
Apprenticeship as a Moral Method and a Moral Ideal

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Abstract

In *Morality For Humans* Mark Johnson suggests that moral deliberation requires an apprenticeship. He says this apprenticeship would educate desire, sensitize reason and engage imagination. Using the work of Johnson and Shaun Gallagher on primary intersubjectivity along with Kim Sterelny's *The Evolved Apprentice*, this paper will offer a description of how apprenticeship has roots in infancy as pattern recognition develops. The apprenticeship we know today as an activity of mastery is a limited, focused variant of the activities of pattern recognition in which we could engage. Pattern recognition, in the first instance, is not about control and domination. It is, as Sterelny argues, an activity which is the basis for community and trust. I call it delicate apprenticeship because its practitioners explore the qualities around them with their attention focused upon fully experiencing what that world affords. (I deliberately echo here Goethe's idea of delicate empiricism.)

In the domain of moral deliberation delicate apprenticeship searches the environment for aid in decision making. Using Dewey and Johnson I argue that this apprenticeship incorporates two moments: seeing-*into*-the-actual and seeing-*with*-the possible. The former requires that we tarry with the problem confronting us long enough to grasp its qualities. Here the education of desire and the sensitization of reason are especially highlighted. Dewey's distinction between the desired and the desirable indicates that apprentices must hold at bay their initial reactions to the situation. Over time this is the education of desire. Reason is sensitized in this process by opening to alternative ways of thinking about a situation. The activity of delicate apprenticeship always takes place in a context that includes others who are also struggling with making a decision. Both what I call courageous listening and courageous speech are required to grasp the qualities of the situation.

Seeing-*with*-the-possible highlights the role of imagination. In *Art As Experience* Dewey says that it is imagination which brings to light the possibilities contained in the actual. The two moments I have described operate together. Neither is viable without the other. We cannot usefully project what is possible without a good grasp of the actual. The actual has limited meaning or usefulness unless we understand the possibilities within it. Working these two moments is our best opportunity for moving forward, for growing beyond the current situation.

How is it that apprenticeship is both a method and an ideal? As I weave together the elements I have mentioned above to form a more detailed statement of method, I will also argue that the method itself is an ideal to which we should aspire. The ideas of courageous listening and courageous speech illustrate this point. We tend to think our own ideas are pretty special. As Dewey observes in *The Public And Its Problems*, habits of opinion are the toughest of all to challenge and change. It requires courage to carefully consider challenges

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to one's opinions. But this courage opens a space for a more democratic exchange of ideas. It also takes courage to express one's ideas when one can be pretty sure of disagreement. Democratic open spaces, however, are the best contexts for achieving the two moments of apprenticeship. Apprenticeship demands and supports democracy. It is thus, I argue, a moral ideal as well as a method.

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