

ARTICLE

Dewey's Debt to Barnes

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Abstract John Dewey's association with Albert C. Barnes significantly influenced his monumental *Art as Experience*, a fact Dewey fully acknowledged both in that work and in other writings. Yet Barnes's contribution to Dewey's ideas has seldom been discussed. Even those who write about Dewey's aesthetics frequently ignore it, or provide distorted descriptions of Barnes's life and of the two men's relationship. Dewey was drawn to dynamic individuals who provided empirical evidence for his philosophical views. Barnes's passion for education, conviction that looking at visual art could transform lives, and faith in action all influenced Dewey's thinking. An examination of the Dewey-Barnes correspondence and of some of their joint activities helps set the historical record straight about Dewey's debt to Barnes. It also contributes to our understanding of both men's aesthetic theories and is particularly relevant as the Barnes Foundation moves to a more public venue in Philadelphia in 2012.

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– John Dewey

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey (1859–1952), arguably the most significant United States philosopher and certainly one of the most influential ones, is generally known today for his writings on education. He is acknowledged as the leading thinker on progressive education and one of its earliest practitioners since he founded the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago as a training ground for teachers in 1896. In 1931, he delivered a series of lectures at Harvard University on aesthetics, resulting three years later in the publication of *Art as Experi-*

ence, a work that has continually influenced art museum education and aesthetics in general.

Dewey and Albert C. Barnes (1872–1951), the doctor-turned-industrialist and art collector, began a life-long friendship when Barnes, a man deeply interested in intellectual matters and social issues, enrolled in Dewey's social philosophy course at Columbia University in the 1917–1918 academic year. Today, Barnes is best remembered for his extraordinary art collection, first housed at the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, and scheduled to be moved amidst great controversy to a new location on the Parkway in Philadelphia. Barnes is also remembered for his frequent explosive quarrels with members of the Philadelphia establishment. But Barnes was a serious and knowledgeable intellectual who wrote significant works on aesthetics, was deeply engaged in social issues, and was a strong supporter of civil rights and a champion of African-American culture.

The friendship between Dewey and Barnes, documented in hundreds of letters

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between them, consisted not only of frequent social interactions (often including their wives and, at times, Dewey's grown children), but also in joint political activities and considerable intellectual exchange. Their discussion of aesthetic theory and practice has not been sufficiently acknowledged by writers on Dewey or on Barnes. If their intellectual relationship is discussed at all, the usual comments are that Barnes was influenced by Dewey's *educational* ideas, something that Barnes acknowledged repeatedly. But the reverse influence, of Barnes on Dewey's *aesthetics*, has not received the attention it deserves. This paper is intended to rectify this omission.

In addition, as the Barnes Foundation moves and becomes more accessible to the larger public, it is important that his aesthetic educational program be acknowledged and appreciated rather than dismissed or ignored. A full analysis of his views and practice is well beyond the scope of this paper, but a report of how Dewey considered his visual aesthetics related to Barnes's work can provide a first step in re-evaluating Barnes's contribution to art education.

DEWEY'S STATEMENTS OF HIS DEBT

Nothing could be a clearer acknowledgement of Dewey's debt to Barnes than Dewey's preface to *Art as Experience*. The full reference to Barnes and the work of his foundation is striking:

My greatest indebtedness is to Dr. A. C. Barnes. The chapters have been gone over one by one with him, and yet what I owe to his comments and suggestions on this account is but a small measure of my debt. I have had the benefit of conversations with him through a period of years, many of which occurred in the presence of the unrivaled collection of pictures

he has assembled. The influence of these conversations, together with that of his books, has been a chief factor in shaping my own thinking about the philosophy of esthetics.¹ Whatever is sound in this volume is due more than I can say to the great educational work carried on in the Barnes Foundation. That work is of a pioneer quality comparable to the best that has been done in any field during the present generation, that of science not excepted. I should be glad to think of this volume as one phase of the widespread influence the Foundation is exercising (Dewey 1989/1934, 7–8).

As far as I know this is the most effusive acknowledgement of debt to anyone in all of Dewey's published work.² The book is also dedicated "To Albert C. Barnes In Gratitude."

Art as Experience spells out Dewey's effort to incorporate aesthetics into his general theory of experience. He argues that aesthetic experience is not different in kind from all other experience, but is deeper and richer, both because it occurs when experience is savored and allowed to come to completion, and because aesthetic experiences occur without a traditional instrumental component: they are "pure" experiences, satisfying for their own sake, not to fulfill some practical aim. The book covers a range of possible sources of aesthetic experiences, from appreciation of nature to the arts in general. But references to visual arts predominate, and these examples almost exclusively reflect aesthetic views and judgments of individual artists that mirror what Barnes had written previously.

Despite the repeated references to Barnes's work in *Art as Experience*, the inclusion of multiple illustrations from the Barnes Foundation, and quotations from and references to Barnes's writings, there has been little discussion in the literature on Dewey about what this debt might actually be. There is no mention of Barnes in

the introduction by Abraham Kaplan to the definitive text of the book published by the Center for Dewey Studies (Dewey 1989/1934).

This omission seems even more curious in light of the recent emphasis on Dewey's aesthetics as the central topic of his philosophy. In his collection on the new scholarship on John Dewey, Jim Garrison writes:

One theme of the new scholarship especially well represented in this volume is the tendency to place Dewey's aesthetics at the center of his thinking instead of his theory on inquiry, theory of democratic social relations, or even his philosophy of education. If the new scholarship's emphasis on Dewey's aesthetics is correct, then we will need to reconsider our understanding of the remainder of his holistic philosophy (Garrison 1995, 1).

He goes on to describe in what manner the essays that follow emphasize the centrality of Dewey's aesthetics as they examine various aspects of Dewey's philosophy in relation to education. Among the contributors are leading figures responsible for this scholarship, including Thomas M. Alexander, Philip Jackson, and Richard Shusterman, who have focused particularly on elucidating Dewey's aesthetics and using *Art as Experience*, Dewey's major aesthetic work, as the basis of their critiques.

In his own volume, Alexander also asserts that Dewey's aesthetics is central to understanding his whole philosophy:

The best approach to what Dewey means by "experience" is not to be gained by focusing primarily on the theme by which Dewey is generally known, his "instrumentalism," but instead by looking at experience in its most complete, most significant, and most fulfilling mode: experience as art. In short, I claim that

when we explore experience which has been shaped into an aesthetically funded process, into "an experience," we will discover Dewey's paradigmatic understanding of experience. And this, in turn, may lead to a more coherent understanding of the rest of Dewey's philosophy (Alexander 1987, xiii).

Thirty-five years ago, before the "new" interest in Dewey came to full bloom,³ Zeltner had already emphasized the need to go to Dewey's aesthetic writings, especially the last chapters of *Nature and Experience* and *Art as Experience*, to fully understand Dewey's mature philosophy:

Dewey's aesthetic experience is the capstone of his entire philosophy. This theory is not so much implied, nor indicated, but forced out from the energetic internal development of his previous thinking. His aesthetics is no more tacked on to his general philosophy than mountains are tacked on to the earth. Dewey's philosophy is his aesthetics, and all that he meticulously worked on in the areas of logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology is brought to culmination in his understanding of the aesthetic and art (Zeltner 1975, 2–3).

These assertions for focusing attention on Dewey's aesthetics as a key to understanding his worldview have much to support them, since Dewey argues that aesthetic experience—what he calls "*an* experience"—is the purest and culminating form of experience, and experience is central to Dewey's effort to develop a wholly naturalistic (in Dewey's meaning of the term) philosophy. Dewey states this explicitly in *Art as Experience*:

Had not the term "pure" been so often abused in philosophic literature, had it not been

so often employed to suggest that there is something alloyed, impure, in the very nature of experience and to denote something beyond experience, we might say that esthetic experience is pure experience. . . . To esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is. For this reason . . . the theory of esthetics put forth by a philosopher is . . . a test of the capacity of the system he puts forth to grasp the nature of experience itself. There is no test that so surely reveals the one-sidedness of a philosophy as its treatment of art and esthetic experience (Dewey 1989/1934, 278).

Many scholarly works have been devoted to discussing either how Dewey's mature views on aesthetics (especially since *Art as Experience* was published when Dewey was in his mid 70s) were consistent with his voluminous previous work, dating back to his earliest philosophical positions, or how his position changed as he matured. But little effort has been expended to consider external, experiential influences on Dewey's aesthetic views. This is unfortunate for several reasons.

Unless we understand how much Barnes influenced Dewey's aesthetics, we cannot fully appreciate the significance of "an experience" for Dewey's concept of experience. Barnes had enormous impact on Dewey's thinking because he believed both that aesthetic experiences could be transformative and that thoughts were only realized through action.⁴ Barnes's life and beliefs represented a powerful model for Dewey. Consistent with his own philosophy, Dewey was constantly eager to incorporate the insights he gained from his experiences and the attitudes towards experience of his friends into his philosophy. Dewey himself was a "lover of unalloyed experience" and appreciated others who appeared to have a similar joy in engaging

with life (Dewey 1989/1934, 179). Dewey was particularly intrigued by life experiences that contributed practical evidence for his philosophical views. Some of these led to extensive relationships resulting in intellectual as well as personal friendships, although none more so than the 30-year intimate relationship with Barnes.⁵ Dewey's appreciation that aesthetic experiences were part of the larger world of "experience" and that they were an integral part of life and could influence our behavior in general, was due in large extent to the model provided by Barnes through the educational work he carried out first in his factory and later in his foundation.

MISINTERPRETING DEWEY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH BARNES

In general, Dewey scholars have failed to recognize the significance of the relationship between Albert Barnes and John Dewey, frequently attributing it to some peculiar quality of Dewey's character. In a memorial essay on Dewey, Sidney Hook (1952) went so far as to say "Dewey's goodness was so genuine, constant and sustained even under provocation, that I sometimes found it somewhat oppressive. . . . It was almost with relief that I discovered a shortcoming in him. That was his indulgent friendship with Albert C. Barnes." In a similar vein, Alan Ryan, one of Dewey's biographers, in referring to Barnes, asserts that "Dewey had a taste for the company of oddballs of all sorts, and the seeming gullibility of which his friends complained may have been less a real failure of judgment than a policy of giving possible charlatans the benefit of the doubt" (Ryan 1995, 207).

From Dewey's general attitude toward life and his own philosophical views, we might assume that a close friendship with a man who believed that aesthetic experiences were

powerful and that art could be transformative would have great appeal. And there is ample evidence that Barnes believed passionately in the influence of visual art on life—more precisely, that the appreciation of art and the learned skill of carefully looking at art could change people's lives. Dewey's frequent public and private acknowledgements of Barnes's influence on his thought make this clear.

Even writers who focus on Dewey's aesthetics fail to appreciate the nature of their friendship, often mis-state facts concerning their relationship, or don't acknowledge the significance of Barnes's educational effort for Dewey.⁶ Richard Shusterman has suggested that Dewey's aesthetic theory was influenced by the writings of Alain Locke and that he also "could have imbibed Locke's views indirectly through the art critic Albert C. Barnes who collaborated with Locke on *The New Negro*, and whom Dewey described as the chief influence on his own aesthetics" (Shusterman 2000, x).⁷ In a subsequent publication, Shusterman provides a detailed comparative analysis of Locke's long-neglected writings and Dewey's pragmatic aesthetics (2002). He emphasizes that Locke must have influenced Dewey since the former published his ideas almost a decade before *Art as Experience* appeared. Here as well, Barnes is mentioned only as a possible source for "mediation," consciously or unconsciously passing on Locke's views to Dewey. Since Dewey added chapters on aesthetics to his Carus lectures in 1923 as he prepared them for publication, and had begun corresponding with Barnes on aesthetics before that, while Barnes began publishing articles on aesthetics in the early 1920s before he met Locke, this interpretation cannot be correct.

Barnes was strong-willed, determined, and easily angered. But his personal qualities should

not deter scholars from recognizing his intellectual contributions to education and his significant influence on Dewey. He lashed out at people who he believed were trying to take advantage of his generosity or who didn't acknowledge his intellectual contributions. He refused to acknowledge the traditions of academic appointments, assuming, for example, that if he was willing to pay, universities should allow him to hand pick his protégés for senior academic positions. A self-made, widely read man, he was not patient with people who claimed accomplishments he could see through. But he was also attacked viciously in turn. His first public display of "modern" art in Philadelphia was mercilessly reviled in the press⁸ and his decision to limit admission to his educational foundation to personally chosen individuals was criticized and later legally challenged in an era when discriminatory, selective admission was common practice at many private educational institutions. He was suspicious of the establishment and picked quarrels with privileged people, and he responded angrily and fiercely to criticisms from individuals or institutions.

This treatment of Dewey's relationship with Barnes, reminiscent of how Boydston described philosophers' analysis of Dewey's relationship to F. M. Alexander (see note 5), emphasizes the parallel between these two friendships. Barnes, like Alexander, had an "intimately interwoven influence" on Dewey's thinking over a span of almost two decades by the time *Art as Experience* appeared in print. Dewey repeatedly and consistently acknowledged that his aesthetic ideas owed a great deal to his conversations with Barnes, to the training he got in viewing art with Barnes,⁹ to his experiences with art from his visits to the Barnes collection, and from Barnes's own writing as well as that of other foundation colleagues.

DEWEY AND BARNES ON AESTHETICS

Barnes developed a passion for Dewey's philosophy partly because it accorded with his own thinking. He was not only a collector (after he became enormously wealthy), but also an enlightened industrialist who took seriously the welfare of his employees and wanted to improve their lives. His educational efforts probably began in earnest after he became sole owner of the A. C. Barnes Company in 1908 in Philadelphia, his hometown. He held seminars with his workers during work time that included reading William James, Dewey, and Santayana, and after he began collecting paintings early in 1912, he hung some of them in the factory.¹⁰ Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, published in 1916, impressed him particularly, and he attended Dewey's seminar on social philosophy in the fall of 1917 at the suggestion of a young philosopher, Laurence Buermyer, whom he had hired in 1915 as a tutor. He quickly came to admire Dewey both as a thinker and as a person and invited him and Alice Dewey to visit in Marion before the semester was over. By the next summer, the two men were active together in political causes, visited each other and had formed the warm friendship that included their wives and the Dewey children. When Dewey and his wife began a trip to the West Coast in the fall of 1919 and then expanded it to lecture in Japan and China for a two-and-a-half-year period, Barnes carried on an extensive correspondence with both Deweys, sent them books, and kept them informed of events in the United States (as well as reporting his latest bargain purchases of artworks in economically depressed postwar Europe). He also lent the family money so they could manage during a period when Dewey's income was interrupted or sporadic.

Barnes's passion about education and especially the potential of art to provide a means for

transforming lives lead to discussions of educational and aesthetic theory early in their relationship. These themes blossomed over the succeeding years, both in correspondence and conversation, and must have been a major contributing factor more than a decade later in Dewey's writings on aesthetics. In 1920, Barnes revealed his commitment to education and experience in a long letter to Alice Dewey in China.

My principal interest has always been in education, first for myself, then for those less fortunate ones around us, then in the education of the public in general. . . . From the time I was 11 until now I've been vitally interested in education – particularly that kind of education that looks upon experience as the best teacher (Barnes 1920).

He also gently criticizes John Dewey, in comments he must have expected Alice to share with her husband, while emphasizing his own commitment to action.

Mr. Dewey has best stated my beliefs in *Democracy and Education*, but neither there or in his other writings does he bring out with enough emphasis the principle that makes the world stationary—almost; I mean the domination of the spirit of imitation in all classes, from the intellectual to the peasant. . . . All I mean by this is that experience is only a name until experiment, instead of imitation, becomes the guiding star with everyone in everything they do—in society, art, morals and the little things that make up everybody's real life (Barnes 1920).

A year before, Barnes had written to Dewey suggesting that aesthetic theory might fit into Dewey's conception of "experience."

I have a suggestion in your academic line, which I believe, is practical and much needed; it is something like this: You hold a seminar at Columbia on life itself and its aesthetic phases. All the material you need is in *Democracy & Education*, *Santayana's Reason in Art*; it would take William James, McDougall, and Creative Intelligence in their philosophical and psychological aspects. Art now is detached from life, whereas it is essentially life itself. . . (Barnes 1919).

Never shy, Barnes also suggested that he could contribute to the proposed course using his collection in the same way that he employed it in his educational work at his factory.

You see now that we are in a Socratic dialectic that embraces everything in life and when we get along you'll find that art and life are synonymous . . . when we get to Santayana's "Plastic Construction" and "Plastic Representation" we'll have some Renoirs here to show the meaning—real meaning, not bunk—of the terms, drawing, color, values, etc. . . . This is only a sketch, but you'll see what I mean. Art, Ethics, Politics, Philosophy will dovetail with Life perfectly. Your seminar could be made the finest thing ever attempted. I would be glad to cooperate each week in getting the plan in practical shape. Don't say it won't work—I know it will, I've tried it for years with people who never went to any college but a work-shop. Of course I eschewed [technical] terms and I was handicapped by the absence of what you could put into it (Barnes 1919).

Unfortunately, there are no extant reports of Barnes's educational program in his factory before the opening of the Barnes Foundation in the 1920s. There are only retrospective reports by Barnes and his colleagues of the

efficacy of the program. But from the available correspondence we can be sure that Barnes *believed* in the transformative power of aesthetic experience and that he was able to convince Dewey, who was not easily swayed by such claims, that they did in fact occur.

Dewey answered five months after Barnes wrote this detailed, ebullient letter. It's possible that it took a while to reach Dewey; it's also possible that he considered the proposal carefully before answering. His response was cautious and not enthusiastic.

I was interested in your suggestion about a seminar in esthetics. But I can't rise to my part in it. I have always eschewed esthetics, just why I don't know, but I think it is because I wanted to reserve one region from a somewhat devastating analysis, one part of experience where I didn't think more than I did anything else. And now I have a pretty fixed repulsion [against] all esthetic discussion. I feel about it precisely as the average intelligent man feels about all philosophical discussion, including the branches that excite me very much (Dewey 1920).

Sometime in the early 1920s, after returning from the two years in Japan and China, most likely through his constant discussions with Barnes, Dewey changed his mind and began to include consideration of aesthetic experiences more seriously in his broad, encompassing conception of experience. In correspondence between them concerning Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* in March 1922, Barnes criticizes a sentence by Dewey:

Page 22—"Desire for flowers comes after actual enjoyment of flowers" . . . Substitute any other object—automobile, fine clothes, pictures, etc.,—and you have the same rose under another name. My experience—here, in this

shop, with normally well-endowed, well-meaning people, shows that the underlying guiding principle is our old friend *imitation* (Barnes 1922).

Barnes suggests that other factors may trigger desire, such as the simple wish to imitate, or to possess what others already have. Dewey answers and suggests that Barnes should write on aesthetics:

The formal or legal reply to your point is that the man in question doesn't really desire flowers, he desires to be like others, and that blessing (?) he *has* already enjoyed.

But I'm not fool enough to think this answers your real point. I haven't answered it anywhere in the book. Its not my gift, or it is my limitation that I can't really do it. You think quite likely that it is fear or some self-feeling that renders me incapable. Perhaps it is. But why the devil don't *you* do it? Why should the responsibility fall on me especially?

Personally, my guess is that the thing you want to see done—and which I fully agree needs doing very badly—can only be done in “art”, not in philosophy, probably in the drama primarily, then in the novel. I am decidedly short in art capacity (Dewey 1922).

In 1922 Barnes established the Barnes Foundation “to promote the advancement of education and the appreciation of the fine arts”¹¹ in Merion, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, and he and his colleagues began publishing articles about their previous educational work and their proposed activities at the foundation. As Barnes expanded his educational vision and moved to create an educational institution with his ever-increas-

ing collection as the central component of his plan, he kept Dewey informed and involved in every step of the process. He asked Dewey's advice on how he should word his charter; he appointed Dewey as nominal director of education for the new foundation; and he shared correspondence and articles with Dewey. Thus, Dewey was drawn ever deeper into consideration of aesthetics and art education. Their exchanges illustrate a continuing discussion of aesthetics that leads to both Barnes's and Dewey's extensive writings on aesthetics.

In October 1923, after receiving a preprint copy of Mary Mullen's *An Approach to Art*, Dewey commented to Barnes:

I'm glad to know that Miss Mullen's short book is coming out very soon. I have read about the first third of it and not only found myself in agreement with it, but learned a great deal from its exceedingly lucid presentation. I think there is one point which I should state somewhat differently, and that is, the relation of art to the expression of emotion, but I think I shall find as I read on that the difference is more one of terminology than of fact (Dewey 1923a).

Barnes replies:

If you mean that emotion is different from aesthetic feeling and that to mention them interchangeably will cause confusion, you bring up a question we [Barnes and his staff] thrashed out several weeks ago. The danger is very real. . . . Much of the trouble is due to popular terminology. . . . But we evidently didn't straddle [the problem] successfully or you would not have warned us (Barnes 1923).

He goes on to say that, as the book is not yet in press, they will add an explanatory note, and indeed the published booklet includes a

few paragraphs addressing this point. This is one example of numerous exchanges in which the two modify each other's writing, raise challenges and generally discuss their views of aesthetic theory. They worked together so closely and acknowledged each other's contributions to their thinking so frequently that it is not surprising that even the language they used became similar. As Carrier (2007) points out, it is sometimes difficult to decide from a selected passage whether it comes from Dewey or from Barnes.

In December 1922, Dewey gave the founding series of Carus lectures, endowed by Mary Hegeler Carus in honor of her late husband, Paul Carus, thinker, theologian, and publisher of Open Court Press, who had died in 1919. Dewey's three lectures, "Existence as Stable and Precarious," "Existence, Ends, and Appreciation," and "Existence, Means, and Knowledge," did not refer directly to art or to aesthetics, but when Dewey later enlarged them into one of his most significant works, *Experience and Nature*, he devoted the penultimate chapter to "Experience, Nature and Art." In September 1923 he wrote to Barnes:

Buermeyer's article came in the nick of time for me. In my odd moments this summer I have been preparing for the press the course of lectures on the Carus Foundation of which I gave three last Christmas. . . . I was engaged when the paper came on a chapter, next to the final one, called Nature, Experience and Art. In part Buermeyer's paper gave me courage to say some things I should hardly have dared say. . . . My main point is that anything is art, including what is ordinarily opposed to art, namely science and the "useful" arts which liberates, concentrates and extends our natural enjoyments of natural things, and without Buermeyer's paper I should hardly have ventured to attack

the subject of "fine" arts as directly as I have done (Dewey 1923b).

Simultaneously, Barnes had decided to write his own book, as Dewey had urged him to do, as part of his master plan to create an educational institution. The first 50 pages discuss perception (that it is more than what the senses bring to the viewer, but includes interpretation of this sensory information) and the nature of art, with its combination of form and content and its role in human development. In summary he writes:

The world which we perceived has in it many things, color, shapes, and lines, that may exert natural charm. The colors of a sunset, the lines of a range of mountains, a ship, an automobile, even a piece of furniture, may have an esthetic quality, and this simple quality is probably the germ of the esthetic interest in its full development. . . . In a work of art, however, . . . [a]n object is more than a pattern of lines and colors; it is an individual thing, and its form, as we have seen, is what gives it individuality and significance. . . . the greatest satisfaction is possible from an object which combines . . . decorative and expressive interests and in which what is expressed is not only the universal qualities of the natural world, but human values also (Barnes 1925).

Dewey and Barnes clearly shared views on aesthetics, but the major influence Barnes had on Dewey was not through his formidable intellect, nor his willingness to debate with Dewey on any subject, but Barnes's unflinching faith that experiencing art was experiencing life and could be life transforming. For Barnes, aesthetics was not primarily something to write about or to discuss, but something to *experience*, and he developed an educational system that he hoped

would effect such change. He transferred this attitude to Dewey most clearly when, early in 1930, Dewey began to develop the William James lectures for 1931 that were published as *Art as Experience* in 1934.

On January 6, 1930, Dewey received an invitation to give the first annual series of William James lectures at Harvard sometime during the 1930–1931 academic year. On February 7 he wrote to Sidney Hook, “I feel rather stale at present, and I have learned to heed these feelings, which is the cause of my wish to take up some new field” (Dewey 1930a). A month later, learning that the lectures were not intended to cover any particular subject, only to honor the memory of William James, he made up his mind on a topic. He wrote again to Sidney Hook:

I still feel the desire to get into a field I haven’t treated systematically, and art & aesthetics has come to me. . . . I have jotted down 10 possible titles—this is hurried & would doubtless change . . . I The artistic & the esthetic in experience—II The roots of (fine) art in experience. III The contribution of the arts to experience—IV Social Patterns and Art V The Instruments of Artistic Production (place of tools & techniques VI & ? *The Diversity of the Arts*. VIII ? The Growth of the Arts. IX Art & Appreciation. X Art & Criticism (Dewey 1930b).

Dewey was now fully retired, no longer teaching courses, so he was free to begin work on these lectures before the summer, and he did so by reading the extant literature. In late April, in a letter to Corinne Chisholm Frost, with whom he had an extensive intellectual correspondence starting in 1930,¹² he mentions, while responding to some of her ideas:

Perhaps this is fanciful, but I am trying to work now on the philosophy of esthetics and

art. I am expecting to give some public lectures next year on this topic at Harvard; I’m afraid I’m going to plagiarize freely. . . . I’ve thought of taking the philosophy of art and esthetics for my subject (Dewey 1930c).

He goes on to comment that her ideas, although on another subject, are useful to him and that he wants to treat aesthetics as a component of more general experience and as a useful component of life:

What I should like to do is to get away from starting with the finished and refined end products as it seems to me most philosophies have done and go at it from the standpoint of experience and show the sources and conditions of the finished forms. . . . And I’d like to end up with a very commonplace and common saying about the art of living as the inclusive art, but in a way which would take it out of the commonplaces in which it seems to be usually left (Dewey 1930c).

This was written shortly after Dewey returned from a journey he and Barnes took to Los Angeles (where Dewey lectured and received an honorary degree) with a stop on the way back for a few days to visit Santa Fe and Taos. It’s difficult to imagine that they didn’t discuss aesthetics on the long train rides out and back and while admiring both the scenery and the artwork they encountered on the trip.¹³ As summer approached, Dewey planned another trip to Europe, intending to combine attendance at an international philosophical congress in Oxford in late August with a visit to his daughter Lucy and her family in Vienna. But in July he received a letter informing him that the Sorbonne wanted to give him an honorary degree at a ceremony on November 8, 1930. He changed his plans and began to arrange for a later trip to include

Paris and Vienna. At some point, Barnes and Dewey decided to travel together, so that they could discuss the content of Dewey's forthcoming lectures and Barnes could illustrate his ideas in front of pictures. Dewey, Albert, and Laura Barnes sailed to Europe together on the *Europa* on October 25, 1930; Dewey returned separately on December third.

Before they sailed, throughout the late summer and fall, Dewey made numerous trips to Merion and the two corresponded about various philosophers' writings on aesthetics that Dewey was reading. Dewey's comments in these letters are sharper than his typical public utterances:

I think I've analyzed Ducasse's theoretical premises. In one sense it wasn't worth the trouble; in another, it has by contrast helped clear up my mind on some points. His account is mostly based on taking words one by one, & then hitching them together—Prall—the Calif. man has a genuine feeling & his book is of an entirely different class. I've read Parker for the first time—he strikes me as the victim of a theory who now wishes to communicate the disease to others (Dewey 1930d).

Besides making his own comments about these philosophers in his responses, Barnes also reports on the latest news from the foundation. But Barnes's main point to Dewey is constantly that they need to discuss art with the pictures there to ground the discussion in actual aesthetic experience. Shortly before they sail, Barnes writes, using a quote from Dewey's last letter for emphasis:

Your "I got a real release and can start much freer from technical philosophy than I could before having the talks with you" is my text for this sermon. Too much philosophy and too little natural reaction to experience, and a

too limited experience, is exactly what is the matter with aesthetics from Aristotle to Santayana to Parker to Ducasse. You can cure all that and do an incalculable service to education in art if you will maintain that release and get your own experience as a live animal. But you'll have to stay alive from October 25th to December 1st. I can feed you stuff so fast in the Louvre and in the galleries at Vienna and Berlin that you ought to pant like a greyhound after a race when you get on the boat at Bremen. After that, all you have to do is to make explicit in words the physiological and psychological conditions that make you pant. It will be real philosophy minus the effort at mere philosophical discourse. The technique will take care of itself and your presentation will have the novelty of reality and conviction (Barnes 1930).

There is no doubt that Dewey considered Barnes's contribution to the lectures significant. In another letter to Corinne Frost, written during the days at sea on the way to France, he comments:

I shall be in Paris tomorrow; Mr & Mrs Barnes—of the Barnes Foundation—the finest collection of pictures in the US—came over with me. He is helping me with my Harvard lectures (Dewey 1930e).

Barnes's involvement with the lectures didn't end with preparation in 1930. Dewey continues to acknowledge his debt to Barnes, even as he is in the midst of the lectures. In March, midway through the lectures, Dewey writes to Barnes:

Dear Al,

Thanks for your helpful contributions. I made two lectures out of the material on Form—rhythm

and balance (weight), and I shall probably not give a talk on criticism, though of course I'll include it in the book, and have a chance to use your suggestions and those of further conversations and letters. And of course your memorandum will help keep me to the main theme in handling other topics. I keep your book by my side and make frequent use of it (Dewey 1931a).

Barnes also came to Cambridge to attend several of Dewey's lectures.¹⁴

Barnes's main focus in relation to Dewey's work on aesthetics during the next two years was repeatedly to encourage the latter to write up the lectures for publication. Dewey not only was busy with his usual lectures and essays, he also moved apartments again in 1931, and after returning from a few weeks in Nova Scotia during the summer he made an unscheduled trip to Vienna to visit his daughter Lucy and her husband after learning that their younger child had died.¹⁵ The following year, he worked on other books during the summer, but he tells Barnes that although he didn't work on the aesthetics lectures, he plans to begin soon:

I didn't get anything done last year except revising our *Ethics, & How We Think*. After a week more I hope to get at my Harvard lectures, which I didn't touch last year. I hope as soon as I get 2 or 3 rewritten you will let me bring them down to you—anyway I want to see you— (Dewey 1932).

Barnes answers immediately and suggests they take another trip to Europe together to work on the lectures:

Your pleasant letter was like a springtime breeze laden with the perfume of flowers. It was so nice that I shall refrain from reminding you that you are an utterly shameless person in

having not yet put your Harvard lectures in shape for the printer. . . . There are a number of early Renoir pictures in Germany and France that I shall have to study in order to complete the account of the evolution of his form. I expect to be able to go over about the middle of December and stay perhaps six weeks—ten days in Germany, a week in Paris, a few days in Madrid and, possibly, a week or so on the island of Majorca. I am telling you of this plan because if you really want me to go over the Harvard lectures with you, you had better get ready to go with me on that trip and we could devote at least part of every day to your stuff. Another advantage might be that by being with a really industrious man you might learn the habits of work and forswear laziness. All you need to spend on the trip is the price of an occasional *apéritif* for me (Barnes 1932).

In the same letter Barnes also sends Dewey more material that might be useful for Dewey's writing:

I am sending you herewith what was to be the first chapter in the book on Renoir but I am not sure that it is not too far-afield from a special book on Renoir; consequently I do not think I shall use it in the book. It occurred to me that that chapter might be useful in that part of your Harvard lectures which deals with plastic art; if it is, you are at liberty to use it (Barnes 1932).

Dewey reluctantly declines the invitation for the trip, but reaffirms that he finds Barnes's ideas useful for his own work and encourages Barnes to continue publishing:

Your letter of sweetness & light came last week just as I was leaving—I've been lecturing weekly at Johns Hopkins & last week I stayed over a day to address the negro teachers of

Baltimore who impressed me as a fine lot of people— I didn't get back till Sunday night, as I had to go to Washington too, & since then have been continuously rushed— I loved your piece on vision & form— *You* ought to publish it, then I could borrow instead of stealing. Your statement about traditions & their relation to the vision of the artist & of ourselves is the best you've ever made— "Hell, its perfect"— I am still overwhelmed by your generous invitation. There is nothing I'd like to do so much— But I'm still tied up in a way with the University during term time—being "professor emeritus *in residence*" And there are some other engagements— In short I don't see how I can do it, but I'm not going to say no positively today (Dewey 1932b).

For the next year, the two continue to discuss their respective writings, their debt to each other, and Barnes continues to push Dewey to get on with finishing his aesthetics book. Finally, Dewey, about to complete the task, and acknowledging that he owes much to Barnes, suggests that the dedication that he'll put at the beginning of *Art as Experience* will read:

To
 Albert C. Barnes
 a genius and in
 affection also
 who often makes himself
 God damned uncomfortable
 by the way in which he
 expresses and suppresses it
 (Dewey 1933)

CONCLUSION

Albert Barnes was not an easy man with whom to associate. He loved confrontation and

fighting for what he perceived as his rights. If he felt that someone was trying to take advantage of him, personally or professionally, he responded harshly and at times brutally. He also fought for the rights of others, those he felt did not get a fair hearing from society. He was active in civil rights issues before that became popular. He generously supported African-American students to complete their studies in any field, and provided scholarships to the Barnes Foundation classes and study trips to Europe.¹⁶ He acted on his beliefs, and was willing to spend not only on art but also liberally on causes he felt were just. Besides collecting art, he made education his mission and combined his interests with missionary zeal to create a novel educational institution, the Barnes Foundation, to carry out his interpretation of Dewey's progressive educational philosophy.

But Barnes did more than simply put Dewey's ideas into a practical framework of industrial education. He had a vision that teaching people to look carefully at art, to learn to see what was in a painting, could be life-changing, and he set about developing that belief into an educational program first in his factory and later in his classes at the foundation. Barnes's own work in aesthetics was a major effort to incorporate aesthetic experiences into life experiences, to accommodate controversial "modern" art into the mainstream of aesthetics and art history, and through his early championing of African art, to expand the notion of "art" beyond the classical canon of Western art.

Barnes learned a great deal from Dewey, as he repeatedly states, but Dewey also owed a debt to Barnes. Through his commitment, energy, and intellectual imagination, Barnes demonstrated that a passion for art need not be expressed in isolation from other life activities, but could lead to a rich, engaged life using aesthetic experience to enrich all else.

Above all, Barnes, like F. M. Alexander, represented for Dewey a model of someone who combined intense intellectual passion with equally intense activity to promote an idea that was central to Dewey's philosophy: the unity of experience, derived from the fact that the lives of human creatures are embedded in their natural and cultural environments. Barnes's contributions to Dewey's aesthetics, as well as to twentieth-century art education, deserves to be more widely acknowledged.

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NOTES

1. Dewey usually spells the word "esthetics." Except for quotations, I follow the current, more common usage, "aesthetics."
2. The statement that the work at the Barnes Foundation represents "the best that has been done in any field . . . that of science not excepted" may seem particularly hyperbolic to the reader unfamiliar with Dewey's work. But Dewey makes clear in *Art as Experience* that he believes aesthetic experience is the essence of all experience, while scientific work, which can also lead to aesthetic experiences, represents only a sub-group of possible experiences. Science provides limited experiences because, in his view, it deliberately leaves out the emotional and spiritual qualities that can enrich experiences.
3. The "new" interest in Dewey's philosophy is often dated as beginning with Richard Rorty's discussion of Dewey. Rorty's seminal work,

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, was published in 1979.

4. "The key to Barnes's personality was that he believed in human perfectibility and was messianic about it. He believed in it because he was convinced he had proved its possibility in his own life. . . . Barnes never doubted that he had molded his own destiny, and that he had done so by means of ideas derived from James, Santayana and Dewey. . . . Barnes also believed that ideas should lead to action, and that if we fail to act we stultify ourselves and in time become permanently paralyzed psychologically" (Hart 1963).
5. A parallel situation arises from Dewey's friendship with F. Matthias Alexander (1869–1955), the developer of the Alexander Technique. Alexander was not an easy person and commentators have wondered at Dewey's loyalty towards him. Jo Ann Boydston (1986) has pointed out that a major reason for Dewey's delight in Alexander and his "method" was that Alexander demonstrated the significant physical association between "mind" and "body," one of the crucial dualisms that Dewey was determined to abolish. Boydston argues that commentators who consider the relationship peculiar fail to recognize "the intimately interwoven influence of Alexander's ideas throughout Dewey's philosophy."
6. An exception is Zeltner (1975). In a footnote, page 2, he writes "It was primarily through his association with Barnes that Dewey was able to merge his general philosophical concerns with his increasing knowledge of the fine arts to produce a few articles for the Barnes Foundation, and eventually go on to write *Art as Experience*." More significantly, Zeltner several times employs quotations from Barnes's *The Art in Painting* to illustrate Dewey's views.
7. Dewey certainly knew of Locke, who made a financial contribution to Dewey's 90th birthday celebration. Barnes had an extensive relationship with Locke and with other members of the Harlem Renaissance (Meyers 2004). *The New Negro*, edited by Locke and

including a chapter by Barnes, came out in 1925, a few months after Barnes's *The Art in Painting*. The majority of Locke's critical writing appeared later.

8. There was considerable hostility to any "modern" art exhibitions in Philadelphia at that time. I am grateful to Richard Wattenmaker (private communication) for pointing this out to me.
9. In a letter from Paris to his close friend and colleague George Mead, he wrote, "Our serious occupation is pictures, in which we are both interested. In fact I think I'm more interested in them than anything else outside of philosophy, and we have both [he was travelling with his daughter in law] been educated a la Barnes and our tastes agree" (Dewey 1928).
10. Wattenmaker (1993, 5) reports that Barnes hung "work by the American painters Glackens, Lawson, Maurer, Prendergast, and others" in his factory.
11. See http://www.barnesfoundation.org/h_main.html.
12. See Frost (1959).
13. "Monday we took the bus to Taos about 75 miles from [Santa Fe]— There is a large colony of painters there . . . but they are bum painters judging from the pictures I saw. . . . The old Spaniards or Mexicans in this country used to paint religious pictures—plaster on wood & then painted in tempera, like the frescoes. They used to kick around, & sell for fifty cents or a dollar, but now everybody is buying them, & some of them are way up—they are scarce the good ones, but I bought seven, and Barnes has a large collection. They are very "primitive" & I wonder if you will like them—I think they are charming. Barnes bought thousands of dollars worth of rugs & silver; & the last day or two he suddenly got interested in pottery & began buying that." 1930.04.10,11 (08231): John Dewey to Louise Romig.
14. David Riesman, the late Harvard sociologist and son of Barnes's classmate and friend Dr. David Riesman, mentions that Barnes visited him at Harvard "several times" during the

1930–1931 academic year. He reports, "I remember one day he yanked me out of bed and said, 'Let's go see Jack.' 'Jack' was of course, John Dewey. He took me over to John Dewey who was lecturing at Harvard and slapped him on the back and did so with a whack that I thought would send him across the room. He introduced us and we spoke briefly" (Williams 1982, 132).

15. "We moved last summer, & then I went to Nova Scotia, & then towards the end of Aug. to Vienna— Lucy lost her little girl, from intestinal constriction, & so I went over which I hadn't planned to do. Alexander met me in Bremen & we went to Southampton together. He is just getting out another book" (Dewey, 1931b).
16. Classes at the Barnes Foundation were free, but Barnes would offer stipends to needy students he admitted so they could afford to participate. "A new move of the Foundation's program is an arrangement with Johnson, editor of "Opportunity," whereby we take on four promising, artistically endowed young negroes and, by bed and board, and instruction at the Foundation, try to help them to help themselves as creators of literature and the other arts that itch them. It starts next month" (Barnes 1927).

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