Beyond Liberal Democracy

*Dewey’s Renascent Liberalism*

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**Abstract**

My project aims to develop a relational, pluralistic political theory that moves us beyond liberal democracy, and to consider how such a theory translates into our public school settings. In this essay I argue that Dewey offers us possibilities for moving beyond one key assumption of classical liberalism, individualism, with his theory of social transaction. I focus my discussion for this paper on Dewey’s renascent liberal democracy. I move from a discussion of Dewey’s liberal democratic theory to what a relational, pluralistic democratic theory might look like, with Dewey’s help.

**Introduction**

The United States was founded on a concept of democracy that has its philosophical roots in the Euro-western classical liberal theory of Locke (1823/1960) and Rousseau (1762/1968). For classical liberal political philosophers such as Locke and Rousseau, the role of government/the state is to protect individuals from others, and otherwise to stay out of individuals’ lives and allow them to live as they freely choose. The goal of liberalism is to secure opportunities for individuals to realize their full potentials. Classical liberal democracy emphasizes a negative view of freedom as “freedom from.” “Freedom from” focuses on individual rights as natural rights and emphasizes the need to protect these natural rights, for they belong to individuals prior to the formation of political governments and social relations. It is an argument for the primacy of the individual over the state. Such a view of democracy is based on a strong assumption of individualism that treats individuals as if they
develop atomistically on their own. It is also based on a strong assumption of rationalism, on freed intelligence, that individuals can learn to think for themselves and use their reasoning capacity to critique their government’s actions and change the government if it is not meeting their individual needs. Liberal democratic theories, even in their more recent forms, such as Dewey’s (1935) *renascent liberal democracy*, or their current forms, such as Rorty’s (1998) *social hope*, are vulnerable to criticisms that they continue to focus on individual freedom and autonomy. They are also vulnerable to charges that they continue to count on an Enlightenment-type of rationalism as its method of critique, even in Dewey’s (1916/1996) more recent form as the scientific method, in Habermas’s (1984) form as ideal speech acts, or in Rawls’s (1993) form as the veil of ignorance. I want to address the vulnerability of these charges in the case of Dewey.

Great changes have occurred in political philosophy and in societies at large since Dewey was writing. We live in times that Nancy Fraser (1997) describes as “postsocialist.” Today key underlying assumptions of liberal democratic theory are being questioned and dismissed. Enlightenment rationalism and the idea of a unitary subject have come under serious criticism by postmodernists, feminists, and critical theorists. Surprising, given the time that has passed since Dewey was writing, I find Dewey is still a key source to help us find our way out of liberal democracy’s assumptions and show us how to move on. I will argue that Dewey offers us possibilities of moving beyond individualism with his theory of social transaction (Dewey, 1949/1960); I have argued elsewhere that he shows us how to move beyond Enlightenment rationalism in his arguments for truths as warranted assertions (Dewey, 1938/1955; Thayer-Bacon, 2003).

I want to follow Dewey’s social transactional lead and describe our world as one that is pluralistic, relational, and in process as we continually contribute to the ongoing constructing of knowing. I want to address Iris Young’s (1990) concerns for more emphasis on differences, and to emphasize social differences as resources, without at the same time falling into the trap Young does of embracing a wholesale, undifferentiated and uncritical version of politics of difference. Like Chantal Mouffe (1993) I don’t want to embrace extreme pluralism that emphasizes heterogeneity and incommensurability, which leads us to what I (2003) call *naïve relativism*. Instead I want to argue that certain differences should be challenged and even eliminated (such as extreme levels of classism) while other differences should be enjoyed, similar to Fraser (1997). We need a differentiated politics of difference that represents a more *qualified relativist* view of truths, moving further in the direction Dewey (1938/1955) pointed to in *Logic*. Such a view argues that we make decisions based on the best criteria and standards we can agree upon, with the full understanding that our agreed-upon criteria and standards are fallible and subject to change. Our criteria and standards must be submitted to continual critique and reevaluation, even criteria that we cherish such as individuality and freedom.

I focus my discussion for this paper on John Dewey’s *renascent liberal democracy*. I do so for several reasons. Dewey’s work has strongly influenced cur-
rent democratic theories, such as Benjamin Barber’s (1984) *strong democracy*, as well as Judith Green’s (1999) *deep democracy*. Even more importantly, Dewey has influenced my own theory, for I think he offers me a direction for how to move beyond liberal democracy’s assumption of individualism. Dewey presents a nice summation of liberal democratic theoretical assumptions and their pros and cons in *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), which is why I will turn to it as a start.¹ I will also consider two other key political works about democracy, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) and *Freedom and Culture* (1939).² After a discussion of Dewey’s liberal democratic theory I will turn to a discussion of what a relational, pluralistic democratic theory might look like.

**Renascent Liberal Democracy**

John Dewey recognizes we start out as members of communities, in associated living, and that our first community is our family, where we are nurtured, and we experience face-to-face relationships. He (1916/1996) begins his classic work *Democracy and Education* with a discussion of social communities, and how individuals develop out of those communities. In many of his writings we can find Dewey discussing infants and their relationships to their mothers as well as their extended families. Unlike classical liberal philosophers, Dewey does not treat individuals as if they sprout out of the ground already fully developed. He never seems to lose sight of the fact that we all begin our lives in someone else’s loving arms. Dewey developed a sense of self that begins in relation with others, a social self that develops and grows to become more autonomous and rational as we continue to interact with others. Many have written about the influence his friend and colleague George H. Mead, a philosopher and sociologist, had on his social concept of self (e.g., Garrison 1995).

It is not until late in Dewey’s career, in his work co-authored with Arthur Bentley (1949/1960), *Knowing and the Known*, that he introduces the term *transaction*, but one can find the seeds for this idea in many of his earlier writings, including *Democracy and Education*. Earlier Dewey used the term “interaction” to describe relationships that affect each other, but later he amended the term to “transaction” because he realized that things can interact with each other without necessarily affecting the individuals in significant ways, like billiard balls that hit each other on a pool table and bounce off of each other but still maintain their original form. For Dewey, selves interact with others such that both are changed as a result, and thus their relationship is more accurately described as a “transaction.” Communities help to shape the individual into who s/he becomes, but individual selves, as immature young members of the community, help to shape and change the community as well, due to their immaturity, which allows them to be flexible, open, adaptive, and growing.

Dewey’s concept of democracy as a mode of associated living, much broader than any particular view of political democracy, as well as his concept of transaction are cornerstone ideas for the relational view of democracy I want to describe.
What is interesting to me is an examination of how much Dewey allowed or did not allow his key idea of transaction to shape his own social and political view of democracy, for his view of democracy was both a social and political view, and the two cannot be separated, as it is our forms of social relations that affect our political relations. In order for me to explore how Dewey’s concept of transaction did or did not affect his own view of democracy, I turn to the three key later works of his I named above. I begin with *Liberalism and Social Action*, as I think Dewey offers an excellent analysis of classical liberal political theory and its further developments in this text.

*Liberalism and Social Action*

*Liberalism and Social Action* is a publication of Dewey’s Page-Barbour Lectures delivered at the University of Virginia and published in 1935. In this series of lectures he begins by laying out the history of liberalism, as he seeks to find what permanent value liberalism contains and how these values can be maintained in today’s world (the 1930s). In typical Deweyan style, his method of philosophical argumentation is a historical approach. After pointing to the fact that liberalism can be traced back to ancient Greece and the idea of “free play of intelligence,” Dewey begins his historical analysis in earnest with John Locke, in 1688, and his vision that governments exist to protect the rights of individuals. He shows us how Locke’s philosophy focuses on the individual, where individualism is opposed to organized social order. For Locke there is a natural opposition between an individual and organized society. Locke was seeking to find a way to get out from under the constraints of society that had developed by his lifetime. He solved this problem by beginning with an assumption that individuals develop on their own, as self-made men, and have the freedom to decide whether or not to join up with others to form a society. The decision to join up with others is always at the expense of the individual’s freedom. Locke described democratic governments as offering individuals the service of safeguard and protection, to ensure their individual rights are honored and to make sure that others do not harm them. However, this is always a precarious governmental service that must be kept in check to make sure that the government does not infringe on our individual rights any more than is necessary to protect us. The relationship between individuals and the government is one of distrust and suspicion; it is one where the individual must always be on the watch to make sure the government is powerful enough to protect individual rights, but not so powerful that it takes away individual rights. Key values of Locke’s classical liberalism are that every individual has the right to “the full development of his capacities” and that liberty is “the most precious trait and very seal of individuality” (Dewey, 1935, p. 24).

Dewey’s insightful criticism of early liberalism is that it assumes a conception of individuality “as something ready-made, already possessed, and needing only the removal of certain legal restrictions to come into full play” (p. 39). Dewey tells us the “Achilles heel of early liberalism” is the idea of separate individuals, “each of whom is bent on personal private advantage” (p. 54). Early liberalism did not
conceive of individualism “as a moving thing, something that is attained only by
continuous growth” (p. 39). Dewey offers us his description of the individual as not
starting out in a state of nature prior to entering a social state, but rather as human
infants connected to and cared for by family members. He warns: “If liberalism is
concerned with the importance of individuality, it must be deeply concerned with
the structure of human association, for the latter positively and negatively affects
the development of individuals” (p. 41). From Dewey’s criticism of early liberalism,
we can see that it is clearly the case that Dewey did not begin his own democratic
theory with an assumption of atomistic individualism.

Apparently Locke was not able to see social arrangements as positive forces,
instead of just as external limitations. According to Dewey (1935), it is not until
the second half of the nineteenth century that the idea arises that the state should
be instrumental in securing and extending the liberties of individuals (pp. 5–6).
Slowly we see a shift from the idea of using government action only for protection
and safeguarding to arguing that we can use governmental action to aid those who
are economically disadvantaged, to alleviate their condition. During the nineteenth
century there is a movement in liberal thinking from seeing society as only a hin-
drance to individuals to beginning to see society as offering assistance and help
toward individual development. During the second half of the nineteenth century
in American history we find arguments for the value of public education for chil-
dren whose parents cannot afford to give their children private education. Horace
Mann and others suggest that the government (federal and state) should pay for
public education out of public funds raised through individual taxes. Today in po-
litical discussions in the United States, Libertarians and conservative Republicans
represent the early classical liberal’s view of democracy as one where the least gov-
ernment is the best, and Democrats and moderate Republicans represent the new
liberals of the nineteenth century, who are committed to using society and the state
to help individuals develop to their full capacity.

Dewey (1935) recognizes the important battles that were won by early liberal-
ism in terms of freedom of thought, conscience, expression, and communication.
These qualities are what he sees as essential for us to have “freed intelligence.” For
Dewey, the enduring values of early liberalism are “liberty; the development of the
inherent capacities of individuals made possible through liberty, and the central
role of free intelligence in inquiry, discussion and expression” (p. 32). However,
Dewey does not regard “intelligence as an individual possession and its exercise as
an individual right,” as classical liberalism does (p. 65). Intelligence depends on “a
social organization that will make possible effective liberty and opportunity for
personal growth in mind and spirit for all individuals” (pp. 56–57). Again we find
evidence that Dewey does not rely on an atomistic view of individualism.

Freed intelligence is a social method that Dewey wants to be identified with
the scientific method of investigation. Importantly, because he describes freed in-
telligence as a social method of inquiry, he recognizes that intelligence is not a ready-
made possession; it must be secured. He is very aware that oppressions in terms of
slavery, serfdom, and material insecurity are harmful to freed intelligence. He gave the Page-Barbour Lectures during the Great Depression, and he was worried about fascism and communism at the time. Dewey argues for a “renascent liberalism” that recognizes that democracies must establish material security as a prerequisite for individual freedom.

We do find evidence that Dewey’s democratic theory relies on an assumption of rationalism in his concept of freed intelligence. Dewey trusted that the scientific method of inquiry would replace brute force as the method of cooperative intelligence. He was greatly influenced by Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, as were other classic pragmatists, such as Peirce and James, and he references Darwin’s contribution to scientific thinking in many of his writings, including *Liberalism and Social Action*. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916/1996) emphasizes freed intelligence through his discussion of reflective thinking that begins in doubt, where one is stirred to move to action, to generate possible hypotheses and test these out in order to arrive at a conclusion that ends the doubt. Reflective thinking is the scientific method, which by 1935 Dewey describes as “freed intelligence.” Predictably, he ends *Liberalism and Social Action* by pointing to education as the first object of a reascent liberalism, to aid in the producing of habits of mind and character that are necessary for freed intelligence.

**The Public and Its Problems**

In Dewey’s (1927) *The Public and Its Problems*, which is based on lectures he gave in 1926 at Kenyon College, Ohio, prior to the Great Depression, we find Dewey worrying about the problem of loss of a public, and how this loss affects democracies. Interestingly, he does not begin his talks by looking at political philosophy and the public; he begins by looking at individuals. He wants to emphasize “that all deliberative choices and plans are finally the work of single individuals” (p. 21). However, just when we may think we have caught Dewey assuming individualism, he goes on to criticize individualism and say that individuals exist and operate in association. Again he talks about how we are born infants, “immature, helpless, dependent upon the activities of others” (p. 24). What we believe is the outcome of association and intercourse. For Dewey conjoint, combined, associated action is a universal trait of the behavior of things. A society is individuals in their connections with one another, whereas a political state is a distinctive and secondary form of association.

Dewey (1927) then turns to examining the democratic state, and as in *Liberalism and Social Action*, we find he again takes a historical look at what formed democracy. It was not theory that formed democracy but rather a convergence of a great number of social movements. Again we are reminded of the fear of government and the desire to reduce its power that motivated Locke. Dewey shows us again that Locke took the route of individualism, “a theory which endows singular persons in isolation from any associations,” “a doctrine of independence of any and all associations,” to diminish the government’s power (pp. 86–87). Locke’s route was to go
back to the naked individual and sweep away all associations as foreign to his nature and rights. Other forces that helped to contribute to this concept of individualism (also discussed in *Liberalism and Social Action*) include Adam Smith’s laissez-faire capitalism, the Mills’ (father and son) utilitarian economic theory, and science’s development of machines (which today I think we would describe more generally as Newton’s atomistic and mechanistic scientific description of the universe).

Dewey (1927) argues there was no need for Locke to take the individualism route he took in order to limit the role of government. It would have been enough to assert that some primary groupings have claims that the state should not legitimately encroach upon. These primary groupings include families and neighbors. Our roots for democracy began in the false roots of atomistic individualism. Again, Dewey shows how we start out our lives in association with others, with our earliest associations being face-to-face interactions with families and neighbors. They are our “chief agencies of nurturance” and they are “bred only in intimacy” (p. 211). According to Dewey, “There is no substitute for the vitality and depth of close and direct intercourse and attachment” (p. 213).

In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927) discusses how in the United States we are losing face-to-face interactions in the small community life and town meetings that were the cornerstone of American democratic polity. He describes the printing press, railways, telegraphs, mass manufacturing, and urban centers (basically, the industrial revolution), as well as the large influx of immigrants, as leading to a loss of public. In 1926 he was worried that the American public was becoming too large, too diffused and scattered, and too intricate in composition. What is his solution to this problem of loss of the public and the apathy and indifference to democracy that it breeds? We come back to Dewey’s key idea that a democracy is a social idea as well as a system of government, and the second form of democracy (political) depends on the first (social). A democracy is shared interests established through interaction; it is associated joint activity that is dependent on community to exist. For Dewey, we are born in associations, but not necessarily in communities. We have to initiate our young into communities by teaching them our language and customs through education. For Dewey, democracy is an ideal always in the making, never to be achieved, and so is community (pp. 148–149). His solution to the problem of loss of a public is to restore our local communities, for our local communities are the mediums for democracy: “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community” (p. 213). Dewey wants communities restored that are alive and flexible as well as stable, ones that “manifest a fullness, variety and freedom of possession and enjoyment of meanings and goods,” ones that are responsive to the complex world in which we are enmeshed, local but not isolated (p. 216).

**Freedom and Culture**

Dewey’s *Freedom and Culture* was published in 1939, during the outbreak of World War II, when there was great fear as to whether or not democracy would survive.
This time Dewey decides to look at democracy in the United States and its development with the help of Jefferson, rather than Locke, since he argues that American conditions are different from the British. He starts with a cultural focus (to gather up the terms upon which human beings associate and live together), suggesting we cannot isolate any one factor, such as the relations of industry, communication, science, art, or religion. For Dewey, all of these are intrinsic parts of the culture that affect politics, and no one factor is dominant over all others. Dewey criticizes Marxism because it isolates one factor, economics, in its discussion of human associations. He tells us that the full conditions for a complete democratic experience have not existed yet.

Using his historical approach again, Dewey (1939) reminds us in *Freedom and Culture* that America started with an economic focus (rebellion over taxation, restrictions on industry and trade). As in *The Public and Its Problems*, again we find Dewey taking a romantic view of early theory and practice in the United States, presuming harmony between liberty and equality in farming times, and how this has changed with industry. There is no discussion of women’s rights in this romantic view, or the sexism that pervaded the United States prior to industrialization, and there is next to no discussion of Native Americans and African Americans and the overt racism that was so dominant during that time in American history. Again, Dewey warns us that we are not going to have democracy until all our institutions are run democratically (church, business, schools, family, law, government, etc.).

In *Freedom and Culture*, Dewey (1939) connects the future of democracy to a spread of the scientific attitude, like his “freed intelligence” in *Liberalism and Social Action*. Here he argues that the scientific attitude is our sole guarantee against widespread propaganda. Dewey recognizes that democracy needs free speech, free press, free assembly, and an education system that encourages inquiry, a scientific attitude. We can secure democracy with all the resources provided by collective intelligence operating in cooperative action (p. 176). Dewey ends *Freedom and Culture* by returning to Jefferson to underscore that Jefferson was not afraid of change. Jefferson referred to the American government as “an experiment.” Dewey wants to encourage us to have the same attitude. As in *The Public and Its Problems*, he again points to the need for face-to-face interaction, political organization in small units, and the need for direct communication in order for democracy to thrive (p. 159). Again he recommends, “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborhood community,” using a direct quote from *The Public and Its Problems*. And again, as in *Liberalism and Social Action*, he recognizes the need for equalization of economic conditions so that free choice and free action can be maintained. Dewey tells us democratic ends demand democratic methods. His central claim is 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” (p. 173).
A Relational, Pluralistic Democracy Always in the Making

I want to argue for a pluralistic, relational democratic theory that starts by letting go of the assumptions of individualism, rationalism, and universalism, which form the foundation for classical liberal democracy. Individualism has many problems with it as a base for democracy, as we discovered with Dewey’s help from his lectures presented here. However, in letting go of individualism, a relational democratic theory does not embrace communitarianism, which starts with the social community as the base from which we derive individuals, thus placing individuals always within the danger of social determinism. This was the problem for Mead (1934). Liberal democracy and communitarianism seem to be logically exclusive of each other, presenting themselves in a way where one must choose either one or the other. I want to argue for a both/and logical approach that suggests we can learn from the strengths and weaknesses of individualism and communitarianism in developing a democratic theory that describes selves as multifarious selves-in-relation-with-others, including our natural world. Following Dewey’s lead, the democratic theory I present here is based on a view of relations as transactional, where individuals are influenced and affected by others but at the same time influence others; it is a relationship that works both ways, and all are changed as a result.

This transactional relational view of democracy does not assume universality. It is located in the contingent, local everyday world of diverse people and their values and beliefs. It is located in a world of specific material needs such as shelter, food, jobs, healthcare and childcare, as well as social, psychological, and spiritual needs. It seeks to address real people and their concerns in terms of their specificity and situatedness, as well as in terms of their diversity and plurality. It does not seek to homogenize and whitewash over distinctions and unique qualities, but at the same time it aims to address people’s commonalities across their differences. This relational democratic theory is not only pluralistic in terms of embracing cultural diversity, it is also pluralistic in that it does not argue that there is one universal answer or truth upon which in the end of time we will all agree. Rather, it is a theory that suggests there are many answers and truths and in the end we will still have a variety of ways of explaining our world and our experiences, relying on a variety of tools to help us in our descriptions. In the end of time, we will still be discussing and debating, meditating and chanting, singing and dancing, as we consider new possibilities. This theory does not suggest that we can hope to solve all of our problems by some special method, such as language analysis, historical analysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics, or the scientific method with the use of an important tool such as reason or intuition. Instead, it recognizes that we use a variety of tools to help us solve our problems and they all have important roles to play in our inquiring processes. I am introducing a democratic theory always in the making that is never complete or finished. Like Dewey’s democratic theory, which is a mode of associated living, it is a comprehensive theory in that it argues for the need to inform all kinds of social institutions in order to thrive. These social institutions include our families, churches, workplaces, and schools, not just political forms of
government, for all forms of social institutions exert power over individuals at the same time that they generate power due to individual contributions.

**Conclusion**

What distinguishes the pluralistic, relational democratic theory I sketch in this essay from Dewey’s liberal democracy are his assumptions of rationalism and universalism that still trail along in his renascent liberalism. We find the assumption of universalism in his romantic view of agrarian American society prior to the industrial revolution and the influx of immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. We also find universalism in his romantic view of face-to-face interactions in small communities prior to the industrial revolution and his recommendation that we need to get back to face-to-face interactions through such methods as town meetings. We discover his assumption of rationalism in his naive view of the scientific method as what will lead us beyond the powerful influence of culture and our fears of social determinism and indoctrination.

A pluralistic, relational view of democracy insists that we need to look at America’s past from the perspective of African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans (involuntary immigrants and conquered people indigenous to this land), and women and children (viewed as property of males). America’s wealth was built on the free, slave, and indentured labor of these people, without them having recognized rights as citizens of this country until the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (children still are viewed as the property of their parents). The radical view of democracy I am developing insists that we consider power issues involved in face-to-face interactions in small communities and the kinds of homogenizing and silencing effects these communities have on diverse opinions and perspectives. People from the dominant culture who acquired fluency in the dominant language and practiced oral skills and styles of relating valued by the dominant culture are the ones whose voices were heard in those town meetings Dewey and present day Barber want to go back to. People living in the communities who were not considered citizens were not allowed to attend the meetings, or if they were allowed to attend they were seated in the balconies or the back and were not allowed to speak.³

The view I offer in this essay also recognizes the limitations of the scientific method and its biases and prejudices, which are disguised as neutral and universal, relying on rationality and the valuing of reason. Science has been used to argue racist and sexist biological deterministic views of inferiority for non-Anglos and women. Due to feminist theory and critical theory, we now can recognize that even science is embedded within paradigms that shift over time, and that what we take to be neutral criteria, standards, and principles are negotiated and influenced by the scientists doing the investigating (Harding, 1991; Haraway, 1988; Keller, 1985). With the introduction of minorities and women’s views, we have exposed the limits of reason and we now can recognize other valuable tools to help us in our inquiring, including intuition, emotions, and imagination (Thayer-Bacon, 2000).
By exploring Dewey’s discussion of classical liberalism, we gain a solid understanding of classical liberalism’s foundational beliefs as well as problems these beliefs present for democratic theories. By considering Dewey’s renascent liberalism in contrast to classical liberalism, we uncover his powerful criticisms against classical liberalism. We also learn the limits of Dewey’s ability to move beyond his own embeddedness within a liberal culture and we discover his biases, which affected his own criticisms and recommended solutions. Now we are in a position to be able to recognize Dewey’s influence on other current democratic theories, such as Barber’s strong democracy, Green’s deep democracy, and my own relational, pluralistic democracy—always-in-the-making.

Notes

1. This means that I will not address the three works in exact chronological order in terms of their writing, but this will not limit our understanding of Dewey’s key ideas, nor will it keep us from seeing the development of his ideas.

2. As any author wanting to write about Dewey’s ideas knows, Dewey was a very prolific writer and wrote more on a chosen topic than a scholar can discuss in one small essay with any success. There are even more possible writings to consider if one includes as sources secondary authors writing about Dewey’s ideas. I have chosen to limit my discussion to these three key works, as they offer the most in-depth discussion of liberalism by Dewey that I am aware of, and I have chosen to limit myself only to Dewey’s original writings to make sure I have the room to carefully discuss his own work. I am aware that there is more to choose from but recognize the impossibility of addressing it all, nor do I think that is necessary for my purposes here. See the reference list for some other suggested readings on Dewey’s ideas concerning liberalism.

3. One of my reviewers suggested that I do not give Dewey enough credit for his involvement in the women’s suffrage movement and his support as a founding member of the NAACP. I don’t wish to deny that Dewey was active in fighting social justice issues of his time. I would add to the reviewer’s examples Dewey’s support for the Highlander Folk School, in Tennessee, which helped to organize the southern labor movement and later the civil rights movement. My criticism is with the lack of attention to racism and sexism in Dewey’s democratic theory, not his way of life. I am not the only one criticizing him on these issues. See Frank Margonis’s and Charlene Haddock Seigfried’s contributions to this topic.

References


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