Eidos volume 4 no. 4 (2020)

A JOURNAL FOR PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

DOI:10.14394/eidos.jpc.2020.0042

Laura Mueller
Department of English, Philosophy, and Modern Languages
West Texas A&M University, USA
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8718-441X
lmueller@wtamu.edu

Modern Socratic Dialogue and Resilient Democracy: Creating the Clearing for an American *Bildung*

Abstract:
This article puts forth Modern Socratic Dialogue as a pedagogical tool for cultivating an American *Bildung*. Beginning with Michael Hogue's work on "resilient democracy," an associational *ethos* that is vulnerable and based on our lived uncertainty. To further establish this American *Bildung*, I investigate what it means to be American. Drawing from the works of Michael Walzer and Gloria Anzaldúa, I establish that "American" means unfinished, pluralistic, and embraces ambiguity. The question of how to cultivate this pluralistic, ambiguous, and vulnerable *Bildung* is framed by the freedom and social bonds of Wilhelm von Humboldt's theory of *Bildung*. For an American *Bildung* to flourish, freedom and social bonds can be presented and practiced in the form of Modern Socratic Dialogue – "truths" are created by the community of interlocutors, and problems and solutions are based on the experiences of the participants.

Keywords:
Bildung, democracy, education, Modern Socratic Dialogue, pragmatism, Wilhelm von Humboldt, American identity

… unless all men and all classes contribute to a good, we cannot even be sure that it is worth having.

– Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*

In *American Immanence*, Michael Hogue continues a very "American" philosophical tradition: a tradition in which philosophy is not alienated from life, but rather, part and parcel of the structure of our experiences – a way of living. Hogue's notion of "resilient democracy" is particularly representative of this tradition of thought. For Hogue, resilient democracy is, first of all, an *ethos*, grounded in "the collective experience of uncertainty and animated by the living desire to bring about a more beautiful world."[1] This *ethos* is an associational, relational one, and it is democratic because, for Hogue, it must be "empathetic, emancipatory, and equitable," assuming that each member of the association can be enriched by other members," (AI, 172–173). Vital to this democratic *ethos* is its anti-foundational politics; we start not with an immutable reality, but rather with the vulnerable reality of our actual, political, experiences (AI, 176). We start with where we are, not where some abstract ideal demands we should be. Democracy, for Hogue, is not just a certain political ideal for which to aim, but rather a way of being, a way of life. This dual existence as both ideal (product) and struggle (process) is reminiscent of part of the structure of traditional Germanic notions of *Bildung*, in which self-cultivation is both to be aimed for, but is also created through the very struggle of aiming.

Consider an analogy: if art is the product, then the *work of art* is the activity of the product. Thus, there is a difference between – and also a close connection between – the product and the process or the work that the product represents. In the case of *Bildung*, the product is teleological in a qualified sense. There is no "predetermined end" of humanity in the *Bildungstradition*. There is, however, focus on the development of the individual – a development which must come from within. Christoph Lüth refers directly to Wilhelm von Humboldt, writing that the individual is in "continuing activity," whose powers are never stagnant; humankind is always progressing – an infinite object.[2] We can consider this in terms of an "end in view," rather than an end that is fixed. Humboldt "did not formulate a catalogue which prescribed what a person should know, what a person should read, what a person should have heard, what a person should have concerned himself with, so that one can say: this person has Bildung."[3] For Humboldt, *Bildung* is "the development of the capacities of the individual into a harmonious whole."[4] This qualified teleology does not preclude us from having some end in view of the kind of culture we want to progress toward. If we want to use educational practices – which pragmatists such as Dewey certainly do – to build a better American society, we do not need some fixed end in mind; we can rest content with meliorism. Meliorism, Colin Koopman explains, "is the thesis that we are capable of creating better worlds and selves … that better futures are made real by our effort."[5] Rather than having some fixed idea of "best," we need only the idea of "better." However, to have some idea of what "better" American culture might be – to have an idea of what we seek to cultivate – we must tackle the problem of what "American" even is.

Hogue's call for resilient democracy can help us unravel the problem of "what it means to be American," in terms of what "American culture" is. An American *Bildung* is self-correcting vulnerability, which is best

1) I would like to thank the editors for *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*: Dr. Kenneth W. Stikkers, Dr. Paulina Sosnowska, Dr. Przemysław Bursztyka – Editor-in-Chief, and the anonymous reviewers for this paper for their helpful comments and suggestions.
Hogue, *American Immanence*, 171. Hereafter referred to in parentheses as AI, followed by page numbers.

2) Lüth, "On Wilhelm von Humboldt's Theory of *Bildung*," 50.

3) Konrad, "Wilhelm von Humboldt's Contribution to the Theory of *Bildung*," 113–14.

4) Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 114.

5) Koopman, "Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Hope," 107.

expressed through something like "resilient democracy." Unfortunately, this resilient democracy itself seems like an unattainable ideal, especially when we take note of US political conversations, which seem to vacillate between pure dogma and pure subjectivity. We cannot ever achieve the end, if we cannot engage in the process (a process that yields the fruit within itself). Rather than viewing resilient democracy as some unattainable ideal, however, we can see the vacillations between extreme political and personal opposites as part of what it means to be vulnerable, self-correcting and resilient; starting where we are, even if where we are looks to be utterly disunited, is part and parcel of an American *Bildung*. In other words, we can see resilient democracy in the work and experience of what is happening *now*. Resilient democracy (like humanity in the *Bildungstradition*) is not some antecedent ideal to which we are progressing; it is present *now*, happening *now* – the work that is going on *now*.

"Order," Dewey writes, "is simply a thing which is relative to an end."[6] (Again, this need not be a fixed end; it can be an "end in view.") Thus, our order for cultivating and sustaining the *Bildung* of resilient democracy must be appropriate to our end. If your end is a democratic society, then your order must also be democratic. In the realm of education, Myles Horton put it best: "When you believe in a democratic society, you provide a setting for education that is democratic."[7] I want to propose the philosophical methodology of Modern Socratic Dialogue as the order of cultivating our American *Bildung* in education. By "Modern Socratic Dialogue," I do not mean a dialogue within other methodologies, such as analytic methods, or phenomenological methods, and so forth. I am referring to *the* method of philosophy: the Socratic method *as* method through dialogue. This kind of conversation cultivates empathy (in listening), pluralism (difference is accommodated and incorporated) and equity (insofar as no special knowledge is required), and anti-foundationalism (participants approach the conversation with epistemic humility, not trying to grasp a Truth as the ground of knowledge, but rather work together to form a common truth that comes out of their situatedness). These are all traits of Hogue's resilient democracy, and all traits of an American *Bildung*, our self-correcting vulnerability, a way of being that replaces an unattainable ideal without sacrificing amelioration.

This paper focuses on: 1) resilient democracy as part of the American tradition of philosophy as a way of life; 2) the history of *Bildung*, especially its reliance on freedom and social bonds; 3) "American *Bildung*," crafted through the works of Hogue, Du Bois, Anzaldúa, and other American philosophers, including its contrasts with Germanic *Bildung*; 4) philosophy and democracy as ways of life in America; 5) how the Modern Socratic method, especially as espoused by philosopher and activist Leonard Nelson, can help us achieve an American *Bildung*.

Much like the tradition it addresses, this paper is layered; it is polyphonically pluralistic in method and structure. The many voices of this paper are first stratified and folded in together, growing together in difference and unity, just as the voices in a Modern Socratic Dialogue are meant to do. So, for example, we will find Humboldt's theory as an interpretive framework for Hogue; we find *la mestiza* consciousness as living examples of the product of this interpretation. In particular, the stratified sections listed above will be folded together in the following ways: after addressing Hogue's own theory of resilient democracy, I demonstrate how Humboldt's key concepts of freedom and social bonds provide a hermeneutical framework for resilient democracy. I then engage in scholarship on what it means to be American, particularly showing how the pluralism of *la mestiza* consciousness exemplifies freedom, social bonds, and resilience in uncertainty. Finally, I provide a brief history of Modern Socratic Dialogue and demonstrate how such a pedagogical method cultivates our American *Bildung*.

6) Dewey, *The School and Society*, 16.

7) Horton, *The Long Haul*, 68.

I. Hogue on Resilient Democracy

In *American Immanence*, Michael Hogue uses the works of John Dewey, William James, and Alfred North Whitehead to provide a new account of democracy, and a new account of theopolitics, for a new way of living. In particular, Hogue addresses the problem of American Exceptionalism and seeks to form a new theory that addresses the "Anthropocene paradox": "that the beginning of a human age for the Earth also marks the ending of the (primarily modern Western) idea of the human as separate from the rest of nature," (AI, 17). Hogue's entire theory of "American immanence," his reliance on Dewey, James, and Whitehead, is to establish an ontology of human beings as internally related to each other and their environment. Our world is, in other words, "a world of relational experience," (AI, 19). This new ontology "grounds us," so to speak, in nature, and allows us to rethink our metaphysics, our philosophical inquiry, our ways of being – including our democratic ways of being.

Hogue's theory of "resilient democracy" is my main focus. As he explains it, "resilient democracy is a grassroots theopolitics committed to the practices of democracy as a way of life" (AI, 156). Note that "democracy" is not being used here as a specific form of political governance; rather, democracy is *a way of life*. There are two elements of Hogue's theory that I want to emphasize: 1) democracy as a "politics of uncertainty," (AI, 175) and 2) the associational *ethos* of democracy.

As a theory entrenched in traditional pragmatism, Hogue's version of resilient democracy is grounded in the anti-foundationalism of classical American thought. This anti-foundationalism includes a rejection of "certainty" as such; Hogue himself writes, "democracy and certainty are antithetical" (AI, 175). Epistemic foundationalism assumes a "first principle" or some immutable reality that is antecedent to the knower; this assumption separates the knower from the known, thought from action, "true reality" from the world of the knower. Such foundationalism, taken for so long as a plausible theory of knowledge, constantly contradicts the world of the knower. Our experiences are not experiences of oppositions between what is known and the person knowing, between thought and action. Foundationalist epistemology is "epistemic gas-lighting." As Hogue points out, "A foundationalist epistemology is insufficient for our experience as embodied and relational, to our creatural and contingent vulnerability, and to the systematically entangled nature of our political realities" (*AI*, 176). Our experiences simply *are* as embodied and relational creatures.[8]

Foundationalist epistemology, ethics, politics, ontologies, and so forth, do not start with where and how we are. As Hogue elaborates, by treating starting points/first principles as immutable for all of time, "foundationalist reasoning externalizes the differences of historical context, social location, and embodiment. But insofar as democracy is a continuous struggle to widen the circle of empathy … democratic deliberation and democratic community must include these and other kinds of differences" (*AI*, 176). Just as epistemic foundationalism works "backwards," from our experiences as knowers to antecedent "truths," so too does political foundationalism work backwards: from antecedently held political beliefs to the idea of political life. In other words, political foundationalism works from beliefs or concepts that *were never part of political life* to asserting these beliefs as *what we should aim for*. Or, as John Dewey put it almost 100 years ago: "Thus philosophy in

8) Ada María Isasi-Díaz provides a nice example of the disconnect between most academic theories and experience: "Hyphens, slashes, dashes and parentheses indicate that we are in-between times – we find ourselves in a situation where the explanations of what is and the reasons for it (theories) that we created and have depended on to make sense of our world, are less and less apt to help us deal with reality, if not ours, at least the reality of the great majority of the world, which we find less and less capable of ignoring." Isasi-Díaz, "Burlando al Opresor," 341.

its classic form became a species of apologetic justification for belief in an ultimate reality in which the values which should regulate life and control conduct are securely enstated."[9]

As creatures that are part of a precarious world, we seek certainty – certainty in values, certainty in politics, certainty in beliefs. Thus, philosophically (in the Western world), we found ourselves committed to an impractical foundationalism. The alternative to this foundationalism is democratic uncertainty. As Hogue points out for us, we need democracy because our lives and our worlds are fundamentally uncertain, and we need a way of life that reflects that. In other words, "Democracy is a vulnerable politics for vulnerable creatures in a vulnerable world in a cosmos without a center" (AI, 178).

The "associational *ethos*" of democratic resiliency is grounded in the "collective experience of uncertainty and animated by the living desire to bring about a more beautiful world" (AI, 171). As an *ethos* of democratic living, however, we must realize that associational *ethos* is *formless*; there is no *fixed form* for democracy and association itself is *not* inherently democratic. Associational *ethos* is democratic when it requires, at the level of individuals, a responsible share according to the activities of the group to which one belongs, and participating in values the group sustains. At the level of the group, we must liberate the potentialities of members of the group in harmony with common and shared interests. As Hogue states, "A democratic *ethos* encourages people to actively participate in defining a community's purposes and value and strives to ensure that the goods and benefits of the community are equitably enjoyed" (AI, 171). Rather than political foundationalism, which provides the ideals for which we strive *antecedent to* the community, democratic anti-foundationalism – with an animating democratic *ethos* – sees the community's purposes and values as coming *out of the community*. An associational *ethos* is democratic when it is empathetic, emancipatory, and equitable (AI, 172); it presumes that individuals have something to contribute to each other and to the whole, that members can be enriched by other member's participation, that empathetic work of identifying and emancipating human capacities is a communal responsibility, and the coordination and equitable enjoyment of interests and goods of common life are an ongoing struggle and a blessing (AI, 172).

The *ethos* of the community reconstructs the reality, rather than receives an antecedent, immutable "Reality." In a resistance to certainty, this *ethos* stems from an ontological view of the universe as unfinished (AI, 91), and this *ethos*, as a way of life, is an *ethos* that will never be finalized but always be vulnerable. The "power of the people," after all, is never fully secure (AI, 172). However, equally important is resilience. Resilience stems from ontological vulnerability; complex systems, when they reach a breaking point, "seed and fertilize" new systems that emerge (AI, 164). For Hogue, democratic resilience is the infinite adaptability of democratic living based on its interrelational vulnerability.

My contention is that, when cultivating an American *Bildung*, we must start where we are, not seek some transcendent reality; our process for the *Bildung* must reflect the very culture it seeks to cultivate. In this instance – American *Bildung* – the culture by its very nature is vulnerable, uncertain, and never finalized. An American *Bildung* is not a struggle *for some ideal*; rather, it is the *struggle itself*, a self-correcting and resilient vulnerability that is always in process, with no transcendent ideal as its product.

II. The Cultivation of *Bildung*

Before the Germans had their *Bildung*, the Greeks had their *paideia* and the Romans had their *civitas*. And, though separated by time, geography, and culture, what *Bildung*, *humanitas*, and *paideia* all share is the idea that individual improvement occurred through education, and pointed to the ideal of human perfection that

9) Dewey, "Philosophy's Search for the Immutable," 103.

separated us from animals. As Jennifer Herdt writes, "While both *paideia* and *Bildung* may be translated to 'culture,' neither is 'culture' in a descriptive sense; both point to an ideal of human perfection and a process of formation that realizes that ideal,"[10] and, of the Roman ideal of humanity, "Humanitas, like paideia, was invoked to distinguish the fully human from the vestigially human."[11] Embedded in the Greek and Roman ideals of humanity was a justification for Greek and Roman rule, respectively: "Humanitas, in other words, was deployed expressly for the purpose of justifying Roman rule. Humanity did not preclude conquest. Rather, it dictated the appropriate way to rule the conquered."[12] He (and it was almost always a "he") who was fully human – whether through the process of *paideia* or through being civilized by Roman law – was also justified in conquering those who were less than human. Of course, culture as justification for both "perfect humanity" and the conquest of other nations did not end with our "ancients." Hegel, perhaps the last "great philosopher" of *Bildung*, was still pushing this agenda of justified colonialism, centuries later. To create an "American *Bildung*," then, we must be assured that it: 1) does not separate a kind of "perfected humanity" from the rest of the natural world, and 2) cannot justify colonialism and the racism and genocide that so often accompanies it.

Wilhelm von Humboldt had perhaps the greatest influence in Western thought on the relationship between education and cultivation. His notion of *Bildung* includes a tension between self-formation, education, and culture. *Bildung*, as both culture and self-cultivation, contains within it both a civic and an inward conception. *Bildung* as civic refers to the necessary social bonds and political activity of the one who achieved inner harmony. As inward, *Bildung* is an end-in-itself; it is the process of self-cultivation and inner harmony – a free process – that occurs in relationship with the world, but occurs *for its own sake*.[13] This tension between freedom and social bonds, however, is not a dualism; rather, it is more of a dialectic, a give-and-take, a push-and-pull between the individual and the world. Herdt describes Humboldt's *Bildung* as a self-formation developing the capacities of the individual into a harmonious whole; however, this self-formation cannot occur in isolation. We must engage with the world and allow our senses to engage with the world. As Herdt points out, this means that self-formation is not just a private pursuit; requiring engagement with the world allows us, as the self-forming individuals, to transcend *Bildung* as a merely private, self-interested pursuit.[14] As she writes, "Engagement with the world, then, preserves the pursuit of *Bildung* from becoming a kind of narcissistic self-cultivation."[15]

In *The Limits of State Action*, Humboldt presents the necessity of social ties in the "true end of Man," which is the "highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole."[16] He writes, "And indeed the whole tenor of the ideas and arguments unfolded in this essay might fairly be reduced to this, that while they would break all fetters in human society, they would attempt to find as many new social bonds as possible. *The isolated man is no more able to develop than the one who is fettered*."[17]

We can see from even such brief passages that both freedom of the individual and social ties are required for the "true end of Man." For Humboldt, "If there is one thing more than another which absolutely requires

10) Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 32.

11) Ibid., 33.

12) Ibid., 34.

13) "His conception of Bildung always appears as an end in itself; though the process of self-formation occurs in relationship to the world, it exists for its own sake." Sorkin, "Wilhelm Von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (Bildung), 1791–1810," 68.

14) Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 32.

15) Ibid., 115.

16) Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, 16.

17) Ibid., 98. My emphasis.

free activity on the part of the individual, it is precisely education, whose object it is to develop the individual."[18] Freedom in the development of the individual comes in the form of state non-interference in the educative processes. Civic development can only occur as a consequence of individual self-cultivation. Should the university fulfill its highest end, then the State too will find its ends fulfilled.[19] State interference with education provides an ulterior motive to the formation of the individual, which limits the development of human nature. And so, Humboldt writes:

> If education is only to develop a man's faculties, without regard to giving human nature any special civic character, there is no need for the State's interference. Among men who are really free, every form of industry becomes more rapidly improved – all the arts flourish more gracefully – all sciences extend their range. In such a community, too, family ties become closer; the parents are more eagerly devoted to the care of their children, and, in a state of greater well-being, are better able to carry out their wishes with regard to them.[20]

Humboldt meets the first criterion of *Bildung* in restricting the powers of the State in educational institutions. The second criterion – social bonds – is met in the educational system itself, most notably in the University of Berlin. Humboldt "endeavored to establish the educational system itself, with the University of Berlin at its pinnacle, as the institutional setting in which the free interchange of varied personalities can occur."[21]

From Humboldt's philosophy of education and culture, we find historical concepts that can help us build our own American *Bildung*, suited to American culture, voices, and history. Freedom and social bonds are two key components, providing both culture as self-cultivation and culture as that which is social. From the history of *Bildung* as cultivation in general (both self and social), we also see the mistakes of our intellectual predecessors. We must avoid the mistakes of elevating humans so far above nature that we nearly become "unnatural," and of justifying colonialism, racism, and genocide (and the two mistakes are so very closely connected). The implied barbarism that is the other side of "civilized," the inhumanity that is the sacrifice for *humanitas* must be avoided.

III. Voices of America

To be foundational components of an American *Bildung*, freedom and social bonds must be interpreted and applied through a very particular American identity. And yet, the question of American identity, or what it means to be American, seems to be a puzzle never solved. "There is no country called America," Michael Walzer begins his essay "What Does It Mean to Be an 'American'?"[22] And, as Walzer points out, when it comes to the United States – whose citizens often seem to think they are the only "Americans" in the world – things get even more fuzzy. Citing Horace Kallen, Walzer points out something rather obvious once pointed out: most other countries get their names from the peoples who inhabit them. But no one *in particular* inhabits the United States (not after past and current Native American genocide, and First Nation peoples have their own names for their

18) Ibid., 51.

19) If universities "attain their highest ends, they will also realize the state's ends too." Humboldt, "On the Spirit and Organizational Framework of Intellectual Institutions in Berlin," 246.

20) Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, 53.

21) Sorkin "Wilhelm Von Humboldt," 60.

22) Walzer, "What Does It Mean to be an 'American'?," 633.

histories and cultural identities): "It never happened that a group of people called Americans came together to form a political society called America."[23] There is no ethnic "United Statesian." Anybody can come here (in theory). There is nothing about the adjective "American" (which, for better or worse, has become nearly synonymous with "U.S. citizen") that reveals anything about race, ethnicity, or religion. "American" is empty.

Patriotism to the homeland, Walzer states, is assumed in other nations, but not in America. As a "nation of immigrants," America is not a nation spoken of or thought of as a "fatherland," "motherland," or "homeland." The United States is "a country of immigrants who, however grateful they are for this new place, still remember the old places. And their children know, if only intermittently, that they have roots elsewhere. They, no doubt, are native grown, but some awkward sense of newness here, or of distant oldness, keeps the tongue from calling this land 'home'."[24] The United States is "anonymous"; the United States is not the United States because it got its name from a collection of its people. Rather, it works the other way around: "The people are Americans only by virtue of having come together."[25]

"American" is anonymous, especially *ethnically* anonymous.[26] Of course, this is nothing new. Du Bois stated this anonymity of "American" – and the price it demands from others – in *The Souls of Black Folks*: "One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro, two souls; two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. . . . He would not Africanize America. . . . He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism."[27] People are Asian-American, African-American, Haitian-American, Mexican-American, but very few declare themselves as German-American or British-American – they are just *American*. Walzer's "anonymity of America" might as well be "white America is anonymous," because it can be. If we take away the hyphen, if we assimilate, we are free of our ethnicity and become lost in the anonymous wash of plain old Americanism. As Walzer puts it: "But, free from hyphenation, he seems also free from ethnicity."[28] To be free from one's ethnicity is (as Walzer states) to escape one's "old identity," and the "'inwardness' of their nativity," to "call his grandfather a 'greenhorn,' reject his customs and convictions, give up the family name, move to a new neighborhood, adopt a new 'lifestyle'."[29] Some might call this assimilation into the great "melting pot," along the lines of what Orosco calls the "Anglo-Saxon conformity model": "This model holds that there is a fixed cultural core to US American national identity, and immigrants who want to live in the United States must leave behind their Old World identities and adopt or mimic these new values."[30] Of course, these values to be mimicked were Anglo-Saxon customs and traditions. This "melting pot" dream is a barely-veiled white supremacist nightmare. Lest we risk misinterpretation here: "assimilationist ideas suggest a racial group is temporarily inferior,"[31] and that the dominant group, once they take the "inferior" group into the fold, will "save them."

This brief look at Walzer's article reveals just how complicated the question of what it means to be American is – but to craft an American *Bildung*, we have to be aware of what is so very *American* about it. So let us identify some of the problems we must address, so we can avoid them, in a different account of "American":

23) Ibid., 636.

24) Ibid., 634.

25) Ibid., 636. Of course, this quote overlooks those who were already here and consequently dispossessed, or those who were forced to come here.

26) Ibid., 637.

27) Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 11.

28) Walzer, "What Does It Mean to be an 'American'?," 637.

29) Ibid.

30) Orosco, *Toppling the Melting Pot: Immigration and Multiculturalism in American Pragmatism*, 13.

31) Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, 32.

1. An account of American culture cannot rely on any melting-pot or assimilationist ideology. As previously stated, this assimilationist goal is based in the ideology of cultural supremacy, where "whiteness" is supreme and "saves" via obliteration the culture that has assimilated. Such a view treads firmly in the path already set by history, a path that justifies and defends colonialism as "good for the oppressed."
2. An account of American culture must not be teleological in a traditional sense. This does *not mean* that American culture or thought does not have hope for progress. The distinction I am making here is between a "final end" that is seen as an antecedent cause for culture (both civic and individual) – an end to which growth is merely a means – and the process or growth *itself* as the final end. Perhaps we can call this refined version of *telos* an "American *telos*," where the process itself is the end, and thus the end forever *is process* and uncertain (like Hogue's resilient democracy).
3. The "American *telos*" cannot be based on achieving some national culture or ethnic fulfillment. Recall, as Walzer pointed out, there is no "ethnic core" to America. By contrast, there *are* thinkers who qualified *Bildung* with national ethnicities, and we must take care to avoid such thinking. For example, Heidegger's "Self-Assertion of the German University" demonstrates a *telos* built around an antecedent notion of the "essence" of a people. The social bonds necessary for *Bildung*, for Heidegger, are community bonds, bonds with the destiny of the nation, and bonds with the "spiritual mission of the German people."[32] Each social bond is centered around something essentially and ethnically German, linked to national destiny. However, as Walzer points out, "America has no singular national destiny – and to be an 'American' is, finally, to know that and to be more or less content with it."[33]

Ultimately, in his article, Walzer commits to "American" as pluralism:

> Michael Walzer, in his essay, "What it Means to Be an American," also sees America in terms of an irreducible pluralism, an association of citizens, a union of ethnic, racial, and religious groups, individuals and groups with varying identities and the freedom to choose which aspect of their identity they wish to emphasize in what context and for what purpose. However, Walzer also argues that the adjective "American" is a political one that emphasizes generosity, tolerance, and accommodation, allowing for the survival and the enhancement and flourishing of manyness.[34]

America is "radically unfinished."[35] This unfinished nature of American culture, I think, is what Hogue means by resilient democracy, by the politics of uncertainty previously mentioned. The very process and act of associational *ethos*, as described by Hogue, is in perpetuity. There is no final end, no final resting place, that guides us into its light of Certainty. Democracy is not a Being; it is always, by its very nature, a process of becoming. However, in tandem with that uncertainty, that vulnerability, is also a resiliency; this resiliency is demonstrated in the social bonds we form and the responsibility of freedom. Rooted in uncertainty is a commitment to democracy as a way of life, a commitment to forming new patterns of cultural understanding. Emerging from vulnerability, resilient democracy *creates*; it is an adaptive complex system,[36] one which allows for the survival of our manyness.

---

32) Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," 486.

33) Walzer, "What Does It Mean to be an 'American'?," 653.

34) Kegley, "Do Not Block Inquiry," 361.

35) Ibid.

36) Hogue's notion of resilience draws from notions of panarchy, which is a discussion far beyond the scope of this paper. See AI, 157–154.

American culture, if it cannot rest on an assimilationist, "melting-pot" ideology,[37] rests instead on cultural pluralism. One need not sacrifice who they were – or who their families were – in order to be American. On the contrary, "On the pluralist view, Americans are allowed to remember who they were and to insist, also, on *what else they are*."[38] Take, for example, the words and works of Gloria Anzaldúa, renowned American author, poet, and philosopher. In *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa explores the existence of *la mestiza*, who is "torn between ways," a "mixed breed," and "in a state of perpetual transition."[39] This "borderlands" state of *la mestiza* gives way to a new consciousness. *La mestiza*, product of the borderlands, "has discovered that she can't hold concepts of ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep undesirable ideas out are entrenched in habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death."[40] As such, *la mestiza* copes "by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity."[41] Consider again Du Bois' double-consciousness: one cannot be both an "American" and a "Negro." The two cannot be reconciled in the "dark body" and are always at war; the body is the battleground for the clashing identities. For Du Bois' struggle to end, he would have to melt in the pot. The hyphen in African-American would have to dissolve, along with everything to the left of it. But, per Walzer's pluralist *apologia*, one need not choose between either side of the hyphen; one can be both Black and American; one can be Chicano, Anglo, Asian, *indio* at once. The melting pot becomes a farce; "They'd like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven't, we haven't."[42]

There is no "ethnic core" to *la mestiza* consciousness, and the consciousness is unfinished. As an unfinished, "mixed" and "borderlands" consciousness, that equally embraces all sides of however many hyphens there are, *la mestiza* consciousness is the future, "Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures… The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show … how duality is transcended."[43] As a consciousness, and a *creation* of culture[44] – *la mestiza* consciousness uproots dualities – including the dualities that lead to the painful and dangerous "double-consciousness," and the dualities that lead to a demand for assimilation to be a "true American." What we see in *la mestiza* consciousness is a way of thinking and perceiving and acting that comes from the experiences of being many things at once: *indio,* immigrant Latino, American, Anglo, Chicano, American Indian.[45] This is resilience that, through social bonds forged in a shared struggle, brings about a new epistemology of self – rooted in experience, as opposed to using experience to fit into antecedent concepts – and provides "a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and the planet."[46] *La mestiza* consciousness is the creation of a new culture.

---

37) Walzer, "What Does It Mean to be an 'American'?," 635.

38) Ibid., 636.

39) Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 100.

40) Ibid., 101.

41) Ibid.

42) Ibid., 108.

43) Ibid., 102.

44) Ibid., 103.

45) Ibid., 109.

46) Ibid., 103.

Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, which continually creates, never stagnates, and has learned to tolerate ambiguity – is an example of the kind of associational *ethos* that Hogue is proposing.[47] Take, for example, Isasi-Díaz's work, which posits the *cotidiano* as the ground of *mestiza* consciousness. The ever-shifting spaces in which *la mestiza* exists is not only uncertain, but yields social bonds and resilience. She writes:

> The interstices in which we stand (not any less "real" in and of themselves in spite of their constant movement/evolvement into the next one; their flux and temporality not making them any less capable of yielding reality and truth as we deal with them/become involved in the process of changing them), need to be recognized and embraced (ah! yes! embraced, as in un abrazofuerte, with not even a little bit of air between the embracer and the "embracee") as a way of exposing and subverting the liberal hegemonic paradigm that continues to control society and the academy, as a way of revealing the power differences that keep many at the mercy of a few, and as an antidote to a self-aggrandizement that will make us explode (well, maybe implode).[48]

There is a creative, productive capacity within the shifting borderlands in which *la mestiza* exists. The interstices yield truth and reality not through their immutability, but rather through becoming involved with them. In the vulnerability, Isasi-Díaz identifies resiliency. The *mestiza's* very identity is democratic and pluralistic, forged through struggle, cemented through relationships with others, and understood through connection with the environment. *La mestiza* just is the "flourishing of manyness."

IV. Creating the Clearing

An American *Bildung* is democracy as a way of life; an associational *ethos* grounded in the experience of uncertainty, an association that is "empathetic, emancipatory, and equitable," assuming that each member of the association can be enriched by other members (AI, 172–173). It must be founded in the pluralism of American experiences and identity – a non-dualistic identity exemplified by works such as Gloria Anzaldúa's. This *Bildung* must be founded on the two main elements of any *Bildung*: freedom and social bonds.

Just as the Germans looked at philosophy, poetry, the novel, and the liberal arts as a way to cultivate the self and civil society, so too can we look at philosophy as a way to cultivate this way of life that we can call an American *Bildung*. To begin with, the American philosophical tradition itself developed largely *outside* of institutions and instead developed as intertwined with everyday life. Philosophy has, historically, been part of American life. There are several reasons for this, including an institutional distrust of philosophy by the Reformers, independent scholars who made their living by public lectures, letters, and pamphlets, and the exclusion of Black and African American intellectuals from universities; these intellectuals thus created their own institutions in churches, libraries, and lodges.[49] The development of our philosophical tradition outside of institutions is uniquely American, and so too will freedom and social bonds be uniquely American, as will the method of education to cultivate the self and culture be unique to our situation.

---

47) The first edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera* was published in 1987, 31 years before Hogue's ideas of uncertain democratic associations in *American Immanence*. To say that Anzaldúa's works are an example of Hogue's ideas is not to claim her ideas are only worthwhile as an example of Hogue's works. Rather, it is to say that her works and ideas – presented long before Hogue's – can show one way this *ethos* and understanding of self and the world has already *been in action*.

48) Isasi-Díaz, "Burlando al Opresor," 343.

49) Stikkers, "Practicing Philosophy in the Experience of Living," 44–5.

Focusing on African-American philosophy – which, as stated, primarily developed *outside* of academic institutions and *from and with* struggles of experience – Ken Stikkers shows us what such philosophical traditions can teach us about philosophy as a way of life. He writes,

> they were especially well situated to observe what habits are necessary for philosophy to be a way of life, embedded in the fabric of everyday existence, and not merely a subject for detached, abstract study. Among the qualities that they teach us need to be habituated into a philosophical way of life are: (1) the systematic incorporation of marginalized perspectives into public inquiry and, with that, (2) the ability to listen, especially to marginalized voices.[50]

Indeed, the associational *ethos* of a resilient, uncertain, democracy, *must* incorporate marginalized voices to avoid the white-supremacist-based melting pot anonymity. "It is 'the wretched of the earth' who, in speaking from their suffering, are most qualified to articulate the problems of publics."[51] As Stikkers points out, "not all suffer equally from public problems."[52] Any democratic *ethos* we seek to cultivate must be founded in the struggles of experience, rather than any antecedent ideal, and so we must seek out and *listen to* those who struggle the most. Recall Hogue's criteria for a democratic *ethos*: it must be empathetic, emancipatory, and equitable. A democratic *ethos* must "ensure that the goods and benefits of the community are equitably enjoyed" (AI, 172). If goods and benefits are only enjoyed by some, if some groups are suffering more from public problems, then our *ethos* is none of the "three e's."

One way that we can cultivate such empathy, through freedom and social bonds, is through Modern Socratic Dialogue (MSD). Just as Humboldt (along with others in the *Bildungstradition*, such as Kant, Goethe, and Herder), saw education as a way toward self-cultivation, so too do Americanists in the philosophical tradition. For Dewey, a society with democratic forms of associated life must "have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control."[53] Dewey's critique of "traditional" educational styles reveal his views on the relationship between education and democratic culture; merely lecturing facts and providing exams encourages students to focus only on their individual needs, rather than cultivating a social spirit.[54] In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey describes democracy as an associated mode of living in which each has an interest in the actions of others, for the actions of others "give point and direction to his own," and vice versa. This is "equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity."[55] Traditional education, which lends itself to individualism and selfishness rather than social spirit and common bonds, cannot accomplish the goals of democratic living. In *The School and Society*, Dewey expresses similar thoughts: "The common needs and aims demand a growing interchange of thought and growing unity of sympathetic feeling."[56]

Philosophy as practiced through MSD provides both freedom and social bonds (including empathy), the incorporation of marginalized voices, and the demand to listen to those voices. It cultivates freedom in the autonomy of the participants, and social bonds in the shared struggle for meaning. It is rooted in vulnerability,

---

50) Ibid., 44.

51) Ibid., 50.

52) Ibid., 48.

53) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 56.

54) Dewey, *The School and Society*, 15.

55) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 50.

56) Dewey, *The School and Society*, 14.

in a puzzling situation in which meaning is not immediately known, but must be resiliently and adaptively created. It is anti-foundational, and its only *telos* is the participation in the process, rather than a demand to find a certain Truth. It need not occur in institutions, though it can occur as a way of association and method of pedagogy. Emending Leonard Nelson's version of MSD with feminist thinking such as Lori Gruen's "oppositional community" and contemporary practitioners of the discipline, we can see how MSD as a pedagogical tool creates the clearing for the cultivation of our new American *Bildung*. Based on shared experiences and community inquiry, MSD also provides an epistemic method that stems from our experiences as embodied and relational.

V. Modern Socratic Dialogue: Nelson and What Comes After

Leonard Nelson – reformer, philosopher, activist – was a self-proclaimed follower of Kant and Fries, who developed the discipline of MSD when he was teaching at the University of Göttengen in the early twentieth century.[57] Nelson himself, seeking to put ethical demands into practice, founded a political movement as well as the *Philosophisch-Politische Akademie*. As Fernando Leal recounts, Nelson saw philosophy as struggle that *demanded* a certain way of life. Much like other philosophical living traditions, Nelson's groups engaged in "spiritual exercises"[58] in the form of MSDs. While the dialogue of Nelson has changed somewhat in the past century, there are nine core points that remain relatively untouched. They are, in short:

1. The group must be small (6–10 people), and include a facilitator, who is not a participant. Participants must not fall into a "free association" of ideas.
2. The dialogue is mainly concerned with ethical values, struggles, or dilemmas. No expertise is needed.
3. The dialogues are open-ended; no particular truth or result is expected. The main goal is that each participant understands at all times what is being said.
4. People must not quote authorities, feign hypothetical situations, or speculate about possibilities. The examples given must be lived experiences.
5. The dialogues must not be about defining words ("what is X?") While doing so does help the dialogue, the main goal is to find what we care for, why we should care for it, and what sort of life we should live.
6. The dialogues are in depth and not a battle of wits.
7. The dialogues must be free of jargon; no special expertise is needed or welcome. Participants must express themselves as clearly as possible and be able to explain everything they say to the group.
8. The ultimate purpose of the dialogue is to allow for self-transformation, to understand and strengthen one's own ideals and convictions, and to change one's own life and the condition of the world.
9. The dialogue presupposes that the truth about questions can be found by this method.[59]

57) Leal, "Leading a Philosophical Life in Dark Times," 197.

58) In the Philosophy as a Way of Life tradition, spiritual exercises are designed to maintain a commitment to philosophical living. Another such example of spiritual exercises are the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. For more on this, see Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*.

59) Leal, "Leading a Philosophical Life," 198–199. This point draws on Nelson's Kantian proclivities regarding *a priori* knowledge. However, for American *Bildung* purposes, we can extract MSD from its Nelsonian framework and also ponder the method as a way to create intersubjective truths via community.

Perhaps many elements of these core nine points already seem to work well with the American tradition of philosophy and living, particularly the *ethos* of a resilient democracy. For example, self-transformation, starting with lived experiences, a reliance on clarity rather than authority or jargon, all speak to a way of life that is concerned with how we should live, and the truths that stem from the discussion are discovered through experience, rather than sought *outside* of experience as some antecedent Truth.

A discussion among MSD facilitators, researchers, and advocates Jos Kessels and Dieter Krohn further provides clear links between MSD and the American *Bildung* that has been developed. When speaking of the experience of MSD (referred to by them as SD), Krohn states that "the SD which is based on concrete experience really concerns the whole person not just the intellect and that SD through this can even change a person if he or she takes seriously what is gained,"[60] while Kessels discusses the surprising difficulty of the activity: "And I was amazed by the amount of difficulties, the difficulty of understanding someone else but also the difficulty of understanding yourself. Because you lose that certainty."[61] Refer back for a moment to Hogue's words regarding certainty and uncertainty. Democratic uncertainty is the alternative to political foundationalism, which Hogue (along with a long history of American thinkers) has established as impractical. Resilient democracy is the associational *ethos* that comes out of a collective experience of uncertainty. "Democracy is a vulnerable politics for vulnerable creatures in a vulnerable world in a cosmos without a center" (*AI*, 178). Without some immutable reality to rely upon, we *do* lose that certainty; we have only concrete experience, which is vulnerable. As a counterweight to the vulnerability, though, we have also found resiliency; democratic living is an adaptive and complex way of life, in which new patterns of cultural understanding, interpretation, and even consciousness (e.g., *la mestiza* consciousness and/or *proyectohistórico*, which stem from shared *cotidiano*) emerge. Furthermore, with no immutable reality that we are trying to "discover," we find that the very process of MSD is the goal; as Kessels states, "Because what you are after is what you are doing already. That's the only thing."[62]

Concrete experience is, as already stated, one of the nine key elements of a MSD. However, "concrete experience" does not here mean merely subjective and isolated. Recall, after all, that MSD is being used as an educational method to cultivate an American *Bildung*, which is both self and civic cultivation. And, this *Bildung* is a certain kind of associational *ethos*, a democratic way of living that is embedded in relationships and stems from a collective experience of uncertainty. The concrete experiences, then, are *shared* with one another in order to find a common truth (or common truths). Kessels states, "what we are after is a *sensus communis*, a common sense. So it is not only a private experience or a private thing. You are doing that as a group. What we are doing in a SD in a systematic way is trying to understand one another. How do you think or feel and how does that relate to me,"[63] while Krohn efficiently adds, "Truth is always truth for the people who come together."[64] Social bonds, in other words, are required in order for the uncertainty to gain resiliency.

Previously, I stated that the process of *Bildung* must reflect the culture it seeks to cultivate; thus, if resilient democracy is vulnerable and uncertain, never finalized but always in process, then our pedagogical method of self and civic cultivation must also be vulnerable and uncertain, never finalized and always in process. However, the uncertainty must be accompanied by resiliency; "resilient democracy leverages change from the ground up and the middle out by amplifying the countervailing democratic resonances of ecologically attuned and socially just associations, communities, and solidarities" (*AI*, 157). Thus is the nature of the MSD, with its emphasis on

60) Kessels and Krohn, "'Can we put into words what a Socratic dialogue really is?'" 662.

61) Ibid.

62) Ibid., 665.

63) Ibid., 666.

64) Ibid.

shared truths that we find together through communal process, rather than a certain immutable truth antecedent to experience, with its emphasis on lived experience rather than hypotheticals, with its emphasis on one's own voice rather than appeal to authority and, as Kessels stated, the thing we are after is the *thing we are doing*. The struggle of the process *just is* the *telos*. Through this struggle, the interlocutors are committed to find meaning together, to craft the space of uncertainty into a shared experience and truth.

This communal engagement of inquiry, the *sensus communis* that delimits the MSD from simply a private endeavor, provides the necessary social bonds for *Bildung* education. Recall the earlier emphasis on engagement with the world in a discussion of Humboldt: "Engagement with the world, then, preserves the pursuit of Bildung from becoming a kind of narcissistic self-cultivation."[65] The communal effort of inquiry involved in MSD creates the required social bonds that prevent self-cultivation from becoming a self-indulgent, solipsistic activity.

Nelson's own words on his version of the Socratic dialogue help explicate how autonomy is cultivated in the exercise. Nelson opens his lecture, "The Socratic Method," by defining what the eponymous method is, and what it seeks to accomplish: "The Socratic method, then, is the art of teaching not philosophy but philosophizing, the art of not teaching about philosophers but of making philosophers of the students."[66]

For Nelson, the pressures applied by the method of Socratic dialogue "forced" minds to freedom: "Only persistent pressure to speak one's mind, to meet every counter question, to state the reasons for every assertion transforms the power of that allure[67] into irresistible compulsion. This art of *forcing* minds to *freedom* constitutes the first secret of the Socratic method"[68] (SM, 15). Reminiscent of Kant, Nelson repeats Kant's own paradox: how can one be forced to freedom? He writes: "How can we affect a person by outside influences so that he will not permit himself to be affected by outside influences?" (SM, 19) and "We must resolve this paradox or abandon the task of education" (SM, 19). However, the human mind is always affected by outside influences, whether these influences are teaching, or determinants, or stimulations that sway the mind to accept one judgment over another. For Nelson, the pressure to autonomous thinking that the Socratic dialogue provides also "weakens any influences that prohibit philosophical growth and comprehension, and reinforces any influences that promote it" (SM, 19). For example, as we saw from Leal's summary of Nelson's nine core elements of the Socratic dialogue, one must not appeal to authority, but rather can appeal only to one's own lived experience. Now, we can see why. Authority on any subject is an external influence; while that authority itself is not bad, one must learn to think on one's own and weaken the reliance one has on other voices. On the other hand, working together with the "external influences" of dialogue participants encourages one's own autonomy, as the participant is being encouraged by others to think for herself.[69]

---

65) Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 115.

66) Nelson, *Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy*, 1. Hereafter referred to in parentheses as SM, followed by page numbers.

67) The allure that the lecture holds for spontaneous thinking; however, this allure is not irresistible as the dialogue is.

68) Again, we can see the strong influence that Kant's works had upon Nelson. In his *Lectures on Pedagogy*, Kant states, "One of the biggest problems of education is how one can unite submission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use one's freedom. For constraint is necessary. How do I cultivate freedom under constraint? I shall accustom my pupil to tolerate a constraint of his freedom, and I shall at the same time lead him to make good use of his freedom. Without this everything is a mere mechanism, and the pupil who is released from education does not know how to use his freedom." Immanuel Kant, "Lectures on Pedagogy", 9:453. For more on Kant and autonomy in education, see Laura Mueller, "Education, Philosophy, and Morality: Virtue Philosophy in Kant."

69) The dynamic relation between freedom and social bonds is much like Viktor Frankl's statement in *Man's Search for Meaning*: "Freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibleness. That is why *I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast*." Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 132.

Philosophical truth, Nelson writes, is a matter of *insight*, rather than just knowledge. We must have precision of thought (SM, 94) along with freedom from the "shackles of authority" (SM, 92). Clarity in concepts comes through the process of the Socratic dialogue; refer again to the nine points that Leal provides. One must be able to explain everything she says to the group. So, freedom from authority is not enough; rather, it is a precondition for philosophical thinking (SM, 92) (similar to how freedom is a precondition for cultivation in Humboldt's philosophy). The emphasis on insight rather than knowledge also explains the focus on lived experience, and the focus away from mere definition. Reflection *must* be directed toward problems that matter. "It violates our requirement of *purposeful thought* to struggle with questions of no more than formal importance or with mere subtleties" (SM, 95). Mere logic games are "sheer babble" (SM, 96).

Nelson's reliance on Kant and Fries does not make *him* a perfect fit for American thought, American education, and American *Bildung*; we cannot deny the glaring differences between Nelson's philosophical commitments and that of American thought. Nelson, for example, strongly rejected democracy (as political system),[70] believing that it was "incompatible with justice."[71] Nelson clearly distrusted the "masses,"[72] and advocated for the rule of one man, who would be "autonomous in thought and capable of self-criticism."[73] Furthermore, Nelson is committed to universal truths that are apparent through reflection, and that beginning with experiential judgments allows us to "regress" and abstract to find the universal (SM, 10) (see, for example, the ninth core element of MSD that Leal provides).

Thus, we can see that Nelson's political and philosophical commitments are antithetical to core elements of an American *Bildung*; MSD, however, need not be. After all, there is no particular philosophical commitment that the method has, other than the process of dialogue. Furthermore, if we pair MSD with something like an "oppositional community," we can secure a pedagogical endeavor that incorporates marginalized voices (including, for some, the "voice of nature") and helps us avoid a stark distinction between humans and nature.

As we know, MSD takes place between 6–10 participants, who appeal only to their own lived experiences, rather than appealing to authority figures, possibilities, or hypothetical situations. The topics they are discussing must have significance to the group. While there are many variations to the MSD, a few things remain consistent in all accounts: a question – decided upon by the group – is asked. After the question is asked, each participant writes down an example of a lived instance of the topic. If, for example, the question is "What is friendship?" then each participant would write down an example of when they experienced friendship.[74] The facilitator writes down each example on the board. The participants then, through dialogue, together select *one* example that they think best represents an experience of, say, friendship. This example becomes the exemplar. The exemplar must be a story to which all can relate to and empathize with. The next stage involves the participant whose story was chosen to break down the experience in a series of steps:

> If friendship is the topic, the participant may describe a series of consecutive events that led him to the realization that he was experiencing friendship. The other participants are then encouraged by the facilitator to ask as many clarifying and interpretive questions to the author of the exemplar

70) Struve, "Leonard Nelson," 186–187.

71) Ibid., 196.

72) Ibid., 199.

73) Ibid., 200–201.

74) Roy, "To Imagine, to Recollect, per Chance to Discover," 151.

> as are needed for all of them to empathize with the experience. The more sincere the empathy is, the more successful the dialogue will be.[75]

This is an arduous process, though eventually this stage, too, comes to an end. Everyone will eventually agree that friendship occurred as a specific moment. This is the "consensus phase," and is crucial. Consensus is *not* compromise. Everyone must be in agreement. In the final stage, participants each give reasons why the core statement represents the "spirit" of the question. They might write their answers as "X is P because."[76] Often this final stage is not reached, but "It does not always matter if the final stage of the dialogue is not reached, because what happens as a result of the process is often just as important as what happens when you reach a conclusion. Indeed it can be said that the process is more important than the content."[77]

The empathy cultivated is vital to the MSD process. Participants must be able to empathize and connect with the exemplar, not just reach compromise for the sake of efficiency. Such empathy can help us avoid hierarchical thinking in regards to humanity. As stated earlier in this article, the Roman and Greek notions of *humanitas* and *paideia*, respectively, were invoked to separate the "perfected human" from the "vestigially human." The vestigial human can be animals, nature, women, or those of varying races, religions, and social classes. The later Germanic tradition of *Bildung*, much like its ancient predecessors, used the notion of self-formation to contrast their own culture (white, European) with those who were "unformed" or "less human" in some way. In other words, self-cultivation and civic cultivation were used to justify colonialism and the atrocities that accompanied it.[78] However, the more voices we allow into our MSDs, the more empathy we will cultivate. A diversity of voices is required for our *American* MSD.

One example of a dialogue that *must* include a diversity of voices is the feminist "community of opposition," discussed by Lori Gruen. If viewed as a required part of MSD, this kind of community allows us to avoid the mistakes of separating the human from the "vestigial human," thus avoiding the heinous actions of previous philosophers and colonizers. Drawing on the work of Ann Ferguson, Gruen writes that "Communities of opposition, while created due to certain shared interests, allow for the important recognition of differences between members of the community."[79] In such communities, the status quo can be reconsidered as diverse community members express their interests. MSD groups must be communities of opposition to avoid assimilationist ideology. Gruen writes, "The process of generating value in chosen communities requires that individuals and communities themselves always seek to expand their moral experience by including those who may not initially be friends but who nevertheless deserve respect."[80] Through such a community, Gruen elaborates, we avoid parochialism that so often plagues communities. For Gruen, additionally, non-human nature can be included in our communities of opposition. We can include nature in our communities through direct experience, and the enjoyability of those experiences does not matter. After all, we do not always enjoy opposition, but we certainly learn from it. Gruen writes, "Direct experiences of the nonhuman world will create better knowl-

75) Ibid., 162.

76) Ibid.

77) Ibid., 163.

78) For example, in *The Racial Contract*, Charles W. Mills writes, "But if in the racial polity nonwhites may be regarded as *inherently* bestial and savage … then by extension they can be conceptualized in part as *carrying the state of nature around with them*, incarnating wildness and wilderness in their person." Thus, the "nonwhites" were either killed because they were "just animals," or subjugated in order to be "saved." Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 87.

79) Gruen, "Revaluing Nature," 360.

80) Ibid., 362.

edge of nature and can only help us make more informed judgments about our relation to it."[81] Ensuring that our MSD communities are "oppositional," and that this opposition and direct experience can include nature, also helps us avoid the grievous conceptual divisions and immoral actions of our predecessors.

Educational practices focused on the voices of the community – practices that utilize main elements from MSD – are a fundamental part of social change, and this is not restricted to the Germanic traditions of Nelson's Academy. Both Myles Horton (founder of the Highlander Folk School (now the Highlander Education and Research Center) and Ella Baker (civil rights educator, educator, and organizer) utilized personal experience, community, and oppositional dialogue to enact empowerment and social change among the most oppressed groups of American culture and society. Baker, objecting to the social conformity and obedience of traditional schooling, taught for liberation. As Barbara Ransby recounts, "Baker's pedagogy was democratic and reciprocal. Although they never met, and there is no evidence that she was familiar with his writings, Baker's teaching style very much resembled that of the Latin American educator and activist Paulo Freire."[82] To teach for liberation was to empower people to find within themselves the answers, to find the answers and tools for social change within the collective experience of the community. Baker used opposition and conflict as tools for learning, an early predecessor to the theoretical term "oppositional community." Rejecting "the dominant values of society and the elitist markers of supposed success, Baker encouraged young people to wrap themselves in a different culture, not as an escape but as part of their re-envisioning and redefining a new form of social relations that prioritized cooperation and collectivism over competition and individualism."[83] This was a way of learning and living that promoted, like resilient democracy, new patterns of cultural understanding.

Horton, too, was heavily involved in the civil rights movement and viewed educational practices as tools for lasting social change. Founded in 1932, the Highlander Folk School was founded to work with the oppressed poor, so they could learn to value and analyze their own experiences and thus collaborate and organize for social change.[84] In a conversation with his dear friend and colleague Paulo Freire, both Horton and Freire state in their own terms tenets of MSD that have been discussed in this paper. As Freire states:

> The more people participate in the process of their own education, the more the people participate in the process of defining what kind of production to produce, and for what and why, the more the people participate in the development of their selves. The more the people become themselves, the better the democracy.[85]

Horton, in agreement with Freire, follows up, adding:

> So I rediscovered what's long been known, that one of the best ways to educate is to ask questions. Nothing new about that. It's just not widely practiced in academic life. I guess the academicians give you a lecture on it, but they couldn't practice it. So I just found that if I know something well enough, then I can find a way in the discussion that's going on to inject that question at the right time, to get people to consider it. If they want to follow it up, then you ask more questions, growing out of that situation. You can get all your ideas across just by asking questions and at the same

81) Ibid., 363.

82) Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 359.

83) Ibid., 365.

84) Horton, *The Long Haul*, 56–57.

85) Horton and Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking*, 145.

> time you help people to grow and not form a dependency on you. To me it's just a more successful way of getting ideas across.[86]

Through questions and allowing the conversants to analyze and understand their own experiences, the answers become *theirs*, not that of the "expert." The community members learn to rely on themselves; they learn autonomy. It is not that a teacher (an authority) is not needed; rather, that authority cannot become authoritarian; authority and guidance must be balanced out by the freedom of the pupils (much as Humboldt argued). The teacher makes "it possible for the students to become themselves. And in doing that, he or she lives the experience of relating democratically as authority with the freedom of the students," says Freire.[87] If our American *Bildung* is to be democratic, we must have education that reflects that goal. And, as Baker, Horton, and Freire exemplify for us, elements of MSD emphasize both social bonds and autonomy, allowing education to be a tool for social change and resilience.

VI. Concluding Thoughts

The way here has been crafted from a *bricolage* of thoughts, much like America itself. We began with Hogue's conception of resilient democracy as uncertain (anti-foundational), empathetic, emancipatory, and equitable. The uncertain and unfinished nature of this associational *ethos*, is, I have claimed, a self-correcting vulnerability. America corrects its course toward amelioration, and it does this not through immutable truths of identity or philosophy or politics, but rather in the precarity that is part of democratic forms of life. After all, the power of the people is never fully secure (AI, 172). In addition to the vulnerability, however, we have the resilient commitment to democratic living; this resilience stems from an assumption of ontological internal relatedness, in which systems, uniting around a common purpose, can transform larger systems (*AI*, 164).

To determine what is so very "American" about such vulnerability, we then looked into the anonymity of "American" identity in the first place, discussing the ethnic erasure required to create such anonymity. We established a need for a sense of "American" that is tolerant of ambiguity, that allows one to move between either side of the hyphen in American identities. This tolerance looks something like Gloria Anzaldúa's *la mestiza* consciousness, and if embraced, would end the torment of double-consciousness. *La mestiza* consciousness also demonstrates the resilience of vulnerability.

In order to cultivate this tolerance for ambiguity, empathy toward others, and embracing of vulnerability, we must turn to education. For this, the history of *Bildung* is helpful, particularly as it explores the relationship between education and self and civic cultivation. Wilhelm von Humboldt, perhaps one of the most important *Bildung* scholars in European history, provides two criteria for such cultivation: freedom, and social bonds. Combining the need of freedom and social bonds, as demanded in classical *Bildungstradition*, with the need for vulnerability, direct experience, empathy, and uncertainty in an American *Bildung*, we find the pedagogy of Modern Socratic Dialogue. Drawing from core principles established by Leonard Nelson – direct experience, no goal but the activity, no reliance on authority – we see the cultivation of autonomy, thus meeting the requirement of freedom. The communal element (social bonds) of MSD, especially when emended with an oppositional community – again focusing on direct experience, but this time of the oppressed – forges empathy with others, and cultivates tolerance for ambiguity: of experiences, of identity, of self-formation. The oppositional community also includes nature, thus supporting Hogue's ontological position. The truth is communal,

86) Ibid., 146.

87) Ibid., 181.

rather than immutable. Thus formulated, MSD is democratic in spirit and in practice, and so as a pedagogical tool, cultivates the democratic spirit and associational *ethos*.

In addition, much like the history of American intellectual thought itself, MSD need not occur in institutions. MSD can happen anywhere there are willing participants; even its practice – where and when it can be practiced – is fundamentally democratic in nature. More than ever, American culture needs self and civic cultivation. We need to learn empathy, we need to fight for emancipation, we need to fight for equity. We are currently in a cultural place that, to many, seems to be anything but empathetic, emancipatory, and equitable. We seem to be in a cultural place that appears to want stagnation, to retain its past "greatness," rather than embrace its uncertainty. For example, on June 23, 2020, at a rally in Phoenix, Arizona, President Donald Trump made the following remarks: "But the radical left, they hate our history, they hate our values, and they hate everything we prize as Americans… . They're tearing down statues, desecrating monuments, and purging dissenters. It's not the behavior of a peaceful political movement; it's the behavior of totalitarians and tyrants and people that don't love our country. They don't love our country."[88] In the face of such comments from American leadership, Americans, rather than despair (or cheer, as some might) need to dialogue with their communities, and include opposition within those communities. The breaking points, the shattering edges, between such "camps" can embrace the uncertainty between them and create something new. Anything else is anti-democratic stagnation. Such dialogue needs to be part of the educational system, whether within or outside of institutions. It needs to be fundamental to our cultural practices in order for self and civic formation to continue to progress. If Americans wish to embrace their national identity of uncertainty, ambiguity, and resilient creation, then "The concern with empathetic identification with the oppressed and the focus on the direct experience of actual dialogue are good places to start."[89]

88) Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at a Turning Point Action Address to Young Americans," (Speech at Dream City Church, Phoenix AZ, June 23, 2020).

89) Gruen, "Revaluing Nature," 362.

Bibliography:

Addams, Jane. *Democracy and Social Ethics*. The Citizen's Library of Economics, Politics, and Sociology. Project Gutenberg. 2005. https://iuristebi.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/democracy-and-social-ethics.pdf.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*: *The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2012.

Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. Simon & Brown, 2011.

—. "Philosophy's Search for the Immutable." In *Essential Dewey* Vol. 1. Edited by Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander, 102–12. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

—. *The School and Society and The Child and The Curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Terri Hume Oliver. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.

Gruen, Lori. "Revaluing Nature." In *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Edited by Karen J. Warren, 356–74. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

Hadot, Pierre. T*he Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. Translated by Michael Chase. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2001.

Heidegger, Martin. "The Self-Assertion of the German University: Address, Delivered on the Solemn Assumption of the Rectorate of the University of Freiburg, The Rectorate 33/34 Facts and Thoughts." Translated by Karsten Harries. *The Review of Metaphysics* 38, no. 3 (March 1985): 467–502.

Herdt, Jennifer. *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226618517.001.0001.

Hogue, Michael S. *American Immanence: Democracy for an Uncertain World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.7312/hogu17232.

Horton, Myles, and Paulo Freire. *We Make the Road by Walking*: *Conversations on Education and Social Change*. Edited by Brenda Bell, John Gaventa, and John Peters. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

Horton, Myles, Judith Kohl, and Herbert Kohl. *The Long Haul: An Autobiography*. New York: Doubleday, 1990.

Humboldt, Wilhelm von. "On the Spirit and the Organizational Framework of Intellectual Institutions in Berlin" [in "University Reform in Germany"]. *Minerva* 8 ([1900]1970): 242–67. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01553214.

—. *The Limits of State Action*. Edited by J.C. Burrow. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. EBSCO eBook Academic Collection.

Isasi-Díaz, Ada Maria. "Burlando al Opresor: Mocking/Tricking the Oppressor: Dreams and Hopes of Hispanas/Latinas and Mujeristas." *Theological Studies* 65, no. 2 (May 2004): 340–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390406500205.

Kant, Immanuel. "Dohna-Wundlacken Logic." In *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Lectures on Logic*. Edited and translated by J. Michael Young, 425–516. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

—. "Lectures on Pedagogy." In *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education*. Edited by Günter Zöller, 434–85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Kegley, Jacqueline Ann. "Do Not Block Inquiry: Philosophy in America – Peirce and Socrates." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 52, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 353–565. https://doi.org/10.2979/trancharpeirsoc.52.3.03.

Kendi, Ibram X. *How to Be an Anti-Racist*. New York: One World, 2019.

Kessels, Jos, and Dieter Krohn. "'Can we put into words what a Socratic dialogue really is?' Dieter Krohn and Jos Kessels in Dialogue on the Meaning of Socratic Dialogue." *Philosophical Practice* 5, no. 3 (November 2010): 661–73.

Konrad, Franz-Michael. "Wilhelm von Humboldt's Contribution to a Theory of *Bildung*." In *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and Controversies Between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism*. Edited by Pauli Siljander, Ari Kivelaä, and Ari Sutinen, 107–24. Rotterdam: Brill Press, 2012. EBSCO eBook Education Collection. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-031-6_7.

Koopman, Colin. "Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Hope: Emerson, James, Dewey, Rorty." *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2006): 106–16. https://doi.org/10.1353/jsp.2006.0020.

Leal, Fernando. "Leading a Philosophical Life in Dark Times: The Case of Leonard Nelson and His Followers." In *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns – Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*. Edited by Michael Chase, Stephen R.L. Clark, Michael McGhee, 186–209. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118609187.ch11.

Lüth, Christoph. "On Wilhelm von Humboldt's Theory of *Bildung*." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 30, no. 1 (1998): 43–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/002202798183756.

Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Mueller, Laura. "Education, Philosophy, and Morality: Virtue Philosophy in Kant." *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 3, no. 4(10) (2019): 114–37. https://doi.org/10.14394/eidos.jpc.2019.0045.

Nelson, Leonard. *Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy*. Translated by Thomas K. Brown III. New York: Dover Publications, 1949.

Orosco, José-Antonio. *Toppling the Melting Pot: Immigration and Multiculturalism in American Pragmatism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2005wtt.

Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2003.

Roy, Bernard. "To Imagine, to Recollect, per Chance to Discover: The Modern Socratic Dialogue and the History of Philosophy." *Philosophical Practice* 1, no. 3 (November 2005): 159–70.

Sorkin, David. "Wilhelm Von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (Bildung), 1791–1810." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 1 (January – March 1983): 55–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2709304.

Stikkers, Kenneth W. "Practicing Philosophy in the Experience of Living: Philosophy as a Way of Life in the American Philosophical Tradition." In *Practicing Philosophy as Experiencing Life: Essays on American Pragmatism*. Edited by Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński, 34–57. Brill: 2015. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004301993_004.

Struve, Walter. "'Leonard Nelson: The Rule of the Just." In *Elites Against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890–1933*, 186–215. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Trump, Donald. "Remarks by President Trump at a Turning Point Action Address to Young Americans." Speech at Dream City Church, Phoenix AZ, June 23, 2020.

Walzer, Michael. "What Does it Mean to Be an 'American'?" *Social Research* 71, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 633–54.