ABSTRACT. Despite the affirmation below from a chapter entitled “The Moral Self” in his Ethics (1932), Dewey seems not to have used the term “moral self” outside that context. Perhaps he didn’t think it that crucial in his overall philosophy. I argue, on the contrary, that the concept of the moral self is fundamental to Deweyan moral psychology and that it provides an illuminating lens through which to view his philosophy of education. This paper explicates Dewey’s perspective on moral education as education of the moral self.

KEY WORDS: ethics, John Dewey, moral self, moral education, moral psychology

“The real moral question is what kind of a self is being furthered and formed.”

Ethics (1932)

In recent years, in moral psychology, moral philosophy, and moral education, increasing attention has been paid to the moral self and moral identity. In moral psychology, Blasi (1983, 1984) has been the major proponent of a shift in focus from judgment, under the powerful influence of Kohlberg (1981, 1984), to motivation and its source in personality. Bergman (2004b) has outlined this shift and offered a synthetic model of the moral self from the perspective of developmental psychology. An overview of the current psychology of the moral self is also provided as the last chapter of Lapsley (1996). A recent book, Moral Development, Self, and Identity (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004), presents diverse perspectives on the state of the question.

In moral philosophy, new attention to the moral self is also evident. Issues of identity and self are central to Flanagan’s Varieties of Moral Personality (1991) and to the essays collected by Flanagan and Rorty in Identity, Character, and Morality (1990). Wren (1991) provides “philosophical perspectives in moral psychology” in Caring About Morality and argues for a “deep structure” of moral motivation which resides in the self. Noam and Wren (1993) collect important essays from both philosophers and psychologists in The Moral Self. More recently, the Australian philosopher Chazan (1998) has sought out the philosophical (Hume, Rousseau, Hegel, Aristotle) and psychoanalytical (Kohut) resources for an adequate conceptualization in a monograph also titled The Moral Self. And most recently, Musschenga, Van Haaften, Spiecker, and Slors (2002), have
presented the multidisciplinary papers from an expert-seminar held in Amsterdam in January, 1999, on the topic of Personal and Moral Identity.

Concern for the moral self has also emerged in field of moral education. Nucci’s (2002) *Education in the Moral Domain* argues for a shift from an emphasis on character education to education of the moral self. Van der Ven (1998) provides analysis of *Formation of the Moral Self* under seven modes with the common denominator of moral communication. But perhaps no theorist of moral education has given such sustained and fine-grained attention to what she calls “the ethical self” as does philosopher Noddings (1984; Bergman, 2004a) in her seminal *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*.

Despite this remarkable convergence of attention to the moral self from diverse perspectives within and across the fields of psychology, philosophy, and education, no attention has been paid, as far as I am aware, to John Dewey, perhaps the only historical figure to make major contributions in all three fields, and who did so in ways directly relevant to our present concern.

Perhaps this oversight is because, despite a century of prodigious Dewey scholarship, relatively scant attention has been paid to Dewey’s writings on the moral self.¹ And this may be because, despite the claims made about the importance of the concept in his chapters on “The Place of the Self in the Moral Life” and on “The Moral Self” in the two editions of *Ethics* (1908 and 1932), Dewey himself seems not to have used the term outside that context. A search of the index (Sharpe, 1991) of the 37-volume *Collected Works* reveals not a single entry for “moral self” outside the 1932 *Ethics* – and in fact not a single reference outside the eponymous chapter within that volume. Perhaps Dewey himself didn’t think the concept that crucial in his overall philosophy. I would argue, on the contrary, that while the term “moral self” sees limited use by Dewey, the concept is indeed fundamental to his moral psychology and provides an illuminating lens on his philosophy of education. It is the purpose of this paper to explicate Dewey’s perspective on moral education as education of the moral self. The paper will proceed according to the following outline:

I. In Search of the Moral Self: Dewey’s *Ethics* from 1908 to 1932
II. We Are Our Habits: *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922)
III. Educating for Character: *Moral Principles of Education* (1909)
IV. Revisiting “Self”: *Cyclopedia of Education* (1912–1913)