THE DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC TO BE BROUGHT INTO EXISTENCE AND EDUCATION AS SECULARIZATION

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INTRODUCTION: DEMOCRACY AS THE 'DEAD GOD' OF MODERNITY AND THE DIMENSIONS OF THE 'OFFICE'

A decade ago the German sociologist Ulrich Beck seemed to consign democracy to the past and, significantly, drew upon an ironically religion-inspired vocabulary:

Democracy becomes the religion of the past epoch. One still practises it—on Sunday or on Christmas under the 'Christmas tree' of polls. But no one really still believes in it. It is the dead God of the first modernity.¹

When Ulrich Beck dismisses democracy as "the dead god" of a past era or as a liturgy drained of any substantial meaning, he misses the target principally in reference to modernity: indeed, from a Deweyan perspective, if democracy is really going to expire it may be not because of the end of modernity but precisely because modernity is "as yet unformed, inchoate."² Against this backdrop the question this paper would like to explore is whether (and in what sense) the engagement with a genuine democracy is, in the final analysis, the engagement with modernization as secularization (in a sense which needs to be investigated). And whether (and in what sense) such an engagement is also (if not primarily) an educational one.

I will deal with this thematic constellation (weaving together the themes of God and a [bygone?] liturgy, democracy and modernity, secularization and education) through a reading of *The Public and Its Problems* and, in particular, through an investigation of what *official* means, the latter being a notion which is pivotal in Dewey's political theory. Indeed, the very first illustration of what 'public' means is realized by referring to 'official' as opposed to 'private,'³ and the very definition of 'public' implies a mobilization of the notion of 'officials.' By resorting to an archaeological analysis of sorts in the wake of Giorgio Agamben,⁴ I will investigate how and in what sense the notion of 'official' is interlaced with that of 'community' up to the point that they come to constitute a sort of dyad.

I will take my cue from and build on a peculiar expression that Dewey uses after summarizing his hypothesis on the public: officials and their special powers give form and organization to the public, which otherwise would be formless,⁵ but

*since the public forms a state only by and through officials and their acts, and since holding official position does not work a miracle of transubstantiation, there is nothing perplexing nor even discouraging in the spectacle of the stupidities and errors of political behavior.*⁶

I am not interested here in the sociological remark about possible crimes and misdemeanors but, firstly, in the occurrence (very rare but very significant in Dewey⁷) of such a momentous word as “transubstantiation” in the context where the ‘forming power’—in a non-substantialist but rather purely functionalist sense—of officials is highlighted and, secondly, in the fact that, in terms of the history of ideas, *the officials’ position has much to do with the miracle of transubstantiation*. In a sense, to speak with a taste for the paradox, the question of ‘democratic officialdom’ amounts to how transubstantiation occurs in human communities. Inadvertently and independently from any clear historical and genealogical consciousness that he could have had about it, Dewey is here hinting at one of the depths of the idea of the office as *officium* (I am using the Latin word here to signal that the concept is being used in reference to its long-standing history).

Investigating this idea, by capturing and elaborating the clue offered in the text, will allow us to understand what is at stake when the question of officialdom emerges and when it reacts with those of democracy and of community. This will require an exploration of the idea of *officium* and the distinction between three different (but interrelated) senses of it (I will speak, then, of *officium*₀, *officium*₁, *officium*₂, for the sake of brevity). By *officium*₀ I refer to the anthropological dimension of the notion, related to the institution and management of the practical life, such as it emerges from a Deweyan re-interpretation of some of Cicero’s tenets (Cicero being the author who offered the first investigation of the concept). By *officium*₁ I refer to the idea as it is linked with officialdom, that is, to the role of the “officials,” while I connect *officium*₂ to the idea of community understood etymologically as the *sharing of offices* (and this understanding will require an exploration of the conceptual-etymological substance of the word ‘community’). Against the backdrop of these distinctions I will discuss Alphonso Lingis’ view of a *community of those who have nothing in common*⁸ as it was reappropriated in the context of education by Gert Biesta⁹ and taken *beyond Dewey’s education through democracy* in an Arendtian¹⁰ direction. I will endeavor to show what I consider to be some limitations of this perspective, which lie fundamentally in the fact that it remains within the horizon of a specific modern logic and gives rise to undue and unhelpful dichotomies.

By contrast, Dewey’s *genuinely modern*¹¹ view, as it can be reconstructed by mobilizing the circuit between *officium*₀, *officium*₁, and *officium*₂, can provide us with a more promising theoretical option, building upon the *intrinsic* relationships between democratic community, communication, and education. In the wake of Steven Rockefeller,¹² but following a somewhat different path, I will propose reading

these relationships as a secularization of the Christian message, showing how Dewey drew the most radical conclusions from a creative resignification of what transubstantiation means once we take leave of the metaphysical, nonmodern horizon and engage in bringing a genuinely modern one into existence.

It is in this work of secularization as modernization that education as communication appears in its structural coupling with the life of the community as the sharing of offices.

1. THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL NOTION OF 'OFFICIUM' AND THE COMMUNITY AS THE SHARING OF OFFICES

In the matrix-treatise on the 'office,' Cicero's *De officiis*, there is, at the outset of his discussion, a distinction between *officium*, insofar as the supreme good is concerned, and *officium* pertaining to the "precepts through which the practice of life could be given a form in all its parts."¹³ These precepts aim chiefly at the *institution and conduct of common life* (in Cicero's words).

Without disentangling the multifarious threads interwoven in Cicero's complex, epoch-making text, I am interested in highlighting the connection between *officium* and the idea of an in-formation of common life (a link which still echoes in Dewey's theoretical device when he refers to a 'forming power' of the officials). *Officium* principally identifies a 'space,' that of life as a practice, where life receives a form, gets 'institutionalized' and is made stable, so that it can 'stand,' by means of a fit organization, and is, accordingly, rescued from the risk of amorphousness.

It is noteworthy that in Cicero's text, through which the topic of *officium* broke into Western thought, the notion of *officium* has not primarily to do with a moral or political dimension but rather with an "anthropological" one.¹⁴ Cicero suggests that *officium* is connected with the human way of being-in-the-world, which is characterized by going beyond the mere sphere of the sensation and coping with the connections of things, mainly in their temporal development. The 'transgression' (understood etymologically as the passing from one state to a completely different one) from the domain of mere sensation entails the opening up of the domain of action and the establishment of the realm of life as a practice, which exists to the extent that *consequences* are taken into consideration and which is, then, stretched between past and future and is not, accordingly, confined to the pure present.¹⁵

Concurrent with this rise of a domain of practice are the linguistic relations of mutual intercourse and of society with one's fellow-men.¹⁶ We can read all this through a Deweyan lens and say that human beings, unlike other animals, are "capable of perceiving things instead of merely feeling and having them."¹⁷ By 'perceiving,' we should understand the ability "to acknowledge unattained possibilities; it is to refer the present to consequences, apparition to issue, and thereby to behave in deference to the connections of events."¹⁸ Such a behaving in reference to the

connections of events (Cicero himself speaks of *consequences*) is to consider events in their meanings: indeed, “when an event has meaning, its potential consequences become its integral and funded feature.”¹⁹ What Cicero calls *reason* should, then, be understood as ‘mind,’ in the sense that Dewey worked out in *Experience and Nature*.²⁰

Like Cicero, who insists on nature bringing man, *by means of reason*, into language and social intercourse, a Deweyan perspective also links the passing from feeling to perceiving with the realm of meaning and with language.²¹

Officium is, therefore, closely bound up with the emergence of the mind and of the sphere of meaning, which are related to life in common and association as well as language and communication. It is appropriate to mention a significant difference here: while, according to Cicero, reason is the force through which nature gives rise to the accord among men, which is manifested in language and in the life of society, Dewey sees things the other way around through a transactional perspective. But what I want to highlight is the circuit between the emergence of a sphere of perceiving (as different from sensing) and that of meaning and of the mind, which are structurally connected to language and association (ultimately, to communication), because this circuit marks off and identifies the ‘space’ of a ‘primordial *officium*.’

The expression ‘primordial *officium*’ may be misleading and it is worth specifying that by it I do not understand an *original officium*, a sort of paradigm or Platonic idea of *officium*, according to which any further ‘embodiment’ of it would be assessed and ‘measured.’ The ‘primordial *officium*’ is rather to be understood as that condition of possibility for the rise of a human life as something not merely (and ‘bestly’) lived and sensed, but as something in which things, insofar as they are meaningful, can (and should) be ‘managed’ or ‘ruled’²² and where life is ‘instituted’ and conducted as life in common.

The government and management of things and the ‘instituted life’ are not already ‘political,’ but are the pre-political backdrop out of which a political community emerges. According to a traditional etymology, the word *officium* comes from *efficere* (to do; to effect). The ‘primordial *officium*’ then signifies that doing through which life is not only a biological matter, but is also the domain of the government and management of things (as far as they are provided with meanings), of *pragmata*, a word which in Greek significantly means both things and deeds. The ‘primordial *officium*’ is related to the properly human capacity of practical activity (in a radical sense, as the *capacity of having to do with things*) and of giving life a form.

The German philosopher Axel Honneth²³ sees in the presupposition of “a form of pre-political association” for the deploying of “democratic procedures” one of the chief merits of Dewey’s political theory in contrast with approaches such as Arendt’s and Habermas’. But, in speaking of a ‘primordial *officium*’ and of a pre-political backdrop, what I have in mind is rather something that precedes

even the stage of a pre-political association. Indeed, as Cicero makes clear, by defining “between morality and law, the sphere of *officium* as that where what is at stake is the typical human capacity of governing one’s own life and that of the others,”²⁴ this capacity concerns principally “the primary groupings,” to use Dewey’s expression,²⁵ insofar as it deals with the care for and the protection of all people who are held dear.²⁶

It is not by chance, therefore—and it is, indeed, deeply rooted in what fundamentally *officium* is—that in *The Public and Its Problems* “the excursion enable[ing] us to distinguish the state from other forms of social life”²⁷ begins precisely with children’s helplessness and dependence upon others’ care. What I want to point out here is that, as I have been arguing, through a ‘Deweyan’ reading and deconstruction of Cicero’s passage, at the level of primary groupings we already find that *officium* plays a part. Consequently, when Dewey notes that “most states, after they have been brought into being, react upon the primary groupings,”²⁸ this remark, apart from pointing to a socio-political fact, raises a fundamental question: what kind of change intervenes between the pre-political *officium* (let’s call it *officium*₀) and the political one, the latter determining the role of officials (let’s call it *officium*₁)? Is the latter just the evolution of the former? Or does the passage from direct to indirect consequences, from the private dimension to the public, produce a major change in the meaning of *officium*? And if so, what are the implications for educational discourse?

A first point has been already established, one that will direct the subsequent steps of this present analysis: there is *officium* whenever life gets ‘institutionalized’ and there is a passing from sensing to perceiving and to the consideration of consequences. Dewey’s entire discourse about the emergence of a public due to the *perceiving of indirect consequences* and resulting in an organization by means of officials can be considered as grounded, therefore, in such an ‘original’ constellation and could be approached by bearing in mind the very roots of the meaning of *officium*.

All the questions raised thus far can be engaged with from a reverse angle, so to speak, by investigating what a community is, *to the extent that* we mean by community not generally an association or a communal life (even in primary groupings), but that kind of association of which democracy is the crowning, or better, “the idea [. . .] itself.”²⁹ It is important to highlight that the notion of *officium* indirectly resonates with that of community and is even inscribed in the very ‘wordly’ substance of the latter. Indeed, *community* is etymologically *cum-munus*, and *munus* is a very complex word that can convey three meanings, those of *gift*, *charge*, and *office/service/duty*.

The *office* is, then, a kind of *munus* and the community is the sharing (in a sense to be explained) of it. The sharing of ‘offices,’ understood as a kind of *munus*, could hint at that ‘identification’ of both the citizen-voter and the sheriff as officials³⁰ in a democracy (which then would be really the idea of community itself).

But the first interpretative problem to tackle is in what sense *officium* as a *munus* belongs to the same category as the *gift*. The characteristic of the *munus* in comparison with the *gift* is that

munus is a specific type of *donum*, from which it is to be distinguished by its obligatory character, implied by its root *mei-*, which denotes ‘exchange.’ Once the recipient accepted the *munus* (‘exchange-gift’), he was under a burden of obligation (*onus*) to make a due return, whether in kind (*donum*) or by a service (*officium*).³¹

The Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito properly remarks that

[The *munus*] is the gift which is given, because it *must* be given and *can not but* be given. [...] it is a ‘pledge’ or a ‘tribute,’ which is paid in mandatory form. The *munus* is the obligation which has been contracted towards the other and that solicits an adequate reciprocation. [...] What prevails in the *munus* is, therefore, reciprocity or ‘mutuality’ (*munus/mutuus*) of a giving which delivers one to another in a common engagement and ... oath [...] *communitas* is the group of people united not by a ‘property’ but by a duty or by a debt.³²

Viewed from this standpoint, we would have a sort of *community of those who have nothing in common*, in a peculiar sense, different from that given by Alfonso Lingis. What I would like to suggest is that in the community as the sharing of offices-as-a-kind-of-*munus*, an idea which I propose reading along Deweyan lines, the idea of a *community of those who have nothing in common* acquires a different spin in comparison with what risks being a fairly Manichean dichotomy in Lingis’ approach. Indeed, the latter distinguishes the *rational community* from the *other community*: “The rational community produces, and is produced by, a common discourse in a much stronger sense. The insights of individuals are formulated in universal categories, such that they are detached from the here-now index of the one who first formulated them.”³³ The *other community* (which entails a peculiar, ‘un-Deweyan’ way of understanding communication) is opposed to the former:

The other community forms when one recognizes, in the face of the other, an imperative. An imperative that not only contests the common discourse and community from which he or she is excluded, but everything one has or sets out to build in common with him or her. It is not only with one’s rational intelligence that one exposes oneself to an imperative. [...] The rational community that forms in the exchange of information exchanges abstract entities, idealized signs of idealized referents. Communication is extracting the message from irrelevant and conflicting signals—noise. Interlocutors are allied in a struggle against noise; the ideal city of communication would be maximally purged of noise. But there is noise internal to the message—the opacity of the voice that transmits it.³⁴

Biesta nicely links Lingis' rational community with the modern community Bauman, and he points out how the school system in modernity has been understood principally as an agency to build rational communities both in Lingis' sense³⁵ and in Bauman's.³⁶

By elaborating on Lingis' idea that the "*other community* is not simply absorbed into the rational community; [and it] [...] forms not in a work, but in the interruption of work and enterprises,"³⁷ Biesta relates the two communities to two distinct dimensions of learning and education (learning as the *acquisition of something external (knowledge, values, skills)* and learning as *a response to a question*), without invoking any complete replacement of the one with the other.

The educational reinterpretation of Lingis' reflections made by Biesta allows the latter to prepare a conceptual platform to discuss the issue of *education and the democratic person*,³⁸ privileging an Arendtian rather than a Deweyan perspective. Dewey is not dismissed, and his merits in fostering education *through* democracy instead of education merely *for* democracy are explicitly recognized, but Arendt appears to Biesta to provide us with a view which breaks from any individualism³⁹ and of any instrumentalism.⁴⁰

Although I agree with many aspects of Biesta's proposal and understand some of his misgivings, I would like to suggest an alternative 'Deweyan' idea of the *community of those who have nothing in common* with recourse to the considerations just developed on the *munus* (with an eye to Esposito's remarks). This will require an exploration of a third dimension of the semantic spectrum of *officium* (the *officium* as *munus* and understood, therefore, through a peculiar hermeneutical bent, within the horizon of the act of giving), what can be called *officium*₂. This could offer a viewpoint that enables us to grasp the scope and the import of the notion of the Great Community and the way in which it is constitutively educative.

But to get there and to capture a possible 'Deweyan' meaning of *officium*₂, I have to investigate the meaning of *officium*₁ (that related to the role of officials) and pick up again the thread of the discourse on officials and transubstantiation, from which this reflection on the *officium* has taken its cue.

2. BEYOND THE LOGIC OF THE IMPERATIVE: SECULARIZED TRANSUBSTANTIATION AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION AS COMMUNICATION

Lingis' approach risks being trapped in what appears to me a powerful trend in 'un-Deweyan' modernity. In drawing upon Kant, Lingis finely underscores the logic of the imperative which presides over the rational community. To this imperative, implicitly elaborating some tenets of Levinas, he opposes *another imperative*, coming from the otherness of the other. What is not cast in doubt, though, is precisely what I have called *the logic of the imperative*, and this logic is

the modern outcome of a long history related to *officium*₁, that is, to the *officium* as the role played by officials. The true challenge of the democratic community is, instead, that of building a community as the sharing-of-offices-as-a-kind-of-*munus* (= *officium*₂) by ‘weakening,’ ‘de-sacralizing,’ without denying, the role of officials (= *officium*₁) and by developing, also at the political level, the institution of the communal life (= *officium*₀).

In such a re-articulation of the dimensions of *officium*, by pinpointing an interpretation of education as secularization and elaborating a Deweyan version of the community not held together by a common property, we should

1. abandon the modern logic of the imperative, which still operates in Lingis despite any attempt to use a Levinasian move to be free from the grip of Reason and its imperialism;
2. fully valorize “the subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication,”⁴¹ which was, along with the “highest and most difficult kind of inquiry,” the core of Dewey’s response to Walter Lippmann’s attack on the myth of participatory democracy.⁴² On this view communication is no longer understood, as in Lippmann, as the occupation of spin-doctors who sex-up information addressed to the citizen, but rather as intimately related to that in-formation of the common life through which the latter is institutionalized (*officium*₀).

In order to outline the main features of the *officium*₁, as related to the role of officials, and to show the bonds with the logic of the imperative, I will draw upon the erudite archaeological analysis of Giorgio Agamben, from which, though, I will pick up only some suggestions, significantly simplifying the historical passages, in relationship to the current investigation. The main insight of Agamben consists in knitting together the topic of the ‘office,’ that of the ‘imperative,’ and a peculiar, really epoch-making, re-interpretation of being and action, highlighting how this complex whole is rooted in the history of Christianity and in the development of liturgy, and in theological reflection about it.

What is now called liturgy was, for many centuries, defined as *officium*. The first point to be underscored is, then, the overlapping of the ideas of ‘liturgy’ and ‘office,’ at least in one of its meanings. Liturgy means originally “public work.” In classical Greece, *leitourgia* designated works which, as Demosthenes put it, were connected with “the care of the public.” While in the original church there was no special juridical office of priests over the community, starting from the letter of Pope Clement to the Corinthians (I century A.D.) a special position of priest was codified and connected to a special activity understood in terms of *liturgy*. Liturgy became a public service entrusted to specially designated people.

By idiosyncratically appropriating this train of considerations I will define the “liturgical problem” as the transformation of a ‘public work’ into a specific activity for which a specific group of people are alone responsible. Consequently, in

the Deweyan perspective I am developing, the question of a 'democratic officialdom' is that of how to harmonize the need to entrust the care for public matters to officials with the "American theory [=that every citizen is a sovereign], a doctrine which in grandeur has but one equal in history, and that its fellow, namely, that every man is a priest of God."⁴³

In the evolution of Christian practice, liturgy came to be understood as that activity, related to the Communion, which is the re-actualization of the sacrifice of Christ, who is the highest priest (according to Paul's *Epistle to the Hebrews*):

The *Epistle to the Hebrews* and Clement's letter to the Corinthians constitute two poles through the tension between which Christian liturgy will not cease to be articulated and defined. On the one hand, there is the *semel* [=the once and for all character] of the sacrament, effective but unrepeatable, of which Christ is the only subject; on the other, the *quotidie* [=daily character] of the "liturgy" of the bishop and priests within the community. On the one hand, the *mystery* of a perfect sacrificial action [...] on the other, the *ministry* of those who must celebrate its remembrance and renew its presence.⁴⁴

Due to this relationship between mystery and ministry, a distinction in the cult arises between the 'objective' element—the mystery, which is *opus operatum*, the work operated by grace—and the 'subjective' element, that is, the acts carried out by the agent, in other words, the human priest, which is called *opus operans* (I am going to use the expression *opus operatum* as distinguished from *opus operans* in the following as they are technical phrases).

There exists, therefore, a very complex situation: On the one hand, there is the operation interior to the very life of God, the sacrifice of Christ as the highest priest, which cannot but be effective for the very fact of being operant once and for all; on the other, this operation is continuously renewed (and should be) in the ecclesiastical community by a special group of people together with the whole community.

By defining in this way the peculiar operativeness of its public praxis, the Church invented the paradigm of a human activity, the effectiveness of which does not depend on the subject who realizes it and which needs, however, him as an 'animated means' to be realized and made effective.⁴⁵

To return to Dewey's sentence in *The Public and Its Problems*, from which these reflections began ("since the public forms a state only by and through officials and their acts, and since holding official position does not work a miracle of transubstantiation") we begin seeing how a long tradition resonates in it. The question of the public and the question of the 'official' are tightly interwoven—officials operate in the stead of the public and only through them the public acts. The 'liturgical risk' is that only some people hold such an official position, and the democratic challenge is that each and every one is an official, and that the public

can operate through each and every one (even if, strictly speaking, she or he does not hold an official position).

In Christian tradition, the effectiveness of the Eucharist (*the miracle of transubstantiation*), although it occurs through the operation of a mediator (*opus operantis*), is not connected to him because it is the operation of the highest priest, Christ (*opus operatum*). But what happens when such an *opus operatum* is not there? When, in other words, “holding the official position does not work a miracle of transubstantiation”? The first (meritoriously common sense) answer of Dewey, as previously mentioned, is clear: “there is nothing perplexing nor even discouraging in the spectacle of the stupidities and errors of political behavior.” Briefly: where we cannot but do with *opus operantis* the risk of wrong-doings and misdemeanors is unavoidable.

But there is something more: if democracy is in Dewey the contemporary outcome of Christian history (a point on which Steven Rockefeller insisted⁴⁶), and if, as I am trying to spell out, also in the naturalistic political theory of *The Public and Its Problems* a long-lasting question still echoes, in the issue of the strategic position held by the officials, can we identify also in democracy something like the miracle of transubstantiation, that is, something which guides and orients the operativeness of ‘officialdom,’ or better, something of which ‘officialdom’ is a ‘derivative’ operativeness?

Of course, in the case of thinking, such as Dewey’s, which took leave of any reference to a previous reality, it would be erroneous to speak of an *opus operatum* (an operated operation), but the real question is whether in democracy there is something of which the *opus operantis* (the operation of the officials as the operators) is the reverberation. If the ministry, the ‘officialdom,’ by administering the Communion, re-actualizes the mystery of the economy of the life of God, what—in a democratic community—holds the place of that economy?

The answer is, once again, linked to transubstantiation: in a democratic community the place of that economy of the life of God (of which transubstantiation is the sign) is the community itself as the space of communication. Indeed, as we read in *Experience and Nature*, “and that the fruit of communication should be participation, sharing, is a wonder by the side of which transubstantiation pales.”⁴⁷ Participation and sharing as the paling of transubstantiation are the paling of that operation which transforms the existence into eternity⁴⁸ and which, in order to deal with the conditions of experience, mobilises a panoply of “eulogistic predicates.”⁴⁹

The most genuine and radical secularization is the replacement of the unmodern metaphysical transubstantiation, searching for certainty, deleting the precariousness and derogating the change, with the wonder of sharing and participation through communication (*officium*₂) and the practical engagement with the conditions of common human experience, in order to manage them (*officium*₀). This appeals to a different statute of knowledge understood not as a theory, a vision

of an anterior reality, but as the “apprehension of a thing in terms of the results in other things which it is tending to effect”⁵⁰ which, once again, substitutes for the “miracle of transubstantiation.”⁵¹

The miracle of transubstantiation, in a Deweyan sense, and its overcoming as secularization are therefore intimately connected both with a radically new recognition of the role of communication (and of the meaning of community) and with a new “pragmatic hypothesis”⁵² concerning knowledge. The community of inquiry is ultimately the Deweyan substitute for the *opus operatum*, of the economy of the life of God. It is not by chance nor a contradiction that such a ‘democratic’ *opus operatum* is coextensive with the *opus operantis*: it is not an anterior or a temporal reality but the very growth of the *opus* in its operativeness. And it appeals, consequently, to a completely different status for officials (for operators, mediators): what we continue to call officers occupies only one position within the broader sharing of offices-as-a-kind-of-*munus*, which is the life of the community. In other words, *officium*₁ is re-comprehended within *officium*₂.

While the Christian reflection on liturgy was an incessant endeavour to come to terms with the question of how to harmonize the perfect effectiveness of the work of the economy of the life of God (*opus operatum*) with the ‘need’ for the ecclesiastical praxis (*opus operantis*), democracy, as the enterprise of a secularized modernity, is engaged with the question of how to let the community flourish through communication, within which mediators are also involved, and produce the wonder of sharing.

From this perspective education is crucial and democracy is quintessentially educative. And this educational character of democratic life is the outcome of its being the (ever-to-be-remade) apex of secularization: if the ‘once and for all’ which characterizes mystery is not the anchor of the daily ministry, if the *opus operatum* is the life of the community itself and is coextensive (if not identical) with the *opus operantis*, and growth is (or at least should be) the main character of the life of the community, then education is not something external from the life of the community. Rather, it is life itself in its self-conscious ‘direction.’ Education is engagement with the task of continuing the wonder of communication (and, in this sense, it is remote from any reproduction of rational community in Lingis’ sense, which entails a different status of communication, completely subdued by the imperative of Reason).

Biesta rightly insists on the pivotal role that the idea of communication plays in Dewey’s educational thought and identifies the first accomplished emergence of this paradigm of communication in *Democracy and Education*.⁵³ On the basis of what I have been arguing here, I would suggest that what is new in *Democracy and Education* is that in it and its theory of communication the process of the ‘secularization’ (in the broad sense I am using it) of the Christian heritage, which had been going on since the mid-1890s, arrived at a mature expression (this justifies the fact that Dewey

considered the book the most complete expression of his vision up to that point). As Rockefeller highlighted, Dewey “came to identify Christianity with the disclosure and communication of truth made possible by modern democracy and science”⁵⁴ and “the true church and kingdom of God [. . .] with the democratic community.”⁵⁵

The community-of-inquiry is the Deweyan secularization of the Christian message. But as there is no “once and for all” (the mystery of the economy of the life of God) anymore which sustains the daily ministry, what remains is only the daily ministry, that is to say, the commitment to a wonder which makes pale that of transubstantiation in that it implies that an “incarnation of God in man [. . .] becomes a living, present thing, having its ordinary and natural sense.”⁵⁶

As there is no “once and for all” anymore, there is nothing that ‘guarantees’ that renewal of transubstantiation which takes place in the ministry. Education comes in as Dewey’s solution to the question of a daily ministry of transubstantiation, which risks going astray without the underpinning of *opus operatum*.

From this perspective this is the (or at least one of the) reason(s) why, while insisting on the fact that “education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform” and that “education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness,”⁵⁷ Dewey’s thinking culminates in an affirmation which should no longer be read as the yielding to a quasi-mystical attitude towards education, but rather within the ‘secularized’ framework here proposed: “The teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.”⁵⁸ A question that has to be postponed for further, more specific investigation is that of how all this can/should produce a re-signification of some crucial topics, such as the role of the teacher as a democratic official, the pedagogy of learning by doing, and the idea of the school as “a miniature community, an embryonic society.”⁵⁹ These two latter ideas could be re-interpreted in light of the notion of *officium*,⁶⁰ and therefore of the management of things and of the *institution of the common life* (with a possible significant convergence on what Leonard Waks⁶⁰ has lately called *education as a general initiation into worthwhile adult activities*).

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NOTES

1. Ulrich Beck, *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter* (Frankfurt a.-M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 443.

2. MW 12:273. Citations of the works of Dewey are to the critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press. Volume and page numbers follow the initials of the series. Abbreviations for the volumes used are: EW: *The Early Works* (1882–1898); MW: *The Middle Works* (1899–1924); LW: *The Later Works* (1925–1953).
3. LW 2:245.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei. Genealogia dell'ufficio* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012).
5. LW 2:277.
6. Ibid. Emphasis added.
7. In the *Collected Works* the word 'transubstantiation' recurs five times, always at crucial points: the first occurrence is in *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy* (MW 10:43), significantly as an antithesis to the new pragmatic idea of knowledge advocated by Dewey; in *Experience and Nature* there are three occurrences (LW 1:34, 54, and 132); the last occurrence is in the quoted passage from *The Public and Its Problems*. I am going to explore in some detail the meaning of these occurrences in § 2 of this present paper.
8. Adolpho Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).
9. Gert J. J. Biesta, *Beyond Learning. Democratic Education for a Human Future* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), esp. chapters 3 and 6.
10. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).
11. MW 12:273.
12. Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey. Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
13. Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 7.
14. Agamben, *Opus Dei. Genealogia dell'ufficio*, 89
15. "But between man and beast there is this essential difference, that the latter, moved by sense alone (*sensu movetur*), adapts himself only to that which is present in place and time, having very little feeling of the past or the future (*paulum admodum sentiens praeteritum aut futurum*). Man, on the other hand—because he is possessed of reason, by which he discerns consequences (*consequentias cernit*), sees the causes of things, understands the rise and progress of events, compares similar objects, and connects and associates the future with the present [. . .]" (Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 11).
16. "Nature too, by virtue of reason (*vi rationis*), brings man into relations of mutual intercourse, into language and society with his fellow-men (*ad orationis et ad vitae societatem*) [. . .]" (Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 12).
17. LW 1:143.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. LW 1:198.
21. Ibid.
22. Cicero speaks explicitly of *res gerenda*.
23. Axel Honneth, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today," *Political Theory*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (1998), 775.
24. Agamben, *Opus Dei. Genealogia dell'ufficio*, 91.
25. LW 2:279.

26. After invoking the fact that “[n]ature too, by virtue of reason (*vi rationis*), brings man into relations of mutual intercourse, into language and society with his fellow-men,” Cicero significantly adds that it “generates in him a special love for his children; prompts him to promote and attend social gatherings and public assemblies; and awakens in him the desire to provide what may suffice for the support and nourishment, not of himself alone, but of his wife, his children, and others whom he holds dear and is bound to protect. This care rouses men’s minds, and makes them abler in managing things (*ad rem gerendam*)” (I, 12) In this view—which I am summarizing with the expression ‘primordial *officium*’—the taking care of children and the attendance of public assemblies are closely related, and the management of things encompasses wide-ranging concerns (spanning from the care for the family to social questions). It is easy to see how the ‘primordial *officium*’ could be profitably put in relation with the Heideggerian issue of care, a thematic trajectory which cannot be explored here but would be very promising if re-appropriated within a Deweyan horizon.
27. LW 2:251.
28. LW 2:279.
29. LW 2:328.
30. LW 2:282.
31. Netta Zagagi, “A Note on Munus, Munus Fungi in Early Latin,” *Glotta*, Vol. LX, Nos. 3–4 (1982), 280.
32. Roberto Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità* (Torino: Einaudi 1998), xiv–xv. I draw upon this remark, although I will develop it independently of any discussion of Esposito’s specific philosophical perspective.
33. Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, 109–110.
34. *Ibid.*, 10–12.
35. “It will not be too difficult to recognize the role of education—the role of schools and other educational institutions—in the constitution and reproduction of rational communities. [...] Schools provide students with a very specific voice, namely, with the voice of the rational communities it represents through the curriculum”; Biesta, *Beyond Learning. Democratic Education for a Human Future*, 56–57.
36. “Indeed, the ideal of modern education [...] is to ‘release’ children and students from their local, historical and cultural situations and bring them into contact with a general, rational point of view”; *Ibid.*, 58.
37. Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, 10.
38. See Biesta, *Beyond Learning. Democratic Education for a Human Future*, chapter VI.
39. “For Dewey the democratic person is an individual with certain ‘attributes’ or ‘qualities’”; Biesta, *Beyond Learning. Democratic Education for a Human Future*, 132.
40. “Dewey does remain caught in an instrumentalistic approach, in that he sees participation in democracy as the way in which the socially intelligent person is created or produced”; *Ibidem*.
41. LW 2:350.
42. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Sioux Falls, SD: NuVisions Publications LLC, 2007[1922]); Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2007[1927]).
43. EW 1:237.
44. Agamben, *Opus Dei. Genealogia dell’ufficio*, 31–32.

45. Ibid., 41.
46. EW 4:7 ff. See also Rockefeller, *John Dewey. Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*, 186 ff.
47. LW 1:132.
48. LW 1:55.
49. LW 1:33. The eulogistic predicates are “permanence, real essence, totality, order, unity, rationality, the unum, verum et bonum of the classic tradition” (*Ibidem*). Incidentally, it would be interesting to read *Experience and Nature*, where the word transubstantiation recurs three times, as Dewey’s *summa* on transubstantiation.
50. MW 10:43.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Gert J. J. Biesta, “‘Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful.’ The Communicative Turn in Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*,” *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect. A Critical Engagement with Dewey’s Democracy and Education*, ed. David Hansen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 23–37.
54. Rockefeller, *John Dewey. Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*, 226.
55. Ibid., 215.
56. EW 4:9.
57. EW 5:93.
58. EW 5:95.
59. MW 1:12.
60. Leonard J. Waks, *Education 2.0. The Learningweb Revolution and the Transformation of the School* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013).

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