Dewey's philosophy of education resists traditional models of education. In Dewey's words:

> If one attempts to formulate the philosophy of education implicit in the practices of the new education, we may, I think, discover certain common principles amid the variety of progressive schools now existing. To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world.[17]

John Saltmarsh suggests that Dewey's view of education influences service learning on at least five counts: (1) Dewey eradicates dualisms, connecting theory and practice, experience and education; (2) he saw that education was for democracy because "the individual's sense of self is only fully developed in association with others"; (3) he pushes people to see service not as charity but justice; (4) he shows that learning from action requires reflection, and (5) the purpose of education is ultimately social transformation.[18] Service learning seems to express

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[14] For more on service learning's reliance on pragmatism see Goodwin Liu, "Knowledge, Foundations, and Discourse: Philosophical Support for Service-Learning," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 2 (1995); Kenneth Richman, "Epistemology, Communities and Experts: A Response to Goodwin Liu," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 3 (1996); Robert Tucker, "Biting the Pragmatist Bullet: Why Service-learning can do without Epistemology," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 9 (1999); Thomas Deans, "Service-Learning in Two Keys: Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 6 (1999).

[15] O. Smythe, "Practical Experience and the Liberal Arts: A Philosophical Perspective," in *Combining Service and Learning: A Resource Book for Community and Public Service*, ed. J.C. Kendall (Raleigh: National Society for Experiential Education, 1990), 296.

[16] Giles and Eyler, "Theoretical Roots," 78-9.

[17] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1938), 19-20.

[18] John Saltmarsh, "Education for Critical Citizenship: John Dewey's Contribution to the Pedagogy of Community Service Learning," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 3 (1996).

Saltmarsh's five Deweyian characteristics, and the movement now consciously turns to Dewey to improve its rigor and practice.[19]

The challenge with any assessment of Dewey's philosophical contribution is the breadth and dynamism of his corpus: his early writings on ethics and education evince his indebtedness to Hegelian idealism, but his later writings express a pragmatic empiricism. My intention here is not to dismiss the entirety of Dewey's ethics—and especially not the ethics of the entire pragmatist tradition. Dewey makes some ethical claims—like his rejection of charity because of the way it divides the classes—that service learning can find quite helpful.[20] I want to suggest, however, that Dewey's approach to ethics is of limited help to service learning for three primary reasons: (1) though it speaks to individual and social ethical challenges, it offers little guidance on the interpersonal challenges that arise in the classroom; (2) it lacks a coherent moral criterion for evaluating education experience; and (3) its empiricism foreshadows and in some ways supports the imperialistic assessment of "moral development."

The first limitation of Dewey's ethics for service learning is that it takes quite seriously the relationship of the individual to the community, but neglects interpersonal relationships. As a whole pragmatism "results in a conception of philosophy," according to Cornel West, "as a form of cultural criticism in which the meaning of America is put forward by intellectuals in response to distinct social and cultural crisis." West further notes that with Dewey "American pragmatism achieves intellectual maturity, historical scope, and political engagement."[21] When Dewey speaks about democracy, he is not just interested in politics. For him democracy is "more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."[22] Dewey identifies the key ethical problem of the democratic life as "how to harmonize the development of each individual with the maintenance of a social state in which the activities of one will contribute to the good of all the others."[23] Dewey's views of the

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[19] For example, service learning professionals typically see reflection as an essential tool in the combination of the theoretical and the practical. Rather than unguided reflection exercises, the best practices in the field urge the use of Dewey's five elements of reflection (or David Kolb's adaptation of them): (1) perplexity and doubt as part of an incomplete situation, (2) a tentative interpretation of the situation, (3) a careful study of elements contributing to the situation or problem at hand, (4) a refined and clarified hypothesis, and (5) using the stated hypothesis as a basis for action so as to test the hypothesis (John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* [Lexington: Feather Trail Press, 2009], 83).

[20] Dewey argues in his *Ethics* that "the best kind of help to others, whenever possible, is indirect, and consists in such modifications of the conditions of life, of the general level of subsistence, as enables them independently to help themselves" (Ibid., *Ethics*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 5, *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924* [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008], 350). This insight appears in the service learning literature, see Saltmarsh, "Education for Critical Citizenship," 17.

[21] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 5-6.

[22] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 49.

[23] Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 388-9.

individual and democracy raise important ethical questions, but he neglects the interpersonal relationships constituent of both the individual and democracy.

Service learning practitioners rightly take their cue from Dewey to incorporate goals about citizenship and democratic responsibility into the syllabi of courses. The connection between service and citizenship in itself can be a positive outgrowth of engagement with the philosophical literature. Unfortunately, the service learning literature tends to embrace more of a political than social or ethical interpretation of Dewey's democratic ideal. Julie Hatcher subsumes Dewey's "moral dimensions" in part to political ends.[24] And some of the most influential scholars in the service learning field, Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, penned a "democratic manifesto" designed to "help transform American into a truly participatory democracy—the model 'city on a hill' dedicated to realizing Dewey's inspiring utopian vision of a worldwide, organic 'Great Community' composed of truly participatory, democratic, collaborative, and interdependent societies."[25] They argue that service learning approaches can help the "Dewey Problem," which they define as Dewey's failure to provide practical strategies for implementing his vision of participatory democracy. They, like William Paringer, believe that "a concept of (progressive) liberal democracy is the central value and organizing principle in Dewey's reform ideology," and service learning can be a vital tool to achieve Dewey's political vision.[26]

Dewey's democracy is not a bland, big tent, apolitical concept. He has a particular form of liberal participatory democracy in mind. And when one adds to his particular political bent the reality that the service learning movement has been funded and driven by the US government, it is not hard to understand why political ends tend to dominate many service learning programs.[27] And despite some critics who believe service learning is too political, renewed calls are continually sounded to use service learning to get students more politically involved.[28]

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[24] Julie Hatcher, "The Moral Dimensions of John Dewey's Philosophy: Implications for Undergraduate Education," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 4 (1997).

[25] Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), ix.

[26] William Andrew Paringer, *John Dewey and the Paradox of Liberal Reform* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 24.

[27] Government initiatives in service learning include the creation of VISTA, the federal agency ACTION, the Commission on National and Community Service, Corporation for National and Community Service, which includes Learn and Serve America, and the government has also funded many research projects and policy briefs on service learning, including, most recently, the Department of Education funded *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, ed. National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012).

[28] See, for example, Anne Colby et al., *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsiblity* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Anne Colby et al., *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

Service learning can certainly be a powerful tool for training citizens and developing civic leadership skills. The problem arises when the prioritization of political ends eclipses the kind of ethical thinking that service learning—and democratic politics—demands. My students typically are attracted to debating the more abstract political issues—like Title I funding—but they have to be pushed to reflect on their own moral perspectives, motivations, and visions of the good life. Think, for instance, of the ethical issues surrounding college students volunteering in a low-income school: How will students' prejudices affect their ability to relate to the children? Will students have their stereotypes reinforced? Will students enter the school with a savior mentality or leave with a feeling of self-satisfaction disconnected from the actual service they have provided? It is easier to discuss things like good citizenship and public policy in the classroom than engage in rigorous self-reflection. But a body politic needs citizens who understand themselves and their interpersonal relationships. Dewey, sadly, is of little help here.

Though Dewey speaks to the ethical issues of inequality, charity, and justice, the second limitation of his work for service learning is that his instrumentalist ethics lacks a coherent moral criterion for the practice of service learning. Dewey does not speak much of the term "practices" as do many continental philosophers. The most analogous term he employs is "experience." For Dewey an experience "takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after." Furthermore, experience modifies the people who act on or undergo the experience—it changes them.[29] Service learning is an experience insofar as it is a discrete social activity that affects those involved. But experiences can be educative or mis-educative. A truly educative experience—a good service learning course, for example—must lead to future educative experiences. The criterion for judging the quality of experience is "growth": "only when development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth does it answer to the criterion of education as growing."[30] And growth is not just a personal phenomenon, but because of the social nature of Dewey's conception of morality, good experiences result in growth for the whole community. "The criterion of the value of school education," in Dewey's words, "is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact."[31] Or in the negative, "any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience."[32] Growth is a natural, instrumental, and cumulative concept. It occurs as the young mature and are able to take over the leadership of society. Growth evaluates the experience (or practice) of service learning based on the increase it produces in maximal association and maximal communication, which occurs best in democratic association.

Dewey's pragmatic empiricism argues that all assertions—including the moral criterion of growth—are empirical hypotheses waiting to be tested. But the criterion of growth seems to be

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[29] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 35-6.
[30] Ibid., 36.
[31] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 31, 4.
[32] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 25, 30.

implied in the empirical process itself. Dewey argues the moral criterion arising from experience "should be tested, confirmed and revised in future practice; having a constant point of growth instead of being closed."[33] How can one test the validity of the criterion of growth using a test that judges based on growth? The empirical hypothesis of growth must be tested against some kind of non-empirically given concept of growth—a hidden transcendental, perhaps a remnant of Dewey's early Hegelian idealism. Furthermore, Dewey claims that all assertions are empirical, but how can that claim—that all claims are empirical—be an empirical claim? The self-refuting nature of Dewey's claim leaves his concept of experience in education without a viable moral criterion.

The final limitation in Dewey's ethics that I want to address is his strong empiricism, which infuses his ethics and can be used to support the contemporary obsession with moral development. Dewey assigns half of the work of ethics to the domain of psychology and half to the sciences of biology, economics, sociology, and other social sciences. He believes psychology investigates the "inner process" of a person's "thought and feeling, ideals and motives, valuation and choice."[34] Though the inner and outer processes of morality are in mutual transformation, psychology remains a dominant tool in Dewey's approach. Dewey cannot be solely blamed for the collapse of morality and ethics into the psychological evaluation of moral development in the service learning literature. In fact, positivism more than pragmatism is likely to blame here. Nevertheless, Dewey's ethics, because of its reliance on and association with psychological approaches, lacks the ability to resist the imperialism of the empirical assessment forces. I do not want to dismiss the insights of psychology or assessment, but I do want to resist the stranglehold they have on radical pedagogies like service learning.

I have no doubt that the flaws I perceive in service learning's philosophical indebtedness to Dewey could be corrected by attention to other thinkers in the pragmatism movement. I think, however, that service learning can benefit from enlarging its philosophical base. Continental philosophy, in particular, has much to contribute to the kind of engaged and counternormative classroom that service learning intends to produce.

RE-THEORIZING ETHICAL PRACTICES IN SERVICE LEARNING

Though the differences between Dewey and Ricoeur span decades and continents, both thinkers were significantly influenced by Hegel and sought to create a way out of the binaries that dominated modern philosophy. Rather than either/or approaches, they sought to develop both/and philosophies.[35] While Dewey crafted a third-way through pragmatic empiricism, Ricoeur developed a hermeneutical phenomenology. Instead of analyzing service learning through the concept of experience, Ricoeur shows how it can be a narrative practice open to

[33] Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 381.
[34] Ibid., 4.
[35] For some similarities between Dewey and Ricoeur on literature see Paul Fairfield, *Education after Dewey* (New York: Continuum, 2009), ch. 9.

ethical investigation and urging the use of practical wisdom. As with Dewey, though, Ricoeur does not develop a philosophy of education intended for service learning. Like service learning practitioners have done with Dewey, I draw out practical suggestions from Ricoeur's work that stretch and bend his theory as it confronts the concrete practices of the service learning classroom. I do not intend to offer a comprehensive summary of Ricoeur's argument. Rather, I gesture toward a few of his insights that provoke pedagogical approaches that can respond to the neglected ethical challenges in the service learning classroom.

Ricoeur uses the term "practice" in his narrative theory to broaden the practical field of an analytic theory of action. He sees a practice as composed of more than linear relations of cause and intended effect, but of "nesting relations," involving subordination and coordination. A practice includes both the vertical axis of ever-more subordinate actions and the horizontal axis of coordinate actions. That is, for example, the service learning course I mentioned in the introduction included on the vertical axis subordinate relations, like, volunteering, reflection, teaching math, playing games with kids, debriefing with the elementary school teachers, our classroom conversations, and discussion board posts, all the way down to the most basic actions, like, pushing keys on a computer or pulling a child in for a hug. Service learning also includes a horizontal axis of coordinate relations—the "systemic and teleological" relations—like the learning objectives for the course, the needs to be served in the community, and so on. Furthermore, to the extent that service learning is a practice, it includes "constitutive rules" that give meaning to the particular gestures within the practice. Such rules are not moral rules, but internal rules that offer meaning within the practice. Constitutive rules signal the "*interactive* character belonging to most practices." A practice is "based on actions in which an agent takes into account, as a matter of principle, the actions of others."[36] In my service learning classes (unlike my non-service learning classes), I have learned to interpret a group of students gathered together at the start of class as a sign of engaged learning that needs to be explored. Similarly, when my students enter class and see a circle of chairs, they know they will have to take an active role in leading the class conversation. In sharp contrast, the buzz of the PowerPoint projection screen descending from the ceiling in a traditional classroom tells students to be quiet, passive recipients of knowledge. Without such an interactive character, practices would not have constitutive rules or relations of meaning.

Ricoeur does not pass ethical judgment on practices—they are "only a first step in the direction of ethics."[37] Concrete practices must be joined to "life plans," which "take shape—a shape that is mobile and, moreover, changeable—thanks to a back-and-forth movement between more and less distant ideals, which must now be specified, and the weighing of advantages and disadvantages of the choice of a particular life plan on the level of practices." The practice of service learning, if it is to be formative of the self, must be placed into conversation with the professional and personal ideals of the student's life. Under pressure from the more "global project" in a student's life, the practices of service learning may "lose the clear outlines assigned

[36] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 153-7.
[37] Ibid., 155.

to them."[38] A give and take between continuity and change forms as ideals and practices both seek to determine the practical field of action.

As part of Ricoeur's narrative theory, practices prepare the way for ethics. Ricoeur, unlike MacIntyre, sees a contrast between literary narratives and life histories that allows for literary narratives to become laboratories of moral thought, returning meaning and insight to life histories through multiple avenues. Narrative, more generally, for Ricoeur is a "propaedeutic to ethics" as it brings together fiction and history.[39] Through narrative Ricoeur sees that the self confronts the other in itself. That is, the enduring sameness of the self through time (*idem*-identity) confronts the mutability of selfhood (*ipse*-identity). "The narrative self," in Richard Kearney's words, "involves an ongoing process of self-constancy and self-rectification that requires imagination to synthesize the different horizons of past, present, and future."[40] Narrative prepares the way for ethics as the self continually, and critically, interprets itself based on the stories it tells: "self-constancy is always informed by self-questioning."[41]

Ricoeur's narrative theory, however, is not a downward spiral of solipsistic interpretation. It is a hermeneutical circle that erupts into action. The "Who am I?" of the self overwhelmed by the plurality of options in literary narrative confronts the "Here I am!" of the moral self who accepts responsibility for his or her actions.[42] As the self interprets itself in narrative, it confronts the other than itself within its narrative. The interpretive circle breaks as the self makes decisions and moves to act, and it breaks as the self recognizes the other that cannot be reduced to the self.[43]

In service learning much is currently made—following Dewey—of the need for students to write reflection papers that integrate the theory they learn in the classroom with their experiences in the community. Ricoeur's emphasis on narrative as preparatory for ethics should urge service learning practitioners to move from Dewey's dyadic relation of theory to practice to a triadic relation of practices, ideals, and literature. Students should narrate their life histories in light of the concrete practices of service learning, the global ideals they continually form and reform during the class, and a relevant work of literature (which could be fiction or the students' own writings) that provides them a hypothetical moral world in which to try their hands at practical wisdom, allowing the insights of such an exercise to reform their own narratives. Student reflections should be exercises in self-knowledge. They should require students to interpret their lives in light of the service experience, pushing them to confront the stories of the other within themselves. Reflections, furthermore, should build on each other, so that at the end of the course, a student's reflections can be read as a narrative that emplots the

[38] Ibid., 157-8.
[39] Ibid., 115.
[40] Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*, Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 108.
[41] Ibid., 111.
[42] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 165-8.
[43] See Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur*, 112.

dialectic between self-constancy and self-rectification, between the "Who am I?" of the narrative self and the "Here I am!" of the moral self. Such reflections can help students gain self-knowledge and transition from the training ground of the classroom to claim their place as moral agents in the world.

Now the question becomes how to structure the practice of service learning—and the subordinate exercises, like reflections, within it—so that it helps students respond to the ethical challenges they face in the world. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur takes up the task in his "little ethics," which constitutes the book's seventh, eighth, and ninth studies. He offers three insights that I take to be of crucial importance to service learning: (1) the relationship he constructs between ethics and morality, (2) the three levels of relations in which ethical and moral thought occur, and (3) the kind of conviction such ethical reasoning produces.

Ricoeur differentiates between a teleological understanding of ethics rooted in Aristotle and a deontological understanding of morality rooted in Kant, and he seeks to make a third way that holds the two traditions together. He develops a threefold relation of ethics to morality understood as "(1) the primacy of ethics over morality, (2) the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the norm, and (3) the legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to impasses in practice."[44]

The relationship between ethics and morality is further delineated into three levels of relations in which both ethics and morality occur. Ricoeur, like Aristotle, argues that all actions have an end. The specific ethical end or intention he articulates is "aiming at the 'good life,' with and for others, in just institutions."[45] This definition articulates the three levels of relationships within ethics and morality: personal, interpersonal, and social. Furthermore, the aims of one's life do not descend from on high or form as autonomous creations. They are shaped by the practices: the ideals people articulate draw on the internal grounds of excellence that constitute the practices in which they participate. Practices, like service learning, do affect the way people conceive of the good life through their established internal standards of excellence. Practices, therefore, must recognize the interdependence of social, interpersonal, and personal forces.

Service learning as it stands tends to place its emphasis on the personal and social dimensions of service work. Classroom conversations often include reflection on student professional goals or personal trajectories and reflection on the social or justice implications of the service work. Ricoeur insists on the need for individual autonomy and social equality as part of the ethical aim, but he does not just jump from the individual to society. He also attends to the interpersonal relationships that hold the individual and society together. Such an intermediary step is critical for service learning because so many of the ethical challenges participants encounter are interpersonal. In my recent service learning class, students wrestled with how to help community members without being paternalistic. They wrestled with the way people in

[44] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 170.
[45] Ibid., 172.

the community perceived them as entitled and privileged (when some of my students were less privileged than might appear). And at root the class wrestled with how to treat others with respect. As service learning practitioners develop the best practices of the movement, we must be cognizant of the way such practices shape the ethical aims of students. We should form practices that support personal, social, *and* interpersonal ethical reflection.

Ricoeur argues that the self, left to itself, will turn in on itself. It is only through the other that the self is opened to itself. In order to realize its capacities, the self needs to see itself through the other. Aristotle's view of friendship articulates an ethics of reciprocity that propels Ricoeur toward his theory of interpersonal solicitude. Ricoeur uses Aristotle's view of friendship to illicit three insights: (1) "friendship serves as a transition point between" the individual aim at the good life and the social virtue of justice, (2) friendship is not a feeling but a virtue—it is an ethical term, and (3) friendship is essential for happiness.[46] Friendship itself, however, cannot establish solicitude because it demands absolute equality in giving and receiving. Ricoeur believes a spectrum of solicitude—of giving and receiving—exists, and the reciprocity of friendship is in the middle. On one end Levinas' other gives only commands of justice, and on the other end, the suffering other is in a condition to only receive. Ricoeur regards the suffering other as "the supreme test of solicitude." In the three forms of interpersonal relationship, "the self perceives itself as another among others." The self realizes there is *reversibility* in roles between actors and patients of action, that in such interactions the people are *nonsubstitutable*, and the phenomena of reversibility and nonsubstitutablity produce *similitude*, in which one realizes "I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others *as* myself."[47] By participating in interpersonal relationships the self comes to know itself better through the other.

In the service learning classroom, it is all too easy to jump from the individual student to social justice or policy reform. The harder part is to think through interpersonal relations. Are the relations one is building with community members friendships based on equality? Is one responding to community members' demands for justice? Or, perhaps, must one respond to the suffering of the community partner? The last form of encounter is most likely to reinforce classist or racist stereotypes that people are lazy or need to help themselves. In contrast to students who think the poor have nothing to offer them—that they are the ones who must give and give—Ricoeur urges that:

> In true sympathy, the self, whose power of acting is at the start greater than that of its other, finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return. For from the suffering other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing but precisely from weakness itself…when unequal power finds compensation in the authentic reciprocity in exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands…A self reminded of the vulnerability of the condition of

[46] Ibid., 181-2.
[47] Ibid., 192-3.

> mortality can receive from the friend's weakness more than he or she can give in return by drawing from his or her own reserves of strength.[48]

We must help students recognize the other in themselves, to see their mortality and vulnerability, to learn from the weakness of the other by being present—in whispers and clasped hands—with the other. Such powerful interpersonal relationships demand more than an hour a week, more than one time service events, more than a smorgasbord of service opportunities. They demand that if a service learning course places students among the vulnerable, it must require them to invest the time necessary for "true sympathy" to form. This is a high—and perhaps impossible—standard within the constraints of the semester system, and there are vulnerable populations (like abused children) that service learning should avoid because students cannot invest the necessary time, and the pain of rupturing the relationship may cause more harm than good. Service learning practitioners must seek opportunities in which students and community partners can develop true sympathy to bring the other into the self and break open the stereotypes that keep the other at a distance. The interpersonal relationships formed in service learning are a vital component to self-understanding and how people view the good life.

Such relationships also connect the individual aim to the social one. While Dewey's view of morality ultimately depends on social intelligence and democracy, Ricoeur sees "the relation between ethics and politics in terms of intersection rather than of subordination."[49] Though ethics is deeply social and politics uses and requires ethical thinking, the two fields are independent. While politically a society may move forward based on a consensus about an ethical aim, the plurality of motivations and justifications for that aim are not properly political because they are personal and often in conflict.[50] Like Dewey, Ricoeur advocates for democracy as the best way to find consensus on ethical aims in the modern era, but as he seeks a third way beyond the liberal-communitarian divide, he believes "there is no canonical form of democracy."[51] The citizen's task "is to keep a lively tension between" the personal convictions one has (Max Weber's "ethics of conviction") and the responsibility one has to compromise and work with others (Weber's "ethics of responsibility).[52]

Service learning classrooms can help students develop the ability to articulate their deeply held convictions and learn to listen to and compromise with others. While many service learning courses have students individually volunteer with partner agencies, Ricoeur might urge a more

[48] Ibid., 191.
[49] John Dewey, *The Moral Writings of John Dewey*, ed. James Gouinlock (New York: Hafner Press, 1976), 175; Paul Ricoeur, "Ethics and Politics," in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 325.
[50] Dewey, "Ethics and Politics," 342-5.
[51] Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 288, 312-4.
[52] Ibid., 257; Max Weber, "Politik als Beruf," in *Gesammelte Aufsaetze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1973).

problem-based approach in which the entire class must work together to address a challenge the community has identified. Here students would have to learn to express their personal convictions about the service to be done, but also learn to compromise with others when it comes to acting together as a class. They would see that the "political" action of the class does not subordinate their ethical reasoning. Ethics and politics overlap, but they have their own spheres of influence. Students cannot be allowed to forgo the ethical and jump exclusively into the political.

After considering the individual, interpersonal, and social ethical aims, Ricoeur insists that they pass through the moral dimension: self-esteem needs self-respect, solicitude needs respect for others, and equality needs justice. The deontological realm, however, includes within it teleological gestures and results in conflicts as universal norms collide with each other. When such collisions occur, Ricoeur urges people to return to the ethical intention, using practical wisdom to arrive at conviction. Ricoeur believes that "If we did not pass through conflicts that shake a practice guided by the principles of morality, we would succumb to the seductions of a moral situationism that would cast us, defenseless, into the realm of the arbitrary. There is no shorter path than this one to reach that point at which moral judgment in a situation and the conviction that dwells in it are worthy of the name of *practical wisdom*."[53] And at the end of the day, I want my students to walk away from a service learning classroom having exercised practical wisdom.

In practical terms Ricoeur would seem to urge students to think through the universal norms related to the three relations of the personal, interpersonal, and social that constitute the ethical aim. In doing so they will surely encounter norms that conflict. The promise a student makes to a child she is tutoring to keep a secret conflicts with a norm requiring the student to disclose all information she learns that might prevent the child from being physically harmed. When such conflicts occur, I urge the student to write up the conflict, using the creation of the narrative as a propaedeutic to ethics. Then she should bring the conflict to the class where we together look back to the ethical aims we have discussed throughout the semester (including the standards of excellence guiding the practice of service learning as laid out in the syllabus) and enter into an "ethic of argumentation." Argument, for Ricoeur, is a particular language game in the midst of other language games (like narrative or life histories). It is "the critical agency operating *at the heart* of convictions, argumentation assuming the task not of eliminating but of carrying them to the level of 'considered convictions,' in what Rawls calls a *reflective equilibrium*."[54]

Ricoeur's third major contribution to the practice of service learning is how he pushes students to move beyond thinking they can have knowledge of right and wrong and toward the development of considered convictions. Ricoeur's hope seems to be that students emerge from rigorous classroom arguments with the kind of considered convictions that lead to action. It is incumbent on service learning practitioners to emphasize to students that what they leave with

[53] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 240-1.
[54] Ibid., 288.

is not a moral absolute, but a considered conviction, forged through intensive conversation, that remains open to reconsideration.

In the Service Learning Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct at High Point University (HPU), one can find normative statements directing students to:

> [Place] the community partner's duties and responsibility as a first priority and willingly accepting all reasonable duties assigned.

And

> [Acknowledge] the diverse views of community partners.

But situations have come up in which one community partner has ignored—and asked students to ignore—the views of other members of the community. To address such conflicts of morality, the HPU Code of Conduct concludes by offering a Ricoeurian approach to such conflicts. A students experiencing conflict should identify the conflict, interpret the situation, lay out his or her ethical aims, and join others in conversation in order to arrive at a considered conviction to guide action.[55] What HPU intends to cultivate in students is the practical wisdom to deal with conflicts of norms and continue to pursue the ethical aim.

The service learning classroom influenced by Ricoeur becomes a place where the self confronts the other within itself through personal reflection, interpersonal service, and institutional commitments to equality and justice. Service learning constitutes an important pedagogical practice with continually developing internal standards of excellence that inform how students understand the good life in conversation with the norms that contribute to it. As students narrate and discuss their interactions for class, they create hypothetical worlds in which they can work out ethical dilemmas, but insofar as they are also agents in the community, such hypotheticals become actual and students can be ascribed as the agents of action, made to be responsible for the outcomes of their action. And with any hope, they become capable of recognition—capable of reflecting on otherness within the sameness of the self.

CONCLUSION: A RENEWED PRACTICE OF SERVICE LEARNING

The practice of service learning has upended many college classrooms, placing students in more active learning roles and emphasizing the connection between individual learning and the community's good. Service learning, however, confronts students and faculty with tricky ethical issues, and, as I have argued, the traditional philosophical reference for the movement in the work of John Dewey fails to offer solid ethical guidance. Dewey tends to neglect interpersonal relationships, his self-refuting pragmatism cannot sustain a moral criterion for

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[55] The term "conversation" is used with students because of how easily they can misunderstand the intent behind Ricoeur's use of "argument."

evaluating education, and his empirical approach foreshadows the collapse of ethical thinking into the assessment of "moral development." Service learning practitioners have coped with the ethical challenges of the practice on an ad hoc basis for years, but the movement needs better philosophical guidance.

I argue that the ethical work of Paul Ricoeur is a helpful guide to service learning. I do not intend to remake the practice of service learning through Ricoeur's work, but only to gesture to ways his thought can support and guide the practice through the difficult ethical challenges it faces. Ricoeur's ethics can help students think through the interpersonal challenges service learning raises. For example, it offers students ways to understand the partnerships they are forming: Are they reciprocal friendships or relationships more of giving or receiving? Each type of relationship opens the student to the other in a different way for which faculty need to be prepared. Ricoeur also helps faculty decide what placements can help create true sympathy and which vulnerable populations cannot be well served in the semester system. By focusing on the constitution of the self in and through the other, Ricoeur's ethics pushes students to move beyond the stereotypes that prevent genuine partnership, service, and self-knowledge. And his narrative theory suggests a restructuring of reflections to take advantage of narrative as a training ground for ethical thinking.

Though Dewey's moral criterion of growth crumbles under its own weight, Ricoeur sees the practice of service learning—like other practices—to have internal standards of excellence that help those who are part of the practice form their ethical aims. But he would not say that service learning just creates its own standards. Rather, the standards of excellence established for service learning participate in a hermeneutical circle that subjects them to the global aims of the students' life plans, and as part of the ethical aim, the standards are subjected to the sieve of the moral life—made to respond to universal moral demands. Ultimately, the standards that guide service learning must be seen as outgrowths of an ethic of argumentation. They are considered convictions forged in argument about how to resolve the conflict of morals to achieve the ethical aim. They are the product of the practical wisdom of several decades of service learning practitioners and theorists working out the best practices in the field.

Finally, Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology offers a way to resist the imperialism of the empirically-laden concept of "moral development." Such resistance, however, will be unpopular in an academic atmosphere dominated by an assessment culture. Ricoeur's narrative theory, ethics, and view of the self cannot be simply translated into a survey or focus group question. The only people who can judge practical wisdom are those who practice practical wisdom, who are part of the ethics of argumentation, who struggle to reconcile the intrinsic excellences in particular practices with life plans, ethical intentions, and universal norms. Ricoeur wants more than the positivist evaluations of morality or even the judgments of Aristotle's "men of practical wisdom." He would seem to suggest a holistic assessment of professors, friends, community partners, and oneself that captures the personal, interpersonal, and social relations of ethics and morality. It would not be an assessment of numbers, but of narrative. Such an assessment method is far more intensive than most schools are willing to undertake, but it seems the only way to assess practical wisdom is to practice practical wisdom in the quest to evaluate it.

The service learning movement will continue to transform more and more classrooms, and as it does the ethical challenges it faces will continue to multiply. In its current condition, the quest to evaluate how service learning contributes to "moral development" obscures and obstructs the valuable learning that could take place as faculty, students, and community partners work together to address the ethical challenges they face. With a more robust ethical framework, like the one Ricoeur provides, service learning can refocus attention to the development of practical wisdom. It can become a practice in self-knowledge that simultaneously prepares students for the world and holds them accountable as agents in it.

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