

# *John Dewey's Notion of Aesthetic Experience.*

## *A Comparative Approach*

My doctoral dissertation argues an interpretation of John Dewey's aesthetics, presenting in his *Later Works*, and particularly in *Art as Experience*. Dewey's proposal, ahead of his time, tries to restore the continuity between art and life, laying the foundations of an everyday philosophy and defining the notion of aesthetic experience as an harmonic interaction between living creatures and surroundings. Thus, aesthetic experience is not a special attitude or a distinct encounter with works of art, but a previous phase of knowledge; the kind of experience which emerges in the immediacy of situations. Today, his considerations offer fresh insights into the field of aesthetics, which has been extended to include objects and experiences traditionally ignored. However, due to his terminology (he uses notions from traditional philosophy but with new meanings) and his forms of expression, Dewey's aesthetics has been misunderstood and criticized in some cases.

My approach attempts to contribute the nature and scope of Dewey's aesthetic, through a comparative methodology, which brings Deweyan notion of aesthetic experience into dialogue with the concept of harmony that Confucian philosophy suggests. Drawing on the comparative approach which current scholars have developed<sup>1</sup>, I will present a conversation which recognizes commonalities and differences as a means of enriching the understanding of aesthetic experience. The method, thus, seeks to overcome misconceived assumptions about Dewey's philosophy, promoting suggestive interactions, which tries to offer a more accurate view of Dewey's thought in his late period, and particularly after his stay in China. In reference to this point, his daughter asserts: "Whatever the influence of Dewey upon China, his stay there had a deep and enduring influence upon him."<sup>2</sup>

In this presentation, I will briefly explore this dialogue in two phases: firstly, I consider the resonances between Dewey's emergentism and what Roger Ames and

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<sup>1</sup> See the articles from the Symposium "A Dialogue between East and West", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43 (1) (2009): 1-58. Also see the monographs, R. Ames and D. Hall (1998), *Democracy of the Dead. Dewey, Confucius and the Hope for Democracy in China*, Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company; J. Grange (2012), *John Dewey, Confucius and Global Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY; and J. Wang (2007), *John Dewey in China. To Teach and to Learn*, Albany: SUNY.

<sup>2</sup> Jane M. Dewey (1939), "Biography of John Dewey", en P. A. Schilpp (ed.) *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, New York: Tudor Publishing Co, 42.

David Hall names Confucian ontology of events<sup>3</sup>; secondly, I try to clarify the notion of experience and *dào* (道), from Deweyan and Confucian thought, by means of a comparative analysis.

## **1. DEFINING OUR TERMS DEWEY'S EMERGENTISM AND CONFUCIAN ONTOLOGY OF EVENTS**

To begin, I would like to introduce a common background of Dewey's and Confucius philosophy. Both authors seem to share the central philosophical concern about "where is the way?" In other words, they do not seek universal principles or theories, but the way of action that promotes harmonious existence. According to Dewey and Confucius, we live in an immanent world which does not have an established order, but needs to be constantly achieved by creating new patterns or modes of interaction.

In his later works and particularly in *Experience and Nature* (LW1:17), John Dewey proposes a new method in philosophy called denotative method (also empirist method). Through this, Dewey tries to overcome the intellectualisms which has placed experience as subordinate to knowledge. According to Dewey, philosophy has been wrongly considered refined or secondary objects, that is, reflective objects, building from primary experience, as real objects. Thus, it has led philosophy to despise and condemn primary experience. "We get the absurdity of an experiencing which experiences only itself, states and processes of consciousness, instead of the things of nature" (LW1:20). In contrast, for Dewey, we primarily observe things, not observations, and criticize that those "mental attitudes or ways of experiencing were treated as self-sufficient and complete in themselves".

In contrast, despite the fact that Dewey recognizes the main role of subjects in experience, he extends experiences beyond representations or interpretations. We find potentialities which could not be reduced to mere knowledge and include other human aspects as love, desire or fight. The matter is that philosophers have denied the capacity of ordinary experiences to develop methods of creating inherent standards of judgment and value (LW1:41). He points out that there are two methods in philosophy: one of them starts with "experience in gross", "experience in its primary and crude forms" and the other one starts with "refined selective products" and "work from them back to the primary facts of life" (LW1:366). Each way has its advantages and disadvantages. The

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<sup>3</sup> R. Ames and D. Hall (1987), *Thinking through Confucius*, Albany: SUNY, 15.

dangerous matter is the oversight that science is an art, and philosophy has built on scientific facts and goals. Therefore, philosophy has tried to follow this avenue, focusing on those objective aspects and rejecting immediate facts of experience in gross. This has led to “suicide of philosophy” (LW1:367).

The goal of denotative method is to study general features of experienced things and to interpret their significance for a philosophic theory of the universe in which we live (LW1:13). This method does not focus on secondary objects or knowledgeable objects but in which we experience. Experience is not limited to conscious or knowledge, but “the whole wide universe”. “Experience as we are here told to conceive it, includes just everything and anything, actual or potential, that we think of and talk about” (LW1:371). Thus, the denotative method shows how denotation comes first and last (LW1:371), that is, we mean the universe and solve the problems through experience. Hence, Dewey asserts that this method shows human humility because we can not have absolute certainty in knowledge of things and absolute security in the ordering of life. Our experiences are not only cognitive but also moral and aesthetic. The denotative method implies a new approach to philosophy which emphasizes in change and creative response of human beings.

However, Dewey does not only propose a new method for philosophy, but a new metaphysics which is not free of criticism. With Rorty words “for better or worse, he wanted to write a metaphysical system”<sup>4</sup>. Many scholars have harshly criticized Dewey’s attempt to construct a metaphysics, from Croce (contemporary with Dewey) to Rorty (who denied Dewey’s metaphysics as bad Dewey, as Thomas Alexander said<sup>5</sup>). This briefly presentation does not deal with a century of criticism, but, like authors as Alexander, Sleeper, Thayer, Bernstein, Hickman or Mougan, I defend that his metaphysics is a key aspect of his philosophy and aesthetics, in spite of the vague and troublesome spot in Dewey’s metaphysics, particularly in the issue of “generic traits”.

Therefore, I wish to draw attention to this new ontology which has been called emergentism in order to deal with the dimensions of nature and experience. The roots

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<sup>4</sup> R. Rorty (1982), *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Hassocks: Harvester Press, 73.

<sup>5</sup> “Rorty’s Dewey was a deeply bifurcated person; there was a ‘good Dewey’ who engaged in cultural criticism and a ‘bad Dewey’ who frequently succumbed to the siren song of ‘Hegelian’ metaphysics” [T. Alexander (2013), “Introduction”, *The Human Eros. Eco-Ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence*, New York: Fordham University Press, 3].

of the notion of emergency needs to be found, as Eames said<sup>6</sup>, in the darwinism. “For Dewey, new forms or species emerge out of old ones. Where nature is ongoing, that is, where new forms have survival value and do not pass into extinction, these new forms make new demands upon other parts of nature.”<sup>7</sup> Darwin presents nature in continuous change, a place where emerges new forms. However, similar to the rest of pragmatist (with the exception of Joseph Margolis<sup>8</sup>), although Dewey uses the term in his philosophical project, he does not deal with it. This fact hinder its understanding because of its use in different contexts, as artificial life, studies about consciousness, or the philosophical reflection about realism and the emergence of knowledge<sup>9</sup>.

Dewey, rejecting the realism, presents a new ontology based on the continuity of living creature and surroundings in the immediacy of situations<sup>10</sup>. This ontological proposal can be revitalized, establishing a dialogue with confucian philosophy, understood as ontology of events, not of substances, as Roger Ames and David Hall say<sup>11</sup>. Thomas Alexander, in the organized discussion about the potential dialogue between East and West highlights the importance of this dialogue to rethink pragmatism itself. The aesthetic dimension of Deweyan pragmatism, with Alexander words “not very well understood even on its home ground”, can be enriched by an opening to Asian schools of “the art of life”<sup>12</sup>, and particularly, I defend by an opening to Confucian tradition.

Returning to the ontology of events we can ask: what does it mean an ontology of events? According with Ames and Hall, Confucius does not develop a philosophy about qualities, attributes or characteristics, but “an explication of the activities of specific people in particular contexts”<sup>13</sup>. Thus, confucian philosophy can be denominated contextualistic philosophy. This is the proposal of Lewis E. Hahn, who introduces some

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<sup>6</sup> “Dewey is an emergent naturalist, that is, he sees nature as evolving in the manner indicated by Darwin over one hundred years ago” [S. M. Eames (2003), *op. cit.*, 25].

<sup>7</sup> Morris Eames (2003), “Primary Experience in the Philosophy of John Dewey”, en *Experience and Value. Essays on John Dewey and Pragmatic Naturalism*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Charbel Niño El-Hania y Sami Pihlström (2002), “Emergence Theories and Pragmatic Realism”, *Essays in Philosophy* 3(2), 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> W. Savery (1939), “The Significance of Dewey’s Philosophy”. In: P.A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 2nd ed., Tudor, New York, 479-513

<sup>11</sup> R. Ames y D. Hall (1987), *op. cit.*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> T. Alexander (2009), “The Music in the Heart, the Way of Water, and the Light of a Thousand Suns: A Response to Richard Shusterman, Crispin Sartwell and Scott Stroud”, *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43: 1, 41.

<sup>13</sup> R. Ames y D. Hall (1987), *op. cit.*, 15.

parallelisms between contextualistic philosophy of John Dewey and Confucius<sup>14</sup>. Hahn explains how, according to contextualists the single most distinctive mark of the real is change; and, in the same way, the Confucian Book of Zhou tells us that change is great and comprehends all “”. Contextualistic philosophy is a philosophy of change which deal with happenings or occurrences, viewed not as something past and done with but rather as dynamic, living presences, affording an important way of making comprehensive sense of our world<sup>15</sup>.

For that reason, Santayana, who calls himself a naturalistic philosopher, criticizes Deweyan thought, to be limited to a point of view, a particular perspective. Santayana sais: “in the nature there is no foreground or background, no here, no now, no moral cathedra, no centre so really central as to reduce all other things to mere margins and mere perspectives”<sup>16</sup>. Thus, as Larry Hickman<sup>17</sup> has emphasized, Santayana charges Dewey with advancing a “half-hearted” and “short-winded” naturalism, arguing that Dewey was only interested in “foreground,” and that consequently the rest of nature is reputed to be intrinsically remote or dubious or merely ideal. Santayana accuses Dewey of ignoring or idealizing nonhuman nature, however, in this interaction of human beings and surroundings, the living creature is an element which builds and is built in that relationship.

Likewise, Confucius characterizes people in terms of events, rejecting the consideration of agency or isolated actions. “The agent is as much a consequence of his act as its cause.”<sup>18</sup>. Thus, this ontology puts its emphasis in the immanent cosmos, in which human beings interact with their surroundings. What is more, Ames and Hall stress two significant implications of this ontology: the idea of order and creativity in an immanent universe<sup>19</sup>. Acquiring an order does not imply a logical or rational order, but an aesthetic. In contrast to Judaeo-Christian notion of *creatio ex nihilo*, confucian

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<sup>14</sup> L. E. Hahn (1998), *Enhancing Cultural Interflow Between East and West: Collected Essays in Comparative Philosophy and Culture*, Thome H. Fang Institute, 37.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>16</sup> G. Santayana (1925), *op. cit.*, 373.

<sup>17</sup> L. Hickman (2007), *Pragmatism as Postmodernism: Lessons from John Dewey*, New York: Fordham University Press, *op. cit.*, 133.

<sup>18</sup> R. Ames y D. Hall (1987), *op. cit.*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

terms allude to creative actions within the world of natural events. Therefore, in the Yi Jing, we can find<sup>20</sup>:

It is heaven and earth that furnish models and patterns. It is Time that changes and evolves. It is the sun and moon that are the most bright. It is wealth and nobility that are the most exalted. It is the sages that prepare things for practical use, and invent instruments for the benefit of the world.

They (the sages) all understand the ways of nature and know the needs of man. They thus made the skillful things for the use of the people<sup>21</sup>.

This approach, in spite of being different philosophies, implies two key common characteristics: the principle of continuity and the notion of situation. According to Morris, Dewey follows the darwinism and how there is a line of continuity from the less complex to the more complex forms and functions of life<sup>22</sup>. However, Dewey does not only follow darwinism, but also the influence of Hegel. The growth of a seed into a plant is an example of this continuity. And although the principle of continuity can be found through all Dewey's work, particularly in his reflections about education, nature, research and methodology<sup>23</sup>, Dewey never gives a clear definition about that. A possible definition can be considered it as the growth which merges in the situation, which implies a creative theory of human existence.

The reality is the growth-process itself; childhood and adulthood are phases of a continuity, in which just because it is a history, the later cannot exist until the earlier exists ('mechanistic materialism' in germ); and in which the later makes use of the registered and cumulative outcome of the earlier –or, more strictly, is its utilization ('spiritualistic teleology' in germ). (EN, LW 1:210).

Thayer has asserted few characteristics as unification, growing, progress or integration, in opposition to the discontinuity which implies brokes, pauses, interruptions,

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<sup>20</sup> Some scholars, as Feng Youlan, has attributed these commentaries to Confucius, but due to the controversy about that, I quote the Yi Jing because it is the main source and book, as well as *The book of Poetry*, for Confucius.

<sup>21</sup> *Yi Jing*, trad. James Legge,

<sup>22</sup> S. E. Morris (2003), *Essays on John Dewey and Pragmatic Naturalism*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 18.

<sup>23</sup> "The growth and development of any living organism from seed to maturity illustrates the meaning of continuity" [L, LW 12: 30]. "The educative process is a continuous process of growth, having as its aim at every stage an added capacity for growth" [DE, MW 9:59].

dualisms or fragmentation<sup>24</sup>. The important aspect for this presentation is the idea of growth in our lives, which supposes an endless process.

This led us to the second notion, the situation. Dewey employs it with specific characteristics and, although he uses the term along his works, he does not consider it carefully until his later work *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry*. Nonetheless, this notion is not only important to understand his ontological project, but also is the basis of his aesthetic thought. For Dewey, the process of life implies a series of events in which organisms are in continuous interaction with their surroundings. Living creatures try to restore the harmony with these interactions because of the necessity of equilibrium (L, LW 12:34). And Dewey does not exclusively attribute this characteristic to human beings, but to all the living beings.

Capacity for maintenance of a constant form of interaction between organism and environment is not confined to the individual organism. It is manifested also, in the reproduction of similar organisms... As long as life continues, its processes are such as continuously to maintain and restore the enduring relationship which is characteristic of the life-activities of a given organism. (L, LW 12:33).

The succession of activities in life is teleological, the order implies series, although this continuous interaction is marked by rhythms with disequilibria. For Dewey, every living creature has the necessity to restore the equilibrium, and the higher the organism, the more elevated will be the disruptions and the more energy will be required to achieve the harmony.

The higher the organism, the more serious become the disturbances and the more energetic (and often more prolonged) are the efforts necessary for its reestablishment. The state of disturbed equilibration constitutes need. The movement toward its restoration is search and exploration. The recovery is fulfillment or satisfaction. (L, LW 12: 34)

The restoration of harmony can be considered as an aesthetic dimension of human beings and this approach will be enriched from a dialogue with Confucian thought. Similarly to Dewey, Confucius also asserts the necessity of restoring the equilibrium through the notion of harmony (和), which presupposes the existence of multiple and diverse possible relationships. As Chenyang Li<sup>25</sup> has asserted, the Confucian insight of the World does not present the world as an isolated element, but as a myriad of things in

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<sup>24</sup> H. S. Thayer (1968), *op. cit.*, 174.

<sup>25</sup> Chenyang Li (2006), "The Confucian Ideal of Harmony", *Philosophy East & West* 56: 4, 589.

interaction. Thus, the personal growth is a fundamental aspect of human lives, characterized because of its creativity, that is, “realizing oneself as a person is an art”<sup>26</sup>. Dewey shares with Confucian thought the belief in the continuity of beings, as an essential element of his ontology, but also an essential element of his aesthetic. As Roger Ames and David Hall asserts in reference to Confucian thought, “aisthesis as praxis require a world composed of the termini of aesthetic acts. Praxis as aisthesis is fundamentally to be understood in terms of processes of self-creativity grounded in perspectives defining the forms of preoccupation with the world.”<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, some scholars have also emphasized how Chinese philosophers do not have a myth of a created and fixed world, but a belief in the becoming. Thus, F. W. Mote says:

“the Basic point which outsiders have found so hard to detect is that the Chinese, among all peoples ancient and recent, primitive and modern, are apparently unique in having no creation myth; that is, they have regarded the World and man as uncreated, as constituting the central features of a spontaneously self-generating cosmos having no creator, god, ultimate cause, or will external to itself”<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, this approach can help to clarify the emergentism of Dewey, through which he proposes the creative and aesthetic capacity of man to interact harmoniously with the world.

## 2. DEWEYAN NOTION OF EXPERIENCE

For Dewey, every human activity is the result of interaction between organisms and their surroundings, between to experience and to make, which implies a reorganization and fusion of energies. That is, living creatures are continuously suffering rhythmic alternations between disunity and unity, between harmony and chaos in their lives and this is not simply a passive activity, but a meaningful creative process which joined a combination, a movement and culmination, of breaks and re-adjustments. Nevertheless, Dewey distinguishes between the experience which is developed in the continuous living process from aesthetic experience. The aesthetic quality emphasizes those experiences which imply a meaningful way of interaction. With Dewey words:

“Aesthetic is no intruder in experience from without, whether by way of idle luxury or transcendent ideality, but that it is the clarified and intensified development of traits that

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<sup>26</sup> R. Ames y D. Hall (1987), *op. cit.*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick W. Mote (1971), *Intellectual Foundations of China*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 17-18.



belong to every normally complete experience. This fact he takes to be the only secure basis upon which aesthetic theory can build” (AE: 52-53)

This quotation alludes to two key aspects: the aesthetic quality is not a luxury or a transcendental idea, that is, aesthetic has its roots in our everyday life; and, in contrast with modern aesthetic, Dewey assigns the aesthetic quality to the experience, to the process, not to the objects or subjects. Both are parts of that process and “in such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues” (AE, LW 10: 43).

Next pages, I would like to consider main features of aesthetic experience in order to characterize it, but also to overcome recent criticisms<sup>29</sup> that assert that Dewey’s emphasis in the humdrum of ordinary makes aesthetic experience difficult to happen:

*Unity:* Aesthetic experience has the unity which characterizes it. Dewey says “an experience has a unity that gives its name, that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts” (AE, LW 10: 44) Nevertheless, the unity is not constituted because of the anticipation of consummation through the experience, as Sherri Irvin has suggested. Through this pervasive quality, Dewey has indicated an organizational quality, the temporal quality of the events which are developed as a whole. With Dewey’s words, “because of continuous merging, there are no holes, mechanical junctions and dead centre when we have an experience There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement.”(AE, LW 10:46). Aesthetic experience is a process in which human beings are linked creatively with the world. Thus, “Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience” (AE, 42).

*Rhythm:* Dewey examined the notion of rhythm in the chapters seven and eight of *Art as Experience* (Natural History of Form and Organization of Energies). Traditionally, it has not paid enough attention to this term and its explanations rely on the notion of form. Nevertheless, rhythm roots aesthetic activity in the ordinary. Defining rhythm as a universal scheme of existence, underlying all realization of order in change<sup>30</sup>, Dewey characterizes it as a quality of life and nature. Human beings are affected and participate

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<sup>29</sup> I refer particularly to Yuriko Saito’s criticism, which accuses Dewey of presenting a notion of aesthetic experience too restricted and limited to certain isolated moments in our lives. Cf. Y. Saito (2010), *Everyday Aesthetics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 44

<sup>30</sup> Dewey, p. 154

in nature's rhythms, from sunrise and sunset to circadian rhythms<sup>31</sup>. In fact Dewey carries out a genealogy of human interaction with the environment through these flux: firstly, people being aware of the rhythms of nature, become farmers and relate these rhythmical cycles with their needs and community life; subsequently, when human beings introduced new economic models, man generates new rhythms, new ways of interacting with the environment. In other words, the intimate participation of man in nature's rhythms induced him to introduce rhythm where they did not appear; and this is the aesthetic activity in germ.

One of the most important examples was the Greeks and their notion of *techné*. Traditionally, we have associated *techné* with a kind of interested knowledge and activity, united with necessity. In contrast, according to Dewey *techné* is a reproduction of the order of natural changes, through *techné* Greeks "shaped things of use were wedded to the rhythms of voice and the self-contained movements of the body, and out of the union technical arts gained the quality of fine art"<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, rhythm is not only a phase of artistic product, it is the harmonization which directs the interaction with our environment. Aesthetic experience is the rhythmic way of interacting with their surroundings and, although, some criticism has emphasised the separation between the ordinary and that perception, Dewey has stressed that this is not an unusual fact.

*Organization of energies:* Life supposes energy and attention, but also pulses or stimulus; life is a process of interacting and interchanging through which man dynamically organises his environment. For that reason, Dewey gives the same value to change and order; in fact, if there is a greater change or variation, there will be a more interesting aesthetic response. Dewey shows how living creatures restore the harmony in their environment, adopt a meaning and this is possible because our environment is in flux, as Thomas Alexander said «meaning is only possible in a world which can be disrupted, in which ambiguity, change, and destruction play a role»<sup>18</sup>. Our lives are developed in variable and disruptive situations and places that need a sense; hence human beings signify different phases of their lives at every moment. Aesthetic experience is a full act of perceiving what happens in our lives when we are both most

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<sup>31</sup> Circadian rhythm is a biological process driven that displays an [endogenous](#), [entrainable](#) oscillation of about 24 hours. These rhythms are driven by a [circadian clock](#), and rhythms have been widely observed in all living beings. Endogenous means that rhythms are determined genetically and are generated by own organism. Although organisms have an on-going relationship with external cycles, adjusting their process to environmental process.

<sup>32</sup> Dewey, op. Cit., o. 153

alive and most concentrated on the engagement with the environment. At every single moment, every living creature experiences the world and organises the energies, involving past experiences and creating new meanings.

This configuration is the aesthetic cause of its creative feature, but also it is vital and functional: it is whereby men develop their lives, the way whereby men could experience a fulfilled life. “This organization of energies to move cumulatively to a terminal whole in which the values of all means and media are incorporated is the essence of fine art”<sup>33</sup>. And this process does not cease, being alive implies to create new relationships in different contexts with different consequences. Every phase, every conclusion, even every pause, are important parts of that configuration. For Dewey, this quotidian organizations are the essence of fine art. “What we perhaps are less cognizant of is that this organization of energies to move cumulatively to a terminal whole in which the values of all means and media are incorporated is the essence of fine art.” (AE, LW 10:177). Nonetheless, in our ordinary life, much of our pressing forward is impelling by outside necessities, following established patterns without paying attention or developing a mindful attitude. This led us to the fourth features, mindfulness.

*Mindfulness*: We can define this notion with Dewey’s words about mind. According to Dewey, “mind is primarily a verb, it denotes all the ways in which one deal conciously and expressly with the situations in which we find ourselves. Unfortunately, an influential manner of thinking has changed modes of action into an underlying substance that performs the activities in question” (AE, 268). That is, mind is not a kind of fixed substance, but a way or orientation in which we interact with our surroundings. Dewey criticizes how “this conception of mind, as isolated being, underlies the conception that aesthetic experience is merely something ‘in mind’, and strengthens the conception which isolates the aesthetic from those modes of experience in which the body is actively engaged with the things of nature and life. It takes art out of the province of life creature” (AE, LW 10:268).

As Jerry Levin has asserted, similar to James, Dewey presents mind as a natural force, built by a natural and cultural environment<sup>34</sup>. “Mind’ denotes every mode of variety of interest in, and concern for, things: practical, intellectual and emotional. It

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 176-177

<sup>34</sup> J. Levin (1999), “The Aesthetics of Pragmatism”, *The Poetics of Transition: Emerson, Pragmatism, & American Literary Modernism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 79.

never denotes anything self-contained, isolated from the world of persons and things, but is always used with respect to situations, events, objects, persons and groups” (AE, LW 10:267-268).<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, Dewey goes further and present mind as a way in which pay attention to the world (practically, intellectually and emotionally)<sup>36</sup>. In this way, orientation needs to be understood as direction, not as resolution. This term has been thoughtfully considered by Scout Stroud in relationship wick Deweyan meliorism. Stroud emphasizes the process, thorough which we reinterpret our quotidian habits in the immediacy of situations. It is in the ordinary interaction between organisms and surroundings, when it can be developed the attentive and equilibrated attention, which led us to an harmonic interaction in the different situations.

### 3. CONFUCIAN NOTION OF DÀO (道)

Similarly to Deweyan notion of aesthetic experience, Confucius notion of *dào* (道) denotes an active project of “road making”, that is, a meaningful way of experiencing, interpreting and influencing the world. Nevertheless, it is a difficult task to explore the confucian notion of *dào* becuase of the complexity of this term. Marcel Granet has defined *dào* as a set of ideas based on order, wholeness, responsability and effectiveness<sup>37</sup>. In the same way, Feng Youlan has emphasized that theory of *dào*, the common ground of Daoist and Confucian scholar, is inspired by the movements of the sun and moon and the succession of the four seasons, to which farmers must pay particular heed in order to carry on their own work<sup>38</sup>. As Archie J. Bahm has stressed, the way of nature that can be observed in the procession of the seasons as follow:

In spring, seeds sprout, plants star grwoing, trees turn green, and flowers blossom. In summer, plants grow up, tree leaves mature, flowers wilt under the blaze of the sun, and new seeds begin to take shape. In autumn, the fruit and grain ripen while leaves fall, and plants dry up, turn brown, and wither. In winter, plants die and begin to decay; but winter moisture penetrates the seeds which have fallen to the ground, readying them for spring sprouting.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted by J. Levin (1999), *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> M. Granet (2013), *El pensamiento chino*, Madrid: Trotta 229.

<sup>38</sup> F. Youlang (), *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, 213.

<sup>39</sup> Archie J. Bahm (1969), *The Heart of Confucius. Interpretations fo Genuine Living and Great Wisdom*, New York: Weatherhill, 18.

Confucius uses this term in *Analects* to define an interaction between human beings and surroundings, through which people can elevate their minds<sup>40</sup>. In the *Analects* Confucius says “Set your sights on the way (*dào*), sustain yourself with excellence (*dé*), lean upon authoritative conduct (*rén*), and sojourn in the arts”<sup>41</sup>. “If at dawn you learn and tread the way (*dào*), you can face death at dusk”<sup>42</sup>. For Confucius, the *dào* is the continuous progress of humankind, an interpretation of human experience. The unity of *dào* is expressed by the fact that every moment is a function of past events but also the basis for future possibilities. In this way, similarly to John Dewey’s notion of experience, the notion of *dào* has different parts or phases:

Ziyou said, ‘The disciples and young friends of Zixia are quite all right when it comes to housekeeping, taking care of the things, and standing in attendance, but these are just the tips of the branches. What do you do about the fact that they have no roots?’

Zixia heard about this, and responded, ‘Ah! Ziyou is mistaken! On the path (*dào* 道) of the exemplary person (*junzi* 君子), what is passed on first and what must wait until maturity, can be compared to plants which must be nurtured differently according to kind. How can he so misrepresent the path of the exemplary person? And it is the sage (*shengren* 聖人) alone who walks this path every step from start to finish.’<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, Archie J. Bahm presents Confucian notion of *dào* as a way of nature “which proceeds through comings and goings, beginnings and endings.” It is observed in the seasons, in the path of the sun<sup>44</sup>, but also in the course of human life (birth, childhood, youth, middle age, maturity, old age and death). Therefore, this notion of *dào* presents correspondences with Deweyan notion of experience: “To follow the clues of experience is to see that the so-called sensible world is a world of immediate beginnings and endings; not at all an affair of cases of knowledge but a succession of qualitative events.” (EN, LW 1:114).

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 241

<sup>41</sup> 子曰：志於道，據於德，依於仁，游於藝。 *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, VII, 6, p. 112.

<sup>42</sup> 子曰：朝聞道，夕死可矣。 *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, IV, 8, p. 91.

<sup>43</sup> 子游曰：子夏之門人小子，當洒掃、應對、進退，則可矣。抑末也，本之則無。如之何？」子夏聞之曰：噫！言游過矣！君子之道，孰先傳焉？孰後倦焉？譬諸草木，區以別矣。君子之道，焉可誣也？有始有卒者，其惟聖人乎！ *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, XIX, 12, p. 221.

<sup>44</sup> “which rises in the morning, ascends to the highest heaven at noon, and then descends through the afternoon into evening, thereafter remaining hidden in the dark during the night” Archie J. Bahm (1969), *op. cit.*, 18.

The starting point of Confucian tradition, like Dewey, is the vital context in which it is developed: the interaction between organism and nature. This relationship has also a functional quality, but presents differences with Deweyan notion. Confucian notion of *dào* is multifaceted, although this notion indicates what is important in each area of our cultural interest (for example, here is a *dào* of music, a *dào* of government minister or a cosmological *dào*)<sup>45</sup>. And although Dewey also introduces the notion of experience in different fields such as education, ethics, politics and so on, his proposal was determined by his criticism of modern philosophy. In this sense, it is important to stress that Confucius and Dewey's proposals, despite of resonances, must not be isolated from their context and biographical life.

Nonetheless, the comparative approach can enrich our understanding of these complex notions. Particularly, the most significant point of this relationship is the idea of novelty and originality. As Roger Ames and David Hall has pointed, the importance of continuity can not inhibit us to see these ideas<sup>46</sup>. The past is continuously revised through the eyes of the present. In contrast to traditional interpretation of Confucius' conception of *dào*, which reduces human realization "to the satisfaction of some externally existing schema", Ames and Hall asserts that human lives are "an open-ended activity in which true qualitative growth is a function of cultural accumulation and the attendant enrichment of possibilities"<sup>47</sup>. Confucius says: "Although the Songs are three hundred in number, they can be covered in one expression: 'Go vigorously without swerving.'"<sup>48</sup> "The Master said, "Where everyone despises a person, you must look into the matter carefully; where everyone celebrates a person, you must also look into it carefully."<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Dewey exposes how the man renovate the new and the old by means of a re-creation which led to a new interaction in future situations:

"The junction of the new and old is not a mere composition of forces, but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the sorted, material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation" (AE, LW 10: 66).

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<sup>45</sup> R. Ames y D. Hall (1986), *op. cit.*, 232.

<sup>46</sup> R. Ames and D. Hall (1986), *Thinking through Confucius*, 232.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>48</sup> 子曰：詩三百，一言以蔽之，曰思無邪。 *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, II, 2, p. 76.

<sup>49</sup> 子曰：人能弘道，非道弘人。 *Ibid.*, XV, 28, p. 190.

Thus, the creative aspect of these notions is built from the situations. However, as Roger Ames and David Hall<sup>50</sup> assert, this aspect have been minusvalored and even forgotten in the interpretation of Confucian tradition. Traditionally, despite that it has been emphasized the value of confucian concept of human beings<sup>51</sup>, scholars fails to give full value to Confucius conception. They tend to “reduce human realization to the satisfaction of some externally existing schema depriving the human being of his role as the ultimate creator of human meaning and value”<sup>52</sup>. Nevertheless, these interpretations distort the originality and potencial of his thought. With Confucian words “It is the person who is able to broaden the way (*dào* 道), not the way that broaden the person”<sup>53</sup>.

Similar to Dewey, this creative dimension is built from two part of a unity such as agent-act. This is Joseph Grange’s position, who sees similarities between Confucian and Deweyan notions. According to Grange, *dào* is “ a way of acting that establishes the deepest and widest associations within a particular situation or event [...]Like experience, the way must evoke intense feelings that will fuel the effort needed to go the distance. It must summon up liveliness.”<sup>54</sup> Both authors characterize their notions with the idea of growth, through which human beings establish new relationships in new events. In this interactions, we add past experiences from a new situation, giving new meanings. Thus, it is not a mechanical activity but an aesthetic way of interaction. There is a well-known Confucian quotation that sais:

“From fifteen, my heart-and-mind waas set upon learning; from thirty I took my stance; from forty I was no longer doubtful; from fifty I realized the propensities of tian (*tianming* 天命); from sixty my ear was attuned; from seventy I could give my heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries.”<sup>55</sup>

“When an appropriate *dào* is experienced, then imbalances, instabilities, and overwrought or understressed dimensions of reality receive new direction from the corrective interpretations embodied in every fit way of being human.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, Confucius sais “To fail to cultivate excellence (*dé* 德), to fail to practice what I learn, on

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<sup>50</sup> R. Ames y D. Hall (1987), *op. cit.*, 236.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 233-236

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>子曰：人能弘道，非道弘人。 *Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, XV, 9, p. 190.

<sup>54</sup> J. Grange (2004), John Dewey, *Confucius and Global Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY, 23.

<sup>55</sup>子曰：吾十有五而志于學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。 *Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, II, 4, p. 76-77.

<sup>56</sup> J. Grange (2004), *op. cit.*, 24

coming to understand what is appropriate (yi 義) in the circumstances to fail to attend to it, and to be unable to reform conduct that is not productive – these things I worry over.”<sup>57</sup> It is necessary to question and judge our ways of interactions, it is inevitable examine our meanings in different situations; and new interpretations will be accepted when it will meet community’s approval.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

*Dào* represents an experiential path that is taken from our culture and context. “And at the heart of *dao* is the sensibility that takes in the community as the ultimate measure by which to judge one’s actions.”<sup>58</sup> Through my dissertation I defend that Confucian philosophy and, particularly, this character can help us to clarify some aspects of Dewey’s naturalism and notion of experience. As Joseph Grange has asserted *dao* succeeds in overcoming the dualisms that haunted Dewey’s vision of nineteenth- and twentieth century culture<sup>59</sup>, but also the creative dimension of human beings that seems to be forgotten by scholars interested in Deweyan thought. In the second edition of *Experience and Nature* Dewey changes the term experience for culture and his argumentation for this modification resembles the features of Confucian notion’s of *dao*.

Therefore, it can establish some connection between Confucian notion of *dào* and Deweyan notion of experience with care and moderation. The dialogue is complex and my approach does not try to consider exclusively similarities. Due to the limited time, I can not consider their distinctive features, but it is important that there are and these can not be omitted. My dissertation deals with this interaction from a detailed analysis of their elements and a careful study about their functions, contexts, characteristics and peculiarities. However, I can assert that both share the consideration of thought as a way to achieve a harmonious relationship between human beings and surroundings.

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<sup>57</sup> 子曰：德之不脩，學之不講，聞義不能徙，不善不能改，是吾憂也。 *Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, VII, 3, p. 111.

<sup>58</sup> J. Grange (2004), *op. cit.*, 24.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*