DEWEY'S PARTICIPATORY EDUCATIONAL DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT. In this essay, Emil Višňovský and Štefan Zolcer outline John Dewey's contribution to democratic theory as presented in his 1916 classic *Democracy and Education*. The authors begin with a review of the general context of Dewey's conception of democracy, and then focus on particular democratic ideas and concepts as presented in *Democracy and Education*. This analysis emphasizes not so much the technical elaboration of these ideas and concepts as their philosophical framework and the meanings of democracy for education and education for democracy elaborated by Dewey. Apart from other aspects of Deweyan educational democracy, Višňovský and Zolcer focus on participation as one of its key characteristics, ultimately claiming that the notion of educational democracy Dewey developed in this work is participatory.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatism and democracy are inseparable.[1] Of course, this does not mean that the relation between them is simply mechanical or linear. Still, especially in times of crisis, which many suggest is our current situation, pragmatism and democracy are "mutually reinforcing."[2] This is to say that pragmatism (among other things) might help to rescue democracy, and democracy might serve as the most appropriate framework for keeping pragmatism alive. In pragmatist social thought, it is democracy that is genuinely allied with social hope, if there is to be any.[3]

The same applies to the relation between pragmatism and education. Education lies at the heart of the philosophy of pragmatism, and even though one can imagine education without pragmatism (as many have done), democratic education is hardly imaginable absent the key ideas of pragmatism.

Of course this also applies to education and democracy, as John Dewey argued in his classic *Democracy and Education*.[4] Even though the relation between

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1. This rather more standard than radical claim has been defended by many, recently, for example, by Michael Sullivan and Daniel J. Solove, "Radical Pragmatism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. Alan Malachowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 324–44, in opposition to the pragmatic theory of democracy as presented by Richard A. Posner in his *Law, Pragmatism, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Dewey's conception of democracy may not need a metaphysical backup, as Richard Rorty infamously claimed (see, for example, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 175–96). And it may have other resources such as are found in the work of G. W. F. Hegel (see, for example, Eric MacGilvray, *Reconstructing Public Reason* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004]). But it would be radically mistaken to separate the two.

2. Sullivan and Solove, "Radical Pragmatism," 338.

3. See Judith M. Green, *Pragmatism and Social Hope: Deepening Democracy in Global Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); and Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

4. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924,* vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985). This work will be cited in

democracy and education is complex, it should nevertheless be clear that there cannot be democracy without education, nor can there be education without democracy. Moreover, despite the fact that Dewey earned the well-deserved title "American philosopher of democracy,"[5] his democratic theory has been neither fully understood nor universally accepted. *Democracy and Education* is by any measure one of Dewey's most important works, and it has been both influential and controversial from the very beginning. Arguably, neither social nor political philosophers have given the work its due. Some have even asked whether there is any theory of democracy in the book. In comparison to other works by Dewey that address social and political issues,[6] and that are considered to be his major contributions to democratic theory, *Democracy and Education* includes just a single chapter that explicitly deals with democracy: chapter 7, "The Democratic Conception of Education" (*DE*, 87–106).

Alison Kadlec rightly suggests that the title of *Democracy and Education* is a bit misleading since the book "appears to be about neither democracy nor even education as such."[7] She claims that this work instead presents the "summation" of Dewey's "philosophy of the social" in which democracy and education, and both in their conjunction, play the most crucial role: "The primary expression of Dewey's philosophy of the social is his core concern with the role and function of education in the pursuit of a democratic society."[8] His particular contribution consists in demonstrating the mutual interdependence between democracy and education: (1) the meaning of democracy (understood philosophically as a way of life) for education, and (2) the meaning of education (understood philosophically as a social process) for democracy. But before turning to a detailed exposition

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of Dewey's democratic theory in *Democracy and Education*, it will be useful to provide a general context of his theory.

<center>Dewey's Democratic Theory: A Genealogical Recap</center>

Dewey's democratic theory is one of the most robust conceptions in the history of human thought in the sense that it is not only political or ethical, but it is also philosophical and even religious. Dewey articulated this conception in a steady series of works written during the roughly sixty-year period from 1888, when he published "The Ethics of Democracy," through the 1940s, with his unpublished 1946 essay "What Is Democracy?" and the 1951 piece "Contributions to *Democracy in a World of Tensions*."[9] Democracy, whether in theory or practice, was Dewey's primary topic and concern throughout his life. He never denied that democracy is "a word of many meanings," and he considered this plurality a fully adequate expression of the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon.[10] Dewey reconstructed the whole concept and theory of democracy in his own way. Let us now proceed with the key stages and phases comprising a genealogy of his conception. We shall distinguish two stages in this genealogy — early and mature — with the latter divided into five phases.[11]

In the early stage Dewey laid down the cornerstone of his democratic theory by maintaining that it is not only a form of government or the rule of the many (*ED*, 229 and 230); rather, he stipulated that there are three constitutive elements of democracy. First, on a comprehensive societal level, it is a form of society whose cement is a common will (*ED*, 232). Thus if society is a social organism, democracy is an expression of its ideal organization, and its democratic government is constituted by its every member (*ED*, 238). The political concept of democracy is secondary to and derivative from social and ethical concepts since democracy "is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association" (*ED*, 240). Second, on an individual moral level democracy as an ethical ideal pertains to the inner qualities of the individual or personality; it "is not to be put into a man from without. It must begin in the man himself, however much the good and the wise of society contribute. Personal responsibility, individual initiation, these are the notes of democracy" (*ED*, 243). Third, on a social and economic level, it is in the ideal of equality that "democracy lives and

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9. John Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy" (1888), *EW* 1; John Dewey, "What Is Democracy?" (1946), *LW* 17; and John Dewey, "Contributions to *Democracy in a World of Tensions*" (1951), *LW* 16. Dewey's essay "The Ethics of Democracy" will be cited in the text as *ED* for all subsequent references.

10. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 286. The complexity and richness of Dewey's concept of democracy have puzzled, even infuriated, his critics such as Clarence Carson. Carson counted as many as thirty meanings of the term democracy in Dewey's work and concluded from this that the word meant either "nothing," in the sense of absurd ambiguity, or "all," in the sense of totalitarian ideology. See Clarence B. Carson, "The Concept of Democracy and John Dewey," *Modern Age* 4, no. 2 (1960): 180–87.

11. By using "genealogy" we wish by no means to provide a special Foucauldian reading of Dewey's theory of democracy. Rather, our intention is to show the "evolution" and continuity of his democratic thought, and by identifying particular "stages" and "phases" to indicate its qualitative development or growth.

moves" (*ED*, 246). Democracy must also reach the regions of wealth, labor, and industry (*ED*, 246–48). Based on this, Dewey could conclude, "Democracy and the one, the ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity are to my mind synonymous. The idea of democracy, the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, represent a society in which the distinction between the spiritual and the secular has ceased …, the divine and the human organization of society are one" (*ED*, 248–49).

No wonder this sounds idealistic and romantic, even utopian. But Dewey went further along these lines by giving democracy a religious meaning. He strengthened understanding of democracy as "a spiritual fact," not "a mere piece of governmental machinery." Democracy "has a spiritual meaning" that consists in freedom for the sake of revealing truth.[12] For a community of truth-seekers, then, democracy is just the means, not the end.[13]

Thus democracy for Dewey is from the start a social, ethical, and spiritual human condition whose purpose is "freeing intelligence for independent effectiveness — the emancipation of mind as an individual organ to do its own work."[14] He makes a very logical step when moving into an educational context, asking whether school has anything in common with democracy. His reply is that the schools have been "successful in building up the machinery of a democracy of mind," but they have failed to be "conscious of the ethical principle upon which it rests."[15] It is here where Dewey for the first time suggests that the remedy for the "evils of democracy" consists in "more thoroughgoing democracy."[16] And what else could democracy mean (he wrote, with teachers in mind) than both individual and collective participation, that is,

> that the individual is to have a share in determining the conditions and the aims of his own work; and that, upon the whole, through the free and mutual harmonizing of different individuals, the work of the world is better done when planned, arranged, and directed by a few, no matter how wise or of how good intent that few?[17]

Democracy can become a part of any human reality only as a consequence of its recognition as the spiritual principle,[18] which is a result of understanding achieved through education.

It would be untrue and unfair to Dewey, however, to charge him with dismissing in his later work the social and economic realities at which he hinted in the concluding passages of his cornerstone essay on democracy, "The Ethics of

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12. John Dewey, "Christianity and Democracy" (1892), *EW* 4, 8.

13. Ibid., 9.

14. John Dewey, "Democracy in Education" (1903), *MW* 3, 229.

15. Ibid., 229 and 230.

16. Ibid., 232.

17. Ibid., 233.

18. Ibid., 239.

Democracy." In his 1908 book *Ethics*, for example, he poses the question whether material goods could be so produced and distributed as to promote the democratic ideal of their common sharing.[19] He concludes that "justice cannot be fundamentally in contradiction with the essence of democracy. This means that wealth must be produced, distributed, and owned justly: that is, so as to promote the individuality of every member of society, while at the same time he must always function as a member, not as an individual."[20] At that time Dewey started to turn his sharp critical eye toward the dangers of vocational education for the future of democracy as practiced by industrial capitalism.[21]

It may go almost without saying that for Dewey these social issues served as critical incentives for his more general philosophical immersion into education from a democratic perspective. The final chapter of his *Schools of To-Morrow*, titled "Democracy and Education," deals with real problems of democracy in the school setting where democracy at that time was "a comparatively new thing."[22] He expressed substantial concern

> that the concentrated interests of businessmen and their influential activity in public matters will segregate training for industry to the damage of both democracy and education. Educators must insist upon the primacy of educational values, not in their own behalf, but because these represent the more fundamental interests of society, especially of society organized on a democratic basis. The place of industry in education is not to hurry the preparation of the individual pupil for his individual trade.[23]

Dewey was worried that such an education "is fatal for a democracy" because it engenders "the formation of fixed classes."[24] Democracy as a positive social ideal requires just the opposite: an antidual and antidualistic education "in which learning and social application, ideas and practice, work and recognition of the meaning of what is done, are unified from the beginning and for all."[25]

Dewey's classic *Democracy and Education* was actually written within this context, but we shall deal with it separately in the next section. For now, we shall hold our discussion of that work and move beyond it in our genealogical recap of his democratic theory.

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19. John Dewey, *Ethics* (1908), *MW* 5, 152.

20. Ibid., 466.

21. See John Dewey, "Some Dangers in the Present Movement for Industrial Education" (1913), *MW* 7, 98–103; and John Dewey, "Industrial Education and Democracy" (1913), *MW* 7, 104–05.

22. John Dewey, *Schools of To-Morrow* (1915), *MW* 8, 399.

23. Ibid., 402. Dewey was a staunch critic of the so-called dual system of education (see Kadlec, *Dewey's Critical Pragmatism*, 75–81). This is precisely the educational situation in the contemporary Slovak Republic, where a governmental act on dual education was approved in March and went into effect on April 1, 2015.

24. Dewey, *Schools of To-Morrow*, 403.

25. Ibid., 404.

Dewey continued developing his positive as well as his critical conceptions of democracy in the context of education and society. He was moving closer to a more complete realistic (rather than idealistic) theory when thinking about "education in an industrial democracy."[26] In addition to defining political democracy as "a form of government which does not esteem the well-being of one individual or class above that of another," but serves "the happiness and interests of all as upon the same plane," he comes back to defining social or moral democracy as "a state of social life where there is a wide and varied distribution of opportunities" along with "social mobility," "free circulation of experiences and ideas," "recognition of common interests," and "mutual support between social organizations and their members."[27] Such a democratic social condition "has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife."[28] In an industrial society another form of democracy cannot be avoided — an industrial democracy; however, according to Dewey, this one cannot be separated from general social democracy just as industrial education cannot be separated from general education as a social process.[29]

In the next stage, the mature stage, Dewey's approach provided the concept of democracy with more philosophical grounding.[30] Thus his 1920 book *Reconstruction in Philosophy* combines democracy with universal ideals of the human good; and 1922's *Human Nature and Conduct* combines it with means of original human thought and action.[31]

Such had been Dewey's long, but still preliminary journey to his mature theory of democracy. Phase one in the development of this conception comprised Dewey's deep discontent with both the theory and practice of political democracy as a form of government that he expresses in his 1927 work *The Public and Its Problems*. As regards theory, Dewey contends, political democracy is a very narrow or empty concept that is based on insufficient classical liberal individualistic premises; as regards practice, it has been shown to be weak or mechanistic. Political democracy simply cannot cure its ills if it remains confined just to the political.[32] Within this critical context Dewey reasserts his definition, developed in previous idealistic

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26. See John Dewey, "The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy" (1916), *MW* 10, 137–43; John Dewey, "Learning to Earn: The Place of Vocational Education in a Comprehensive Scheme of Public Education" (1917), *MW* 10, 144–50; John Dewey, "The Modern Trend toward Vocational Education in Its Effect upon the Professional and Non-Professional Studies of the University" (1917), *MW* 10, 151–57; and John Dewey, "Democracy and Loyalty in the Schools" (1917), *MW* 10, 158–63.

27. Dewey, "The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy," 137 and 138.

28. Ibid., 139.

29. Ibid., 143.

30. John Dewey, "Philosophy and Democracy" (1918), *MW* 11, 41–53.

31. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *MW* 12; and John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *MW* 14.

32. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 325–27.

writings, that "as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself. It is an ideal in the only intelligible sense of an ideal. … [D]emocracy in this sense is not a fact and never will be."[33] Simply put, the essence of democracy is a genuine community, a genuine communal life. "Democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion."[34] No wonder, then, that democracy "must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community."[35]

Phase two of Dewey's mature conception is represented by his refusal to turn a blind eye to or remain silent about the problems, crises, and failures of real democracy that he thought grew out of problems with social organization.[36] Dewey demanded inquiry into the reasons for the eclipse of democracy in the twentieth century, and he argued that one key factor was the absence of well-developed social roots necessary for a thick social democracy.[37] He expanded this hint when writing about the cultural bases of democracy in *Freedom and Culture* (1939).[38] It emerges very clearly that even political democracy cannot survive without the maintenance of a broad cultural background to support it. He claims, very resolutely, "If we cannot produce a democratic culture, one growing natively out of our institutions, our democracy will be a failure. There is no question, not even that of bread and clothing, more important than this question of the possibility of executing our democratic ideals directly in the cultural life of the country."[39] Thus in theory the Deweyan concept of democracy comes closer to the concept of culture: "democracy means the belief that humanistic culture should prevail"; moreover, democracy builds up its own culture (a democratic culture) in the broadest sense of the term (*FC*, 151). Dewey argued further that the "struggle for democracy has to be maintained on as many fronts as culture has aspects: political, economic, international, educational, scientific and artistic, religious."[40]

Phase three of Dewey's mature conception consisted in his radical but intelligent defense of democracy. He was well aware that democratic ideals are still far from being settled due to their high moral demands,[41] and that to implement them in practice is a much more complex task than even their originators

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33. Ibid., 328.

34. Ibid., 350.

35. Ibid., 368.

36. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 25.

37. John Dewey, "The Future of Democracy," *LW* 11, 532.

38. John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (1939), *LW* 13. This work will be cited in the text as *FC* for all subsequent references.

39. John Dewey, "Politics and Culture" (1932), *LW* 6, 48.

40. Ibid., 186.

41. John Dewey, *Construction and Criticism* (1930), *LW* 5, 135.

contemplated.[42] One of the critical factors against which democracy has to be defended is the industrial development of capitalism: "In consequence, the problem of democracy is no longer chiefly governmental and political. It is industrial and financial — economic."[43] Unless democracy can work for the economy and become industrial democracy, the economy hardly will work for democracy in society. The solution is by no means easy but must include changing economic conditions in a way that supports their democratization (*FC*, 118). This requires making clear the "connection between political and industrial democracy … and the necessity of a new political order so that the spirit of democracy may have a re-birth."[44]

A democratic social order is one in which "every individual has a degree of power to govern himself and be free in the ordinary concerns of life."[45] Yet another major factor on the international political scene against which Dewey had to defend democracy was the rise of totalitarianism with its unintelligent forms of rule such as violence, war, authoritarianism, autocracy, dictatorship, oligarchy, and the like; according to Dewey, totalitarian regimes represented "the tragedy of democracy in the world today,"[46] despite the claims of democracy by Nazis and Stalinists (*FC*, 132). In response to these antidemocratic trends, Dewey asserts, "In order to restore democracy, one thing and one thing only is essential. The people will rule when they have power, and they will have power in the degree they own and control the land, banks, the producing and distributing agencies of the nation."[47] And here also human intelligence as the key method of democracy should be invoked.

Even if one is skeptical of how intelligence may solve the problem of change with respect to power relations, intelligence is nevertheless the main democratic force for solving social problems, clashes of social interests, and social conflicts. "The method of democracy — insofar as it is of organized intelligence — is to bring these conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised, where they can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests than are represented by either of them separately."[48] The same applies to the defense of democracy in America, to which Dewey devotes a great deal of

42. John Dewey, *Ethics* (1932), *LW* 7, 359.

43. John Dewey, "American Education Past and Future" (1931), *LW* 6, 96.

44. John Dewey, "Democracy Joins the Unemployed" (1932), *LW* 6, 245.

45. John Dewey, "A Resume of Four Lectures on Common Sense, Science and Philosophy" (1932), *LW* 6, 431. Dewey, however, never elaborated on his conception of "economic democracy" in any detail. For more on this topic by contemporary authors, see, for example, Kenneth W. Stikkers, "Dewey, Economic Democracy, and the Mondragon Cooperatives," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2011): 186–99.

46. John Dewey, "Democracy Is Radical" (1937), *LW* 11, 296.

47. John Dewey, "Imperative Need: A New Radical Party" (1934), *LW* 9, 76.

48. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 56.

his efforts in theory and practice. According to him, an "American democracy can serve the world only as it demonstrates in the conduct of its own life the efficacy of plural, partial, and experimental methods in securing and maintaining an ever-increasing release of the powers of human nature, in service of a freedom which is cooperative and cooperation which is voluntary" (*FC*, 187).

Phase four of Dewey's mature conception was an enhanced restatement of a positive ideal of democracy in the form of a concept of democracy as a way or form of life, "as the truly human way of living,"[49] which "is a way of personal life and one which provides a moral standard for personal conduct" (*FC*, 155). He expresses its "key-note" as "the necessity for participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together: — which is necessary from the standpoint of both the general and the full development of human beings as individuals."[50] But first of all, Dewey proves that democracy "as a form of life cannot stand still" and must be recreated and re-formed continually in every new situation to meet the changes.[51] Otherwise, we might develop the illusion that democratic ideals have already been fixed once and for all, which has never been the case in any country.[52] Second, this constant challenge of democracy must and can be best answered by the system of education that, in the same way, "cannot stand still."[53] Third, along with education there has to be science, whose enormous resources are capable of securing the future of democracy.[54] In Dewey's work science and democracy have much in common. They both depend on "freedom of inquiry, tolerance of diverse views, freedom of communication, the distribution of what is found out to every individual as the ultimate intellectual consumer" (*FC*, 135). Even though Dewey could not believe in an immutable, ahistorical, and nonsocial human nature, he rooted the foundation of democracy in the "faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience."[55]

Phase five of Dewey's mature conception of democracy was his "democratic testament" in the form of the idea of "creative democracy." By this point Dewey had come to the conviction that democratic social order can neither be left to chance nor considered as something automatic.[56] He presumes that democracy is a way of life for persons or individuals and thus, in his view, building up

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49. John Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration" (1937), *LW* 11, 218.

50. Ibid., 217–18.

51. John Dewey, "The Challenge of Democracy to Education" (1937), *LW* 11, 182.

52. John Dewey, "Education and Social Change" (1937), *LW* 11, 416.

53. Dewey, "The Challenge of Democracy to Education," 183.

54. Ibid., 187.

55. Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration," 219; see also Dewey, *Freedom and Culture,* 151–53.

56. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy — The Task Before Us" (1939), *LW* 14, 225.

democracy requires embedding democratic qualities, habits, and attitudes in the personal character of individuals. One of these necessary qualities is a democratic faith or democratic spirit that leads an individual to become a real democrat in practice and social action.[57] Such a democratic approach to practical social life naturally includes "the habit of amicable cooperation" as its other constituent on the personal or individual side (despite the fact that this may appear too radical).[58] Dewey completes his journey in thinking of democracy as "a moral ideal" that becomes "a moral fact" via the formation of "democratic habits" of mind and heart in human beings through their social experience, both educative and noneducative. Experience here goes hand in hand with education since "the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute."[59] Such is the task ahead of every democratic generation to make democracy a living reality.[60]

DEMOCRACY FOR EDUCATION AND EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

In order to explicate the contribution *Democracy and Education* makes to democratic theory, it has been necessary first to provide a genealogy of Dewey's thought on democratic issues. Now we can focus on the contribution particular to his 1916 classic.

Despite the scarcity of explicit discussion of democracy in the volume,[61] *Democracy and Education* contains such rich democratic conceptions that these are on a par — as to the work's meaning — with its conceptions of education. It is impossible to understand Dewey's democratic theory fully apart from this work. His focus was the relationship between democracy and education, which he succinctly described more than two decades later in his essay "Democracy and Education in the World Today": "[It] is obvious that the relation between democracy and education is a reciprocal one, a mutual one, and vitally so. Democracy is itself an educational principle, an educational measure and policy."[62] Dewey's intention is clearly to promote both democracy as well as education in their mutual coordination. He understands that "the growth of democracy" is the result of the progress of civilization, which includes "the development of the experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and the industrial reorganization," but that it cannot be fully realized unless it is followed by the concurrent developments in education (*DE*, 3).

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57. Ibid., 226–27.

58. Ibid., 228.

59. Ibid., 230.

60. John Dewey, "Education: 1800–1939" (1939), *LW* 14, 271.

61. Dewey used the term "democracy" in the volume just thirteen times, and the term "democratic" just thirty-four times.

62. John Dewey, "Democracy and Education in the World of Today" (1938), *LW* 13, 294.

According to Dewey, there are two types of correlation between democracy and education. The first of these is more profound, more important: democratic society necessarily needs individuals with particular capacities, knowledge, and a certain level of intellectual, moral, and personal maturity; therefore, a proper education is a *sine qua non* for a genuine democratic society. Another correlation is inherent in the process of education and concerns the application of democratic principles: schools should be organized along the same lines as democratic society is organized. This connection is easy to misunderstand, however. To avoid such a misconception, it is crucial to understand the true meaning of a democratic society as Dewey described it.

Democracy as social ideal and social method provides the social framework for education. Dewey selects two substantial elements of his concept of democracy, taken from the principles upon which democratic society is based, to serve as his basic criteria for evaluating the process of democratization in education: (1) shared common or mutual interests, and (2) free and open interaction capable of continual adaptation to changing conditions (*DE*, 92). This conception is based on a deeper, nonpolitical understanding that "democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (*DE*, 93). This is the restatement of Dewey's primary philosophical problem: How can people live together at all? Or in other words, how is it possible to develop a community of human beings in which both community and individuals work together to achieve mutual growth? How can we achieve self-governance of a community through equal participation of all members? In a later work, Dewey himself put the point this way: "[T]he idea of democracy as opposed to any conception of aristocracy is that every individual must be consulted in such a way, actively not passively, that he himself becomes a part of the process of authority, of the process of social control; that his needs and wants have a chance to be registered in a way where they count in determining social policy."[63]

Democracy is the social order but its purpose is to serve the development of all (*DE*, 129); otherwise, democracy loses its meaning. Thus, democracy is a social framework and a structure — an instrument — not the goal itself, not the final end even if we want education to serve democracy and democratic society. The goal of democracy is a good society and this is the goal for education as well — education for democracy is education for democracy *as a means to* a good society and a good life for people. Democracy is clearly antielitist and it "cannot flourish where the chief influences in selecting subject matter of instruction are utilitarian ends narrowly conceived for the masses, and, for the higher education of the few, the traditions of a specialized cultivated class" (*DE*, 200). Democratic society both requires and allows each individual to choose and make his or her own way of life. "Hence a democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures" (*DE*, 315).

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63. Ibid., 295.

However, there is one substantial difference between democracy and education. While democracy is the best social framework for an ideal community to fulfill its mission, and in this sense it is just an option or possibility that may or may not be realized, education is a necessity, a natural requisite without which society cannot survive, at least not in the long run. "Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life" (*DE*, 3). The same is true for the life of any social group: even after the demise of individual members, the group continues its existence by means of transmission. Education as such is a form of sharing the knowledge, beliefs, ideals, hopes, and so on of a social group or a community. An immature member of a social group learns the skills, values, and practices of the group from mature members. Thus education is the means of social continuity in life; it is a necessary condition of this continuance. Every experience may be educational (that is, it may result in one learning something) and the very fact of living in a society entails some form of education.

There is no way to avoid the educational experience that Dewey designates as "informal" (*DE*, 9). An informal education consists of primary experiences enabled by the social environment itself. This is the unconscious influence of the environment that "is so subtle and pervasive that it affects every fiber of character and mind" (*DE*, 21). Here Dewey includes learning language (mother tongue), manners (good breeding), good taste, and aesthetic appreciation. But this type of education is only incidental, not intentional, and so the experience of education in complex societies must be intensified and thus formalized (institutionalized). As the complexity of a social group increases, the informal type of education becomes insufficient. More formal education is needed, and this requires a school system.

Therefore Dewey emphasizes the necessity of formal education for the maintenance of modern society (*DE*, 9–12). However, he warns us about the continued split between formal and informal modes of education that is not easy to avoid. Formal education "easily becomes remote and dead — abstract and bookish, to use the ordinary words of depreciation" (*DE*, 9). It might become rather artificial, focused on teaching students some abstract ideas without actually translating them into practice. When this happens, "[t]he permanent social interests are likely to be lost from view" (*DE*, 10). This potential problem with formal education, Dewey contends, is the negative result of overemphasizing the intellectual aspects of education. He rejects the idea of education as a process of filling students' minds with pieces of information to be memorized.[64]

Education is a living process and has relevance for an individual as well as for a society. In some way it is useful at every point of one's own personal growth. It becomes socially valuable when there is balance between specialist and general

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64. In this conception Dewey had found an important follower: Alfred North Whitehead. According to Whitehead, the student's mind is an organism; "it is not a box to be ruthlessly packed with alien ideas." Moreover, the ideas taught cannot simply be passively received "without being utilized, tested or thrown into fresh combination." Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Mentor Books, 1957), 47 and 1.

education so that a special knowledge can be properly directed by general training. A specialized knowledge that is not guided by a vision of right direction provided by a sound general educational foundation can be rather more dangerous than useful; however, when directed by a proper general knowledge base, specialized knowledge eventually blossoms into a form of work or craft that is socially valuable and that can support the conscious and effective achievement of our aims. The different types of education each have their importance. They must not be disconnected and must be in the right balance so that education as a whole can support the individual's self-development (his or her personal growth) and can be valuable for society.

Now, the crucial problem education is concerned with is that of the intellectual development and social organization of society. The specific task is how to make society democratic, but what does this mean?[65] A democratic society is a mode of association based on equal access and shared responsibility.[66] In a desirable — that is, democratic — society, there must be some degree of shared interests among its members, but the society must also allow members the freedom to develop new interests:

> The problem of democracy becomes the problem of that form of social organization, extending to all the areas and ways of living, in which the powers of individuals shall not be merely released from mechanical external constraint but shall be fed, sustained and directed. Such an organization demands much more of education than general schooling, which without a renewal of the springs of purpose and desire becomes a new mode of mechanization and formalization, as hostile to liberty as ever was governmental constraint. It demands of science much more than external technical application — which again leads to mechanization of life and results in a new kind of enslavement. It demands that the method of inquiry, of discrimination, of test by verifiable consequences, be naturalized in all the matters, of large and of detailed scope, that arise for judgment.[67]

The spirit of Deweyan democracy is participatory through and through.[68] His terms for "participation" are "sharing" and "[mutual] contribution" (*DE*, 167),

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65. One simple example is the architecture or arrangement of classrooms. The first question a teacher from a Deweyan laboratory school asked on meeting educators from our country (Slovakia) was whether we still organize our classrooms so that the students sit in banks of desks arranged in several straight lines, one after another. The answer, alas, was yes. It might not seem important to talk about the architecture of the school, but every type of arrangement has its relevance. When students sit in a circle instead of rows, for example, the apparent hierarchy of teacher and students is eliminated; discussions in seminars can thus be held with each participant occupying an equal position in a way that is similar to the equality of individuals in a democratic society.

66. See George Allan, "Whitehead and Dewey: Religion in the Making of Education," in *Whitehead's Philosophy: Points of Connection*, ed. Janusz A. Polanowski and Donald W. Sherburne (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 41.

67. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 25.

68. According to Robert Westbrook, among liberal intellectuals of the twentieth century Dewey was the most important advocate of participatory democracy, that is, of the belief that democracy as an ethical ideal calls upon men and women to build communities in which the necessary opportunities and resources are available for every individual to realize fully his or her particular capacities and powers through participation in political, social, and cultural life. See Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), xiv–xv.

not only as central to the meaning of human life, but also as offering the only meaningful way to achieve growth. This can be understood as the expression of Dewey's lifelong craving for common happiness and unity in the social realm. "Sharing our experience with others," he wrote in his *Psychology*, is his principle of democracy.[69]

Democracy for Dewey is a part of being human as a social being. Even though it is not possible for a human being to live in isolation as an abstract individual, the social being of an individual may manifest itself in two ways: either democratic or undemocratic. In Dewey's view, not to participate or not to share is something strange, even to the point of absurdity from a normative perspective. Democratic participation as a "truly human way of living"[70] is a voluntary commitment to life within community, to engaging in social action and interaction for the sake of the common good.

In a political context, freedom without real opportunities to participate is empty and purely formal. Dewey was a resolute supporter of citizen participation. He thought that universal and direct "participation in choice of rulers is an essential part of political democracy."[71] Self-government through participation is the true democratic vista. Such participation is intelligent, creative, and deliberative. Thus, the Deweyan idea of participatory democracy encompasses at least three important ideas: communication, cooperation, and creativity.

The fruits of participation are manifold: social, practical, moral, transformational, political, and educational. Thus Deweyan educational democracy — that is, democracy in education — cannot be other than participatory. Sharing or participation in an educational context is a two-way street. One direction — from society to an individual — is necessary for the adoption or "consumption" of what already exists in the way of experience or culture. This is learning. The other direction — back from an individual to society — is necessary as individuals make their distinctive, creative contributions to the common experience and culture.

All of this must be learned, and despite the fact that democracy seems a very natural way of life for community, it demands education all the way down since "learning to give and take … is the best possible method of training for membership in the larger society."[72] Participation of the individual in the world via education is also crucial and vital for mental and moral development. Thus the purpose of participation for Dewey is twofold: it serves not only the development of community but at the same time the development of the self. Participation is self-government and self-development, self-realization of human potentialities. "The ideal of democracy demands the fullest possible development of personality

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69. John Dewey, *Psychology* (1887), *EW* 2, 307.

70. Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration," 218.

71. Dewey, "The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy," 138.

72. Dewey, *Ethics* (1908), 521.

in all — irrespective of birth, wealth, creed, or race — through cooperative association with others, and mutual understanding and consent. The ideal further demands that all the institutions, customs, and arrangements of social life shall contribute to these ends, that is, that they shall be educative."[73]

Educating Democratic Citizens

Dewey's idea of democracy as participatory provides the substantial link between school and society. The school is a community that should be based on and governed according to democratic principles, but it is not detached from the larger community, be it local or global, which should also be democratic. The interactions between the school community (or communities) and the larger community (or communities) provoke many interesting and important questions, the common denominator of which is the democratic citizen as a key social agent who bears the burden of a democratic social life on his or her shoulders. Where do democratic citizens come from? How can schools contribute to their education? How can we get citizens who participate when we do not train them in schools? What is the place and role of educational institutions in the civic life of a nation?

Dewey's conception of education, when combined with his theory of democracy, has multiple implications. At the level of primary schools, educating for participation allows students to begin the process of forming their psychological and moral characters. When students share their experiences, they develop social competencies such as openness to others, willingness to help, selflessness, empathy, solidarity, a sense of social justice, and responsibility.[74] There is ample evidence of how important it is to connect a school's curriculum to life in the local community.[75]

The idea of participatory democracy combined with its educational and social potential was the foundation for the conception of American community schools that Dewey and Jane Addams outlined during the progressive era. The next step in developing this idea was Dewey's project of "university-assisted community

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73. John Dewey and Goodwin Watson, "The Forward View: A Free Teacher in a Free Society" (1937), *LW* 11, 538.

74. This Deweyan approach has many followers, including representatives of the "critical pedagogy" movement such as Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, who focus primarily on the practical social effects of education in terms of habits and value. See, for example, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968; repr. New York: Continuum, 2007); and Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Continuum, 2011). While there are not many examples of a Deweyan approach within the dominant neoliberal culture, Alfie Kohn's idea of collaborative rather than competitive school environment may serve as one; see his *No Contest: The Case against Competition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986). From among direct Deweyan approaches, the ethics of care (Nel Noddings) and idea of "human Eros" (Thomas M. Alexander, Jim Garrison) represent further explorations of this democratic participant educational "spirit." See, for example, Nel Noddings, *Education and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013); Thomas M. Alexander, *The Human Eros: Eco-ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); and Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

75. See Sheldon Berman, *Children's Social Consciousness and the Development of Social Responsibility* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

schools" as "the best practical means to help realize [his] general theory of participatory democracy";[76] he believed this project would "help transform America into a truly participatory democracy" and thus create the democratic culture of a "Great Community."[77] Over time, this strategic project has demonstrated — despite various historical ups and downs[78] — that there can be no social democracy without democratic education and, more particularly, without partnership between educational institutions and other community agencies under the coordinating leadership of universities. Needless to say, the social responsibilities of academic institutions, especially in a global era that requires intelligent problem solving, seem crucial. The contemporary global trends of "academic capitalism," with the unprecedented pressures these place on universities to prove their "right to existence" primarily in terms of their economic (financial) efficiency, make matters much worse. The idea that universities can still play a role as guardians and guarantors of democracy will have to be fought for.[79]

Thus, according to Dewey's philosophy of education we can educate for various purposes — for business and vocation, problem solving and entrepreneurship, private and public success, even happiness and peace — but education for democracy in both individual and social life should permeate all of these purposes. This dimension of Deweyan education is at the heart of his masterwork *Democracy and Education*.[80] The goal is to educate citizens capable of making intelligent contributions to the public (civic) life of their communities (in various ways and to various extents) and of participating in creating the common good. Such civic engagement might range from elementary interest in "what's happening in the news," to petty quotidian involvement in "what is going on in the street," to regular participation in the polls, to temporary service on public boards and commissions, to lifetime commitment to social and/or political activity, to fulfilling the role of a patriot, and so on. This can also include active and self-reliant attitudes toward social and political events. However, democratic civic education, according to Dewey, cannot be reduced to any particular special subject taught within the curriculum.[81] It

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76. Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), xiii.

77. Ibid., x–xiii. Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett call this plan for transformation "The Dewey Problem."

78. For details regarding these ups and downs, see Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, *Dewey's Dream.*

79. With reference to the academic situation in postcommunist European countries such as Slovakia, this sometimes seems almost hopeless. For example, there is almost a complete lack of awareness regarding the necessity and utility of a partnership between schools and local communities under the auspices of higher education institutions.

80. See Patrick M. Jenlink, ed., *Dewey's Democracy and Education Revisited: Contemporary Discourses for Democratic Education and Leadership* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

81. This sort of reductive approach was followed by schools under the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia, when among the basic school subjects were "civic education" (which included some elements of social science) and "civic security" (which included something like theoretical and practical subjects designed to prepare patriots for a military defense in case of a war). Serving the government rather than

must be understood broadly as a component part and integral outcome of education as a whole. Its mission is social and communicative rather than governmental or political in a narrower sense; socialization rather than politicization is its key feature. The lesson is easily at hand: the less the school system uses its educational instruments to serve this social democratic mission, the worse our community life may turn out.

Democracy as a social practice is complex and hard to achieve. Moreover, it is always a dynamic phenomenon that naturally demands flexible and creative educational systems. Nonetheless, looking at the current global trends in education, it will be necessary not only to strongly defend the democratic values and philosophical ideas inherent in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, but also to renew and reinstitute them if democracy and education are to flourish in the twenty-first century.[82]

Conclusion

The theory of educational democracy that John Dewey provided in his classic work *Democracy and Education* is a theory of participatory democracy. Its substance is the idea of a communitarian educational institution in which all participate as equal and free agents in order to share their experiences and competences with the aim of mutual growth. This is the kind of "direct democracy" whose meaning and purpose have to do neither with the power issues involved in the educational process nor with the mutual "profitability" of business processes, but with a democratic way of shared life that leads to the mutual self-creation of humane human beings almost in the sense described by John Amos Comenius, the late Renaissance educator who in his *Didactica magna* (The Great Didactic) of 1633–1638 conceived of schools as "the workshops of humanity."[83] Over the past hundred years, Dewey's *Democracy and Education* could have been read as a continuation of this humanistic–democratic tradition — and we hope that it will continue to be read in this way for the next hundred years and more.

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serving the community was the key mission of such education. No doubt, the Cold War was also a key backdrop for this conception of education.

82. For critical analysis and a Deweyan vision, see Noddings, *Education and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century*.

83. See John Amos Comenius, *The Great Didactic of John Amos Comenius*, translated into English and edited with biographical, historical, and critical introductions by M. W. Keatinge (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967).